

Students' Evaluation of the Desired Teaching Qualities among Lecturers of Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The fast growth of Malaysian higher education in the past decade is proven by the increase numbers of international students to the country. With such development, the vision to create a higher education environment that fosters the development of academic and institutional excellence in order for Malaysia to secure its position as a global education hub can be achieved. That has been translated with the establishment of various private and public universities together with the formation of many colleges fulfilling the new higher education landscape in Malaysia. Sooner or later such development will lead to a new challenge which is called 'competition'. Whether of or not we are in the rural or fast paced urban city, to face such competition, the most relevant question to be asked, are we ready? Are the lecturers fully equipped with all necessary skills to face the challenges? In order to address those questions, this exploratory research is being carried out to develop a deeper understanding of the teaching skills needed in higher learning institutions. Specifically, this paper is trying to identify valuable insights of lecturers demanded by students in higher learning institutions in East Coast of Malaysian in transmitting knowledge. In order to have a good understanding of those qualities demanded, interviews with the students were being conducted. Surprisingly, a number of other unexpected discoveries were made at the end of the session.

Keywords: *Teaching quality, students' demand, higher learning institution, East Coast Malaysia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education can be considered as one category in “service marketing field” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). An analysis of international trends in higher education shows that the globalization of the economy and the commodification of knowledge continued to have significant effects on higher education (Schugurensky, 1999). The Malaysian higher education sector has grown tremendously in the past decade and Malaysia is fast becoming an educational hub for excellence in the Asian region. The fast growth of Malaysian higher education in the past decade is proven by the increase numbers of international students to the country. With such development, the vision to make Malaysia as an important education hub in the world map will never be an unachievable dream. The vision is to create a higher education environment that fosters the development of academic and institutional excellence in the region and the whole world.

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In order to work towards its position as a regional education hub, two new initiatives were proposed. The first is the development of Educity in Iskandar Malaysia, a new major multi-dimensional development next to Singapore. The second initiative is Kuala Lumpur Education City (KLEC), which is actually a strategic education initiative incorporated into a new commercial and residential project in the Klang Valley. Iskandar Malaysia is an economic free zone being established in south of Peninsular Malaysia with developments to include industries, residential areas, port facilities, medical park, national and state government area, tourist attractions and Educity (Iskandar Malaysia, 2010). Iskandar Investment Bhd (IIB) which is backed by the government's investment organization (National Khazanah Bhd.) is responsible for developing Educity. It is interesting to note that under the development of Educity, IIB plans to have eight international universities that offer various study programs in selected fields such as business / financial studies, creative multimedia, engineering, logistics, hospitality and medicine. The opportunities lie in the fact that students from other regions see Malaysia as a low cost destination to obtain an internationally recognized degree. The foreign higher education institutions will be co-located and share common teaching, research, administration, sports and other facilities (Sawahel, 2009).

Another important aspect to look into is the fact that the world economy is fast becoming a knowledge-based economy. As a result, higher education is increasingly being viewed as central to national strategies for securing shares of global markets. The role and value of higher educations are regarded important contributor towards the development of social and economic arrangements which will give a competitive edge to the country. Most importantly, universities are seen as the repositories of much of the scarce and valuable human capital for the nation (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

1.1 Malaysia as an education hub

Such growth has led to the various developments of various public and private universities together with formation of many colleges, with the aim to fulfill the new higher education landscape in the country. With this new environment, has led to new challenge to our university landscape, that is the challenging situation of competition. Somehow or another has forced Malaysian universities to compete between one another. Being one of public universities in Malaysia, universities in the East Coast of Malaysia too will have to take up the challenge and compete.

