

Chapter 1

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. BACKGROUND OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is blessed with a comprehensive education systems ranging from primary to university level. The education system in Malaysia is well supported with a pool of well-educated and highly skilled professionals that are able to produce educated young professionals, who are equipped with high competency and skills into the labor market each year. Malaysian government plays a very supportive role in strengthening our education base by contributing roughly 18% to 20% of the annual National Budget for education each year. These contributions do not go to waste as Malaysia currently achieves one of the highest literacy rates in the world, at 93% as reported by the Ministry of Education in 2002 (www.moe.gov.my). In addition, according to Ministry of Education over 99% of all six-year-olds are enrolled in schools, and more than 92% of all students go on to the upper secondary level.

Education generally starts when children begin their pre-school education at the tender age of four and five years of age. These kindergartens

are run by both government and non-government agencies. The Ministry of Education in 2002 also stated that according to Educational Planning and Research Department, presently there are 1,076 local public kindergartens and 2,161 private pre-schools catering for 27,883 pupils. At the age of seven, children will enter the primary school and will be learning reading and writing skills plus some basic art and science subjects. Malaysia has a unique education system where there are two categories of schools i.e. National (*kebangsaan*) and National-type (*jenis kebangsaan*) schools. 'National-type' schools are for parents who want their children to be educated in their own mother tongue at the early stage of school days. Ministry of Education in 2002 also revealed that at present, there are 7,084 schools teaching 2,870,667 pupils nationwide. Primary students will spend five to seven years here to improve their ability to read and write before they advance into secondary schools that has more extensive curriculum that covers arts, science, vocational and technical subjects. Secondary pupils will sit for two major assessment i.e. Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) in Form 3 to move into more specialized field of study and Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) in Form 5. Upon completion of SPM, students have two options i.e. to continue to pursue a two-year Sixth Form programme as a gateway to enter local and foreign universities or go into matriculation programmes that offered by some colleges and universities in collaboration with the Ministry of

Education. Places in higher education in Malaysia used to be limited but with the recent development in education system to introduce twinning programmes and private universities, students have better chances of obtaining degrees, masters, or PhDs. Today, Malaysia has 11 national universities and a number of private universities catering for 16.6% of those within the tertiary education age group.

1.1.1. STUDYING IN UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

The first university in Malaysia was set up in 1949 in Singapore. The university, known today as University of Malaya can trace its root back to the foundation of the King Edward VII Medical School in Singapore in 1907. This name was only used after the amalgamation of the Medical School with Raffles College in 1949. When Malaysia received its independence in 1957, a branch campus was set up in Kuala Lumpur, based temporarily at the Lumpur Technical College.

Today, University of Malaya is situated in Pantai Valley in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Its 20,000 students can gain additional advantages from its proximity to the cosmopolitan capital. Among the advantages are easy access to databases of information through national libraries, easily get in touch with multinational companies and government sectors. University of Malaya has created many histories as it

continues to uphold its mission as being a premier university that seeks excellence in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge to meet the aspirations of the nation. It has helped many students in achieving their dreams and their full potential. Many Malaysian leaders have studied here before and among former well known students are Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers and CEOs of industries and nation's leading intellectuals.

For many students who just stepped into the university for the first time, they will experience some sort of disruption, especially in the sense of culture shock. This is because for the first time, many students from all over Malaysia will enter University Malaya with excitement and euphoria and some with panic and despair. Also, for the first time they will be living away from home and have to make new friends again. As Earwalker (1992) observed when he wrote his book on helping and supporting students, young students have to begin their social life all over again. They start with nothing, knowing nobody. Realising this, the university tries to provide accommodation on campus to these undergraduates. It was reported by University of Malaya annual report 2001 that presently, the university has 10 residential colleges and 4 hostels outside campus that are capable of providing housing to 10,150 students. All the colleges are comfortably furnished and for off campus students 11

fleet bus service was provided to enable students to travel from their hostel to the university. Apart from accommodation, the university sets up Student Affairs Department to provide students with a conducive environment for learning and acting as a one stop center for services relating to health, financial aid, counseling, general welfare, co-curriculum, industrial training and others.

1.1.2. STUDENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Student Affairs Department, also known as HEP consists of separate units where all of these units are located in the university campus.

These units comprise of:

- a) Central Student Services
- b) Student Counseling Unit and Careers Advisory Unit,
- c) Clubs and Societies
- d) Central Facilities and
- e) Perdanasiswa Complex.

