Students’ Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality Performance: University student advisors in Australia, Malaysia and Singapore

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledge has been made.

Signature : ...........................................

Date : .............................................
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Abstract

As colleges and universities have attempted to become more student-oriented (Wright 1996), students’ perceptions of the higher education experience have become more important to tertiary institutions. Two elements of students’ experience, their treatment during the service process and the actual outcomes experienced by them, affect their judgment of the quality of service and ultimately influence their choice for enrolment in higher education institutions.

In order to compete effectively in the marketplace, institutions need to differentiate themselves from their competitors by providing higher quality services (Joseph 1998). To consider how, and to what effect, this is done, this study focuses on the discrepancies/gaps between expected and perceived services, using a modified SERVQUAL instrument to examine students’ perceptions of the quality of service in higher education environments across Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This study also examines the influence of cultural dimensions and gender on students’ perceptions of discrepancies/gaps between expected and experienced the quality of service.

This study uses a modified SERVQUAL instrument to assess the quality of service, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1988; it employs five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy). Samples are taken from first- and third-year undergraduate business degree students from Australian,
Malaysian and Singaporean Universities. The usable sample size is 1277 in the study. The modified SERVQUAL instrument consists of 22 items measuring the expectations of customers and similarly worded 22 items measuring their perceptions of experience to determine the quality of the services provided. A seven-point scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1) accompanies each statement.

The findings show a significant difference between first- and third-year students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in Malaysia and Singapore. There is a significant difference in the perceived discrepancies in the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore. It is also found that cultural dimensions have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, with discrepancies evident between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. A third finding is male and female students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in Australia are significantly different. Examiner’s comment: Discuss the actual results and their implication. In Hypothesis 1, the findings show a significant difference between first- and third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Malaysia and Singapore. This means first-year students have a lower expectation of the quality of service than third-year students. This could be due to as new students they do not know what to expect of the university; the experiences they have gathered were during the higher school or college, which is a very different environment from a university setting. In Hypothesis 2, the findings show no significant difference between first- and third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia and Singapore. This implies that the students have satisfactory experiences with services provided by student advisors. In Hypothesis 3, the findings show there is a
significant difference in the perceived discrepancies in the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore. This indicates that the third-year students’ expectation are not met, thus, they are dissatisfied with the services provided by the student advisors. This unsatisfactory perceived of the quality of service is a weakness of the student service centre that require re-training of the staffs for better improvement on the quality of service.

In hypotheses 4, 5 and 6, the findings show that cultural dimensions have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, with discrepancies evident between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Interestingly, the findings raise that should Singapore still be classified on high level of power distance dimension given the changes it has undergone since Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) original classification, which need further investigation.

In Hypothesis 7 and 8, the findings show male and female students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in Australia are significantly different. This means that the female students in Australia have higher expectations and perceptions of the quality of service than male students. This is most likely due to Australia is a low power distance society that encourages involvement from male and female employees; women are more sensitive to the relational aspect of service interactions than their male counterparts. In hypothesis 9, the finding show no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap in Australia, Malaysia or Singapore. This implies that male and female students’ expectations are met and the quality of service is perceived to be more than satisfactory.
A lack of knowledge about students’ perceptions might lead management to misallocate resources in attempts to improve the quality of their university; such misdirected efforts could result in further student dissatisfaction. This study’s analysis of the discrepancy/gap between expectations and perceptions of the quality of service, identifies deficiencies and areas of dissatisfaction that offer opportunities for university managers to improve overall student services, to build a long-term relationship with the customers, and to improve the institution’s reputation.
1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of services in a global economy, the range of industries in the services sector, the background of higher education issues across various countries, and the purpose and significance of this study. It also defines the research questions and provides a summary of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 The Role of Services in an Economy

In today’s competitive and dynamic environment, the services sector has become one of the key drivers for global economy development. It is the fastest growing sector in the world in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), accounting for about two thirds of the world’s services trade (Lo, Ooi & Chin 2007). The continual growth of services in world trade derives from globalisation, government liberalisation, and the rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). Various services trades, once restricted by regulations and borders, are now provided worldwide by international organisations, joint alliances, inter-governmental trade agreements, and increasingly efficient internet technology (IT) network systems.
Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott (2006) argue that demographic changes and social demand are further factors that have led to the continued growth of services.

Services have an immense impact on the development and growth of other industries because they complement overall economic performance. According to Lo, Ooi and Chin (2007), the services sector is one of the main builders of many economies throughout the world and many governments are putting great emphasis on this sector in their economic planning. For instance, the US, the world’s largest economy, has experienced a continuous expansion of its leading services sectors throughout the world, particularly in the Asian region, which is its main target market for outsourcing (Lo, Ooi & Chin 2007).

The importance of the services sector is also evident in Singapore’s hospitality industry. The Singapore government’s amendment of its Gambling Act has led to the Singapore Casino Regulatory Authority issuing casino licences to two agents to expand its lucrative premium-player business (Wong 2012). In addition, Singapore hosts the Formula One racing program, and has recently extended the racing circuit licensing agreement until 2017 (Singapore GP Press Release 2012, September 22). Such events are expected to enhance its tourism and services sectors.

The importance of the services sector is evident in the higher education environments of Malaysia and Singapore. In Malaysia, as the country moves towards becoming a developed nation, greater emphasis is placed on the development of the services
sector as the engine of growth that will propel and sustain the economy. Under the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011 to 2015), the services sector is expected to grow at 7.2% annually until 2015, raising its contribution to GDP to 61% by the end of this period (Malaysian Investment Development Authority 2012). In recent years, the Malaysian government has given more autonomy to the higher education institutions to improve their standards, and has developed an area known as EduCity in the south of Malaysia that is expected to attract 100,000 international students by 2010 (Overland 2007; Rout 2007; The Malaysian Insider, 21 November 2008).

Singapore is also establishing an educational hub for both local and international students. Strategically placed in the heart of Asia, Singapore has become a business epicentre serving as a gateway between Western and Eastern economies (Bakhda 2012). The Singapore government has given local universities more autonomy and allowed them to set their own fee structures, this is expected to better satisfy the needs of the students and the overall standard of the institutions (The Straits Times 2004, 9 December). A recently released report by Universitas 21, ‘U21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems’, lists Singapore as the 11th country worldwide and the first in Asia in its provision of higher education (Bakhda 2012). This puts pressure on Malaysian and Australian universities; research has shown that Singapore and Malaysia are more active than ever in the international education industry (Follari & Pearce 2004).

In Australia, there has been a significant decrease in the government’s financial support of higher education institutions. Since 2004, the Australian government has
allowed universities to raise their tuition fees (The Age 2003, 5 December; AAP General News Wire 2005, 25 February). In 2012, the government cut and delayed funding, and universities did not receive millions of dollars earmarked for research infrastructure under the Sustainable Research Excellence program and performance funding (Marszalek 2012). To make up the shortfall, universities are capitalising on the global demand for international education, and particularly targeting the Asian region. There is increasing competition among the various institutions to recruit more local and, in particular, overseas students.

According to the World Bank’s (2000) report, over 64 per cent of the world’s total output is in the services sector. In rapidly developing markets such as those in East Asia, services account for 41 per cent of the region’s GDP and have the potential to grow further (World Bank 2000). As economies modernise, services account for an increasing proportion of economic activity. In Australia, the services sector is the largest contributor to the Australia’s national output, generating 78.5 per cent of real gross value added in the year to June 2011. It continues to grow faster than most other sectors of the Australia’s economy and is a major driver of Australia’s economic growth (Austrade 2011; Regulation impact statement 2012, p. 6).

These are signs of ongoing services development both regionally and globally. It is anticipated that the dynamism of world services will continue in the next decades, generating more opportunities for all nations. However, the challenges are great if all nations are to benefit from the services sector.
1.3 The Services Sector

1.3.1 Services

Services are traditionally difficult to define, primarily because of their diversity. Lovelock, Patterson and Wirtz (2011, p. 6) categorise services as ‘consumer’ or ‘business’, as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Examples of the Diversity of Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer services</th>
<th>Business services</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airline</td>
<td>Accountancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking and finance</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Legal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>Management consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opera/theatre</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football match</td>
<td>IT consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House cleaning</td>
<td>Logistics consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Marketing research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lovelock, Patterson & Wirtz 2011, p. 6)

The services sector also encompasses publicly-offered services such as the police, fire brigades, army, taxation and education services (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006).

The distinction between services and manufacturing lies in the fact that the tangible/physical element of a service is typically incidental to the overall value delivered by a service (Lovelock, Patterson & Wirtz 2011). A ‘good’ is a tangible physical object or product that can be created and transferred; it has an existence
over time and can be created and used later (Saser, Olsen & Wyckoff 1978, p. 8).

Services usually deal with intangibles: things that one cannot hold, touch nor see before use.

There are various definitions of services. These include the view that services are behavioural rather than physical entities; they have been described as deeds, performances or effort (Rathmell 1966; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988) and activities or processes (Gronroos 1990). Service represents any activity offered to a customer which is consumed as it is produced (Kothari 1988). It is an activity or series of activities of a more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, takes place in interaction between a customer and service employees, and may involve physical resources, goods or systems offered by the service provider as solutions to customer problems (Gronroos 1990). Further, service is ‘any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product’ (Kotler 1991, p.455). From these various definitions five characteristics of services may be determined: intangibility, inseparability (simultaneous production and consumption), inconsistency (heterogeneity), inventory (perishability), and inability to own (ownership) (Kaper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006), all of which have an important implications for the delivery of services (Hill 1995).
1.3.2 Services – The higher education environment

Like any other service industry, education is designed to meet the needs and wants of the users of its services (Redmond et al. 2008). However, it is different from most other services in two ways: first, education is a ‘pure service’, for there is no physical product involved (Evans & Lindsay 2002). That means the quality of the service is grounded in the responsiveness, dialogue and relationships that exist between relevant stakeholders such as the teacher and student, and in the appropriateness and methods used to achieve stated learning outcomes. In practice, this means that the teachers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes are transferred and used in appropriate ways to facilitate students’ learning. Second, education is unlike other types of services such as retailing or catering that focus on the interaction between a single provider and a consumer (Redmond et al. 2008). Students receiving an education are not the only beneficiaries; even though they are the primary consumers, there are other stakeholders such as parents, prospective employers and society as a whole, who all have an interest in how successful and appropriate is the education for the needs of the student.

A higher education institution is similar to other businesses in that it needs to satisfy its primary customers (the students) in order to survive, develop, and sustain a competitive edge within its business environment. Maguad (2007, p. 332) supports the idea of considering education institutions as ‘customer-driven entities’, largely because customer-driven organisations are more effective in their commitment to satisfying customers’ (students’) needs. Maguad (2007) emphasises that the success of universities will increasingly be determined by how well they satisfy their
customers. Successful ones will be those that clearly identify their mission and satisfy the students they serve; this makes it imperative for universities to clearly identify the different students they serve and their corresponding needs.

With strong economic pressure to increase universities’ fees because of the reduction of financial support from government in Australia (The Age 2003, 5 December; AAP General News Wire 2005, 25 February); as well as the increase in numbers of competitors both locally and overseas such as universities in Malaysia and Singapore, higher education institutions are now being driven towards more ‘customer-oriented’ approaches (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak 2005). Universities in Australia and Malaysia are seeking to attract and retain student enrolments in order to meet their revenue targets and to accomplish their goals and objectives (The Star 2012, 13 May; Australian Bureau of Statistice 2005). Also, they are engaging in competition for a market share in higher education. Their reputation depends not only on academic programs, prestige and location, but also the quality of student service delivery and the value of student experiences outside the classroom (Nealon 2005). Increasingly, students have come to view themselves as both customers and active learners (Downey, Frase & Peters 1994; Pariseau & McDaniel 1997); they are looking closely at the approach to service delivery of each institution as a significant factor that distinguishes one university from another.

The quality of each service encounter experienced by customers forms part of their overall impression of the whole service provided (Dale 2003) and their ‘impression of the organisation itself’ as well (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes 2006, p. 254).
Customers form their opinions based on the experiences with people who served them. They are either satisfied, dissatisfied or somewhere between these two poles. A satisfied customer engages in positive word of mouth communication that can impact positively on a business’s reputation and financial status. For example, satisfied customers of a tertiary institute may remain with it, re-enrol for more courses, or recommend to their friends or relatives the service which they have experienced there. Dissatisfied customers are likely to pass on negative comments about the service provider, which could affect a business’s operation and cause damage to its reputation. They may withdraw and re-enrol at another university, or pass negative comments to their friends or relatives that affect the university’s enrolment and retention of students.

In order to deliver total student satisfaction, Banwet and Datta (2003) stress, all employees of a university should adhere to principles of quality customer service, whether they are front-line contact staff involved in teaching or administration, or non-contact staff in management or administrative roles. Sohail and Shaikah (2004) find ‘contact personnel’ the most influential factor in students’ evaluation of service. This supports the findings of Galloway (1998), that front-line staff have a direct impact on students’ satisfaction. To follow this line, in this study university business students from first- and third-year in the participating countries were invited to evaluate their advisors, who are front-line staff, on quality of service.

New customers, students just entering a university, may not know what to expect of the institution; their expectations may be high or low, based on experiences in high
schools or colleges, which are usually different environments from a university setting. Without much knowledge of the university, they tend to seek advice or gather information from a university’s student service centre. The centre’s advisors are the ‘first point of contact’ for these students. The services provided by the business student advisors in this study are, therefore, vital; there is a need to maintain high service levels because these advisors represent the university, providing services to its existing customers and, by extension, to future customers and society as a whole.

Any higher education institution seeking to survive and retain its competitive edge within the customer-oriented environment needs to identify its customers’ requirements and respond to them efficiently and effectively. Given the importance of service in the higher education environment, there is a need to identify and examine these services closely. The research focus in this study is to examine university business students’ expectations and perceptions, and consider discrepancies in the quality of service provided by their advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The study further examines the effect of cultural dimensions; and of gender in the rating of services provided by the student’s advisors.

1.4 Background of Problems

1.4.1 Higher education changes, trends and concerns in Australia

Traditionally, Australian higher education was based solely on federal government-funded activity, without pressure or fear of insufficient student enrolments. For
almost two decades, Australian universities have been big winners from the Asian gold rush of full-fee paying international students, turning higher education into the country’s third largest export earner. With federal funding for domestic students in short supply, international student fees have cross-subsidised the education of Australians and the research output of Australian universities (Gallagher & Garrett 2012).

The situation has now changed: the government’s financial support has decreased significantly. Between 1989 and 1997, government funding for higher education fell from 77.2 to 53.8 per cent of costs; in 2000, Federal funding dropped to 46 per cent, below the 50 per cent mark for the first time (GSE 2002, p. 4). A further cut was announced in 2012, with the Australian government announcing cuts of $1 billion from higher education funding over four years in its mid-year budget. This move is expected to cost 1450 research jobs, bringing a decrease in international students and producing lower-quality graduates (Marszalek 2012; Trounson 2012).

According to Chaney (2012, p. 3), the Chair of the International Education Advisory Council, recent years have brought challenges to Australia Universities. Rapid growth in enrolments between 2006 and 2009 has been followed by a decline in overall numbers since 2010. This is partly a response to global factors such as the strengthening of the Australian dollar, the Global Financial Crisis and the current financial uncertainty in world markets, safety concerns that surfaced in 2009, the poor quality of a few former providers, and increasing global competition for international students. Migration settings, which encouraged enrolment by students
who were primarily seeking a migration outcome, were part of the reason for the pre-2009 boom, and the subsequent corrective action has been among the reasons why the high numbers of 2009 have fallen (Chaney 2012, p. 3). West (2012) argues that Australia’s education boom is slow and that the first crisis to hit the Australia’s education industry was the bad press surrounding the mistreatment of Indian students following violent attacks in 2008 and 2009. Tighter visa restrictions and a high dollar have also made Australian degrees less attractive abroad (Bleby 2012); while global economic turmoil has resulted in universities around the world competing aggressively for a share of the education export market (West 2012).

Coupled with a huge expansion in the demand for higher education, economic pressures have led Australian higher education institutions to seek alternative sources of revenue. These have included the marketing of higher education, which has been seen as a ‘quasi-commercial’ activity (Brookes 2003, p. 134). Universities have sought extra funding through research earnings, summer programs and the development of overseas campuses; some institutions rely heavily on the fees paid by overseas students. Australian universities are service-autonomous bodies responsible for their own governance; they make their own decisions on the allocation of funding, staffing and academic courses (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). Since 2004, the Australian government has allowed universities to raise their fees from 25 per cent to 35 per cent of the total course cost (AAP General News Wire 2005, 25 February). This has resulted in increasing competition among universities in Australia to recruit local and, in particular, overseas students.
In a paper presented to the International Development Program of Australian Universities and College (IDP) conference by Follari & Pearce (2004), countries like Singapore and Malaysia were shown to be growing more active than ever in the international education industry. This has put further stress on Australian universities’ desire to capitalise on the global demand for international education, particularly from the Asian region. The IDP Chief Executive Officer (Pollock 2005) emphasised that quality has to be maintained in terms of world-class teaching and learning, as well as in other strategies; for example, upgrading services, recruitment, enrolment support and academic counselling. West (2012) notes that Asian countries have begun pumping billions of dollars into their own educational institutions; it is only a matter of time before universities in Asia rival the world’s best. Singapore is viewed as one of the main competitors. West (2012) noted, already Singapore has four universities, all of them considered as good as those in Australia; as a result, Singaporean students often look to their own universities before they look overseas.

