

SERVICE QUALITY OF MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

International student enrolments make a vital economic contribution to higher educational institutions (HEIs). Because of the importance of international students to HEIs, a number of studies have emerged examining the subject of international students in relation to their living experiences, attitudes and behaviour. However, very few studies have examined international students' overall satisfaction with their university experience. The objective of this paper is to examine international student satisfaction and behavioural intention within a Malaysian HEIs. A conceptual framework is presented that provides an explanation of the linkage among international students' satisfaction with six service factors in Malaysian universities, overall satisfaction to university and behavioural intentions (e.g. intention to spread positive word of mouth about their university to others, intention to re-enrol with their university and willingness to recommend their university to others). Implication of the study to management of Malaysian HEIs and overall conclusion are also presented at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Service quality, Satisfaction, Higher educational institution

INTRODUCTION

The education sector has the capacity to stimulate national economic growth (Becket & Brookes, 2008) through international student enrolments. The international student market plays a very important role for higher educational institutions (HEIs) in generating revenue for the higher education sector (Arambewela, Hall, & Zuhair, 2005). In Malaysia, for instance, international student tuition fees contribute to one of the major income for higher educational institutions. Realising the importance of international students to the national income (Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), 2012), a strategic plan set up by the government known as Strategic Plan of Malaysian Higher Education in the intention to achieve the goals, vision and mission for Malaysia to become a hub of educational excellence of higher education by the year 2020. Based on this plan, the strategy is to increase international students enrolment by monitoring international students' perceptions of the quality of academic and service provided by Malaysian HEIs (Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), 2011). In the second phase of the Strategic Plan of Malaysian Higher Education (2011-2015), the internationalisation becomes the critical agenda in stirring Malaysian HEIs towards world class educational provider. To achieve this level, the government has intensified the efforts to attract international students to study in Malaysian HEIs. As this far, the international students enrolment show an increase and contribute to the country revenue estimated RM2.6 billion (Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), 2012). By 2020, the government estimated of earning RM6 billion (BERNAMA, 2012; Raduian, 2012) from the enrolment of international students in Malaysian HEIs.

Following to the Malaysia determination to attract more international students to come and study in Malaysian HEIs, therefore, the study of international students is wisely to be conducted to determine their level of satisfaction with the quality of services provided by Malaysian HEIs. A conceptual framework in this study provides a fundamental on international student satisfaction with services provided at the Malaysian HEIs comprising of academic services, courses offered, access (i.e. the accessibility to campus buildings and facilities, library operating hours and the various clubs and societies for students) and augmented services. Consequently, their overall satisfaction with university and behavioural intentions (e.g. intention to spread positive word of mouth about their university to others, intention to re-enrol with their university and willingness to recommend their university to others) are also determined. So, the key question is:

What are the key determinants of student satisfaction amongst international students studying at Malaysian universities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been well documented that international student fees contribute to national economy. For instance, international student fees has significant contribution to the Australian economy (Telford & Masson, 2005). Thus, Australian universities have taken various actions to ensure they continue to provide high quality services to their international students (Cuthbert, 1996a). Such action is indicative of the recognition on the part of the university sector that in order to attract and retain international students, the satisfaction of their needs must stand as the centre-piece of any marketing strategy. The logic behind such recognition is

straightforward: students serve as primary consumers of university services (Hill, 1995) in that students are the direct recipients of the services they provide (Brochado, 2009; Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes, 2006). Developing satisfied 'customers' amongst international students should therefore be a primary goal of higher education (Petruzzellis, D'Uggento, & Romanazzi, 2006; Seymour, 1993). Therefore, if Malaysia wants to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in this very competitive industry, it is crucial that its HEIs develop a thorough understanding of the university services that have the greatest impact on student satisfaction (Harvey & Green, 1993; Lawson, 1992; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithmal, 1988; Yeo, 2008a).