Central Student Services handles accommodation and health services while Student Counseling Unit and Careers Advisory Unit handles co-curriculum and industrial training unit. Wide range of

academic, religious and sports activities and international students office matters are handled by Clubs and Societies Unit. The purpose of setting up this unit is to cater for the increasing number of foreign postgraduate students. Central Facilities handling catering services and Perdanasiswa Complex acts as administrative center for Student Affairs Department as well as providing facilities such as a mini-open air theatre, post office and co-operative services center. Student Affairs Department is first headed by Deputy Vice Chancellor Y.Bhg Professor Datuk Dr. Zainal Kling. After him, there were other successors such as Professor Dr. Firdaus Hj Abdullah, Y.Bhg Professor Dato' Dr. Hashim Yaacob and so on. Now, it is headed by Y.Bhg Profesor Dato' Dr. Mohd Razali b. Agus.

The objective of Student Affairs Department are to monitor all the activities conducted by student bodies and coordinate, advise and monitor programmes and raining to students to ensure students achieve excellence not just academically but also spiritually and adept at social skills.

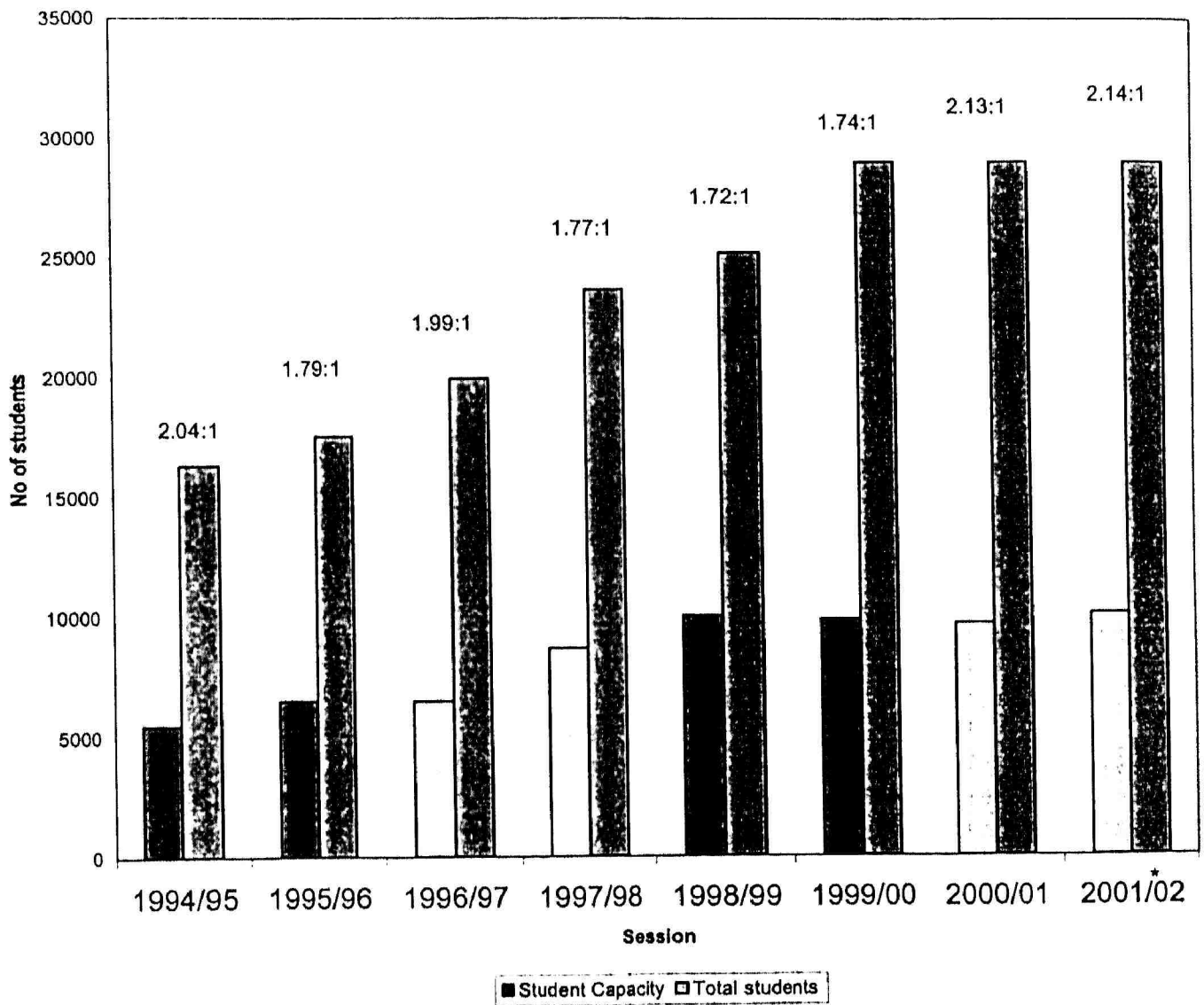
1.2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Malaysian population increases from year to year and better education facilities ensure that more children enjoy the education benefits better than their forefathers during the Malaya times. As such, as the proportion of students in the population rises the needs for higher education also rises

corresponding to the increase in the students number. In the book on Patterns of Residence by Morgan et al. (1979), it captures the similar problem faced by Malaysia today. The authors wrote that with the expansion of higher education, universities, colleges and polytechnics have faced the increasingly difficult problem of providing adequate residential accommodation for students living away from home.