There is a clear value in examining the quality of service of Australian universities, and in particular their student customer service centres, which are the frontline interface where initial meeting of institution and students occurs. When students are satisfied with the services provided, word of mouth reaches future customers for the universities; this ideally increases the reputation of the universities and leads to increased enrolments and revenue.
1.4.2 Higher education changes, trends and concerns in Malaysia

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–1998 forced many Asian students to abandon their high-fee university places overseas and return home (Srilal 1998). In the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2008, demonstrating the increasingly inter-connected nature of the world, Asia suffered exposure to problems emanating in the West. Many Asian countries saw their stock markets suffer and currency devalue; demand for Asian products and services decreased in wealthy countries, meaning there is the increased chance of a slowdown in Asian economies with the concomitant risk of job losses and associated problems such as social unrest (Shah 2010). The Global Financial Crisis has caused Malaysian students to withdraw plans to go overseas to pursue higher education. As families tightened their purse strings their children were encouraged to study locally rather than abroad to save costs; the effects for local and private higher education are expected to remain positive (Malaysia: Economic crisis dashes study abroad dreams 2009).

The Asian Financial Crisis has given the Malaysian government a chance to push ambitions for their country to become a regional hub for higher education (Sohail, Rajadurai & Rahman 2003). Besides the affordability of higher education fees in Malaysia, Rout (2007) notes that the cheaper cost of living in Malaysia is a competitive strength for universities competing with Singapore and other more expensive countries such as Britain, the US and Australia. The fact that Malaysia shares a socio-cultural background with its Southeast Asian neighbours is an additional advantage when attempting to attract foreign students.
The Malaysian government has announced plans to revitalise its lagging university system with the aim of becoming an educational hub in Southeast Asia, placing it in competition with Singapore and Australia. To reinforce its commitment to this aim, the Malaysian government determined ‘to create a knowledge-based society that focuses on information communications technology, education and the retraining of workers’ (Austrade 2007, p. 1). Under its recent Business Development Plan, the Third Outline Perspective Plan 2001–2010 (OPP3), the government renewed its commitment to increase investment in education (Economic Planning Unit 2001). Higher Education Minister Dato’ Mohamed said in 2006 that the Plan represents a road map for improving universities’ standards and includes giving institutions more autonomy and doubling the number of foreign students. With the development of EduCity in the south of Malaysia, the government set a goal of attracting 100,000 international students by 2010 (Overland 2007; Rout 2007).

A recent news release from the Malaysian government states that since the Asian Financial Crisis, the government has engaged actively in promoting and marketing Malaysia as a centre for higher education, rebranding and upgrading its higher education institutions to meet international standards and attract more students from overseas. The education ministry estimates the foreign student population to grow to 150,000 by 2015 and to 200,000 by 2020 (The Star 2012, 13 May). This is a move to lure international students away from the neighbouring country of Singapore, and enhance university competitiveness in the Southeast Asian region.
The Malaysian government has allocated a large part of its budget for educational development, averaging an annual 20 per cent. This has largely been spent on intellectual capital, on the training of academic staff and on research and development in universities (Razak 2006). With regard to the Business Development Plan – the Ninth Malaysian Plan (9MP), the government identified enhancement of human capital as a key pillar for greater development; but training non-academic staff is not included on this agenda: a feature inconsistent with the Plan (Economic Planning Unit 2006). In effect, the lack of training creates concern about the quality of service of non-academic staff in Malaysian education institutions, including those advisors in the customer service arena who deals with existing and potential customers.

1.4.3 Higher education changes, trends and concerns in Singapore

In Singapore, the government has accepted the recommendations of the University Autonomy, Governance and Funding (UAGF) Steering Committee to devolve greater autonomy to its three publicly-funded universities: the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), and Singapore Management University (SMU) (The Straits Times 2004, 9 December). The move to transform NUS and NTU into corporatised, autonomous universities like SMU marks the beginning of the next phase of the universities’ development, wherein they will be able to exercise greater flexibility to make changes to create a unique educational experience for their students and to compete in the global university landscape.
To give local universities more autonomy, the Government relaxed its control over fees and allowed university authorities to set their own prices for tuition (The Straits Times 2004, 9 December). The result was a 5% fee increase in August 2005 and a further 3% in August 2006 for NUS and NTU, while SMU increased its fees by 15% in 2005 although their fees for the following academic year remained unchanged (Teo 2006). In 2008, all three universities raised tuition fees for the new intakes of students. For NUS and NTU, the fee was increased by about 4%, while SMU had an increase of 10%. Both NUS and NTU reported that the fee increases were necessary to meet the increase in manpower and operating costs in order to continue providing high-quality education. Increased charges were claimed to provide better teaching and to improve the overall services within the universities’ environments that could be expected by customers (Singapore News 2008, 13 February; Hoe 2008). The Education Ministry has announced that in 2013 there will be another fee rise of around 2% to 7%. From 2013, Singaporeans starting at NUS and NTU will pay 4% to 6% more than their seniors, depending on their courses; those starting at SMU will pay 5% more (AsiaOne News 2012, 9 February; The Star 2012, 12 February). The argument for raising tuition fees is that it will provide and improve the educational experience of students.

These changes, trends, and concerns in the higher education systems of Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore indicate a need to examine university services, especially those provided by front-line staff.
1.5 Purpose and Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Purpose

Services lie at the hub of economic activity in any society. Service activities are crucial for the economy to function and to enhance the quality of life and can range from a banking industry that transfers funds, a transportation industry that moves food products to areas that cannot produce them, and personal services such as restaurants, lodging, cleaning, and child care. Government services play a critical role in providing a stable environment for investment and economic growth. Services such as education, health care, roads, safe drinking water, and public safety are necessary for any nation’s economy to survive and people to prosper (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004).

It is imperative to recognise that services are not peripheral activities but integral parts of society, central to a functioning and healthy economy. The service sector not only facilitates but also makes possible the goods-producing activities of the manufacturing sectors. Services are a crucial force in today’s change towards a global economy.

In today’s competitive higher education environment, students are faced with unprecedented challenges. This is most obviously seen in increases in university tuition fees: in Australia in 2004 (The Age 2003, 5 December) and in Singapore from 2005 to 2006 (Teo 2006), again in 2008 (Singapore News 2008, 13 February; Hoe 2008); and to come in 2013 (AsiaOne News 2012, 9 February; The Star 2012, 12 February). The allocation of funds for educational development in Malaysia goes
against this trend but, as discussed earlier, does not include training and development of non-academic staff (Razak 2006).

Higher education institutions have become more concerned with the quality of education and services that they offer their students. This is because fee-paying students behave like other consumers and expect value for money, becoming more demanding of their experience as students and wanting their voice heard (Watson 2003). Moreover, high performance clearly improves an institution’s reputation and results in increased enrolments, regardless of fee costs (Shelley 2005).

Researchers (Gronroos 1983; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985, 1988; Teas 1993) have suggested that there is a need to understand how the quality of service is perceived by customers. This is because when the service provider understands how the services will be evaluated by the users, it will be possible to identify how to manage these evaluations and how to influence them in a desired direction (Gronroos 1983). Gronroos (1983) has developed two dimensions to address the quality of service as perceived by customers: technical quality (referring to the result of the service or the question of ‘what has been provided’) and functional quality (referring to the way the service has been delivered and relating to the question of ‘how the service has been provided’). However, Lagrosen (2001) argued that Gronroos’ criterial of the quality of service have an important value for conceptual understandings of services, but may not be sufficient, as it is important to study quality in each specific situation. Therefore, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry
(1985) have based on Gronroos’ research and further expanded on the concept of quality of service.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry’s (1988) study, the quality of service model indicates that customers’ perceptions of quality are influenced by a series of four distinct gaps occurring in organisations. The gaps on the side of marketer or service provider can impede delivery of services that customers perceive to be of high quality. This gap analysis approach became the foundation of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry’s (1985, 1988) research into quality of service. Their studies in 1985 and 1988 revealed the key to ensuring a good quality of service is by meeting or exceeding what customers expect, which is identified by Gap 5 in the quality of service model. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) further explained if the customer’s expectations are met, the quality of service is perceived to lead to satisfaction; if the customer’s expectations are not met, the customer is dissatisfied. When the customer’s expectations are exceed, the quality of service is perceived to be more than satisfactory.

To date, much of the published work on the quality of service in higher education has concentrated on effective course delivery mechanisms, and the quality of courses and teaching (Athiyaman 1997; Bourner 1998; Cheng & Tam 1997; McElwee & Redman 1993; Palihawadana 1996; Soutar & McNeil 1996; Yorke 1992; Varey 1993); healthcare (Moullin 2002); or educational setting (Huang 2006; Nealon 2005). Very little research has been carried out or reported on non-academic staff; little of that with regard to services provided at Student Service Centres, and even less on the
services provided to business students. This study explores business students’
expectations and perceptions of the quality of service provided, and the discrepancies
between them.

The following research questions have been identified for examination. The major
research question for the study is:

What discrepancies can be discerned between students’ expectations and their
perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in
Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

The minor research questions for this study are:

(1) Do individual cultural tendencies have a significant impact on students’
expectations and perceptions, and on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of
services provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and
Singapore?

(2) Does students’ gender affect their service ratings of the quality of service
provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?
1.5.2 Significance

The study is considered to be of significance for a number of reasons:

- It has the potential to improve the quality of service providers in universities by increasing understanding of needs in the marketing of university programs.

- It provides a deeper understanding of the pros and cons of students’ enrolment systems.

- It increases the body of knowledge of business students’ expectations and perceptions of service provided by their student advisors.

- More accurate data will be available to business academics in marketing, enrolment and teaching; non-academic marketing specialists in universities; and business student advisors of student enrolment and information.

- By analysing the discrepancies between business students’ expectations of service provided by student advisors and their perceptions, the research will enable business student advisors to directly manage identified deficiencies and areas of dissatisfaction, improving their overall service.

- Results can be used as a foundation on which to improve business student advisory services to build a long-term relationship between the university and its students.

- Over time the improvements implemented as a result of the findings of this research may contribute to a university’s state, national and international reputation.
1.6 Structure and Outline of Thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the background to the role of services in an economy, with a discussion of the range of services encompassed by the services sector and a particular focus on higher education services in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This chapter also explains the focus, purpose and significance of the research.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the background literature for this study, including the nature and characteristics of service, definitions of quality, identification of the customers in service delivery, and an understanding of the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm, which leads to a discussion of the framework of perceived the quality of service and further development of the quality of service. It examines the various research instruments used to measure the quality of service, and the validity and reliability of the chosen instrument (SERVQUAL). In addition, this chapter investigates the relationship between service, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, with particular reference to service in higher education. Last but not least, the chapter examines cultural influences and their impact on service, and the effect of gender on perceived quality of service.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology, encompassing the selection of students and countries, pilot testing, sample procedure, questionnaire
administration, choice of research instruments, reliability and validity of the instruments selected, and methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, beginning with a preliminary examination of data screening and followed by normality and reliability testing and analysis of the respondents’ profiles.

Chapter 5 analyses the findings on the quality of service of university business student advisors, and is divided into three parts: first, students’ expectations and perceptions, and the resultant service gaps; second, the effect of cultural values on students’ expectations and perceptions, and the resultant service gaps; and third, students’ gender as a function of service rating.

Chapter 6 presents an overview of the study and its theoretical and practical contributions. This chapter summarises the research, highlights the significance of the findings, discusses the research limitations, and suggests future research directions.

1.7 Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to understanding the role of services in an economy, the range of industries in the services sector, the background of higher education issues across selected countries, and the purpose and significance of this study. It also defines the research questions of the study.
The next chapter discusses the definitions of quality and the characteristics of services, understanding the role of customers in service delivery, the importance of customer contact personnel, the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm, the framework of perceived the quality of service and the development of the quality of service. It explains the instruments used to measure the quality of service, the validity and reliability of the SERVQUAL instrument, criticisms of the SERVQUAL instrument and responses to them. It examines the nature of service in higher education, cultural influences and their impact on quality of service, and the influence of gender on students’ perceptions of service.
2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an understanding of the role of services in an economy, the range of industries in the services sector, background problems of education across various countries, and the purpose and significance of this study; it also defines the research questions and outlines the course of this study.

This chapter discusses the definitions of quality, the definitions and characteristics of service, the role of customers in service delivery, customer contact personnel, the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm, the framework of perceived quality of service, and the development of quality of service. It also explains the instruments used to measure the quality of service, the validity and reliability of the SERVQUAL instrument, criticisms of it and justifications for its use. This chapter examines the relationships between quality of service, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, and the nature of service in higher education. Cultural influences and their impact on the quality of service are also discussed, followed by a comparison of Hofstede’s and Trompenaars’ cultural dimensions. The chapter also examines the influence of gender on students’ perceptions of service.
Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct. Often it is mistaken for imprecise adjectives like ‘goodness, or luxury, or shininess, or weight’ (Crosby 1979); Takeuchi & Quelch (1983) argue that its requirements are not easily articulated by customers. Customers will always search for quality, as it is one of the main drivers of customer satisfaction; quality is therefore a natural pursuit for any organisation seeking a source of competitive advantage (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006). Before investigating quality of service, there is a need to understand the various definitions of quality that exist in social and business environments.

Prior to World War II, the notion of quality was based on the physical characteristics of the product (Tenner & DeToro 1992). Llosa, Chandon and Orsingher (1998) suggest that efforts to define and measure quality have been developed mainly in the manufacturing environment. The quality mandate was to measure the variation in the product or service characteristics from standard specifications, and then to confront the manufacturing or service-delivery process that contributed to any variations identified (Tenner & DeToro 1992).

According to prevailing Japanese manufacturing philosophy, quality is based on the zero defects concept and is defined as doing it right the first time; there is no tolerance for failure (Corsby 1979). Corsby (1979) defines quality as conformance to requirements; and states that in order to achieve quality, firms must establish requirement specifications: once these have been established, the quality goal of the various functions of the firm, above all other factors, is to comply strictly with the
specifications. However, Palmer (1998) asks a valid question: whose requirements, and whose specifications?

Another set of significant definitions is presented by Juran (1988) where quality is seen as fitness for use. It centres around three basic quality processes: quality planning, quality improvement, and quality control. Juran’s (1988) definition is market-driven and customer-oriented because it focuses on customer utility and satisfaction. The definitions of Corsby (1979) and Juran (1988) can be united in the concept of customer-perceived quality: quality is in the eye of the customer. O’Neill and Palmer (2004) support the views of Corsby (1979) and Juran (1988), suggesting that quality can only be defined by customers and occurs where an organisation supplies goods or services to a specification that satisfies their needs.

Garvin in 1983 measured quality by counting the incidence of internal failures (those observed before a product left the factory) and external failures (those incurred in the field after a unit had been installed). He classified quality into five major groups: transcendent-based, product-based, user-based, manufacturing-based, and value-based. Of these five approaches, product-based and manufacturing-based referred to objective quality, and user-based paralleled perceived quality. Ideally, quality management is a means of bridging the gap between external quality management, starting with customer perceived quality, and internal quality management focused on conformance (Gummesson 1993).
In defining quality service, there are additional characteristics to be accounted for. Garvin (1988) identifies eight dimensions of quality, each contributing to a set of requirements. All dimensions should ideally be accounted for and planned for in the service process; regardless of how an organisation derives its definition of quality in service, the concept must incorporate as many of the dimensions as possible. The dimensions are function (the primary required performance of the service), features (the expected performance), conformance (the satisfaction based on requirements that have been set), reliability (the confidence of the service in relationship to time), serviceability (the ability to service if something goes wrong), aesthetics (the experience itself as it relates to the senses), and perceptions (the reputation of the quality) (Garvin 1988).

2.2 Service – Definitions and Characteristics

2.2.1 Definitions of service

Service has traditionally been difficult to define, in part because of its diversity (Lovelock, Patterson & Wirtz 2011). For example, consumer services include airlines, banking and finance, insurance, health, and telecommunications; business services include accountancy, architecture, engineering, legal services, and management consulting. The service marketing literature offers various definitions of service. Services are behavioural rather than physical entities; they have been described as deeds, performances or effort (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988; Rathmell 1966) and activities or processes (Gronroos 1990). According to Kothari (1988), service represents any activity, offered to a customer, which is produced and consumed simultaneously. Gronroos (1990) defines service as an activity or series of
activities of a more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, takes place in interaction between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. Kotler (1991, p. 455) defines service as ‘any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product’. These definitions relate to five characteristics: intangibility, inseparability (simultaneous production and consumption), inconsistency (heterogeneity), inventory (perishability), and inability to own (ownership) (Kaper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006), all of which have important implications for the delivery of high-quality service (Hill 1995) and all of which must be acknowledged for a full understanding of the term.

2.2.2 Characteristics of service

Parasuraman (1986) notes that the characteristics of service differentiate services from goods. The five characteristics are:

1. Intangibility. One of the unique characteristics that distinguish services from goods this is the primary source from which the other characteristics of service emerge (Hoffman & Bateson 1997). Services are intangible because they are performances rather than objects (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985); they are an activity or an experience and not a thing (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006).

2. Inseparability (the condition of simultaneous production and consumption). This refers to (1) the service provider’s physical connection to the service being provided; (2) the customer’s involvement in the service production process; and (3) the
involvement of other customers in the service production process (Hoffman & Bateson 1997). This personal contact in services has generated the terms interactive consumption and interaction process (Hoffman & Bateson 1997), which are inseparable (Carmen & Langeard 1980; Gronroos 1978; Regan 1963; Upah 1980). Interaction takes place during the service encounter where both the customer and the employee take on particular roles and activities: thus, quality in service is not engineered at a manufacturing plant and then delivered intact to the consumer. In fact, it is the perception of quality, and occurs during service delivery, usually as an interaction between the client and the contact person for the service firm (Lehtinen & Lehtinen 1982).

3. Inconsistency (the degree of heterogeneity). This reflects variations in consistency from one service transaction to the next (Hoffman & Bateson 1997), because performance can vary from producer to producer, from customer to customer, and from day to day. Consistency of behaviour from service personnel is difficult to assure (Booms & Bitner 1981; Hoffman & Bateson 1997), perhaps because what the firm intends to deliver may be entirely different from what the consumer receives; and because of differences in service providers’ attitudes and behaviours.