In an industry where services are generally homogenous in nature, it is important for universities to develop strategies to differentiate their services from others (DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005). One way to do this is to ascertain the key determinants of student satisfaction as to help universities prioritise the services they offer for the purpose of resource allocation (Douglas, et al., 2006). This approach suggests that there is value in monitoring the importance of services and examining student satisfaction with these services (Garver, 2009). In the context of the competitive Malaysian higher education sector, further research into identifying the services most important to international students and their levels of satisfaction with these services, would provide indicators that could provide better guide the efforts of Malaysian universities in developing their service offerings and differentiating their position in the international market place. Moreover, research must go beyond merely identifying the determinants of student satisfaction to also include how such an attitude impacts upon student behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth, personal recommendations and re-enrolment, because it is this that ultimately determines a university's growth and profitability (Matzler, Würtele, & Renzl, 2006).

Satisfaction In The Context Of Higher Educational Institutions

In order to succeed in such a competitive market, universities must make international student satisfaction a key priority (Munteanu, Ceobanu, Boba'ca, & Anton, 2010). However, despite its importance, there is a lack of consensus as to how student satisfaction should be defined (Hill, 1995; Navarro, Iglesias, & Torres, 2005; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996; Yeo, 2008a) and therefore measured. One of the earliest efforts to define satisfaction in general came via the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Arambewela, et al., 2005; Halstead, Hartman, & Schmidt, 1994). According to this approach, consumer satisfaction is the affective outcome of a cognitive comparison between the service, the consumer expected to receive (e.g. expectations) and the service they actually received (e.g. performance). This process then results in either service expectations being met – referred to as confirmation - or the service failing to meet expectations - referred to as disconfirmation (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Ennew, Reed, & Binks, 1993; Oliver, 1981; Ruyter, Bloemer, & Peeters, 1997; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983). Hence, according to the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, satisfaction is an attitude that derives from a two-part process comprising not the only service experience but also service expectations.

The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm was first conceived by Oliver (1980) and has been widely used, or adapted for use, in generic studies of customer satisfaction (Ennew, et al., 1993; Halstead, et al., 1994). The most widely used application of this paradigm is the SERVQUAL scale (SERVQUAL being an acronym for service quality) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). For many years SERVQUAL served as the predominant means of measuring satisfaction with service quality. According to the SERVQUAL approach, service satisfaction comprises 22 items spread across 5 dimensions – tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithmal, & Berry, 1991). In line with its roots in disconfirmation theory, SERVQUAL conceptualises perceptions of service quality as deriving from a comparison between expectations and performance (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Under this approach, the more performance exceeds expectations, the greater the perceived service quality (Ladhari, 2009). However, SERVQUAL has attracted much based on a multitude of factors including in a wide variety of industry contexts SERVQUAL has been found to lack generality (Angell, Heffernan, & Megicks, 2008). Hence studies seeking to utilise SERVQUAL in a university context have had to make significant changes to the instrument in order to try and make it relevant. For example, SERVQUAL model has been found to yield poor reliability (Soutar & McNeil, 1996) and serve as a poor predictor of service satisfaction (Banwet & Datta, 2003).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed SERVPERF in an attempt to provide another alternative measuring the quality of service. SERVPERF is similar to SERVQUAL in that it comprises the same factors and same scale items. The difference is that whereas SERVQUAL measures performance *and* expectations, SERVPERF focuses on just performance so that a higher perceived performance rating implies higher service quality. There is logic to this approach because performance perceptions are already the result of customers' comparison of the expected and actual service, thereby making expectancy measures redundant (Carrillat, Jaramillo, & Mulki, 2007). It is therefore not surprising that studies comparing SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have found the latter to be superior in regards to validity, reliability, methodological soundness and most importantly, its ability to predict the determinants of service satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor 1992; Jain & Gupta, 2004). SERVPERF still suffers from some of the same inherent problems. Its key problem is the lack of relevance of its generic factors and scale items when applied in an industry-specific context.

