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## Measuring Satisfaction Using Service Quality Towards Preschool in Proton City

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### ABSTRACT

Service education institutions now realizing the significance of customer oriented philosophies and turning to quality management approaches to facilitate managing their institutions. SERVQUAL as an effective approach to measure the quality provided services. However, this limited discussion of quality has largely concentrated on a small number of preschools in Proton City, Perak. Given the importance of early childhood education for children development it is important to study also the service quality of preschool education in emerging markets. In this research, there are five important dimensions on service quality; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Quantitative approach is used in this study. Responses from 53 parents are analyzed. The result shows that alpha coefficient of all five dimensions exceed 0.70 and can be concluded all items were reliable. The mean value for alpha Cronbach is 0.971 which is higher than required.

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## INTRODUCTION

Most families currently have three options for securing child care. First, parents can stay at home and take care their children themselves. But this is increasingly difficult, as most families now rely on two breadwinners to stay above water. Second, parents can pay the child care or preschool operators for the services provided. Thus, this may effect their monthly family budget expenses. The third option for families is to register their children to the federal or state funded childcare or preschool which are very limited number of children being accepted. In the area of Proton City, there are only three preschools operating and limited to provide only 110 students in a year. Actually, the demands is increasing because the increasing of people staying in this area. Most of the parents are working as a lecturer university and technician or engineer in the Proton Automobile Industry. Measuring the service quality from the customers' perception towards their preschool would help the operators to increase the level of service performance. Below are the population of preschool's students in the Proton City.

Preschool	Quantity of Students
KEMAS (Department of Welfare Society -Public Preschool)	20
Preschool in the Government Primary School (Minister of Education- Public School)	50
PASTI (Private School)	40

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The existing of public preschools in Malaysia giving chances for parents to register their children at the early age. Children learn three basic knowledge such as reading, counting, and writing in a formal education provided here by the government. The two public preschools are KEMAS, and MOE preschool shown in Table 1 with the major characteristics such as objective of establishment, number of students and the location of institutions. However, the public preschools are similar in terms of curriculum implemented and the regulations

of daily operations. Thus, the government is maintaining the quality services for the benefits of society near the preschool institutions.

**Table 1:** Major Characteristics of Public Preschools in Malaysia

Public Preschools	Objective of establishment	Number of students	Location
KEMAS	Children that comes from sub-urban, rural and remote areas with family of very low income.	10 – 30 children	Classes are conducted at the community halls (rented or provided free), housing estates, private property, shop houses (rented) or separate building built by the Ministry.
MOE	Children whose families are with very low income in the sub-urban, rural and remote areas.	10 - 25 children each classes	The classes are built annex to the public primary school building with the expenditure borne by Ministry of Education.

With regard to private for-profit organizations, generally they are perceived to be more efficient and effective in the provision of services and less bureaucratic. This enables them to manage their services effectively and efficiently and to act quickly to adapt to changing conditions. For the most part, this characteristic of the private sector is linked to its goal to make a profit. It needs to ensure efficiency in resource allocation and in management and to be customer-oriented to achieve its goal as in Bennett (1991) quoted. To survive in the competitive market, the private sector has to keep its costs low and maintain its reputation high. Below Table 2 are the factors parents trends towards private preschool nowadays.

**Table 2:** Factors Parents' Trends Towards Private Preschool

Factors Parents' Trends	Description
Branded	84.0 % chose Branded Preschools as opposed to non-branded preschools (13.6%) as in [3]. Brand image perceptions directly affect customer loyalty as in [4].
Language medium	71.6 % of participating parents chose English Medium pre-school and 27.8% parents chose Malay Medium because of English as a global language and research medium as in [3]
Curriculum	A parent must ask himself or herself which approach will work best for their child. Some children flourish in a school that allows them independence to choose their daily activities. Other children will simply be bored. Most of the private preschool enriched with variety educational program as in [3].
Religious based	Out of 162 participating Malay parents, 95.1% parents decided on Islamic-based preschool as their choice of pre-school for their children as in [3].

### ***Differences Between Public and Private Preschool in Malaysia:***

The public and private centers are very different in their goals and how they run their program and centers in any aspects such as on teaching and learning, teacher qualifications, teacher-child ration, curriculum, operation schedule. Table 3 illustrates these differences.