4. Inventory (the degree of perishability). Services cannot be saved, their unused capacity cannot be reserved, and they cannot be inventoried (Hoffman & Bateson 1997). Zeithaml (1981) notes that most services cannot be counted, measured, inventoried, tested or verified in advance of sale to assure quality. As a result, a firm may find it difficult to understand how customers perceive their services and evaluate their quality.
5. Inability to own (the degree of ownership). Buying services does not always result in a transfer of title (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006). Service is a perishable activity that does not always lead to the possession of a material object, and that takes place in an interactive process aimed at creating customer satisfaction (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbot 2006).

Within service marketing theory, higher education is frequently cited as a key example of a service with limited tangible outputs (Fisk et al. 2007; Stodnick & Rogers 2008; Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2006). Higher education is classified as a service product with primary outputs being mental development, knowledge, skills, and graduate outcomes rather than the ownership of an object such as the degree certificate that represents tangible evidence of the education service encounter (Dann 2008). Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott (2006) note that in some situations the result of the service encounter may be that the customer receives something of a tangible nature: an airline ticket, a travel code when tickets are booked online, money from the bank, an insurance policy, or a marketing consultant’s report. However, the prime goal of these transfers is not the possession of something tangible. As with insurance, the security provided in case of illness or fire at home, and not the possession of a policy, is the core service (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006).

2.3 Customers in Service Delivery

2.3.1 Customers in higher education

One distinctive aspect of service is that customers are often part of the production and delivery processes (Beilharz & Chapman 1994). The customers in the case of
this study are people who have an interest, either directly or indirectly, in the service delivered by a higher education provider, and includes students (the primary customers in higher education) (Downey, Frase & Peters 1994; Eagle & Brennan 2007; Lawrence & Sharma 2002; Nealon 2005; Pitman 2000; Stodnick & Rogers 2008), parents, alumni, employers, professors and administrators (Pariseau & McDaniel 1997; Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2003), faculty, research users and society as a whole (Willis & Taylor 1999). Students are described as customers of higher education because they are the group affected by the quality of service in higher education every day, and because both how customers are treated during the service delivery interaction and the actual end result experienced by them affects their judgment of the quality of service (Pariseau & McDaniel 1997). Harvey (2001) argues that there are three advantages to obtaining the customers’ (i.e. student’s) perspective of service: first, it offers the views of the people participating in the process; second, the delivery interaction process is direct; and third, it can provide ratings regarding the quality of a variety of items relevant to prospective students.

In supporting Harvey’s (2001) view, Rowley (2003) states that there are four reasons for collecting customers’ feedback:

1. to provide auditable evidence that students have had the opportunity to pass comment on their courses and that such information is considered when bringing about improvements;

2. to encourage student reflection on their learning;

3. to allow institutions to benchmark and to provide indicators that will contribute to the reputation of the university in the marketplace;
4. to provide students with an opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with their academic experience.

1.

2.3.2 The importance of students’ views

Students’ views on all aspects of their higher education experiences are now widely canvassed and regarded as essential to the effective monitoring of quality in universities (Hill, Lomas & MacGregor 2003). Although this quality is difficult to measure, student evaluation of a faculty and instruction is considered a vital source of input data (Helms, Williams & Nixon 2001). Owlia and Aspinwall (1998) note that a customer-oriented approach to quality is necessary to investigating the needs of the customers. This is reinforced when considering the fact that quality of service in general is subjective, unlike the quality of products, which can be measured objectively; therefore, an appropriate way of measuring service characteristics is to assess the perceptions of customers. This research concurs with Yeo’s (2008) argument that the perception of tertiary students as customers will have a direct impact on the dynamics created within and outside a learning space. His findings show that service in higher education should aim at offering experiences that promote dialogue, inquiry and reflection in the long term. Instructors should learn to balance the expectations of students without compromising academic rigour; curricula should be kept up to date by consulting industry and economic trends; and learning support should be student-centred rather than task-driven.

There is a substantial increase in demand for the creation and delivery of value to the customer and the effective management of customer relationships. However, the
body of knowledge about customer value, although growing, is fragmented. Different points of view are advocated with no generally acceptable way of amalgamating them, and related empirical study is very limited (Wang, Lo & Yang 2004). Only a few studies have focused on how superior value is constituted from the perspective of customers, and on how a reliable and valid measurement scale for such a complicated and important construct might be developed (Sweeney & Soutar 2001).

Understanding value from the customers’ perspective can provide useful information to management in allocating resources and designing programs that will satisfy the needs of students (Seymour 1992; Shekarchizadeh, Rasli & Huam 2011); and also in helping higher education institutions gain or maintain a competitive edge (Schmidt 2002; Shekarchizadeh, Rasli & Huam 2011; Watson 2003). This view is in line with Eagle and Brennan’s (2007) argument that a sophisticated interpretation of the student as a customer of higher education can be of value to managers, policy-makers, and academic staff. Studies that examine student satisfaction in higher educational institutions from a customer-oriented perspective may provide additional dimensions to the educational planning activities of colleges and universities (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak 2005). Student satisfaction surveys provide institutions with a tool to understand the complexity of the total learning experience, and include the institutional leadership more directly in quality development issues. When issues are addressed, satisfied students are less likely to drop out (Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker & Grogaard 2002).
2.4 Customer Contact Personnel

Employees in boundary-spanning roles create links for the organisation by interacting with non-members of the organisation (Hoffman & Bateson 1997). The boundary-spanning role is defined as a combination of the parts played by contact personnel, who interact with both the firm’s external environment and the internal organisation (Thompson 1962). As boundary spanners, customer contact personnel become an important link between the organisation and its customers and provide a potentially valuable source of strategic information to managers. These employees have access to information regarding evolving customer needs and possible product or service improvements (Aldrich & Herker 1979; Bettencourt & Brown 2003). Their direct contact with customers and the knowledge they have about the service production process make contact personnel an important source of information for the organisation.

Front-line sales, operations, and service personnel often have the best vantage point from which to make quick and effective strategic decisions (Day 1994), as they represent the organisation externally and may influence it internally through their communications (Bettencourt & Brown 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge 1992). It is showed in the Malaysian educational development agenda (Austrade 2007) that the training of non-academic staff is not part of the agenda, which creates concerns about the quality of service front-line staff will provide to customers in Malaysian higher education institutions. Thus, understanding the extent to which customer contact employees deliver quality service is now imperative, as it may influence an organisation’s competitive standing, and its ability to retain and attract customers.
In the eyes of the customers, the contact personnel are an important dimension of a service organisation’s image and reputation because they generally are the first point of contact in the service encounter. Schneider and Bowen’s (1984) research illustrates that customers often rely upon boundary-spanning employees’ behaviour as part of the evidence for their perceptions of service. Given the importance of customer contact personnel in service delivery, several researchers have stressed both the importance of customer contact personnel to their organisations and their role as ‘front-line’ staff in creating customer satisfaction. Evidence presented in Galloway’s (1998) and Sohail and Shaikah’s (2004) research indicates that front-line staff are the most influential factor in customers’ evaluation of service delivery. Wiers-Jenssen, Stendaker and Grogaard’s (2002) study demonstrates that the quality of service delivered by the administrative staff should not be underestimated when trying to improve student satisfaction; and Banwet and Datta’s (2003) study stresses that all employees of a university should adhere to the principles of quality customer service in order to deliver total student satisfaction. Nguyen’s (2010) research emphasises that the performance of contact personnel helps to attract customer groups and define corporate reputation. This supports Nguyen and Leblance’s (2002) study, whose results reveal the significant effect of customer contact personnel on corporate image and reputation.

Some individuals may find front-line service to be boring and repetitive, but others see the job as an opportunity to meet and interact with different groups of people. Individuals with interpersonal skills may gravitate toward high-contact service jobs; however, a selection process is still required to ensure high-quality ‘moments of truth’ (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004, p. 102). The most crucial HRM function
in these circumstances is effective selection of front line staff (Nankervis et al. 2011). A variety of interviewing techniques have proven useful, such as multiple interviews, on-job scenarios, and task tests (Kasper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006); abstract questioning, situational vignettes, and role-playing have all been used in the selection of potential front-line staff, note Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2004):

1. Abstract Questioning – The questions asked in the abstract interview are open-ended, to allow insights regarding an applicant’s ability to relate the immediate service situation to information collected from past experience. For example, ‘From your past work experience, what type of customer was most difficult for you to deal with and why?’; ‘What was the customer’s primary complaint or negative characteristic?’; ‘How did you handle the customer?’; ‘What would be the ideal way to deal with that type of customer?’

2. Situational Vignette – This requires the applicant to answer questions regarding a specific situation. Their response to a situation may reveal information regarding applicants’ instincts, interpersonal capabilities, common sense, and judgment.

3. Role Playing – This interviewing technique requires applicants to participate in a simulated situation and to react as if it were real. This is often used in the final phrase of recruitment, and provides an excellent opportunity to observe a candidate’s strengths and weaknesses in a realistic customer encounter. However, it does require careful scripting, and the ‘actors’ need to rehearse their roles before the interview.

Training is important for everyone in organisations. The better an employee is trained, the better his or her performance will be; and the more reliable the service will be (Stamatis 1996). Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott (2006) stress that service employees must be trained to undertake the roles they will be allocated, not just at
the time of appointment but throughout their time with the organisation. Besides providing training in standard processes and familiarisation with resources, the training should extend to more advanced levels such as dealing with angry customers, techniques for cross- and up-selling, or ways to cope with stress and improve performance. Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott (2006) suggest that as service personnel become more experienced, it may be desirable to rotate them through other roles so that they eventually experience the complete service process. This is in line with Conger and Kanungos’ (1988) argument that training can help ensure that empowered employees’ decisions are in the best interests of the organisation.

Organisations are paying more attention to customer service in an effort to increase sales and gain market share. For example, the retail drug-store chain Walgreen is training its pharmacists to spend more time helping patients, from a standard three to five minutes to twenty to forty-five minutes per customer; in the retail finance sector, American Express is expanding a program aimed at getting its agents to build better relationships with customers; and telecommunication services like Comcast is putting 24,000 call-centre agents through new training and instructing call-centre supervisors to spend 70% of their time coaching their agents, more than double the amount of time they spent before (Dana 2010). Without adequate training, service providers can be a liability when put in front of customers, because poorly trained and unprepared front-line staff can damage the customers’ experience and, in time, the organisation’s reputation and sustainability. Chebat and Kollias (2000) argue that the responses of customer contact personnel heavily influence customer perceptions of the quality of service and of the service encounter; consequently, it is crucial that
this study aim to provide the student advisors (the customer contact personnel or front-line staff who are providing services to the university customers) ways to examine the quality of their customer service.

2.5 Disconfirmation of Expectations

Understanding customer expectations is a prerequisite for delivering superior service. Researchers have defined customer service expectations in a variety of ways, but there is no conceptual framework to link different types of expectations or indicate their interactions in influencing perceptions of service performance (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1987). According to Anderson (1973), when predicting the effects on product evaluation and customer satisfaction of disparity between expectations and actual or objective product performance, there are four psychological theories to be considered:

1. Cognitive dissonance (assimilation) theory – Any discrepancy between expectations and product performance will be minimised or assimilated by customers, who will adjust their perception of performance to be more consistent (less dissonant) with their expectations.

2. Contrast theory – The customer will magnify the difference between the product received and the product expected.

3. Generalised negativity theory – Any discrepancy between expectation and reality results in a generalised negative state, causing the product to receive a more unfavourable rating than if it had coincided with expectations.
4. Assimilation-contrast theory – There are zones or latitudes of acceptance and rejection in customer perceptions.

As Anderson (1973) suggests, the assimilation-contrast theory is more appropriate to examine customer perceptions because the theory assumes that individuals have ranges or latitudes of acceptance, rejection and neutrality. The theory also suggests that promotional messages should create expectations for the product as high as possible without creating such a level of disparity between expectations and objective performance that it falls outside the customer’s range of acceptance (Anderson 1973).

This is supported by Weaver and Brickman’s (1974) research, the expectancy disconfirmation process consists of the formation of expectations and the disconfirmation of those expectations through performance comparisons. Disconfirmation is an important variable with regard to the perceived quality of service; it is the mental process consumers use to compare what is expected with what is actually observed (Bearden & Teel 1983; Churchill & Suprenant 1982; Oliver 1980). In other words, it is the disparity between customer expectation and perceived service performance, with the effect of generating satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Oliver (1977a) stresses the importance of measuring disconfirmation apart from expectation, because the construct has an independent and additive effect on satisfaction. Oliver (1977b, 1980) also states that expectations and perceptions are usually linked via the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm. This paradigm holds that the predictions customers make in advance of consumption become a standard against which they measure performance (Bearden & Teel 1983; Churchill
1979; Day 1977; Woodruff, Cadotte & Jenkins 1983). The disconfirmation of expectations model suggests that confirmation occurs when performance matches the standard, leading to a neutral feeling (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1987). If perceived performance exceeds the standard, the customer is satisfied, which results in positive disconfirmation. On the other hand, if perceived performance falls short of expectations, this creates a negative disconfirmation and the customer is dissatisfied (Spreng, Mackenzie & Olshavsky 1996).

Several researchers (Oliver 1980, 1981; Tse & Wilton 1988; Yi 1990) support the notion that customers are inclined to form pre-consumption expectancies, observe product (attribute) performance, compare product (attribute) performance, compare performance with expectations, form disconfirmation perceptions, combine these perceptions with expectation levels, and form satisfaction judgments; disconfirmation has an immediate influence on satisfaction (Oliver 1993). However, as Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins (1983) note, the disconfirmation of expectations paradigm is based on experience-based norms. This offers an expanded view of how prior experience influences confirmation/disconfirmation. Several researchers have revealed that experience-based evaluations of a comparison brand are better predictors of satisfaction (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1982; LaTour & Peat 1979).

Cadotte, Woodruff and Jenkins (1987) suggest that experience-based norms are more significant than expectations as the standard of performance influencing feelings of satisfaction. This is because the concept reflects desired performance in meeting needs/wants and is constrained by actual performance. Customers are more likely to
think in concrete rather than abstract terms, and experience with real brands should set limits on the performance a customer believes the focal brand should provide (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1987). Confirmation/disconfirmation leads to the emotional reaction of satisfaction/dissatisfaction; and applying the disconfirmation of expectations paradigm to the evaluation of the quality of service suggests that individuals will compare their expectations against experience.

2.6 Perceived Quality of Service – Initial Development

Perceived quality is the customer’s judgment about an entity’s overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml 1987). According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), it is a form of attitude resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance. Olshavsky (1985) views quality as a form of overall evaluation of a product, similar in many ways to attitude. Attitude is the customer’s relatively enduring affective orientation for a product, store, or process, including customer service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Exploratory research conducted by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) supports the notion that the quality of service is an overall evaluation similar to attitude. Perceived quality acts as a relatively global value judgment (Holbrook & Corfman 1985), or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service.

Concerning the relationship between customer satisfaction and the quality of service, Smith and Houston (1982) claim that satisfaction with services is related to confirmation or disconfirmation expectations. They base their research on the disconfirmation paradigm, which maintains that satisfaction is related to the direction
of the disconfirmation experience where disconfirmation is related to the person’s initial expectations (Churchill & Suprenaut 1982).

According to Gronroos (1947, p.35), ‘a model of how the quality of services is perceived by customers is needed. When the service provider understands how the services will be evaluated by the users, it will be possible to identify how to manage these evaluations and how to influence them in a desired direction’. In line with this thinking, Gronroos (1982) developed a model in which he contends that customers compare the service they expect with perceptions of the service they receive in evaluating the quality of service (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Total Perceived Quality

(Source: Gronroos 1988, p. 41)
Basically, Gronroos (1983) argues that the quality of a service as perceived by customers has two dimensions:

- Technical quality, referring to the result of the service or the question of ‘what has been provided’; and
- Functional quality, referring to the way the service has been delivered and relating to the question of ‘how the service has been provided’.

Gronroos (1988) identifies six criteria of perceived quality of service:

1. Professionalism and skills – The customers realise that the service providers have the knowledge and skills required to solve their problems in a professional way (outcome-related criteria).

2. Attitudes and behaviour – The customers feel that the service providers are concerned about them and interested in solving their problems in a friendly and spontaneous way (process-related criteria).

3. Accessibility and flexibility – The customers feel that it is easy to get access to the service and the service providers are prepared to adjust to meet the demands and wishes of the customers (process-related criteria).

4. Reliability and trustworthiness – the customers can rely on the service providers to keep their promises and perform with the best interest of the customers in mind (process-related criteria).

5. Recovery – The customers know that immediate action will be taken by the service providers if anything goes wrong (process-related criteria).
6. Reputation and credibility - The customers believe that the image of the service providers stands for good performance and accepted values (image-related criteria).

In 2000, Gronroos presented a seventh criterion of perceived quality of service:

7. Serviscape – The physical surrounding and other aspects of the environment support a positive experience (Gronroos 2000).

However, according to Gronroos (1988, 1990), the technical aspects of a service are easily copied and competitive positioning may be easily lost. Functional quality, in contrast, can be used to create a competitive edge by focusing on the more personal aspects of the service encounter. Saleh and Ryan (1991) add that the quality of functional service may even offset technical component problems experienced by consumers. Gronroos (1988) argues that technical quality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for higher levels of quality of service, and that functional quality is likely to be more important than technical quality, even when the latter is of a sufficient standard. Lagrosen (2001) warns that Gronroos’ criteria of the quality of service have an important value for conceptual understanding of services, but may not be sufficient, as it is important to study quality in each specific situation.

2.7 The Quality of Service – Further Development

Expanding on Gronroos’ research and development, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) refined the concept of the quality of service and developed a SERVQUAL instrument. An exploratory qualitative study was undertaken to investigate the concept of the quality of service, which consisted of focus group
interviews with consumers and in-depth interviews with executives to develop a concept of quality of service. Four service categories were chosen for investigation: retail banking, credit cards, securities brokerage and product repair and maintenance, to represent a cross-section of industries along key dimensions used to categorise services (Lovelock 1980, 1983).