To address this problem in a university context, Abdullah (2006) developed HEDPERF, a scale based on the performance-only premise of SERVPERF, but with scale items developed specifically for a university context. When compared to SERVPERF, HEDPERF has been found to serve as a superior determinant of university service quality (Abdullah, 2006). However, HEDPERF is not without two significant shortcomings of its own.

The first of these stems from the fact that Abdullah (2006) only measured HEDPERF in the context of service quality, and failed to measure its subsequent impact on student satisfaction and behaviour. Via empirical analysis Cronin and Taylor (1992) established that service quality and satisfaction are two different constructs. This is a logical finding given that the former relates to providing the maximum level of perceived service quality while the latter relates to the goal of satisfying consumers via the

service itself. As such, customer satisfaction must be measured separately from customer perceptions of service quality. They also found that customer satisfaction mediated the influence of service quality on behavioural intentions and that customer satisfaction is a better predictor of behavioural intentions than service quality. This too is a logical outcome because emotion-based measures (e.g. satisfaction) are often found to serve as better predictors of behavior than cognitive-based measures such as attitudes towards service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

As such, neither SERVQUAL, SERVPERF nor HEdPERF serve as an ideal means of measuring service quality in a university context and its subsequent impact on student satisfaction and behaviour. This naturally raises the question, "What is the best method to measure student satisfaction with their university"?

The Determinants Of Student Satisfaction In A University Context

A wide variety of university attributes have been found to influence student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; DeShields, et al., 2005; Gruber, Fuß, Voss, & Gläser-Zikuda, 2010; Navarro, et al., 2005). Although the influence of these attributes has been well researched, the unique combination of attributes to be utilised in this study has not yet been investigated in the context of international students studying at Malaysian HEIs.

Before identifying the various attributes that influence student satisfaction, it is first necessary to identify the criteria against which potential attributes were selected for inclusion in this study. Given that a university can essentially be regarded as a service-provider, it naturally stands that in order to be included, attributes must be consistent in nature with a defining characteristic of a service: intangibility. However, there are several scholars that take an alternative view, arguing that the service provided by a university comprises both tangible and intangible elements. One view holds that a university essentially comprises intangible characteristics thereby qualifying as a pure service provider (Brochado, 2009; Petruzzellis, et al., 2006; Shank, Walker, & Hayes, 1995). It does so on the basis that:

- No tangible good is exchanged between university and student;
- The service is produced and consumed simultaneously for each student;
- The service is not storable;
- The student plays an important role in the delivery process (Woodside, Frey, & Daly, 1989).

As such, this view regards higher education as intangible because students cannot 'see' or 'touch' the service they receive. Moreover, service elements are also typically intangible in that they revolve around interaction with humans. Scholars that portray university services in this way do so on the basis that the value students receive is essentially intangible, their satisfaction being dependent upon the following (Banwet & Datta, 2003; Parasuraman, Zeithmal, & Berry, 1994):

- The university's ability to perform dependably and accurately;
- University staff's willingness to help students and provide prompt service;
- The knowledge and courtesy of staff;
- Their ability to inspire trust, confidence and caring;
- The level of individualised attention given to students.

The alternative view holds that while the service provided by a university is essentially intangible (hence the inclusion of *people* and *processes* in the extended marketing mix) and tangible elements (e.g. physical evidence) are also required to provide such a service (Kotler, Kotler, & Armstrong, 2010; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). The tangible elements of a service comprise those aspects that are associated with the physical environment where the service is produced and consumed (Parasuraman, Berry, Penney, & Zeithmal, 1993). Focusing on the contribution such elements make to student satisfaction is important because the intangible elements of a service can be difficult for students to evaluate relative to their tangible counterparts (Mavondo & Zaman, 2000). However in spite of this, the need to include tangible attributes as potential determinants of student satisfaction has often been overlooked (Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Such an oversight has potentially serious ramifications because students spend a significant proportion of their service experience utilising the tangible elements of a university (e.g. libraries, IT laboratories, lecture theatres) and so are likely to serve as key influences of satisfaction (Clark & Ramsay, 1990). As such, the list of potential attributes to be included in this study includes both intangible and tangible elements. These elements will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Academic Services