**Table 3:** Public vs Private Preschool in Malaysia

Item Discuss	Public Preschool	Private Preschool
Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher-centered</li> <li>Drill technique</li> <li>Limited learning materials and facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child-centered</li> <li>Classroom conducive for learning</li> <li>Appropriate learning materials and facilities</li> </ul>
Teacher Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locally trained</li> <li>Lack professional development</li> <li>Some not qualify to be an early childhood teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locally and abroad trained</li> <li>Professional in dealings with parents and children</li> <li>Mostly high qualified</li> </ul>
Teacher-Child Ratio	1:25	1:15
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasize social and emotional development</li> <li>Follow the government goals and objectives</li> <li>Intermediate Language: Malay</li> <li>Funded by government.</li> <li>Program organized and controlled by the government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasize cognitive development.</li> <li>Adjustable goals and objectives by the potential of children.</li> <li>Intermediate Language: Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil or mix languages.</li> <li>Run by NGOs or individuals, for profits or welfare purposes.</li> <li>Enriched programs such as Qur'an recitation, martial arts, ballet, drama, modern dance and art.</li> </ul>
Operation schedule	Only one option, 8 a.m – 12 p.m	Many options provided; 7 a.m – 12 p.m 7 a.m - 3 p.m 7 a.m - 6 p.m
Set up rules and system	Government authorities	Each private institution authorities

Thus, this limited discussion of **quality** has largely concentrated on a small number of preschools in Proton City, Perak. Given the importance of early childhood education for children development it is important to study also the **service quality** of preschool education in emerging markets. In this research, there are five important dimensions on service quality; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

#### **Methodology:**

The population for the study consisted of parents who send their children to the preschool institutions in Proton City, Perak. Three preschools, having the same type of services were identified in order to maintain generalizability of the preschools as the sampling frame for the whole population of working parents in Proton City. These preschool institutions are registered with the State Education Department. The convenient sampling technique was used in the sampling. Based on the sampling frame, the researchers then conducted a quantitative descriptive survey where 53 sets out of 110 sets of structured questionnaires adapted from Cronin and Taylor(1992) SERVPERF questionnaire were returned. The questionnaires were collected back two weeks later with the help from the preschool's teachers. The questionnaire was designed to capture some information on demographic factors and also the five dimensions of SERVPERF.

#### **Reliability:**

Table 4 depicts the Cronbach 's Alpha Scores for the five SERVPERF dimensions. The reliability analysis used the Cronbach's Alpha as the reliability coefficient. The reliability scores obtained range from 0.851 to 0.926. According to Sekaran (2003), the closer Cronbach's Alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability. Therefore, the reliability for all dimensions studied is considered as high as it was above 0.70. Hence, the data suggested that the questionnaire was a good and reliable instrument for testing the parents perception towards the service quality of the preschools in Proton City, Perak.

**Table 4:** Cronbach's Alpha Scores for SERVPERF Scale

Scales (Dimensions)	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient (Alpha)
Tangibles	5	0.851
Reliability	5	0.922
Responsiveness	4	0.923
Assurance	5	0.907
Empathy	4	0.926

The result for test of normality is shown in Table 5 below. According to Pallant (2005), the scores obtained on each variable in the study should be normally distributed. This can be tested by inspecting the values of skewness and kurtosis. Whether or not the normality of a distribution of a distribution is rejected will depend on the ratio of the skewness to its standard error and the ratio of kurtosis to its standard error (Coakes & Steed, 2006). Based form the values of skewness and kurtosis, the data was found to be reasonably normally distributed which is between  $\pm 2.0$ .

**Table 5:** Normality Test Result

Scales (Dimensions)	Skewness
Tangibles	-.0124
Reliability	-0.232
Responsiveness	-0.412
Assurance	-0.875
Empathy	-0.017

#### **Demographic Profile of Respondents:**

Table 6 shows the profile of respondents participated in the study. Frequency distribution were obtained for all the personal data. The profiles of the respondents include parents' age, parents' education level, family monthly income, distance from preschool and the decision maker. The majority of 73.6% of respondents are in the range of 30 years old to 39 years old. Then, parents' age from 20 years old to 29 years old with 9.4 % and parents with 40 years old and above are 17%. As shown from the table, parents graduated bachelor are the highest percentage with 35.8%, but the lowest is parents graduated as PHD holder. Actually a lot of lecturers staying in the Proton City area, unfortunately the limited number of children can assess the three preschools provided make them to send their children at the Tanjong Malim area. In addition, most of the government preschool prioritize children from the lower income family. Thus, more preschools or private preschools should be develop to fulfill the demand from the group of higher income family. The distance from preschools are likely equal percentage. Half of the percentage of parents are staying in the Proton City, and other half is staying outside Proton City but may be working in the Proton City. So, parents choose preschool which is near their working place compared their house. Parents mostly total monthly income in the range of RM2001 to RM4000.

This is the income of government teachers, lectures graduated master or engineers. Majority of parents together agreed to choose the preschool when making decision with the percentage 69.8%.