The study showed consistent patterns emerging from the four sets of executive interviews. However, the most important insight obtained from analysing the executive responses was that

A set of key discrepancies or gaps exists regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to consumers. These gaps can be major hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985, p. 44)

As a result of their preliminary research, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) identified five discrepancies or gaps associated with the delivery of a service, shown below in Figure 2.2:

- Gap 1 –between customer expectations and management perceptions of those (customer) expectations;
- Gap 2 –between management perceptions of customer expectations and the firm’s specifications of quality of service.
• Gap 3 – between the specifications of quality of service and actual service delivery.
• Gap 4 – between actual service delivery and external communications about the service.
• Gap 5 – between expected service and perceived service.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) state that the quality of service model indicates that customers’ perceptions of quality are influenced by a series of four distinct gaps occurring in organisations (see Figure 2.2). The gaps on the side of marketer or service provider can impede delivery of services that customers perceive to be of high quality. Gap 5 (the difference between customers’ expectations and perceptions), on the other hand, depends on the size and direction of the gap associated with the delivery of the quality of service on the marketer’s side (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1988). This gap analysis approach to measuring the quality of service became the foundation of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry’s (1988) later research into quality of service.

Teas (1993) concurs that when ‘perceptions’ minus ‘expectations’ (P - E) yields a gap, the impact is similar to the disconfirmation paradigm; hence, gap analysis may assist in making a determination of how well a company performs. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) state that if the customer’s expectations are met, the quality of service is perceived to lead to satisfaction; if the customer’s expectations are not met, the customer is dissatisfied. When the customer’s expectations are
exceeded (thereby delighting the customer), the quality of service is perceived to be more than satisfactory (Hill 1995). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry’s (1985) exploratory study reveals that the key to ensuring a good quality of service is by meeting or exceeding what customers expect. This is what is identified by Gap 5: the discrepancy between expected service and perceived service.

Figure 2.2 Quality of Service Model

(Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985)
2.8 Factors Influencing Customers’ Expectations of Services

As shown in Figure 2.2, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) focus on three primary areas: personal needs, word of mouth communication, and past experiences. The first factor, personal needs, is defined as those states or conditions essential to the physical or psychological well-being of the customer (Zeithaml & Bitner 2002) and is determined by individual characteristics and circumstances (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990). Personal needs are based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory that identifies higher-order needs such as self-actualisation and esteem and lower-order needs such as social, safety and physiological requirements, and suggests that some needs are assumed to be more important than others but that the lower-order needs must be satisfied before the higher-order needs can serve as motivators; physiological (lower-order) needs must be satisfied before safety (higher-order) needs are activated, and safety needs must be satisfied before social needs are activated, and so on (Wood 2005).

The second factor is word of mouth communication, which refers to the personal and sometimes non-personal statements made by parties other than the organisation that convey to customers what the service will be like. These tends to be very important in services that are difficult to evaluate before one purchases or has direct experience of them, and can influence both predicted and desired service (Zeithaml & Bitner 2002): what customers hear from other customers, for example, about medical and dental service providers can influence their decision to patronise them (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990). In a study by Cuthbert (1996), sampled students
reported that word of mouth communication played a big role in their selecting an institution at which to study. Murray (1991) notes that word of mouth is the strongest source of information used by customers in forming expectations.

The third factor, past experience, refers to the customer’s previous exposure to service, which is relevant to shaping predictions and desires (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1982). Past experience might include previous interaction with the focal brand; the typical performance of a favourite brand, experience with the brand last purchased or the top-selling brand, or the average performance a customer believes represents a group of similar brands (Cadotte, Woodruff & Jenkins 1987).

2.9 Instruments to Measure the Quality of Service

2.9.1 SERVQUAL vs. SERVPERF

A substantial body of evidence suggests that the SERVQUAL instrument is effective in measuring the quality of service in the higher education environment and is especially useful in offering guidance for changing shortcomings to strengths (Andell, Heffernan & Megicks 2008; Harris 2002; Wolverton 1995; Yang 2008). SERVQUAL is a two-part instrument, with 22 items measuring expectations of customers and 22 similarly worded items measuring perceptions of experiences of customers, to measure the quality of service. Each dimension of the quality of service is recast into two statements – the first half of the instrument is to measure expectations about firms in general within the service category being investigated; the second half is to measure perceptions about the particular firm whose quality of service is being assessed (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988).
A seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1) accompanies each statement. Responses to the expectation and perception statements are compared. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) state that if the expectation response is higher than the perception response, the score will be negative; if the perception response is higher than the expectation response, the score will be positive. A positive score indicates an area of strength and can represent a competitive advantage for the service provider.

The initial research process began with focus group interviews with customers and in-depth interviews with executives to develop a conceptual model of the quality of service. The original SERVQUAL instrument reflected the criteria used by customers in assessing the quality of service and consisted of 10 dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, and understanding (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985). The dimensions serve as the foundation for the SERVQUAL instrument. However, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), who carried out an examination of the 10 dimensions and factor analyses, suggested that there was some degree of overlap among them. A second stage of examination indicated that the overlap dimensions (competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding) combined to form assurance and empathy dimensions. Consequently, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) argue that SERVQUAL, with five distinct dimensions, has captured facets of all ten of the original dimensions of the quality of service concept.
The final five dimensions of the quality of service are:

1. **Tangibles** – physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel;
2. **Reliability** – ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
3. **Responsiveness** – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
4. **Assurance** – knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence;
5. **Empathy** – caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers
   
   (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) tested the modified version of SERVQUAL with service companies in retail banking, credit cards, securities brokerage, and product repair and maintenance. Samples collected showed that the reliabilities are consistently high across the four service companies and with total-scale reliability close to 0.9 in each of the four instances. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) discovered in their study that ‘reliability’ is consistently the most critical of the five dimensions in influencing customers’ overall perceptions of quality. The second most important is ‘assurance’; ‘tangibles’ are more important in the case of banks than in the other three types. ‘Responsiveness’ and ‘empathy’ are the least important dimensions in all four service companies selected.

The modified SERVQUAL instrument fulfils the two aspects of content validity: the thoroughness with which the construct to be scaled and its domain were explicated; second; and the extent to which the scale items represent the construct’s domain. Convergent validity was examined by comparing SERVQUAL scores and responses
to a question that asked customers to provide an overall quality rating of the firm they were evaluating (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). The samples collected across four service companies offer strong support for SERVQUAL’s convergent validity. This is evident in Pitt, Oostuizen and Morris’ (1992) study, which also supports SERVQUAL’s reliability, content validity, and convergent validity.

Despite the popularity of SERVQUAL, several researchers feel that performance-only-based measures of the quality of service may be an improved means of measuring the quality of service construct (Bolton & Drew 1991; Cronin & Taylor 1992). This has led to the development and application of an alternative scale to determine service performance: SERVPERF. The SERVPERF technique makes use of the original SERVQUAL scale items and requires customers to rate a provider’s performance on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It does not seek to estimate difference scores; however, it does require the customer to rate only the performance of a particular service encounter. The SERVPERF model argues against the use of expectations because an accurate expectations measure can only be obtained prior to the service encounter (Cronin & Taylor 1992; McAlexander, Kaldenberg & Koenig 1994). Studies conducted using this performance-based measure found that SERVPERF explained more of the variance in an overall measure of the quality of service than SERVQUAL. Cronin and Taylor (1994, p. 127) acknowledge, ‘it is possible for researchers to infer customers’ disconfirmation through arithmetic means (i.e., expectations minus perceptions) but customer perceptions, not calculations, govern behaviour’.
The SERVPERF approach has overcome some of the problems raised regarding SERVQUAL, including raising expectations, administration of the two parts of the questionnaire, and the statistical properties of difference scores (Hope & Muhlemann 1997); however, Comm and Mathaisel (2000) state that the use of the SERVPERF scale might reduce by 50 per cent the number of items that must be measured by the customer. According to O’Neil and Palmer (2004), taking a single measure of service performance is seen to circumvent all the problems raised; but from an operational point of view much useful information is lost when only performance measures are taken. The used of SERVPERF is not common in the higher education environment. Jain and Gupta (2004) believe SERVPERF incapable of diagnosing shortfalls in the desired levels of quality of service, as a result of the absence of the ‘disconfirmation’ approach; while Lee (2007) considers SERVQUAL better than SERVPERF for measuring the quality of service in higher education environments across various cultures. As a result, the SERVQUAL instrument is the more suitable instrument and will be used in this study to examine students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in higher education.

2.9.2 Validity and reliability of SERVQUAL

In addition to evaluating the quality of retail banking, credit cards, repair and maintenance, and long-distance telephone services, the SERVQUAL instrument has been used to study the quality of service in settings such as a hospitals, CPA firms, physicians, dental school patient clinics, business school placement centres, acute care hospitals, public recreation programs and real estate brokerages (Brown, Churchill & Peter 1993). Quiram (1995) investigates the appropriateness of the
original SERVQUAL scale as a tool for measuring patients’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in an ambulatory health care setting, and concludes that it is a reliable, valid and appropriate instrument for use in that setting. Heung, Wong and Qu (2000) find that the SERVQUAL instrument has limitations, but still has wide uses in measuring quality of service, giving a fair indication of consumers’ perceptions. Markovic and Gospodarstvo (2006), who conducted an exploratory study of the modified SERVQUAL scale to test its reliability, found that all factors exceeded the recommended level of 0.50; alpha coefficients for the expectations scale totalled 0.7783. The relatively high alpha values indicate good internal consistency among the statements, indicating that the SERVQUAL instrument is reliable and applicable. This study was carried out among students at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Croatia; its findings indicate that SERVQUAL is suitable for use by managers in higher education institutions to design service strategies that meet students’ expectations.

Robledo (2001) compared four different methods of measuring the quality of service within three international airline companies. The results suggest that models that measure the quality of service considering expectation (that is, the disconfirmation paradigm using SERVQUAL) are superior to models that measure the quality of service as a function of performance only (that is SERVPERF). However, SERVQUAL may require some modifications to fit any specific industry for which it is being used. Carman (1990) argues that minor customising of SERVQUAL can be achieved by rewording and augmenting items under each of the five dimensions to make them more germane to the context in which the instrument is being used. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991) concur that minor modifications in the
wording of items to adapt them to a specific setting are appropriate; however, they warn that deletion of certain items could affect the integrity of the scale, and doubt whether such a reduced scale can fully capture the quality of service. SERVQUAL is still considered as a useful starting point for assessing and improving the quality of service; its standard five-dimensional structure serves as a meaningful framework for tracking a firm’s quality of service performance over time and comparing it against the performance of competitors (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991).

2.10 Criticisms of SERVQUAL

Despite the extensive use and numerous citations of SERVQUAL in service-related literature, researchers in the field have offered three major criticisms of the instrument.

2.10.1 Perceptions-only scores

A study by Cronin and Taylor (1992) criticises the SERVQUAL instrument based on its conceptual, methodological, analytical and practical issues. They conclude that it is unnecessary to measure customers’ expectations in research into quality of service, arguing that measuring perceptions is sufficient. They also claim that a performance-only measure of the quality of service is superior to a gap model measurement of the quality of service. Brady, Cronin and Brand (2002), who replicated and extended Cronin and Taylor’s (1992) research, confirm the superiority of performance-only measures over SERVQUAL when measuring quality of service. Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Teas (1993) also question the specification of the quality of service as the gap between customers’ expectations and perceptions, and the appropriateness of SERVQUAL as a two-part instrument for measuring quality of service.
2.10.2 Use of difference scores, reliability and validity

Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993) criticise the use of difference scores (such as expectations minus perceptions) to create a separate variable which then serves as the overall measurement of the quality of service (for example, Gap 5 of SERVQUAL). They investigated responses from undergraduate students enrolled in business courses at a single university. Two surveys were administered: the first a difference score questionnaire and the second a non-difference score questionnaire. They found that because of a positive correlation between the component scores, the reliability of the resulting difference score was intensified so that ‘a measure with low reliability may appear to possess discriminant validity simply because it is unreliable’ (Brown, Churchill & Peter 1993, p. 130). The investigation shows that variance restriction occurs when the component scores of expectations used to calculate the difference score are consistently higher than the experiences component, and that this creates a problem when equality of variance is required in certain statistical analyses.

Other researchers such as O’Neil and Palmer (2001, 2004) argue that from a measurement perspective, there are three psychometric problems associated with the use of difference scores: which are reliability, discriminant validity, and variance restriction. Carman (1990) and Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993) also question the difference between expectation scores and perception scores; these authors recommend that differences between expectations and perceptions should be collected directly in a combined format.
2.10.3 Applicability of SERVQUAL

Carman (1990) argues that SERVQUAL needs to be customised to the specific service, and that more replication and testing of the SERVQUAL dimensions and measures are needed before accepting it as a valid generic measure of quality of service that can be used in any retailing or service situation; Hedvall and Paltschik (1989), too, question the validity of the SERVQUAL scale in different service industries. Carman (1990) conducted a study that replicated SERVQUAL dimensions and measures, and recommended that although SERVQUAL was consistent in many areas, some changes were needed to adapt the instrument to different service settings. Further, Brown, Churchill & Peter (1993) found that the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument were not replicated in service situation, which raised serious doubts about the correspondence between the SERVQUAL measure and the theory underlying it.

2.11 Responses to Criticisms

The criticisms listed above have been addressed by a number of researchers.

2.11.1 Perceptions-only scores

Cronin and Taylor’s (1992) concern that it is unnecessary to measure customer’s expectations of the quality of service as ‘measuring perceptions is sufficient’. Is countered by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry’s (1994a) findings that managers can obtain a truer assessment of the quality of service by comparing expectations and perceptions, rather by interpreting perceptions alone; relying solely on perceptions ratings may result in a sub-optimal allocation of service-improvement resources. Further, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994b) contend that previous research
(Berry, Zeithaml & Parasuraman 1985; Bolton & Drew 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985, 1988; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990) has provided strong support for defining the quality of service as the discrepancy between customers’ expectations and their perceptions. Several researchers (Gronroos 1982; Lehtinen & Lehtinen 1982; Saser, Olsen & Wyckoff 1978) working even before Cronin and Taylor (1992), as well as later researchers (Bolton & Drew 1991; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1993) support the disconfirmation of expectations conceptualisation of the quality of service. In an empirical study, Bolton and Drew (1991, p. 383) conclude that their study is ‘consistent with prior exploratory research concerning service quality, where a key determinant of overall service quality is the gap between expectations and perceptions’. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994b) and Bolton and Drew (1991) disagree with the claims of Cronin and Taylor (1992) that a performance-based measure is superior to the SERVQUAL measure. Instead, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) and Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991) argue that the standard five-dimensional structure serves as a meaningful framework for tracking a firm’s quality of service over time, and for comparing it against the performance of competitors.

More researchers have emphasised that the use of a gap model is more practical than a perception-only model for examining specific service deficiencies (Angur, Nataraajan & Jaheera 1999). Curry and Sinclair (2002) support the usefulness and relevance of the SERVQUAL methodology (a gap model) for determining customer priorities and measuring service performance in the context of public-sector physiotherapy services while Carrillat, Jaramillo and Mulki (2007) report SERVQUAL is a valid predictor of overall quality of service: the gap model appears
to have better diagnostic capabilities than perception-only measures (Kilbourne et al. 2004).

2.11.2 Use of difference scores, reliability and validity

Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1993) find the primary focus of Brown, Churchill and Peter’s (1993) critique is the use of a difference-score (expectations minus perceptions) conceptualisation invoked by SERVQUAL to operationalise quality of service, and address the three psychometric concerns about the SERVQUAL conceptualisation. First, both they and Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993) report a moderate correlation between SERVQUAL’s expectation and perception scales. The findings of Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993) show very strong reliabilities for the two components of SERVQUAL (0.94 for expectations and 0.96 for perceptions), in line with Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml’s (1993) multiple studies that demonstrate high reliabilities for the SERVQUAL measure (ranging from 0.87 to 0.92). Nunnally (1978) notes that Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of more than 0.70 are considered acceptable. Second, in addressing Brown, Churchill and Peter’s (1993) critique of difference-score measures, that ‘discriminant validity’ may be inflated if the measure has low reliability, Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1993) argue that the reliability of the SERVQUAL formulation has been shown to be consistently high (0.87 to 0.92 in Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) and 0.94 in Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993)). The problem of reliability is unlikely to surface in studies using the difference-score formulation of SERVQUAL. Third, Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993) raise a concern that the high mean value and low standard deviation for the expectations component of SERVQUAL, relative to the
perceptions component, will ‘restrict the variance’ of the difference-scores at higher levels. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1993) respond that the relevance and seriousness of this potential problem depend on how the difference-scores are used. The problem is mainly an issue when these scores are used in multivariate analyses, but is not relevant when the scores are used for diagnostic applications, which are the dominant commercial use of the instrument (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991).

2.11.3 Applicability of SERVQUAL

Several researchers have developed specific quality of service scales: for example, in e-service, Parasuraman and Grewal (2000) report, the definition and relative importance of the five SERVQUAL dimensions are different when customers interact with web sites rather than with service employees. Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Malhotra (2005) similarly argue that the measurement of e-service quality requires scale development that extends beyond merely adapting offline scales, and provide a scale called E-S-QUAL, made up 22 items divided in four dimensions (efficiency, system availability, fulfilment and privacy) to measure quality in e-service. Cristobal, Flavian and Guinaliu (2007) propose a different scale with 17 items distributed over four dimensions (web design, customer service, order management and assurance).

Despite such specific applications, research has shown SERVQUAL is widely used and its validity confirmed in a variety of industries, including retail banking, credit cards, repair and maintenance, and long-distance telephone services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988; Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991); hospitals, CPA
firms, physicians, dental school patient clinics, business school placement centres, tyre stores, acute care hospitals, public recreation programs and real estate brokerages (Brown, Churchill & Peter 1993); international airline companies (Robledo 2001); tourism and hospitality management in Croatia (Markovic & Gospodarstvo 2006) and UK (Wang, Vela & Tyler 2008), and even in public transportation in India (Randheer, AL-Motawa & Vijay 2011).