This factor refers to the academic service provided by a university. In this sense, the responsibility for the provision of such services lies with the interaction with people which include teaching staff and as such it typically refers to such attributes as teaching methods, learning materials, lecturers' interaction with students and consultation opportunities (Abdullah, 2006c; Banwet & Datta, 2003; Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Koiliias, 2005; Navarro, et al., 2005; Telford & Masson, 2005). The important contribution academic service makes to student satisfaction has been confirmed by numerous studies (Abdullah, 2006c; Angell, et al., 2008; Arambewela, et al., 2005; Gamage, Suwanabroma, Ueyama, Hada, & Sekikawa, 2008; Gruber, et al., 2010; Joseph & Joseph, 1997; Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997; Navarro, et al., 2005). A key reason for this is the importance students assign to the academic aspects of their service experience, and the resulting impact that academic attributes have on the image and reputation of a university (Gamage, et al., 2008; Mavondo & Zaman, 2000).

Access

Access refers to the extent to which the services provided by a university are conveniently available to students in terms of time and/or place (Arambewela, et al., 2005; Athiyaman, 1997; Telford & Masson, 2005). As such it includes such attributes as the operating hours of a university library (Arambewela, et al., 2005; Petruzzellis, et al., 2006) and ease of access to university buildings and facilities (Sahney & Karunes, 2004). Access should have a potentially significant influence over satisfaction (Diamantis & Benos, 2007; Telford & Masson, 2005) because it directly or indirectly influences the criteria by which a service is typically evaluated by its users (e.g. responsiveness, timeliness etc). In fact one study found that of the various service elements tested, it was access that had the greatest impact on student satisfaction with a university (i.e. Abdullah, 2005).

Administrative Services

Administrative services play a vital role in the service provision of a university. In this study, administrative service is defined as the service provided by non-academic staff to students (Abdullah, 2005). As such, it includes such attributes as the attitude of administrative staff towards students (Abdullah, 2006c; Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997; Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003), the operating hours of student administration offices (Abdullah, 2006c; Koilias, 2005; Sahney & Karunes, 2004), the speed and precision with which administrative staff responds to student matters (Gamage, et al., 2008; Koilias, 2005; Oldfield & Baron, 2000) and the treatment students of different religions and race receive from administrative staff (Abdullah, 2006c; Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997). Previous studies have empirically demonstrated that administrative services exert a significant influence over student satisfaction (Gamage, et al., 2008; Mavondo & Zaman, 2000).

Augmented Services

Augmented services refer to those services that serve as potential determinants of student satisfaction but without falling within the scope of a university's core business. Specific examples of attributes used to conceptualise augmented services include the range of food on offer in University cafeterias, the price of that food (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; Joseph & Joseph, 1997; Price, et al., 2003) and the public transport services available to students (Price, et al., 2003). Given that such services are regarded as having a salient influence over the success and competitiveness of a university (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithmal, 1985), they are also likely to impact upon student satisfaction (García-Aracil, 2008; Gatfield, et al., 1999; Joseph & Joseph, 1997; Koilias, 2005; Kwan & Ng, 1999; Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi, & Leitner, 2004; Telford & Masson, 2005).

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence refers to those tangible elements of university service that can be 'seen' and 'touched' by students (Saginova & Belyansky, 2008). It therefore includes such physical elements as the aesthetic design of university buildings (Abdullah, 2006c; Gamage, et al., 2008; Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997) and the extent to which university buildings and grounds are clean (Gamage, et al., 2008; Kwan & Ng, 1999). Physical evidence is important because as the one tangible element of an otherwise intangible offering, it is very influential in shaping the attitudes that students ultimately form towards their university (Gamage, et al., 2008). It has also been empirically identified as an important determinant of student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Gamage, et al., 2008; Koilias, 2005), particularly in light of the notion that its tangible nature makes it easier for students to evaluate their service experience in this regard (Mavondo & Zaman, 2000).