East Coast is being chosen due to its uniqueness in terms of the development and well-being of the society. Despite of all development efforts done by the government, the economic development in the east region of Malaysia remains low with high poverty level (EPU, 2010). Overall, people in the East Coast are known for their timid and very reserved attitude. The attitude is said to be translated into the students' way of studying – quite slow and complacent at times. Comparing performance and standard of living, East Coast of Malaysia is somehow a bit behind as compared to other rural parts of Malaysia. This study is very important as it tends to uncover that special needs and wants of public universities students in East Coast of Malaysia

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify how does growth in Malaysia education system affects the needs and wants of the students? Earlier of this research has discussed how the landscape of higher education in Malaysia has changed tremendously for the past few years. The paper then continues to discuss how those changes led to a new scenario of competition. This study was being conducted based on the premise of recognizing the significant role played in the value creation and knowledge dissemination for students. Basically we are considering that teaching as a service and students as service customers (Lawrence and Sharma, 2002). Then, the whole value delivered to the students need to be gauged. That is why students' evaluation of their lecturers needs to be studied. This study planned to quantify lecturers' teaching performance based on students' point of view. This study is adapting similar study conducted by Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson (2012), in which he believes to be an important foundation in

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review can be divided into several sections.

2.1 University Lecturer and Teaching

Teaching is considered as an important function of most important function of university and college of education lecturers (Boyer, 1990; Ramsden and Moses, 1992; Ramsden et al, 1995) and has been well thought-out as one of the noblest' profession. It is a popular career choice for people from all walks of life. Teaching is a career that imparts enthusiasm, challenges, personal reward and an opportunity to support others to accomplish their goals. While others state a wider interpretation than the act of teaching is advanced in a tertiary education. In most research universities in the United States, the title of lecturer requires a doctorate or equivalent degree. In general, lecturers can be divided into lecturer, senior lecturers and are permanent positions in universities which implementing both teaching and research activities.

2.2 Characteristics of an Effective Lecturer

Effective teaching can be thought as a process of making students learning possible (Ramsden, 1992). He believes that high quality teaching is also fundamentally about affording high quality student learning. However, since student learning is possible and varies according to different level, ranging from deep to superficial, Ramsden modifies the initial conception of effective teaching. The new conception of effective teaching should consists of the following; namely effective lecturing that creates an environment in which deep learning outcomes for students are made possible, where high quality student learning is promoted and superficial approaches to learning are discouraged (Ramsden, 2003). Devlin (2003) believes effective lecturing means a well prepared and organized lecture and presented clearly and enthusiastically with variation and student involvement. On the other hand, Chireshe (2011) points out the importance of personality characteristics in shaping an effective or ineffective lecturer.

3. METHODOLOGY

With the aim of exploring students' needs and wants towards their lecturers, special interviews were conducted with final year bachelor degree students. Student expectations are a valuable source of information (Sander et al., 2000). According to Voss and Gruber (2006), this is especially true for undergraduate students as they have idealistic expectations. It is hoped when the university knows about their students' expectation, they may be able to respond to them to a more realistic level. The knowledge of student expectations may also help lecturers to design their teaching program (Sander et al., 2000).

This exploratory research is done by asking an open-ended question to final a number of final year Business degree students. A total of 112 students, from various programs took part in the exercise (such as Marketing, Operations Management, Finance, Islamic Banking and Office Systems and Management). Students are chosen due to the fact they are the final students. It is strongly believed that they are able to give the best indicator of lecturer quality that they would want (Ntshoe et al., 2005; Sakthivel and Raju, 2006; Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson, 2012).

At first, during the early stage of our research, the intention of this research was to gauge the readiness of our public lecturer in to face challenges and compete. Readiness was planned to be gauged from students' perspectives. However, when we were halfway through with our interview session, the readiness of our lecturers is not a big issue here. What is more important is the attitude and maturity of the students.

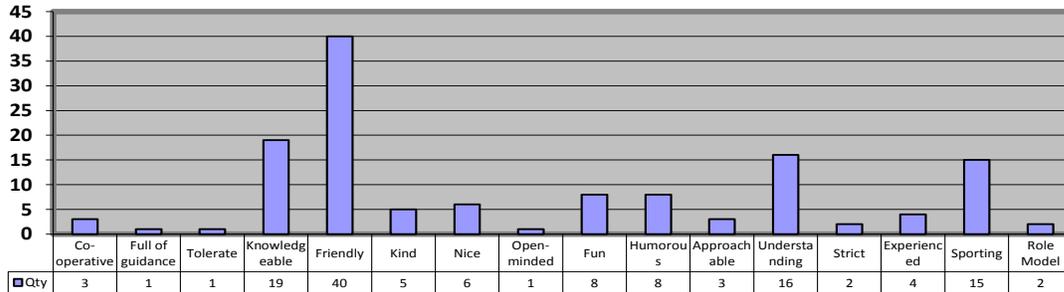
Two types of questions being asked; first is the type or characteristics of a lecturer that they would prefer and four suggestions to improve the overall performance of a university.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Characteristics of Lecturer Demanded by Students