2.12 The Relationship between Quality of Service, Customer Satisfaction, and Behavioural Intention

Several studies have examined the association between the quality of service, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intention. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) find a positive and significant relationship between customers’ perceptions of the quality of service and their willingness to recommend the company. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996), who examined the behavioural consequences of the quality of service involving business customers of a computer manufacturer, and end customers of a retail chain, automobile insurance and life insurance, found strong evidence that behavioural intentions were influenced by quality of service. Olorunniwo, Hsu and Udo (2006) similarly reported a significant effect of quality of service on behavioural intention.

Quality of service and customer satisfaction are widely recognised as key influences in the formation of consumers’ purchase intentions in service environments. Taylor and Baker (1994) report that the positive influence of quality of service on purchase intentions is greater when satisfaction is greater: that is, the highest level of purchase
intentions is observed when both perceptions of the quality of service and satisfaction judgments are high. Results also suggest that customer satisfaction moderates the relationship between quality of service and intent to purchase.

Liljander and Strandfik’s (1993) research into the relationship between quality of service, satisfaction and intentions in restaurants, reports that performance is a better predictor of satisfaction than either inferred or direct measures of disconfirmation. Satisfaction is found to have a positive correlation with intentions to re-buy. The quality of service, measured as inferred disconfirmation (SERVQUAL score) is also connected to intentions, although perceived performance alone has a higher correlation with intentions. Overall, satisfaction is a better predictor of intentions to re-buy than is quality of service.

Oh (2000) reports that a restaurant that uses incentives such as discounts and complimentary appetizers gives customers the impression that it is trying hard to improve the customers’ experience, and is keeping track of its perceived quality, value and satisfaction. Such measures allow a restaurant operator to detect and defuse potential problems before many customers are affected (Oh 2000). Other research also shows that perceived quality, value and satisfaction are good predictors of a customer’s willingness to return and to recommend a restaurant to others (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996).

Customer satisfaction and perceptions of the quality of service affect customer intentions to behave in other positive ways: for example by praising a firm, preferring one company over others, increasing the volume of purchases, or agreeing
to pay a premium price (Zeithaml & Bitner 2002). Boulding et al. (1993) find that strong links between the quality of service and behaviour intentions are of strategic importance in the school setting, leading to such outcomes as planning to contribute money to the class pledge on graduation, or planning to recommend the school to employers as a place from which to recruit.

2.13 The Quality of Service in Higher Education

Delivering quality of service has been perceived as an important goal for higher education institutions (Russell 2005). As part of a service industry, education institutions may need to adopt the techniques used by other industries to measure the quality of their services and the satisfaction of their customers (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes 2003). Cheng and Tam (1997) noted that, increasingly, higher education is being recognised as a service industry; i.e., it is an industry sector placing emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of its customers. For educational institutions to achieve efficiency, they must compete for both finance and customers (Edith & Joseph 1996).

Higher education possesses all five fundamental characteristics of a service industry: intangibility, inseparability, inconsistency (heterogeneity), inventory (perishability), and inability to own (ownership) (Kaper, Helsdingen & Gabbott 2006); and the customers participate in the process (Shank, Walker & Hayes 1995). Colleges and universities increasingly find themselves in an environment where it is necessary to understand the role and importance of the quality of service (Shank, Walker & Hayes 1995). Joseph (1998) states that in order to compete effectively in the marketplace,
educational institutions need to differentiate themselves from their competitors, and suggests that one way of achieving this is through providing high-quality services. Shetty (1987) concurs that improved quality can improve the firm’s competitive position; service is a feature that may differentiate many universities.

The majority of service research has been conducted outside the educational field. In the original design of the SERVQUAL instrument, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) collected sample data from five service companies; although education was not one of them, they concluded that SERVQUAL could be adapted or supplemented to fit the characteristics or specific research needs of any particular organisation. Since then, research has been undertaken to verify the use of SERVQUAL to measure the quality of service in a higher education environment. In Boulding et al.’s (1993) study, 36 items were used to study the expectations and perceptions associated with the delivery of services in an educational setting. The original expectations scale of the instrument was altered to reflect either what a student expects will happen or what a student expects should happen during the delivery of professional educational services. To assess students’ behavioural intentions, the students were asked how likely they would be to recommend their school or to donate money to it in the future. The study concluded that the higher the students’ perceptions of a university’s overall quality of service, the more likely these students were to recommend their school or donate money in the future. When obtaining the difference scores between what students believe a university will provide with what it should provide, Boulding et al. (1993) found that increasing a customer’s expectations of what a firm would provide during future service encounters led to higher perceptions of quality once the customer was exposed to the actual service.
Chen (1993), who applied a modified SERVQUAL instrument to Minnesota Extension Service (MES), found that it was well received by MES clientele and employees. In another study, Ruby (1996) used SERVQUAL to assess student satisfaction with services provided in departments including Academic Records, Admissions, Career Services and Financial Aid. Findings revealed differences in perceptions of the quality of service according to gender, with female students both expecting and perceiving higher quality of service than males. Moderate relationships were found between student satisfaction with support services and their commitment to the college or university they attended. The study concludes that the SERVQUAL model is adaptable to educational support services.

Schwantz (1996) used a modified SERVQUAL to compare traditional (aged 24 and under) and non-traditional (older) students’ expectations and perceptions of quality of service at Texas Tech University; then compared all their expectations and perceptions of support staff and teaching faculty. His findings reveal no significant difference (p = 0.669) in the expectations or perceptions of traditional versus non-traditional students, or in students’ expectations of staff versus faculty; however, there was a significant difference (p < 0.001) in the students’ perceptions: staff scored below faculty in every area measured.

DiDomenico and Joseph (1996) conducted a study at a Midwestern university based on the construction of the original study by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), including the 10 dimensions of responsiveness, reliability, tangibles, communication, competence, access, credibility, courtesy, understanding and knowing the customer,
and security. A gap analysis method was used, and students were asked to compare the service of different departments, including dining facilities, career services, the campus life office and health services. DiDomenico and Joseph (1996) found that ‘tangibility’ was the only dimension where the quality of service surpassed students’ expectations. All the other variables scored in the negative zone. The lowest score was for ‘reliability’, followed by ‘responsiveness’ and ‘competence’. The researchers concluded that outstanding quality of service, as perceived by the customer, could give any organisation a competitive advantage. In order to acquire and maintain this advantage, universities must determine where they stand in the eyes of the students. Facing escalating tuition costs, students are increasingly judgmental about what they receive for their money. In order to survive, universities need to provide better services to students; hence the need for more rigorous measurement of the quality of their services.

Comm and Mathaisel (2000) studied employee satisfaction in a private tertiary institution, analysing the gap between employee expectations and perceptions. To measure quality of service, SERVQUAL with ten dimensions was used. They found that all ten dimensions showed significant discrepancies, or gaps, between expectations and perceptions, and inferred from this that perceptions fell short of expectations. The largest discrepancy was between the importance of pay and the perception of the adequacy of the salary received. Lampley (2001) employed gap analysis to gain insight into the service expectations and experiences of doctoral students at state-supported universities in Tennessee, finding that gaps between the expectations and experiences of doctoral students exist; the findings upheld Hampton’s (1993) hypothesis that as gap scores increase, overall satisfaction...
decreases. Continual improvement of the quality of service may generate higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, which may be manifested in higher retention of the current student population; this, together with positive word of mouth, will lead to decreasing costs of attracting new students (Stodnick & Rogers 2008).

### 2.14 Culture and the Quality of Service

Customers are satisfied with services when their expectations are met or exceeded. In order to ensure such an outcome, service managers need to be cognisant of the parts of the service delivery experience that are open to cultural influences (Espinoza 1999). Service encounters are first and foremost (i.e., highest position) social encounters; so rules and expectations related to service encounters will vary considerably across cultures (Malhotra et al. 2005). Given differences in culture and environment, consumers in different countries may have different perceptions of what quality of service consists of. For example, Ueltschy et al. (2007) suggest that in high-performance service encounters, German respondents express significantly higher satisfaction and consider the service better than do Japanese respondents, while Witkowski and Wolfinbarger (2002) report that German respondents express lower perceived service outcomes and lower service expectations than their US counterparts. Laroche et al. (2004) find that, compared with their Canadian and US counterparts, Japanese customers are more conservative in designating service as superior. Service managers need to be sensitive to variations in personal values, attitudes and behaviours that customers in different cultures will bring to a service encounter.
2.14.1 Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

A number of researchers have considered the differences between national cultures. Two of the most widely known are Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), who have studied staff in multinational companies, collected large databases and classified nationalities in idealised, typical, ‘dimensions’ of culture. Hofstede’s concept of culture is based on the idea that every person is imprinted with patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting, that have been learned over a lifetime. Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) defines culture as a collective programming of minds which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from those of another. Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values.

In 1980, Hofstede conducted surveys in the large multinational corporation IBM. The surveys took place between 1967 and 1973 in two rounds, and produced responses to more than 117,000 questionnaires from 72 countries in 20 languages. The analysis focused on country differences in answers to questions about employee values, and found that the national differences in values revealed within the IBM corporation could be reproduced within a completely different international population, and with an English version of the questionnaire only.

Hofstede’s (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) work on cultural dimensions has frequently been used to classify cultures and countries, and has also been used as a basis for understanding cultural differences. He identifies four statistically independent cultural dimensions that explain the inter-country variation in employee responses to
the survey questions, and ranks 50 countries and three regions according to each dimension:

1. Power Distance – Power distance is the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. In high power distance countries, status and titles are very important in terms of organisational structure, but also lie at the core of social relationships and social formalities. Employees must always be the ones to greet their boss, regardless of age, seniority or experience (Demers 1998). Societies high in power distance are more autocratic and accept differences in power and wealth more readily than societies low in power distance (Bang et al. 2005). Low power distance societies value equality, so class distinctions are less tolerated and democratic participation is encouraged.

2. Individualism and Collectivism – Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself, and his or her immediate family. Collectivism, on the other hand, pertains to societies in which people from birth are integrated into strong, cohesive groups which, throughout their lifetime, protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

3. Masculinity and Femininity – Masculinity refers to a society emphasising on competitiveness, assertiveness, achievement, ambition, and high earnings. In masculine cultures, gender roles are differentiated very clearly (Bang et al. 2005). Femininity, on the other hand, refers to a society that puts emphasis on nurturing, helping others, putting relationships with people before money, not showing off, and minding the quality of life.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance – This refers to the extent to which people are threatened by uncertain, unknown, or unstructured situations. Countries with a high uncertainty avoidance ranking have regulations and controls to reduce the amount of uncertainty since the citizens have a low tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Bang et al. 2005); a phenomenon such as lifetime employment is mostly seen in cultures high on uncertainty avoidance (Demers 1998). Societies low on uncertainty avoidance work to meet basic needs, are tolerant towards various behaviours, and feel relatively secure.

In 1988, Bond conceived the Chinese Value Survey (CVS) project: recognising that the results of surveys designed by Westerners are biased by their designers’ cultural heritage, he asked his Chinese colleagues to compose a questionnaire with a deliberate Chinese mental bias. This led to the creation of a 40-item questionnaire, which was subsequently translated into English; it was administered to 23 Asian and non-Asian countries. The results showed that three CVS dimensions significantly correlated with three of the IBM dimensions (power distance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity), but no counterpart of uncertainty avoidance was found in the Chinese survey. However, a new dimension was found: Bond named it ‘Confucian dynamism’ to show that it deals with choices according to Confucian ideas, and adopted it as a fifth dimension. Confucian dynamism’s positive pole reflects a dynamic, future-oriented mentality, and its negative pole a more static, tradition-oriented mentality. Hofstede (2001) named the positive pole ‘long-term orientation’ and the negative pole ‘short-term orientation’.

In addition to the four original cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1980, 1984), a fifth cultural dimension is included:
5. Long-term versus short-term orientation – Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues, in particular perseverance and thrift, that are oriented towards future rewards. Short-term orientation, on the other hand, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face’, and fulfilling social obligations.

2.14.1.1 Criticisms and responses

Despite the popularity of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, the internal validity of the dimensions and the method of constructing the scales have both come under criticism (Tsikriktsis 2002). Hofstede’s categories are not necessarily exhaustive, because the original survey was not designed to identify dimensions of national culture and hence may not have contained all necessary questions (Schwartz 1994). Voronov and Singer (2002) have expressed concern over whether the dimensions are representative of national cultural values or are the results of transient influences. Jacob (2005, p. 517) notes that long-term versus short-term orientation is fraught with inconsistencies: although Confucian values are intended to be represented in the components of long-term time orientation and short-term time orientation, it is not clear how they are manifested in short-term orientation. Some of the components could be used to reflect a long-term orientation just as effectively, using different logic: for instance, why is the ‘ordering of relationships by status’ a component of long-term orientation, while ‘respect for tradition’ is a component of a short-term orientation? ‘Respect for tradition’ could connote stability, continuity, and freedom from turbulence, all of which could contribute to prosperity in the long term. A study by Keough, Zibardo and Boyds (1999) offers an extensive interpretation of future,
present, and past orientation; their analysis is not congruent with Hofstede’s view, as
‘Generally, past-oriented individuals and collectives believe that plans should be
evaluated in terms of their fit with the customs and traditions of society’ (Jacob 2005,
p. 517). Keough, Zibardo and Boyds (1999) also observe that cultures with a high
past orientation display a great propensity to correct current behaviour in order to
benefit in the future. Such an approach eventually leads to material prosperity. This
is a far cry from Hofstede’s view that the values in Confucian Dynamism that lead to
a long-term orientation are a dynamic, future-oriented mentality (Hofstede & Bond
1988).

A second criticism of Hofstede’s work is that his sample of countries does not
accurately reflect the full spectrum of national cultures: adding additional countries
could therefore have resulted in different, or a different number of, dimensions. A
third problem is that IBM employees are not representative of the general population
of their respective countries in terms of education, scientific and technological
background, and ‘exposure to modernizing forces’ (Schwartz 1994, p. 91). Schwartz
(1994) contends that misrepresentation in Hofstede’s study is likely to have varied
from one country to another, and was probably larger in developing countries than in
developed ones. This undesirable variation may have affected the order of the
countries on Hofstede’s dimensions, and may even have affected which dimensions
subsequently emerged.

Hofstede derived his dimensions from data obtained between 1967 and 1973. Since
then, major cultural changes have occurred worldwide and so a fourth criticism
arises: it may be that his dimensions are outdated (Schwartz 1994; Steenkamp 2001). Shenkar (2001) notes that Hofstede’s work has not been updated to incorporate the fifth dimension of Confucianism, which is critical to corporate strategy. A final criticism is that it is unclear whether Hofstede’s values items are conceptually equivalent across cultures: that is, whether people from different cultures all understand them in the same way (Schwartz 1994; Steenkamp 2001; Shenkar 2001; Jacob 2005). This is a necessity if an international comparison of scores on cultural dimensions is to be meaningful.

In response to these criticisms, Hofstede (2001) argues that, first, additional dimensions should be both conceptually and statistically independent of the five dimensions already defined and should be validated by significant correlations with conceptually related external measures; candidates are welcome to apply. Second, what were measured were differences between national cultures. Any set of functionally equivalent samples from national populations can supply information about such differences. Third, the dimensions found were assumed to have centuries-old roots; only data that remained stable across two subsequent surveys were maintained, they have since been validated against all external measurements, and recent replications show no loss of validity. For example, Jasminka (2011) concludes the constructed scales confirm the content validity of the original four of the five dimensions, failing only with long- and short-term orientation.

Although Hofstede’s cultural dimensions have been criticised, Drogendijk and Slangen (2006) conclude that it may be premature to dismiss his work as outdated or
as inaccurately reflecting national cultures. The control of samples, which was drawn from IBM subsidiaries worldwide and all countries were closely matched in age, gender and educational background, was a unique opportunity to enable national characteristics to be identified and highlighted.

2.14.1.2 Validity and reliability

The validity of Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture has been confirmed in many studies (Søndergaard 1994; Van Oudenhoven 2001), suggesting that they are reliable and can be used to classify countries according to culture, and to determine cultural distances between them. According to White’s (2006) study, the empirical findings of Hofstede’s (1991) initial study identified four dimensions of national culture that converged with the findings of prominent 19th century anthropologists and sociologists, suggesting a degree of content validity.

2.14.2 Trompenaars’ cultural dimensions

Another popular cultural model is that developed by Trompenaars, who also researched value dimensions in 1993; his work was spread over a ten-year period, covering 15,000 managers from 28 countries representing 47 national cultures (Trompenaars 1993). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) define culture as distinguishable by the kinds of solutions it creates for certain problems, and identify seven dimensions:

1. Universalism versus Particularism – The universalistic approach applies rules and systems objectively, without consideration for individual circumstances; the
particularistic approach puts the first obligation on relationships and is more subjective (Deresky 2011); it is commonly found in Asia. Trompenaars (1993) finds that people in particularistic societies are more likely to pass on insider information to a friend than those in universalistic societies.

2. Individualism versus Communitarianism – In individualistic cultures, authority may well rest with the negotiator; a decision-maker accepts personal responsibility; and individualists feel that their achievements are primarily the results of their own efforts (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998). In communitarian cultures, the negotiator is a delegate who reports back to the group; the group makes the final decision. Joint responsibility is the norm; communitarians believe that they achieve in groups (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998).

3. Neutral versus affective – The focus here is on the emotional orientation of relationships. Members of affective societies, such as Italians, Mexicans, and Chinese, openly express emotions even in a business situation; those from neutral societies, like the British and Japanese, consider such displays unprofessional. Members of neutral groups are often regarded as hard to read (Deresky 2011).

4. Specific versus Diffuse – Managers in specific-oriented cultures like the United States, United Kingdom, and France, separate work from personal issues and relationships; they compartmentalise their public and private lives. In diffuse-oriented cultures such as Sweden and China, work spills over into personal relationships and vice versa (Deresky 2011).

5. Achievement versus Ascription – The question that arises here is ‘What is the source of power and status in society?’ In an achievement society, the source of status and influence is based on individual achievement – how well one performs the
job and what level of education and experience one has to offer. Women, minorities, and young people generally have equal opportunity to attain positions based on their achievements (Deresky 2011). In an ascription-oriented society, people ascribe status on the basis of class, age, gender, and so on; one is more likely to be born into a position of influence. Hiring in Indonesia, for example, is more likely to be based on who you are than is the case in Germany or Australia (Deresky 2011).