**Table 6:** Demographic Profile of Respondents

Personal Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Parents' Age (years) :		
20 - 29	5	9.4
30 - 39	39	73.6
40 - 49	8	15.1
> 50	1	1.9
Education Level :		
SPM	13	24.5
STPM	7	13.2
DIPLOMA	11	20.8
BACHELOR	19	35.8
MASTER	2	3.8
PHD	1	1.9
Family Monthly Income :		
< RM 2000	15	28.3
RM 2001 - RM 4000	20	37.7
> RM 4001	18	34.0
Distance from preschool :		
< 3 km	28	52.8
> 3 km	25	47.2
Decision Maker :		
Father	7	13.2
Mother	6	11.3
Both parents	37	69.8
Children	3	5.7

### ***The Five Servperf Dimensions:***

The following Table 7 illustrates the results from the analysis of data on parents perception on the service quality performance of the preschool institutions. The analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The dimension of responsiveness is the highest with the mean score 4.18 and standard deviation 0.572. The second ranked is assurance with mean 4.16 and standard deviation of 0.599. Although, it has been rated second after responsiveness, the researchers believe that it is still very important for the preschools managers to increase quality of assurance in order to increase parents' trustworthiness. Third ranked is the overall mean of five dimensions with mean score 4.11 and standard deviation is 0.531. Reliability and empathy ranked four and five respectively while tangibles have been ranked as the least important dimensions among parents' perception to the preschools in Proton City.

**Table 7:** Overall Mean Perception for SERVPERF Dimensions

Scales (Dimensions)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tangibles	4.03	0.51297
Reliability	4.09	0.60955
Responsiveness	4.18	0.57209
Assurance	4.16	0.59918
Empathy	4.08	0.64223
Overall Mean Perception	4.11	0.53058

In order to find out whether there is any relationship between service quality which represented by SERVPERF dimensions perceived by parents of students registering in the preschools in Proton City with the mean of overall dimensions, researchers tested the data using correlation analysis. Table 8 shows the result of correlation matrix between the dependent variable which is parents overall mean perception with all predictor variables which consist of the five SERVPERF dimensions.

**Table 8:** Correlation Matrix between Overall Mean Perception and SERVPERF Dimensions

		Overall Mean Perceptions	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Pearson Correlation	Overall Mean Perceptions	1.00	0.847	0.946	0.913	0.953	0.855
	Tangibles	0.847	1.000	0.777	0.737	0.769	0.586
	Reliability	0.946	0.777	1.000	0.849	0.903	0.737
	Responsiveness	0.913	0.737	0.849	1.000	0.833	0.707
	Assurance	0.953	0.769	0.903	0.833	1.00	0.788
	Empathy	0.855	0.586	0.737	0.707	0.788	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Overall Mean Perceptions	-	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Tangibles	0.000	-	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Reliability	0.000	0.000	-	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Responsiveness	0.000	0.000	0.000	-	0.000	0.000
	Assurance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-	0.000
	Empathy	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-

The Table 8 basically summarizes the correlation among variables. From the table we can see that all variables have strong positive relationship and significantly correlated with overall mean perceptions. All values are extremely high at 0.700 and above. The correlation between assurance with overall mean perceptions shows the strongest relationship that is 0.953 with  $p < 0.001$ . The assurance explains teachers who are knowledgeable to answer parents' questions and teachers who are giving full attention towards students' performance education.

#### **Discussion:**

The study managed to determine the service quality in Proton City based on parents' perception using quality measurement tool of five SERVPERF dimensions. The customers which referred to the parents who registered their children to the three preschools in Proton City were found to be highly satisfied with the preschools services provided. The mean score for overall perception is 4.11, while the overall mean scores for each five dimensions of SERVPERF are above 4.00. All five SERVPERF dimensions were also found to be significantly correlated with parents' perception. Based from the findings, the researchers could conclude that the preschools institutions had provided the level of expectation services which are synonymous with the culture of the mostly Malay residents in Proton City. Research by Hofstede (2001) has shown that a community with a lower individualistic culture is closely-knit and highly interdependent among themselves. Therefore, the preschool managers gave their excellent without disappointing the customers.

In order to ensure a continuous high preschool institutions service quality in Proton City, the researchers suggested that more preschools should be developed either under government or private organization with varieties of service offer such as additional class of computer class, martial arts or sewing class which offered by the preschool managers. If only three preschools provided in the Proton City, thus it will be limited number of students can register in the preschools and if the managers still accept them to register, it will give existing students inconvenience while studying or doing activities in the class or outside the class. The limits of the students in the class usually 25 to 30 students.

#### **Conclusion:**

Although competition among preschools is one way to promote their institutions, government action should be taken to make preschool education more accessible for children from all backgrounds, whether it is ethnic, economic, or social. The impact towards continuous monitoring the emerging of preschools will help to provide the best quality services in each public or private preschool in Malaysia. Quality servicers will gain quality education for each child in the preschool institutions.

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