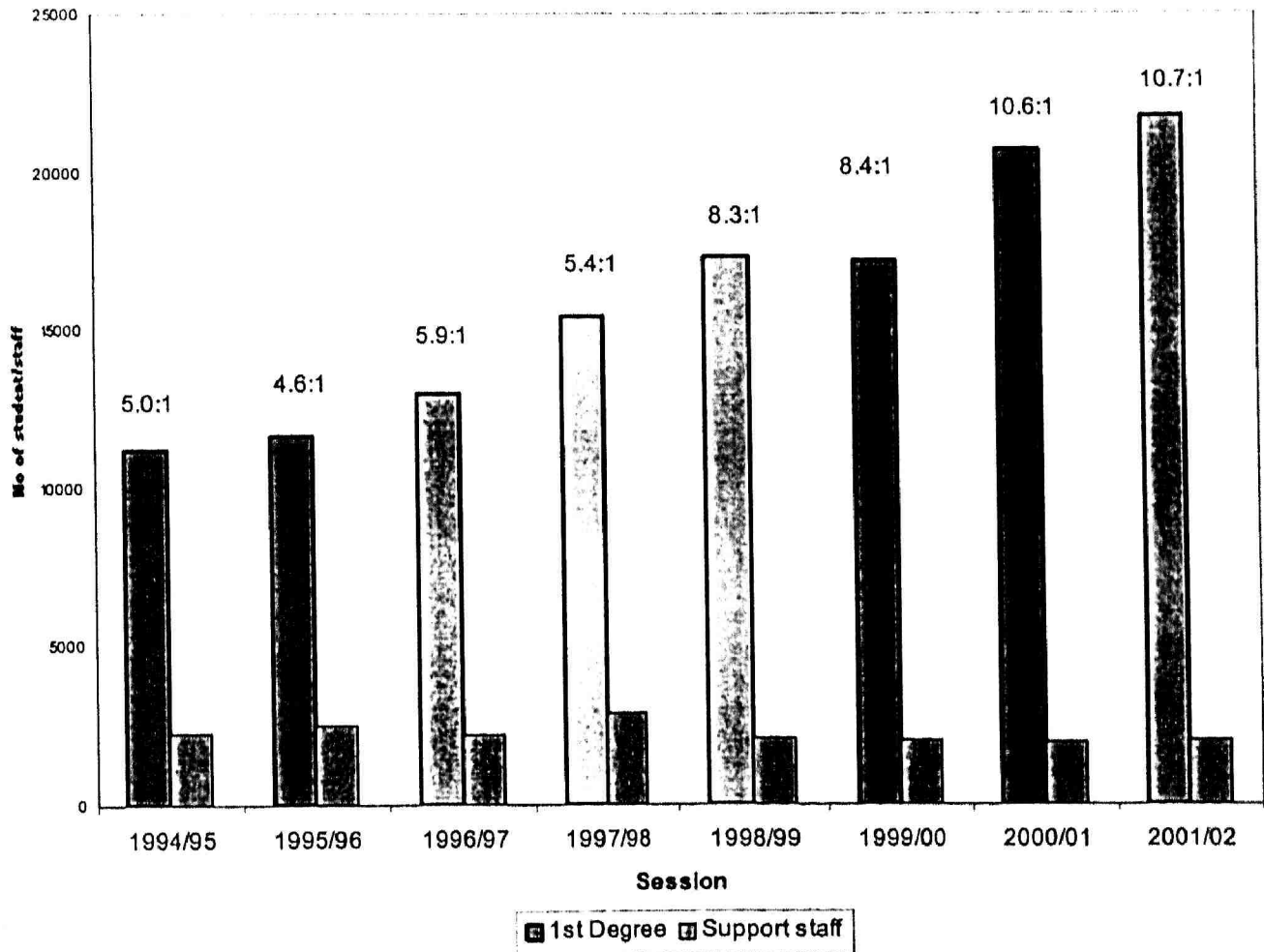
This was supported by the statistics gathered from University of Malaya annual report for a period of 8 years, beginning from year 1994. The results shown in Figure 1 indicated that the number of students continued to increase since session 1994/95 but not all students were able to reside in the residential colleges provided by the university. For instance, in session 1994/95, for every undergraduate who registered in University of Malaya that year, about 2 other undergraduates were not offered accommodation in the college. Therefore the remaining students who were unable to obtain a place in the hostels will have to seek privately rented accommodation outside of the university to overcome the accommodation problem. This accommodation problem were faced not only by local institution of higher learning but also faced by universities in United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Figure 1 also showed that the ratio of undergraduates who were not offered accommodation in the university's hostel did not change significantly from