6. People’s attitude toward time – Different societies look at time differently. In cultures like the US, Sweden and the Netherlands, time is perceived as passing in a straight line, a sequence of disparate events. Other cultures think of time as moving in a circle: the past and present exist together with future possibilities. This causes considerable differences in planning, strategy, and investment (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998).

7. Attitudes toward environment – Some cultures see each individual as the major influence on one’s life, as motivations and values are derived from within. Other cultures see the world as more powerful than individuals, and nature as something to be feared or emulated (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998).

According to Mendonsa (1999), four problems arise: first, only one of Trompenaar’s dimensions directly reflects Hofstede’s model: the individual-collective dimension. Second, although the achievement-ascription dimension has some parallels with Hofstede’s power distance dimension, Trompenaar’s approach is more complex that the ascription dimension can be a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to effectiveness, as an orientation toward achievement. Third, Trompenaars
avoids the controversial masculine-feminine dimension of Hofstede’s model; and fourth, Trompenaars rarely mentions the issues of gender or culture.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are the preferred model to be adopted in this study. The model has a wider coverage of cultural values compared to Trompenaars’ cultural dimensions. Trompenaars has not covered the cultural dimension of masculine-feminine, however, Hofstede’s study has differentiated the gender roles very clearly in the masculine-feminine dimension (Bang et al. 2005). Researches have showed that in a more feminine culture, it is more likely to show empathy than a masculine culture (Kettinger, Lee & Lee 1995; Kunyk & Olson 2001). The differences between masculine and feminine cultures are vital in this study; one of the minor research questions is to examine students’ gender rating of the quality of service. Thus, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are more appropriate model to address the minor research question and hence adopted in this study.

2.14.3 The impact of culture on quality of service

National cultural orientations (Imrie, Cadogan & McNaughton 2002) seem to possess the potential for explaining variations in the criteria that customers use in evaluating the quality of service. Personal values are central to the formation of human attitudes and subsequent behaviours; they provide a sound theoretical basis for understanding complex consumer behaviour such as quality perceptions (Raaipoot 2004). Similarly, culture is a powerful force that determines consumers’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Several studies have identified culture as a factor with the power to influence the evaluation of the service encounter (Malai & Speece 2005; Shih 2006;
Stauss & Mang (1999); and adding cultural dimensions to the quality of service studies will enhance the application of SERVQUAL in wider situations and contexts (Kueh & Voon 2007). For example, Malhotra et al.’s (1994) study concludes that it is important to understand how the various environmental factors affect considerations in the quality of service evaluation. Their findings suggest that various dimensions of the quality of service should be emphasised differently in developed and developing countries. An empirical testing of Malhotra et al.’s (1994) cross-cultural research on perceived quality of service has been addressed by Winsted (1997) and Donthu and Yoo (1998). Winsted’s (1997) study looks at customers’ evaluation of service encounters in the United States and Japan, finding different service encounter dimensions between the two countries and identifying significant cross-cultural differences in these dimensions. Mattila (1999) builds on Winsted’s (1997) work by studying how culture influences customers’ evaluation of complex services, looking at the trade-offs that Western and Asian customers are willing to make between personalised service and a pleasant physical environment in the context of luxury hotels. The findings reveal that customers with a Western cultural background are more likely to rely on tangible cues from the physical environment than are Asians; this suggests that the hedonic dimension of the consumption experience may be more important for Western consumers than for Asians.

Donthu and Yoo (1998) studied the effect of customers’ cultural orientation on their expectations of service. Based on Hofstede’s dimensions of culture and the dimensions of the quality of service from the SERVQUAL scale, they tested the influence of culture on customers’ service expectations and found that, as a result of cultural orientation, customers varied in both their overall expectations with regard to
the quality of service and in their expectations of each dimension of quality of service. Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000) investigated how perceptions of the quality of service varied across cultural groups, matching each culture’s position against Hofstede’s dimensions. The study looked at the relationship between perceptions of the quality of service and cultural-dimension positions, and drew implications for international service market segmentation. The findings show that SERVQUAL dimensions correlates with Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

Even within similar cultural groups, customer satisfaction may vary, as evidenced in Ueltschy et al.’s (2009) investigating into whether Asian cultures are similar enough to allow standardisation of service offerings in dental services: the findings distinguish significant cultural differences, with Chinese respondents perceiving the quality of service as higher and expressing greater customer satisfaction when performance is high, and expressing less customer satisfaction when performance is low, than their Japanese and Korean counterparts. Ueltschy et al. (2009) conclude that although all three countries are considered high-context cultures with their roots in Confucianism, differences in national culture mean that ‘one size does not fit all’ in terms of service offerings.

2.14.4 The relationship between culture and the quality of service dimensions

It has been argued that different cultures tend to value differently the various dimensions of service (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001; Mattila 1999; Raymond & Rylance 1995). Demers’ (1998) study of how culture affects customers’ expectations of the quality of service finds a correlation between
the dimensions of the quality of service and the dimensions of culture. Shih’s (2006) study also reveals such distinctions: customers from some Western countries, for example, the United States and Germany, tend to have higher scores on all five dimensions of the quality of service, compared with the scores of customers from the Eastern countries represented in the sample, Japan and Taiwan.

More feminine cultures may be more likely to emphasise empathy than more masculine cultures, since empathy is often perceived as a feminine trait (Kettinger, Lee & Lee 1995; Kunyk & Olson 2001). Research has shown that Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are related to the importance of the quality of service dimensions. This current study adopts and expands on Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), and Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan’s (2000) studies by examining the higher education environment across Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

The following discussions in Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), and Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan’s (2000) studies offered a direction and suggested the hypothesis for developing this current study:

1. Power distance – The degree to which people accept inequality in power among institutions, organisations and people (Hofstede 2001). According to Donthu and Yoo (1998), most service involves some kind of power of providers over their customers. They have shown empirically that customers with high levels of power distance have lower expectations about responsiveness than customers with lower levels of power distance. Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) show that power distance
is negatively correlated with reliability, responsiveness and empathy; and positively correlated with assurance and tangibles.

2. Individualism and Collectivism – Individualism reflects a preference for a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves (Hofstede 2001). Collectivism refers to a tightly knit social framework in which individuals look after one another and organisations protect their members’ interests (Hofstede 2001). Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) posit that individualists demand responsiveness and reliability, and because of their self-confidence and self-responsibility, do not expect to be assured. Both studies have also found a strong link between tangibles and individualism.

3. Masculinity and Femininity – Masculinity stands for a preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, work centrality and material success (Hofstede 2001). Femininity reflects the value for cooperation, group decision-making and quality of life (Hofstede 2001). Donthu and Yoo (1998) do not investigate the masculinity–femininity dimension because they did not expect it to be related to service expectations. Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) find a positive relationship with responsiveness and tangibles; however, the expected negative relationship between masculinity and reliability is not significantly found.

4. Uncertainty avoidance – People’s intolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity results in support for beliefs that promise certainty and conformity (Hofstede 2001). Donthu and Yoo (1998) find that customers with high uncertainty avoidance have higher expectations of service than people with low uncertainty avoidance. Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) find that uncertainty avoidance is positively correlated with
reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; and negatively correlated with tangibles.

5. Long-term orientation – Long-term orientation reflects a greater concern for the future, and places a high value on thrift and perseverance (Hofstede 2001). Short-term orientation is more concerned with the past and the present, and prioritises the values of tradition and meeting social obligations (Hofstede 2001). Donthu and Yoo (1998) find a positive correlation with tangibles, while Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) find that long-term orientation is associated with responsive and reliable service, and is negatively correlated with assurance and tangibles.

Culture is a powerful force that determines consumers’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviours (Raajpoot 2004). Recent research has focused on industries and been applied in various countries, for example, banking (Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000), hotels (Mattila 1999), health sector (Kilbourne et al. 2004), information systems (Jiang, Klein & Crampton 2000), restaurants (Winsted 1997), telecommunications (Van der Wal, Pampallis & Bond 2002), advertising in the USA and Korea (Bang et al. 2005), engineering institutions in India (Sakthivel & Raju 2006), Australia (Baldwin & Sohal 2003), China (Lam 2002), Cyprus (Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi & Katircioglu 2005), Singapore (Richards & Ross 2004), Thailand and Japan (Witkowski & Wolfinbarger 2000), and Mexico and the USA (Herbig & Genestre 1996). Despite the importance of culture and the quality of service dimensions, little research has involved cross-cultural comparison, particularly in the higher education environment. This may be due to the complexity of the concept of culture that makes it difficult to operationalise, and the nature of its pervasive influence on consumer
behaviour (Bang et al. 2005). As the services sector continues to grow worldwide, it is important to examine whether differences predicted by cultural factors are reflected in services such as higher education in different countries.

Expanding on Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), and Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan’s (2000) studies, this current study examines cultural influences on students’ expectations and perceptions of service in the higher education environment, at universities in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. It is valuable to include cross-cultural studies in the arena of quality of service, in this current study. Since the late 1980s there has been a significant decrease in Australian government support of higher education, which has led institutions to seek alternative sources of revenue through research earnings, summer programs, and the development of overseas campuses. Some institutions rely heavily on fees paid by overseas students. Now that both Malaysia and Singapore are fiercely promoting themselves as ‘education hubs in Asian region’, they offer a significant threat to Australian higher education institutions. Australia will need to work even harder to capitalise on the global demand for international education and, particularly, on the demand from the Asian region. One of the areas to work on, as suggested by the IDP Chief Executive Officer’s Pollock (2005) is to maintain non-academic services, such as upgrading services, recruitment, and enrolment support. Pollock shared his idea of providing better services to students, in particular international students, at the American International Recruitment Council annual meeting (Ulmer 2010), suggesting, for example, that schools should provide on-campus accommodation or a well-trained off-campus student housing office, offering parents a sense of security; that schools should offer appropriate counselling and academic support services to students from other
cultures and non-English speaking backgrounds, and not integrate international student services with domestic student services; and that school campuses need to support cultural and religious diversity by providing such things as dietary choice, prayer rooms and places of worship (Ulmer 2010).

Now that the Malaysian Government has announced its aim of becoming an educational hub in Southeast Asia and renewed its commitment to increase investment in education, it has entered into tight competition with Singapore and Australia. Its recent Business Development Plan, the Ninth Malaysian Plan (9MP), enhances human capital development; however, the training of non-academic staff is not included on the educational development agenda. This is inconsistent with the 9MP and Pollock’s (2005) suggestion, and requires further investigation. Meanwhile, in Singapore, the Education Ministry has relaxed its control and allowed universities to set their fees, which resulted in increases ranging from 5% to 15% in 2005 (Teo 2006). University representatives have stated that the fee increases are to meet the increase in manpower and operating costs in order to continue providing a high-quality education (Singapore News 2008, 13 February; Hoe 2008).

Hofstede’s original cultural dimensions were operationalised to measure work-related values, and are inappropriate for Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan’s study. The context of Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan’s (2000) study is the service environment, and involved a sample of students. To overcome this problem, Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000) developed a list of 20 items originally proposed by Hofstede (1991) to describe the key differences between the two poles of each dimension in
terms of general norms, measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This current study will adapt these 20 items will be adapted and retain the 7-point scale, because it too will involve students and its context too is a service environment. Thus, due to similar target samples (students) and environment, Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000) 20 items has been used in this current study in examining cultural influences on students’ perceptions in higher education environment.

Factors influencing expectations may or may not be within the control of the service provider. Factors that may influence expectations outside the control of the service provider include personal experiences, advertising by competitors or word-of-mouth communications. One particular external factor that may influence expectations is culture. A proper identification of cultural influences on expectations may assist service providers in designing service packages and enhancing the quality of their services. Besides maintaining high standards of teaching, universities providing services should be able to survive in a competitive marketplace for years to come.

2.15 Student Gender and the Quality of Service

According to Hofstede (1991), the masculine dimension of culture places emphasis on traditional masculine values such as competitiveness, assertiveness, achievement, ambition, and high earnings. In masculine cultures, gender roles are clearly distinct. Examples include Japan, Italy, Germany, Philippines and Australia (Hofstede 2001). The feminine dimension of culture, on the other hand, refers to emphasis on values such as nurturing, concern for relationships, and valuing the quality of life (Hofstede
1991). Examples include Spain, South Korea, Thailand, Denmark and Sweden (Hofstede 2001). The masculine/feminine dimension is of particular significance and interest because it is the only dimension in which Hofstede identifies gender differences. Both males and females in a given national culture evidence high degrees of masculinity or femininity depending on their culture: Hofstede (1980, 1991) finds that differences between males and females are greater in more masculine countries.

The service literature has generally overlooked the potentially important independent variable of students’ gender. Empirical evidence suggests that men and women differ in their information processing styles (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy 1990; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran 1991): women engage in more detailed elaboration of information, whereas men tend to have a more general processing style. Women (being more scrutinising processors) tend to overweigh negative information, whereas men appear to give more salience to positive information. Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) report that women may be more sensitive to the relational aspects of a service interaction than their male counterparts.

Service organisations have an interest in research that examines how male and female customers respond to service encounters, because the quality of any service encounter experienced by customers forms part of their overall impression of the service provided (Dale 2003). Most people form their opinions based on the people that they have seen, and are either dissatisfied or delighted, or at some point on the continuum between these states. In order to deliver high quality services to students,
universities must manage every aspect of each student’s interaction and experience with all the service offerings, but in particular those involving people – the student advisors at student customer service centres.

Banwet and Datta (2003) point out that services are delivered to people by people, and moments of truth can make or break a university’s image. In order to deliver total student satisfaction, all employees of a university should adhere to the principles of quality customer service, whether they be front-line contact staff involved in teaching or administration, or non-contact staff in management and administration. In a survey conducted of 310 male Saudi Arabian students attending the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Sohail and Shaikh (2004) found that ‘contact personnel’ was the most influential factor in the students’ evaluation of the quality of service. Galloway (1998) studied students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by the faculty administration office in one UK university and found that front-line staff directly influenced students and their perceptions of the quality of the whole institution. These results indicate that front-line staffs at student service centres play a vital role in the service encounters of customers.

Despite the growing interest in service in higher education, little research has been conducted to examine students’ gender on perceptions of the quality of service. Most organisational studies have been conducted in male-dominated occupations with little consideration of potential gender-based differences (Thomas & Ganster 1995). Some studies have found that the gender of the customer (or rater) may affect employee
performance ratings; female raters generally give higher performance ratings than their male counterparts (Henderson 1984). Huber (1989) also finds this to be true where the performance of the employee is low and the customer is not satisfied.

On the other hand, Mattila’s (1999) study finds no evidence that gender has an impact on service encounter evaluations in a hotel and restaurant setting. This is in line with Leong and Sohail’s (2006) study of current trends in the perceptions of career influences on private academic staff in Malaysia; gender was considered a non-issue in career influences. A study of the food and beverage industry also showed no significant difference in gender perceptions of the quality of service by (Sun & Qu 2011); further, Hanzaee and Dehkordi (2012) find that gender is not a significant factor in the relationship between individual-level cultural values and the quality of service. Against these studies, Snipes, Thomson and Oswald (2006) examine gender differences in customer ratings of service performance and find that biases exist in the evaluations of quality of service: specifically, male customers tended to rate the fairness of service encounters higher than female customers. This current study is designed to close this gap in the research by investigating customers’ gender and the quality of service in service encounters in the higher education environment.

2.16 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Base on the literature review, the major research question in this study is:
What discrepancies can be discerned between students’ expectations and their perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

Hypotheses relevant to the major research question are offered as follows:

Hypothesis 1

(1.) There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ expectations in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha1: There is significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 2

(2.) There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Ho2: There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha2: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 3

(3.) There is a discrepancy/gap (Perceptions - Expectations) between first- and third-year students in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha3: There is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Minor research question one in the study is:

Do individual cultural tendencies have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, and on the discrepancy regarding the quality of services provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?
The following research hypotheses of minor research question one are offered:

Hypothesis 4

(4) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4a: Power distance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4d: Uncertainty avoidance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Hypothesis 5

(5) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on their perceptions of the quality of service provided by student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5a: Power distance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5d: Uncertainty, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 6

(6) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service
provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6a: Power, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6d: Uncertainty avoidance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Minor research question two in the study is:

Does students’ gender affect their service ratings of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?
The following research hypotheses of minor research question two are offered:

Hypothesis 7

(7) There are significant differences between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho7: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha7: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 8

(8) There are significant differences between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho8: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha8: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Hypothesis 9

(9) There are significant differences in the discrepancy/gap regarding male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho9: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha9: There is significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

2.16 Summary

The empirical study of the quality of service has its origin in the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm. Applying this paradigm to the evaluation of the quality of service suggests that individuals will compare their expectations against experiences. Much of the research on the quality of service has focused on determining what quality service means to customers and in developing strategies to meet customers’ satisfaction. There is a need to evaluate students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service. Satisfaction may be the most important element in a program designed to improve the quality of service, and it can be evaluated by assessing the expectations and perceptions of customers.
In today’s competitive environment, delivering a high-quality service is considered an essential strategy for survival, let alone success (Shank, Walker & Hayes 1995). To be able to market educational services effectively on an ongoing basis, there is a need to understand how students evaluate these services once they have experienced them. The notion that students are customers of educational services allows educational administrators to identify and understand their customers’ wants and needs, and their corresponding levels of satisfaction (Hampton 1983; Ortinau & Anderson 1987). Knowing what customers expect is the first, and possibly the most critical, step in delivering quality of service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990); therefore, this current study will focus on the quality of service model – Gap 5 as proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) to examine students’ expectation and perceptions of the quality of service in the higher education environment.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed definitions of quality, definitions and characteristics of service, the role of customers in service delivery, customer contact personnel, the ‘disconfirmation of expectations’ paradigm, the framework of perceived quality of service, the quality of service further development, the instruments to measure quality of service, the validity and reliability of SERVQUAL, criticisms of and responses to SERVQUAL, the relationships between quality of service, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, the quality of service in higher education, Hofstede and Trompenaars’ cultural dimensions, the impact of culture on the quality of service, and the relationship between culture and the quality of service dimensions, student gender and the quality of service.