Courses Offered

Courses offered refers to the courses and degrees offered by a university. Given that students typically compare the courses offered by a university against their desired graduate outcomes (e.g. employment in their desired field) it is no surprise that the perceived relevance of these courses serve as a major influence over student satisfaction (Mavondo & Zaman, 2000). For this reason, many universities offer a comprehensive list of courses that are not only interesting but are also directly relevant to the current employment market (Abdullah, 2006c; Browne, Kaldenberg, Browne, & Brown, 1998; Chua, 2004; Joseph, Yakhou, & Stone, 2005; Koilias, 2005; Soutar & McNeil, 1996). Other attributes that fall within the theme of *courses offered* include courses with specialisation (Ford, Joseph, & Joseph, 1999; Joseph, et al., 2005) and courses offering employable skills (Gamage, et al., 2008; Kwan & Ng, 1999; Soutar & McNeil, 1996). With all of these attributes having been found to affect student satisfaction (Arambewela, et al., 2005; Diamantis & Benos, 2007; Gamage, et al., 2008; Telford & Masson, 2005).

Service Satisfaction

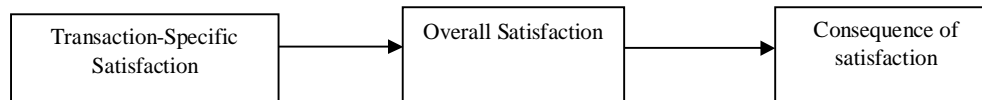
Given the afore-mentioned problems with conceptualising and operationalising service satisfaction using the disconfirmation paradigm, this study will adopt the alternative approach - the transaction-specific and overall satisfaction approach to satisfaction (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Jones & Suh, 2000; Olsen & Johnson, 2003; Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). Under this approach service satisfaction is defined in a generic sense as an emotional feeling after consuming a service, which then evolves into an overall attitude toward utilising the service (Hau & Thuy, 2012). This definition can then be extended to a university context so that student satisfaction is defined as a cognitive attitude and emotional feeling resulting from a student's overall evaluation of their experience with the education service they received (Athiyaman, 1997; Elliot & Healy, 2001; Fečiková, 2004; Oliver, 1981, 1996; Woodside, et al., 1989).

Transaction-specific satisfaction refers to a customer's satisfaction based on their post-choice evaluation of a service after a specific consumption experience (Guolla, 1999) and/or a customer's post-choice evaluation of a service based on its specific

service attributes (Shankar, et al., 2003). Because this study focuses on on-campus students and such students should be expected to frequently utilise the various services offered by a university, transaction-specific satisfaction is defined in this study in terms of specific service attributes rather than a specific service encounter.

Overall satisfaction is defined as a customer's overall satisfaction with an organisation based on their total encounters and experiences with that organisation (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Jones & Suh, 2000; Sureshchandar, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2002). The advantage in measuring overall satisfaction is that it offers the ability to predict student intentions and behaviour (Olsen & Johnson, 2003). Overall satisfaction differs from transaction-specific satisfaction in that a student may have a dissatisfying experience with the latter (e.g. waiting in long queues to enrol) and yet still be satisfied with their overall service experience due to satisfying encounters with other specific services. The two constructs also differ in that transaction-specific satisfaction serves as an antecedent of overall satisfaction (Jones & Suh, 2000). This relationship, portrayed in Figure 2.1, serves as the model of satisfaction to be utilised in this study.