Student evaluations of teaching have been widely used as a measure of teaching quality in colleges and universities. They can be useful for several purposes such as providing data for improving teaching, evaluating faculty performance, aiding student choice and stimulate students to think about their education (Schlenka and Mckinnon, 1994). The list of characteristics of a lecturer preferred by students is as shown in Table1below. The terms used are the exact words and description used by the respondents.

Table 1: Characteristics of University’s Lecturer Demanded by Students



Friendly

Analyzing students’ response, most of them would prefer their lecturers to be a friendly person. This characteristic is important, as the students want a lecturer who is easy for them to relate to and easier to share their problems. According to them, a friendly lecturer will make classes to be less stressful and they will not develop fear should they need to ask questions. The students believe that this kind of lecturer is not only easy for them to communicate to, but also can easily give them A for their final result.

Knowledgeable

Realizing their role at the university is to gain as much knowledge as possible, students also appreciate knowledgeable lecturer. They believe that these lecturers will be able to convey new knowledge and help them to understand their lesson better. They love to have confident lecturer to teach their subject matter. According to the students, knowledgeable lecturers are important as they will be able answer questions imposed by students correctly.

Understanding

The third characteristic of a lecturer demanded by our students is to have an understanding lecturer. Understanding in their perspective means an easy going lecturer who can relate themselves to their students. To have an understanding lecturer is important for the students so that, the lecturers can understand students’ problems better.

Sporting

Students' interpretation of a sporting lecturer is rather vague. They feel that they need a sporting lecturer so that it will make them feel more comfortable in class. There are a few students who feel that by having sporting lecturer will give them motivation to study and score in their subjects better.

Fun & Humorous

Generally students want to have fun class to attend to. It is important as students want to be offered an exciting way of learning. They want to avoid 'dull and boring' classes.

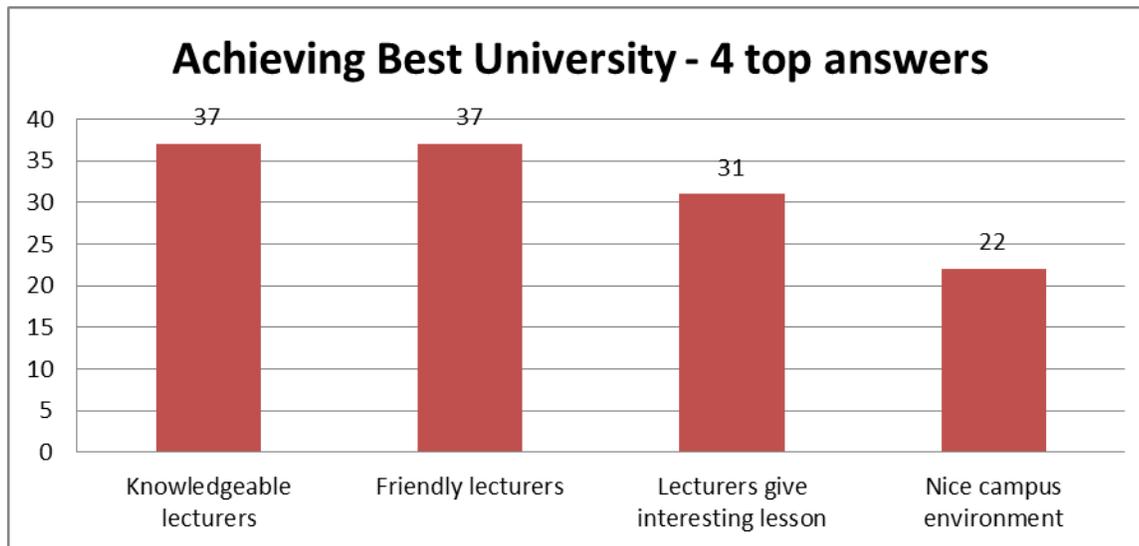
Other characteristics

Other characteristics of a lecturer deemed by students include professional, helpful, caring and supportive.