This chapter presents the research design and methodology, followed by a summary of this study. It includes the selection of students and countries, the use of student advisors, a discussion of expectations and perceptions and the identification discrepancies or gaps between perceptions of the quality of service, the influence of culture and gender on perceptions of the quality of service. It outlines the pilot study, sample procedure, questionnaire administration, research instruments, reliability and validity of instruments, and data analysis.
Delivering a high quality of service has been perceived as an important goal for higher education institutions (Russell 2005). As they are part of a service industry, education institutions can adopt the techniques developed by other industries for measuring the quality of services and the satisfaction of customers (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes 2003). Cheng and Tam (1997) note that higher education is increasingly being recognised as a service industry, and one that places emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of its customers.

For educational institutions to achieve efficiency they must compete for both finance and customers (Edith & Joseph 1996). Joseph (1998) argues that to compete effectively in the marketplace, educational institutions need to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Providing services that are perceived by the customers as of outstanding quality is highly likely to give an organisation a competitive advantage. To acquire and maintain this advantage, universities must first determine where they stand in the eyes of the students. Facing escalating tuition costs, students are increasingly selective about what they are receiving for the fees they pay to universities (DiDomenico & Joseph 1996). In order to survive the rivalry within higher education, universities need to provide better services to their students; hence, the need for more measurement of the quality of their services. Banwet and Datta (2003) stress that all employees of a university should adhere to the principles of quality customer service, whether they are in academic or front-line administrative roles. Wiers-Jenssen, Stendaker and Grogaard (2002) demonstrate that the quality of the services provided by front-line administrative staff such as student advisors should not be underestimated when trying to improve students’ satisfaction; in fact,
they have the most influence and a very direct impact on students’ evaluation of the quality of service (Galloway 1998; Sohail & Shaikah 2004).

3.2 Research Design

This study is a descriptive research that based on survey-based methods, which analyse university students’ perceptions, culture and the quality of service, and students’ gender-based rating of the quality of service, at student service centres in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. According to Amin (2005), descriptive research is one of the most commonly used methods in social sciences, used to gather data from a sample of a population at a particular time. The questionnaire design was based on two instruments: the SERVQUAL model for measuring the expectations of the quality of service and perceptions, and the discrepancy gap; and Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan’s’ (2000, 2001) 20 items modified from Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions. The survey consists of demographic data about the respondents, their expectations and perceptions of their advisors’ service, their gender and their culture.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the conceptual framework, which consists of independent variables (first- and third-year students, culture and students gender), and dependent variables (expectations, perceptions and discrepancy/gap of the quality of service) for this study. Explanation and discussion of the conceptual framework appears in the following sections, and abstracts of the conceptual framework for the hypotheses are developed.
In this study, null and alternate hypotheses are used to test the hypotheses. The null hypothesis is a proposition that states a definitive, exact relationship between two variables, and is expressed as no significant relationship between two variables (Sekaran 2000, p. 110). The alternate hypothesis is a statement expressing ‘a relationship between two variables’ (Sekaran 2000, p. 110). The null hypothesis is
formulated so that it can be tested for possible rejection: this means that if the null hypothesis is rejected, then all permissible alternative hypotheses relating to the particular relationship tested may then be supported.

3.2.1 Selection of participants

This study evaluates students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service offered by university student advisors across three countries, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore, focusing on student service centres. Australia offers possibilities for this research because of recent changes that have forced universities to undergo self-examination. Australian universities are service-autonomous bodies responsible for their own governance, and make their own decisions about the allocation of funding, staffing and academic courses (Australian Bureau Statistics 2005). From 2004, the Howard government allowed universities to increase tuition fees (AAP General News Wire 2005, 25 February), and this resulted in increasing competition among each other to recruit local and, in particular, overseas students. This has brought them into further competition with countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, both of whom are attempting to develop into education hubs that will attract both domestic and international students. Malaysia offers a different and equally interesting situation: the Malaysian government has committed to position the country as a regional education hub, ‘to create a knowledge-based society that focuses on information communications technology, education and the retraining of workers’ (Austrade 2007, p. 1). The training of non-academic staff is not included on the development agenda, raising concern about the quality of service they will be able to provide to existing and potential university customers. The Singapore government
has recently given local universities the autonomy to make far-reaching changes in order to create unique educational experiences for their students, as well as to compete in the global university landscape. There is the possibility that the government may relax its control over fees and allow university authorities to set their own prices for tuition; increased charges, it is claimed, will pay for better teachers and improve all services that are expected by customers (The Straits Times 2004, 9 December).

As these changes move across the Asia Pacific region, there is a need to examine the student service centres services to their customers. The student centres’ advisors are the first points of contact for first-year students: without much knowledge of the university, students tend to seek advice and gather information from them. When service qualities are of high standard, students are satisfied, and less likely to drop out (Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker & Grogaard 2002); their positive reports to other potential students may increase the university’s competitive advantages.

3.2.2 Selection of student participants

First- and third-year undergraduate business students were invited to participate in this study. Understanding value from the students’ perspective can provide useful information to university management, helping them to allocate resources and design programs that will better satisfy students (Seymour 1992); and helping them to gain or maintain a competitive edge (Schmidt 2002; Watson 2003). Studies of student satisfaction in universities from a customer-oriented perspective may provide additional dimensions to the educational planning activities of colleges and
universities (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak 2005). Student satisfaction surveys can also provide institutions with a tool to understand the complexity of the total learning experience, and include the institutional leadership more directly in quality development issues.

First-year undergraduate students were targeted for this study because they are new to higher education and may have little or no prior knowledge or experience of universities, and no comparative basis or framework of reference from which to evaluate their experiences. Their expectations are likely to be based on information gathered during their years in high school or college, which are very different environments from a university. Third-year students were also targeted, as they were expected to be familiar with the business school faculty and services, having had two years to gather knowledge and experience of their university’s services and its environment. The use of third-year students is supported in Ling, Chai and Piew’s (2010) study, which finds a positive relationship between final-year students’ perceptions and universities’ services. Feedback from first- and third-year students will offer student advisors information that will help them to improve the services they provide to the customers – existing and potential students.

3.2.3 Customer service centres – the student advisors

In order to deliver total student satisfaction, Banwet and Datta (2003) stress, all employees of a university should adhere to the principles of quality customer service. Studies conducted by Sohail and Shaikah (2004) and Galloway (1998) indicate that
front-line staff are the most influential factor in students’ evaluation of the service they receive from their university.

The services provided by student centre advisors are vital in assisting undergraduate students, helping with tasks as varied as enrolment, directing students to academic advisors for more detailed planning of their university studies, and answering general enquiries – in this study, relating to business degree programs. Student centre and academic advisors have a close working relationship that ensures students receive accurate information and sufficient direction to overcome obstacles during their higher education. This enables the student advisors to achieve a high level of service and helps students to experience an enjoyable educational environment, simultaneously increasing both the university’s reputation and student enrolments. Therefore, this study chose to evaluate the perceived performance of these front-line contact staff, as seen by the students.

3.2.4 Expectations and perceptions, and the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) conducted exploratory research to understand the construct of the quality of service and its determinants, and defined quality of service as the degree of discrepancy/gap between customers’ expectations of a service and their perceptions of actual performance. The quality of service levels is higher when the discrepancy/gap between perceptions of performance and desired expectation is non-existent or small; the levels of satisfaction exist when perceived performance exceeds what was predicted (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988).
Research shows that quality of service is perceived as an important goal for higher education institutions (Joseph 1998; Russell 2005). Universities who provide services are more responsive to the students’ needs, and take constant measurement of their quality of service, will retain and attract students. This is particularly true of the services provided by student advisors. The quality of any service encounter experienced by customers forms part of their overall impression of the whole service provided (Dale 2003) and of the entire organisation as well (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes 2006). A satisfied customer will pass on positive comments about the service provider that may positively affect a business’s reputation and financial status. In contrast, a dissatisfied customer may pass on negative comments which could affect a business’s operation and cause damage to its reputation. As there is minimal research exploring Student Customer Service Centres in higher education environment, the significance of this study lies in its extension of earlier research into the investigation of perceived quality of service within university student service centres. This needs to be carefully examined when trying to improve student satisfaction, as customers form their opinions based on the people who have served them.

Figure 3.2 illustrates first- and third-year students’ expectations and perceptions of quality of service, and the discrepancy/gap, in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore; this has been abstracted from the conceptual framework in Figure 3.1.
The major research question in this study is:

What discrepancies can be discerned between students’ expectations and their perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

Hypotheses relevant to this research question are offered as follows:

Hypothesis 1

1. There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ expectations in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha1: There is significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Hypothesis 2

(2.) There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha2: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 3

(3.) There is a discrepancy/gap (Perceptions - Expectations) between first- and third-year students in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha3: There is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
3.2.5 Culture and the quality of service

Hofstede (1991) argues that a person’s behaviour is only partially predetermined by his or her ‘mental programs’. He or she has a basic ability to deviate from them, and to react in ways that are new, creative, destructive, or unexpected. The sources of one’s mental programs lie within the social environments in which one grows up and collects life experiences. The programming starts with the family; it continues within the neighbourhood, at school, in youth groups, in the workplace, and in the living community. Hence, culture is defined as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from those of another (Hofstede 1980, 1984, 1991, 2001). Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values (Hofstede 1980, 1984, 1991, 2001).

Researchers have argued that different cultures tend to place different values on different dimensions of service (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001; Mattila 1999; Raymond & Rylance 1995). Based on an understanding of cultures, more ‘feminine’ cultures may be more likely to emphasise empathy than more ‘masculine’ cultures, since empathy is often perceived as a feminine trait (Kettinger, Lee & Lee 1995; Kunyk & Olson 2001). Research shows that Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are related to the importance of the various dimensions of service (Lagrosen 2003; Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi & Leitner 2004; Mathews et al. 2001). Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), and Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan’s’ (2000, 2001) studies indicate that, first, customers with high levels of power distance have lower expectations about the responsiveness dimension than customers with lower levels of power distance; this is negatively correlated with reliability, responsiveness and
empathy and positively with assurance and tangibles. Second, with respect to individualism, individualists demand responsiveness and reliability dimensions; however, they do not expect to be assured because of their self-confidence and self-responsibility. Both groups of authors also find a strong link between tangibles and individualism. Third, Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan (2000) find a positive relationship between responsiveness and tangibles, but not the expected negative relationship between masculinity and reliability. Fourth, high uncertainty avoidance customers have higher expectations of quality of service than with people with low uncertainty avoidance; this is positively correlated with reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, and negatively correlated with tangibles. Fifth, long-term orientation is positive correlated with responsiveness and reliability, and negatively correlated with assurance and tangibles.

According to Snow, Bartel and Cullen (1996), changes in demographic characteristics may suggest corresponding changes in service-quality programs. Their study of service expectations in retail financial services in Toronto (Canada) was to determine whether the quality of service attributes are dependent on cultural background; they find that different service expectations do exist between various ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, expectations begin before the service encounter, and are influenced by many factors. They suggest that the factors influencing expectations, which may or may not be within the control of the service firm, are promising only what the firm can deliver; factors that might influence expectations outside the control of the firm could include personal experiences, advertising of competitors or word-of-mouth communications, and in particular, cultural background.
In this study, both Malaysia, and Singapore are multi-racial countries comprising diverse groups of people from unique backgrounds, although generally, the two societies are made up of the same ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Caucasian/other. Malaysia’s population is mainly ethnic Malays, followed by ethnic Chinese group, with a minority of Indians and Caucasians/others. Singapore’s population is mostly ethnic Chinese (74.1%), with a minority of ethnic Malays (13.4%), ethnic Indians (9.2%), and Caucasian/others (3.3%) (Singapore in figures 2012, p. 4). This mixture is useful for the purposes of this study, which hypothesises that culture is a factor that may affect perceptions of the quality of service.

Expanding on Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), and Furrer, Liu and Sudharsan’s (2000, 2001) studies, this study is designed to examine whether culture influences students’ expectations and perceptions with regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. An understanding of whether, and how, culture influences students’ expectations and perceptions can assist universities in designing their service packages and enhance the quality of their services.

Figure 3.3 illustrates cultural influences on first- and third-year students’ expectations and perceptions, and the discrepancy/gap in the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore; this is abstracted from the conceptual framework of Figure 3.1.
The following research hypotheses are offered:

Minor research question (1)

Do individual cultural tendencies have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, and on the discrepancy regarding the quality of services provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

Hypothesis 4

(4) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
H4a: Power distance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4d: Uncertainty avoidance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the expectations of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 5

(5) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on their perceptions of the quality of service provided by student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5a: Power distance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
H5b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the
perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in
Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the
perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in
Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5d: Uncertainty, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the
perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year students in
Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact
on the perceptions of service quality among first- and third-year
students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 6

(6) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a
significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service
provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and
Singapore.

H6a: Power, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and
third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6b: Individualism, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and
third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
H6c: Masculinity, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6d: Uncertainty avoidance, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6e: Long-term orientation, a cultural dimension, has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

3.2.6 Student gender and the quality of service

According to Hofstede (1991, 2001), masculine culture emphasises traditional masculine values such as competitiveness, assertiveness, achievement, ambition, and high earnings. Countries such as Japan, Italy Germany, Philippines, and Australia are classified as masculine society. In such masculine cultures, gender roles are clearly distinct. In contrast, feminine culture emphasises values such as nurturing, concern for relationships, and valuing the quality of life. Countries such as Spain, South Korea, Thailand, Denmark, and Sweden are classified as feminine (Hofstede 1991, 2001). The masculinity/femininity dimension is of particular interest because this is the only dimension in which Hofstede identified gender differences. Both males and females in a given culture evidence a degree of masculinity/femininity depending on their culture. Hofstede (1980, 1991) contends that the differences between males and females within the culture are greater in more masculine countries.
The service literature has generally overlooked the potentially important moderating factor of customer gender. Since services are provided by and to both men and women, service organisations have an interest to examining how male and female customers respond to service encounters. The quality of any service encounter experienced by customers forms part of their impression of the whole service provided (Dale 2003). Most people form their opinions based on the people that they see, and are either dissatisfied or delighted, or somewhere in between. In order to deliver high-quality services to students, universities must manage every aspect of the student’s interaction with all of their service offerings and in particular those involving its people – the advisors at student service centres.

Despite the growing interest in the quality of service in the higher education environment, little research has been conducted to examine students’ gender-based ratings of quality of service. Most organisational studies have been conducted in male-dominant occupations, with little consideration of gender-based differences (Thomas & Ganster 1995). Some studies find that the gender of the customer may affect employee performance ratings: Henderson (1984) finds that female raters generally give higher performance ratings than their male counterparts; another study, however, finds this to be true only in cases where the performance of the employee is low (Huber 1989). Snipes, Thomson and Oswald (2006) examine gender differences in customer ratings of service performance and show that gender bias exists: male customers tend to rate the fairness of service encounters higher than female customers. Soutar and McNeil’s (1996) study supports the argument that gender has an effect on satisfaction with the quality of service: male students were found to be more satisfied than females.
Against this, some research finds no support for the argument that gender influences perceptions of the quality of service. Mattila’s (2000) study reveals that customer gender failed to have an impact on service encounter evaluations in a hotel and restaurant setting. In line with Mattila’s study, Leong and Sohail’s (2006) examination of current trends in the perceptions of career influences on private academic staff in Malaysia reveals that gender was considered a non-issue. In addition, Sun and Qu (2011) indicate there is no significant difference between genders in the perception of the quality of service within the hospitality industry. Given the uneven findings to date, this study is designed to close this gap in the research by investigating customer’ gender-based rating in their service encounters in the higher education environment. In developing hypotheses in this study, the null and alternative method is used because the direction of the relationship between the variables is indicated.

Figure 3.4 illustrates gender as a function of first- and third-year students’ expectations and perceptions, and the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service among students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore; this is abstracted from the conceptual framework in Figure 3.1.
The following research hypotheses are offered for this study.

Minor research question (2)

Does students’ gender affect their service ratings of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

Hypothesis 7

(7) There are significant differences between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H07: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Ha7: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 8

(8) There are significant differences between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho8: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha8: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Hypothesis 9

(9) There are significant differences in the discrepancy/gap regarding male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho9: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
Ha9: There is significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

3.2.7 Pilot study

Prior to the actual data collection, pilot testing was undertaken using two groups of volunteer focus group participants, all first- and third-year undergraduate business students from one university (here named Australian university A). The first group consisted of ten volunteers from first-year; the second of ten volunteers from third-year: a total 20 volunteer respondents. Each focus group was asked to examine the questionnaire for this study. Pre-testing questionnaires is useful because it can reveal problems with wording or measurements, and any inadequacies can be rectified before the data collection proper, and ultimately reduce bias (Sekaran 2000). These volunteer respondents did not participate in the final survey carried out in 2007 and 2008. Due to time and geographical restrictions, no focus group interview was carried out in universities in Malaysia and Singapore, or in the second target university in Australia; this may lead to a possible limitation in the validity of the study. The study was limited to selected students at participating universities in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Results from the study are indicative of student and university behaviours without necessarily being generalisable to all business students or institutions of higher education.
3.2.8 Sample size and procedure

The research samples for this study consisted of first- and third-year undergraduate business students of universities in Australia (Australia universities A and B), Malaysia (Malaysia university A) and Singapore (Singapore universities A and B). The names of the universities are withheld for ethical reasons.

According to Roscoe (1975), a rule of thumb for determining sample size is that anything larger than 30 and smaller than 500 is appropriate for most research. In this study, a random sample number of 250 to 300 students was selected from among the first-year students of each university. A similar number of third-year students in each participating university were selected; this gave a total of 500 to 600 students from each university.