Figure 2.1: Model of Two Levels of Satisfaction and its Consequence



Source: Adapted from Jones and Suh (2000)

In accordance with this model, the measurement of satisfaction begins with a focus on *transaction-specific satisfaction*. In the case of this study, these transaction-specific attributes refer to the individual service elements of a university. At the second stage, *overall satisfaction* is postulated as an overall service evaluation based on students' composite attitude towards the various individual service elements. At the third and final stage is the *consequence of satisfaction* – students' behavioural intentions in response to their overall satisfaction.

Behavioural Intention (Consequences of Satisfaction)

The behavioural intentions of its customers should be a primary concern to an organisation (Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008; Malhotra & McCort, 2001). Behavioural intentions refer to an individual's conscious decision to exert effort to carry out a particular behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993 in Goode & Harris, 2007, p.513 ; Hsu, Huang, & Swanson, 2010). In order to properly define this construct, it is also necessary to identify whether behavioural intention refers to an attitude or behaviour. When a person holds a positive attitude toward an attitude object, they will also possess the intention to behave in a way towards that object that is consistent with their positive attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Furthermore, the more favorable a person's attitude is toward a behaviour, the more likely they are to perform that behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Hence, attitude and intention compliment and correspond with each other (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) in a way that ultimately leads to behavioural intention (Sheth & Mittal, 2004). In line with this view, this study conceptualises intention as behaviour rather than an attitude.

The importance of gaining insight into students behavioural intentions lies in their direct link to retaining and attracting prospective students (Navarro, et al., 2005) and ultimately ensuring survival in an ever increasingly competitive market place (Bontis, Booker, & Serenko, 2007). In the specific case of a university, key behavioral outcomes of satisfaction would be expected to include positive word of mouth (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Arambewela, et al., 2005; Athiyaman, 1997), the intention to re-enrol (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Arambewela, et al., 2005) and willingness to recommend their university to others (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Browne, et al., 1998; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004). However, in spite of this recognition, academic interest has often ignored the need to include positive word of mouth. This study, therefore makes an additional contribution to new knowledge by operationalising the behavioral consequences of student satisfaction as a single dimension (Landhari, 2009) comprising all three potential behavioural outcomes of student satisfaction includes intention to spread positive word of mouth about their university to others, intention to re-enrol with their university and willingness to recommend their university to others.

The Relationship between Behavioural Intention and Overall Satisfaction

Numerous empirical studies have identified a positive link between overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions across a wide variety of service industries (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008; Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Satisfaction is therefore regarded as a significant determinant of behavioural intentions (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008). This positive relationship also exists between overall satisfaction and the individual measures of behavioral intention. For example, overall satisfaction has been found to be positively correlated with re-patronage intention (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Molinari, Abratt, & Dion, 2008; Patterson, Johnson, & Spreng, 1997). Similarly, studies have identified a strong correlation between overall satisfaction and positive word of mouth behaviour (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2008; Makarem, Mudambi, & Podoshen, 2009). There is also empirical support for the notion that as overall customer satisfaction increases, so too does customers' willingness to recommend the service provider to others (Namkung & Jang, 2007; Zeithmal, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

These generic findings have also been replicated in the specific context of HEIs. For example, several studies have confirmed that overall student satisfaction and behavioural intentions are closely linked (see Alves & Raposo, 2007; Athiyaman, 1997;