4.2 Factors chosen to improve the overall landscape of the University

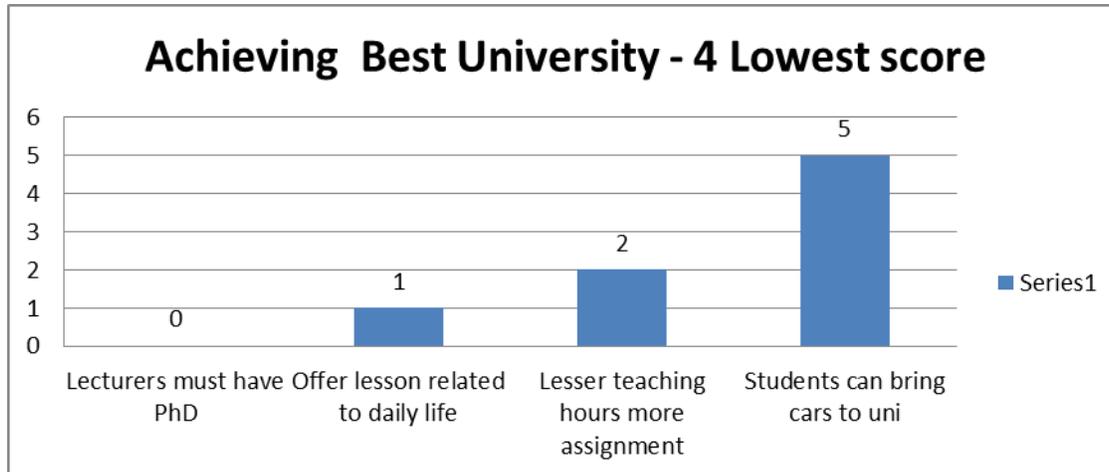
From a list of factors, students were also asked to choose four most important factors in improving the overall university landscape. Their top four factors is as shown in Table 2. According to students' perspectives those top factors that will improve and make it as the best university include to offer knowledgeable and friendly lecturers, having lecturers to give interesting lesson each time and to have nice overall campus environment (landscape).

Table 2 : Achieving Best University - Four Top Factors



On the other hand, the following (in Table 3) are four lowest score answers. Factors that seem least important to the students including lecturers must have PhDs, offering lessons that are related to daily life. Students are also not so keen on having lesser teaching hours but more assignments being given to them. Another surprise is the fact that not many students want to be allowed to bring cars to the university. It is as if, they do not mind not having such 'advantages' during their study period.

Table 3 : Achieving Best University – 4 Lowest Score



5. CONCLUSIONS

Basically, what we want to do in the first place was to find out what are the characteristics deemed by those public university students towards their lecturers. Later, at first we planned to match characteristics deemed by students with actual characteristics that lecturers think they possess. When we got the results students interview, we realize the situation might not turn as what we planned earlier. What concerns us most is the maturity of thoughts among our students. There is a wide difference from what we expect from our students to be and the response that we receive from them. Perhaps for us, university means high quality learning. High quality learning means learning which focuses fundamentally on the development of meaning and 'not a simple task' which enable a person to easily score A. The response that students give, somehow or rather reflect what they expect university could give them at the end of the day. They would like to have 'sporting', 'understanding' and 'friendly' lecturers whom they expect to understand their situation, and not them to understand the course requirement.

However, in teaching them, overall students would want to have knowledgeable lecturers. In fact knowledgeable lecturers have also been the highest score for determining factors to be the best university in the world. Other than that, students are more interested to choose factors that affect their daily interactions overall.

5.1 Recommendations

We are the university and we should be providing value to our students. Regardless of what our students want, we should have a strong stand in providing ‘value’ to our students. Recent developments in service management (as suggested by Vargo and Lusch, 2008) focus on “co-creation of value”. This implies that organizations do not provide “value” to someone; instead they actively participate in a joint process where customers also play an active role partly through direct interaction. Not to say that public universities in the East Coast of Malaysia do not provide the avenue for such ‘value creation’ for the students but most of the time we got carried away with the system. At the end of the day, the system is there, but offering no additional value to the students. Having said all that, there are a lot more to be explored, studied and improved for the better future of tomorrow.

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