Figure 1: Total number of undergraduate students and college capacity, from session 1994/95 to 2001/02



Source: Laporan Tahunan Universiti Malaya 1994/95-2001/02

Figure 2: Total Number of University student and Support staff, from session 1994/95 to 2001/02



Source: Laporan Tahunan University Malaya, 1994/95 – 2001/02

year to year. From Figure 1, the lowest ratio of undergraduates to college capacity is 1.72 while the highest ratio is 2.14.

From Lapuran Tahunan Universiti Malaya 1994 to 2002, as shown Figure 2, we found that as the number of students increased in University of Malaya, the increase of students was not parallel with the increase of support staff. **Support staff is defined as personnel that are non-academic in nature.** These personnel include front-line and service staff that are not directly involved with content and delivery of course units. Among the services provided are handling co-curriculum and industrial training, handling wide range of academic, religious and sports activities and international students office and handling catering and administrative services. Each year the ratio of students to a support staff increased significantly except for session 1995/96. The latest figure for session 2001/02 showed that for every 1 support staff, almost 11 students were allocated to him/her as opposed to 7 years ago, where a support staff was allocated 5 students only. This illustrated that as the gap increased, we would also like to know whether the services provided by support staff of University of Malaya was viewed adequate by the students and was the level of services provided by Students Affair Department viewed to be adequate by the students.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are

- a) To gather information concerning satisfaction level of services provided by Students Affair Department as perceived by students from the University of Malaya.
- b) To identify major concerns of University of Malaya students concerning the services provided by Students Affair Department
- c) To determine whether individual differences such as gender, social background, number of interaction with support staff and enthusiast/non-enthusiast affect customer orientation perceptions
- d) To determine relationship of the major service attributes with perceived service quality
- e) To segment the respondents based on different groups of undergraduates who consider different things in their perception of customer service

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Customers are the lifeline of any public or private enterprise. Service quality can gain or lose customers. However, due to the nature of service, which is intangible, this causes service quality of one personnel to another to be heterogeneous. This means that the customer service that we give to Customer A will not be exactly the same as the customer service we give to Customer B, no matter how hard we try. We will face difficulty to predict and repeat the service process. Nevertheless, businesses that are perceived to have high quality service tends to have higher market share, higher return on investment and asset turnover than companies with perceived low quality. This led to the conclusion that in the long term, the most important factor affecting business performance is the quality of services offered by the organization, relative to its competitors (Ghobadian et al, 1994). In this study, it is related to Students Affair Department in University of Malaya. It is hoped that the findings would help to improve the service level of the department. It would also address major concerns of University of Malaya students and assess weaknesses faced by the service system, if any. It also provides a better understanding of students' needs and requirement. Other local universities could use the findings to assess and improve on their products, services and personnel as well.

1.5. EXPECTED OUTPUT OF THE STUDY

The expected outputs of the study are:

- a) Level of satisfaction service perceived by students varies by social background, type of dwellings they stayed, aim of life and how active are they in co-curriculum
- b) Level of satisfaction service perceived by students varies by the no of interaction they have with the Students Affair Department
- c) Suggestions on how to improve the services provided

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The whole report covered 6 chapters. Chapter 1 touched on the overview of the education system in Malaysia. Recent development in Malaysia education system and Student Affair Department system were also highlighted here. Objective, significant and the expected output of the study were also included to give an overall purpose of conducting the study.

Chapter 2 discussed about the theory and importance of customer satisfaction survey. Criteria used to measure level of satisfaction and reviews

of past research done in this area were also covered in the chapter. Findings from other research studies were also highlighted to guide us on the variables measured and results expected in this study.

Chapter 3 focused on research methodology applied in the survey. Topics discussed include methodology selection, questionnaire design, techniques employed in data collection and analysis.

In chapter 4, findings of the studied were discussed. Analyses performed were univariate and bivariate data analysis using mainly frequency distribution and cross-tabulation.

Multivariate analysis using factor analysis and cluster analysis are discussed next in chapter 5. Factor analysis helps us to summarize the service attributes in this study while cluster analysis is to group the undergraduates into market segments based on their similarities of several variables.

Finally, chapter 6 concludes the findings and translated them into implications and recommendations for improvement in the service level provided by Student Affair Department. Apart from that, future research directions were also discussed.