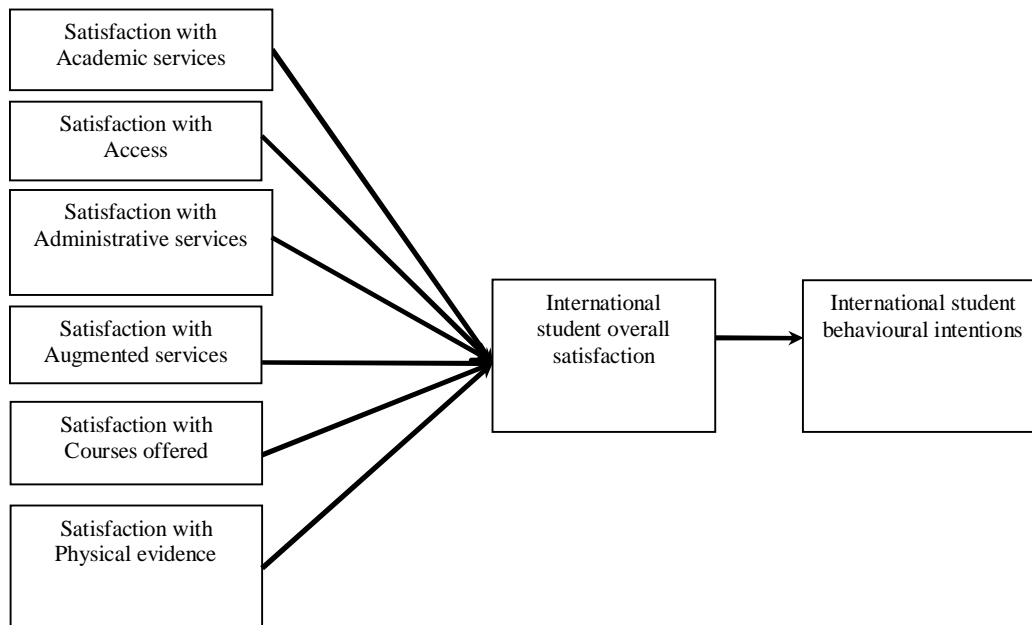
Navarro, et al., 2005). Yet in spite of this, no study has yet to investigate this relationship in the context of international students studying at Malaysian HEIs. Therefore, it is vital to determine the nature of the relationship between international students' overall satisfaction and their behavioural intentions.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

On the basis of the preceding discussion it is possible to construct a theoretical framework depicting the relationship between each of the key constructs under investigation in this study (Figure 2.2). As per this framework, two levels of satisfaction are investigated: transaction-specific satisfaction and overall satisfaction. It is proposed that satisfaction with university service is determined by six service elements – academic, administrative, courses offered, access, physical evidence and augmented. The individual satisfaction levels with each of these six elements of university service determine overall satisfaction. It is proposed that overall satisfaction in turn then influences behavioural intentions.

As per the theoretical framework, there are three key relationships of interest that will dominate the focus of this study. The first of these relationships is between transaction-specific satisfaction and overall satisfaction, whereby the six elements of university service serve as independent variables and overall satisfaction as the dependent variable. The second relationship is between overall satisfaction and behavioural intention. In this case, overall satisfaction serves as the independent variable and behavioural intention as the dependent variable.

Figure 2.2: Proposed Theoretical Framework for this Study



IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

It is clear that observing international student satisfaction with service offerings by Malaysian HEIs is importance in order to compete in competitive market place and also to be different in homogenous market. Thus, marketing strategies used in creating and supporting the demand for international education should be considered more carefully. Malaysian HEIs need to streamline their strategies for internationalisation. To achieve this mission, the recommendation is that Malaysian universities promote their high performing factors aggressively to potential international students by explaining the high levels of satisfaction and quality offered. This can only be done by providing student testimonials about the positive aspects of Malaysian HEIs. Hence in effect, they would be serving as *product endorsers*. This communication channel could prove a very valuable line of distribution of information, which could influence the opinion of potential students and their families. Such strategic action is likely to result in a more direct impact on overall satisfaction, which in turn is likely to result in student attraction (via recommendations and positive word of mouth communications from present students) and retention (via re-enrolment).

To conclude, developing a more effective and sustainable approach to international student recruitment is an arduous task. International students seek value-exchange from their university, and so it is the responsibility of the latter to ensure that the services it provides are delivered in a way that ensures students' are satisfied and that they feel their investment (both time and money) has been honoured (De Wit & Verhoeven, 2000).

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