At Australia university A, the researcher had the support of lecturers/tutors and was able to deliver and administer the survey during class time. All survey responses were returned to the unit controller for collection by the researcher. At Australia university B, the researcher conducted the surveys personally; all survey responses were posted to the researcher by a lecturer at the university who was appointed to assist with and organise the distribution of questionnaires. At each of the Malaysia and Singapore universities, one of the business school lecturers assisted in distributing and collecting the surveys and posting them to the researcher.
3.2.9 Questionnaire administration procedure

Questionnaire distribution was carried out in 2007 and 2008 for Australia universities A and B, Malaysia university A, and Singapore universities A and B. The questionnaire contained a cover letter and included 5 sections. The cover letter introduced the researcher, explained the purpose of the research, noted the areas that the research was looking at, and gave a brief description of each part of the questionnaire. Part 1 consisted of 16 demographic questions and Part 2 of 22 statements that dealt with students’ expectations (i.e., what they felt a student advisor should offer) of the services provided by the business school’s student service centre. Part 3 consisted of 22 statements that related to students’ experiences (i.e., how well has a student’s advisor performed his/her service) of services provided by the business school’s student service centre. These statements correspond to the 22 expectations statements. A seven-point interval scale was used for both Part 2 and Part 3, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree), to 7 (strongly agree). The seven-point interval scale was employed to avoid the central-tendency bunching that commonly characterises Asian responses to a questionnaire (Ellis & Williams 2001).

Part 4 consisted of 20 statements that relate to students’ national culture. A seven-point interval scale was used ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree), to 7 (strongly agree). Lastly, Part 5 consisted of two open-ended questions inviting general comments. Written instructions guided the students in filling in the questionnaires. Participants were asked to circle the number that best matched their
opinion. All responses collected were kept confidential and participants kept anonymous.

3.2.10 Research instruments

3.2.10.1 SERVQUAL

The SERVQUAL instrument was used to measure the quality of service in this study. It is a two-part instrument, with 22 statements measuring expectations of customers (in this case students) and 22 similarly worded statements measuring experiences (perceptions) of customers. The five dimensions of SERVQUAL measured the quality of service: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). A seven-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (7) accompanied each statement. Responses to the expectation and perception statements were compared. For each item, a difference score $Q$ (representing perceived quality along that item) was defined as $Q = P - E$, where $P$ and $E$ are the respective ratings for the matching perception and expectation statements. If the expectation response is higher than the perception response, the score will be negative; if the perception response is higher than the expectation response, the score will be positive. A positive score indicates an area of strength and can represent a competitive advantage for the service provider (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). The SERVQUAL instrument was slightly modified in this study to reflect the nature of services in the higher education environment. The modification included references to the student rather than to the customer, and references to student advisors rather than to employees. This variation is supported
by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) as the modifications were appropriate and did not present difficulties with the reliability or validity of the instrument.

Customers are satisfied with services when their expectations are met and exceeded. In order to ensure such an outcome, service managers need to take into account of the parts of the service delivery experience that are open to cultural influences (Espinoza 1999). Service encounters are first and foremost (i.e., highest position) social encounters; rules and expectations related to service encounters should vary considerably across cultures (Malhotra et al. 2005). Due to differences in culture and environment, customers in different countries may have different perceptions of what the quality of service is. Thus, service managers need to be sensitive to the variation of personal values, attitudes and behaviours that customers will bring into a service encounter in different cultures.

3.2.10.2 Cultural dimensions

Hofstede’s (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) work on cultural dimensions has frequently been used to classify cultures and countries, and it also used as a basis for understanding cultural differences. The five cultural dimensions are power distance, individualism, masculine/feminity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term versus short-term orientation. These were originally operationalised to measure work-related values. The current research sample is composed of students and the context of the study is a service situation (i.e., higher education); therefore, modifications to the original items were required. Hoppe (1998) points out that replications using questions from the Hofstede/IBM surveys are not universally applicable, and
questionnaires have to be adapted to their intended respondent population, situation and period. Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan’s (2000) 20 items are associated with those proposed by Hofstede (1991) to describe the key differences between the two poles of each dimension in terms of general norms; these were adopted for this study to reflect the nature of the respondents (students) and the context of the study (a service situation), and the 20 items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.2.11 Reliability and validity of instruments

3.2.11.1 SERVQUAL

Researchers have proven that SERVQUAL is a reliable instrument for measuring expectations and perceptions of the quality of service (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1993; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990). In 1988, these researchers reported that the coefficients for the five dimensions of the quality of service have a total reliability score of 0.92. Brown, Churchill and Peter’s (1993) study shows very strong reliabilities for two components of SERVQUAL (0.94 for expectations and 0.96 for perceptions), while Hadikoemore (2001) finds a reliability higher than 0.70 and a high validity (significant at the 0.01 level, indicating correlations exist) for the five dimensions of quality of service and considers this strong support for the use of the modified SERVQUAL instrument. A study by Markovic and Gospodarstvo (2006) of the quality of service in tourism and hospitality higher education in Croatia, which refined and developed the existing SERVQUAL scale, indicates that SERVQUAL is reliable and applicable, with relatively high alpha values of 0.7783.
for the expectations scale. The validity of the five dimensions ranged from 0.75 to 0.98 and was acceptable.

3.2.11.2 Cultural dimensions

The validity of Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture has been confirmed in many studies (Søndergaard 1994; Van Oudenhoven 2001), suggesting that they can reliably be used to classify different countries according to national culture, and to determine the cultural distance between them. Donthu and Yoo (1998) provide reliability values of 0.72, 0.76, 0.77 and 0.70 for four of the five cultural dimensions, excluding that of masculinity, which was not included in their study. The reliability of the cultural dimensions is also reasonable, with stability varying between 0.56 and 0.69, as shown in Steenkamp’s (2001) study.

3.2.12 Data analysis

SPSS version 17.0 was used to analyse the data obtained from the questionnaires for this study. To enable ease of data entry, questions were pre-coded. SPSS is user-friendly and easily converts data from Excel; it is commonly used by researchers. A variety of data analysis methods were used, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, t-test analysis, and statistical testing.
3.2.13 Ethical Issues

Several ethical issues were addressed when conducting the study. The study gained approval in writing from relevant representatives in the three Business Schools, including program managers, subject lecturers and the surveyed students. Participants’ responses were kept confidential and participants remained anonymous. The participants were free to withdraw from the study at any stage. An ethical clearance application was lodged as part of the candidate’s university ethical requirements. The letter from the Ethics Committee is contained in Appendix 4.

3.3 Summary

This chapter presented the research method and design, the research questions and hypotheses, the instrument development and measurements used in the sample profile, and the method of data collection. This study evaluates students’ expectations and perceptions, and evaluates the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service offered by university student advisors across three participating countries, focusing on student service centres. First- and third-year undergraduate business students were invited to share their perceptions of the quality of service in this area. Understanding value from the students’ perspective can provide useful information to university management in allocating resources and designing programs that will better satisfy students (Seymour 1992); and help the institutions to gain or maintain a competitive edge (Schmidt 2002; Watson 2003).

Two main instruments were used in this study. The quality of service was assessed using a modified version of SERVQUAL further developed by Parasuraman,
Zeithaml and Berry in 1988. The final five dimensions used in this study are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This modified SERVQUAL consists of a two-part instrument, with 22 items measuring expectations of customers and a further 22 similarly worded items measuring perceptions of experiences of customers; together these permit measurements of the quality of service. Each dimension of quality of service was recast into two statements: the first to measure expectations in general; the second to measure perceptions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). A seven-point scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1) accompanied each statement. Responses to the expectation and perception statements can then be compared (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). If the expectation response is higher than the perception response, the score will be negative; if the perception response is higher than the expectation response, the score will be positive. A positive score indicates an area of strength and can represent a competitive advantage for the service provider.

Hofstede’s (1991) cultural dimensions were adapted by Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000), who argued that the original dimensions, developed to measure work-related values, used terms that were inappropriate for a service environment dealing with students. They developed a set of terms that were more meaningful in the context of a student service environment, based on 20 items proposed by Hofstede (1991). Key differences between the poles of each item were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In this present study, Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan’s’ (2000) 20 items were adopted and a similar 7-point
Likert-type scale was used, as the research sample. Like theirs, consisted of students and the context was a service environment.

The conceptual framework developed for this study consisted of independent variables (first- and third-year students, culture, and gender) and dependent variables (expectations, perceptions, and discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service).

The major research question for this study is:

What discrepancies can be discerned between students’ expectations and their perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

The minor research questions for this study are

(1) Do individual cultural tendencies have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, and on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

(2) Does students’ gender affect their service rating of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

Pilot testing was conducted on two groups of student volunteers from first- and third-year in Australian university A. None of these students took part in the survey proper. The research samples for the study consisted of first- and third-year
undergraduate business students in two Australian, one Malaysian, and two Singaporean universities. Between 250 and 300 students at each year level were selected at each university. SPSS version 17.0 was used to analyse the data obtained from the questionnaires they answered.

The next chapter will provide an analysis of the results.
Chapter 4

Analysis of Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented discussion on the research design and methodology, including the selection of students and countries for study, the reasons for the choice of student advisors as the focal point of the questions, and the reasons for examining expectations and perceptions and discrepancy/gap between them regarding quality of service, and whether these are affected by culture, or gender. The use of a pilot study, sample procedure, questionnaire administration, research instruments, reliability and validity of instruments, and data analysis were also discussed.

This chapter presents the results obtained from the survey of Australian, Malaysian, and Singaporean universities, including discussions of the main findings. This includes the preliminary examination of data screening, normality testing, reliability, and respondents’ profiles, hypothesis testing based on independent sample t-testing, and standardised regression coefficients.

4.2 Preliminary Examination of Data

Examining data allows critical insights into the characteristics of the information collected. According to Hair et al. (1998), this enables the researcher to attain a basic understanding of the data and relationships between variables. Data screening and
cleaning was carried out in this study to establish the accuracy of the input data and to determine how to handle missing observations.

4.2.1 Data cleaning and screening

In descriptive statistics, frequency distribution is used to screen data and detect values that are improperly coded, out of range or missing. In this case, 9 questionnaires had missing responses and were eliminated from the survey. Reverse coding was performed on some expectations, perceptions, and cultural variables where the questions were negatively worded.

Researchers have warned about using a mixture of positively worded and reverse-worded items in cross-cultural settings as they often lead to low internal consistency and obscured dimensionality (Goldsmith & Rene 1991). Wong et al. (2003) have suggested two possible explanations: first, respondents do not understand negative worded items (especially less well educated, younger people) so mixed items tend to be confusing; and second, negatively worded items may cause problems when translated into languages that have different ways of marking negation or contradiction, such as Japanese and Chinese; the resulting differences in expression could become confusing. In this study, some of the negatively worded questions that appeared in the section on cultural variables were dropped due to low reliability.
Boxplot analysis indicated there were 8 outliers, or responses with extremely low scores; these were also dropped. With 9 responses dropped because of incompletion, and 8 because of low scores, the usable sample size was reduced to 1277.

### 4.2.2 Reliability and normality testing

In order to measure internal consistency and reliability, Cronbach’s coefficient alpha is commonly used. According to Hayes (1998) and Kline (1998), adequate reliability occurs when the alpha values are above 0.70, whereas values below 0.50 suggest that at least one half of the observed variance may be due to random error and should be considered unreliable; Nunnally (1967) suggests a threshold of 0.60 may be considered acceptable. Although literature suggests the absolute value of 0.70 and above, a threshold of 0.30 to 0.50 was considered acceptable and was used in this study. Choosing a lower cut-off value is valid, because the absolute value depends upon the research area, and can be adjusted to higher or lower levels (Hair et al. 1998; Kassim 2001; Kline 1998).

Table 4.1 shows that Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for expectations, perceptions and individual cultural tendencies were 0.79, 0.80, and 0.49, 0.36, 0.53, 0.58 and 0.32. This indicates that expectations and perceptions were highly reliable measures; the cultural tendency of individuality also falls within the acceptable range, very near to 0.60. Table 4.1 also shows that, overall, students’ expectations were higher than their perceptions, with mean score of 115.25 and 99.36 respectively. It can be inferred that students have a higher expectation of quality of service than they actually receive. The students’ highest mean score is for uncertainty avoidance, at 10.64; the lowest
mean score is for power distance, at 8.05, suggesting a low tendency on all five cultural traits examined: positive items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, with the lowest composite score 2 and the highest 22.

To assess normality of variables, kurtosis and skewness were generated. Values for kurtosis and skewness are zero if the observed distribution is exactly normal (Coakes, Steed & Dzidic 2006). Hair et al. (1998) state that as long as kurtosis and skewness for all variables fall between -3 and +3, the variables are considered to be normally distributed; Table 4.1 shows that all variables except power distance recorded kurtosis and skewness between -3 and +3, suggesting normality. The expectations variable gave a negative value for kurtosis (-0.22) indicating a flatter distribution, and a negative value for skewness (-0.12) indicating a negative skew. The perceptions variable gave a positive value for kurtosis (1.47) indicating a distribution that was peaked, and a negative value for skewness (-0.34) indicating a negative skew.

The first individual cultural tendencies variable, Power distance, showed a negative value for kurtosis (-3.80) indicating a flatter distribution, and a negative value for skewness (-3.76) indicating a negative skew. This dimension is significantly more negatively skewed and flatter than the other four cultural tendencies, but the Histograms, Normal probability plots and Detrended normal Q-Q plots suggest a normal distribution of the variables. The individualism dimension showed a negative value for kurtosis (-0.03) indicating a slightly flatter distribution, and a negative value for skewness (-0.21) indicating a negative skew. The uncertainty avoidance
dimension showed a positive value for kurtosis (0.90) indicating a peaked distribution, and a negative value for skewness (-0.52) indicating a negative skew. The masculinity dimension showed a positive value for kurtosis (0.82) indicating a peaked distribution, and a negative value for skewness (-0.81) indicating a negative skew. The final dimension, long-term orientation, showed a positive value for kurtosis (0.39) indicating a peaked distribution, and negative values for skewness (-0.32) indicating a negative skew.

Table 4.1 Reliability, Mean, Standard Deviation, Kurtosis and Skewness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Expectations</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>115.25</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Perceptions</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>99.36</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Individual cultural tendency:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>-3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term orientation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3 Respondents’ profiles

The respondents’ profiles appear in Table 4.2 below. There were slightly more female respondents male respondents, at 7.8%: 53.9% and 46.1% respectively. Most respondents fell into the age groups of 18–20 and 21–23, with 41% each (523 respondents each), 14% were in age group 24–26 (179 respondents) and 4.1% (52 respondents) in age group 27 and above. Of the 1277 respondents, a majority of 92.6% were single: and 2.3% were married. Local students’ made up 74.5% (952
respondents) of the sample, and international students comprised the remaining 25.5% (325 respondents). Nationality was divided between 28.2% Malaysian (the largest group), and Australian at 27.4% (second largest), 21.3% Singaporean (third largest), and 0.9% Indian (smallest). There were also 7% Chinese, 2.9% Indonesian, 1.5% Hong Kong, and 1.3% Vietnamese; 9.5% Others made up the final group. Similarly, in terms of nationality at birth, the largest group (28.1%) was Malaysian, 22.6% Australian (second largest), 21.4% Singaporean (third largest), 1.3% Indian (smallest), 7.9% Chinese, 3.1% Indonesian, 1.9% Hong Kong, and 1.6% Vietnamese; Others made up the remaining 12.1%.

Among the four main groups of ethnic origin, Chinese were the majority with 52.5%, followed by Caucasians with 21.85%, Malays with 10%, and Indians with 4.5%; 11.3% of the sample fell in the Others group. The official language of the respondents’ country shows English ranked the highest at 48.2%, the second highest language Malay at 28.7%, followed by Mandarin at 7.4%, Hindi lowest ranked at 1.2%, Bahasa Indonesia at 3.1%, Cantonese at 1.95%, Vietnamese at 1.8% and Others languages at 7.7%.

In terms of enrolment, 95.1% of respondents were enrolled in a full-time course and only 4.9% in a part-time course. In terms of current residency status, 71.6% of respondents held citizenship, 24.7% held student visas, and 3.8% had permanent residency status. The respondents showed that 53.2% of them were in semesters 1–2, followed by 8.7% in semesters 3–4, 30.7% in semesters 5–6 and 7.4% in over 6 semesters. There were 34.2% respondents employed, and 65.8% not employed. Of
those employed, the largest group of 15.9% earned less than $10,000, 9.5% earned between $10,001–$20,000, 3.5% earned between $20,001–$30,000, and 3.3% earned above $40,001; the lowest earning bracket was $30,001–$40,000 earned by 2.3%. 65.5% of the respondents did not indicate their earning bracket, perhaps for reasons of privacy.

In regard to the education level achieved by respondents’ mothers, the biggest level was secondary school level at 43.5%, followed by bachelor’s degree at 21.1%, diploma level at 19.3%, masters degree at 3.8%, and doctoral degree at 1.3%; 11% Others did not fall into any of these listed levels. The fathers’ education levels shown that the biggest group again was secondary school level at 37.5%; diploma level was 18.4%. The second highest level was the bachelor’s degree at 23.2% which was similar to the mothers group (21.1%), followed by master’s degree at 8.8% and doctoral degree at 2.2%; 10.2% were Other. The largest group of respondents’ mothers worked as managers/administrators/executives at 15.2%; the second highest category was clerks/administration assistants/secretaries at 13.5%, followed by 9.6% in the professional category, services and related work at 10.6%, sales and related work at 5.5%, tradespersons at 2.4%, and Others at 43.1%. The respondents’ fathers were managers/administrators/executives at 30.6%, twice that of the mothers group (15.2%), under tradespersons with 15.7%, professionals at 12.1%, service and related work at 9.2%, and sales and related work at 6.9%; the smallest group was clerks/administration assistants/secretaries category at 1.7%, which was the opposite of the mothers group (13.5%). The Other category was 23.9% half that of the mothers group (43.1%).
The respondents’ parents combined income per annum indicated that 24.3% earned below $30,000 (the second highest earning bracket), 10.6% earned $30,001–$40,000, 9.3% earned $40,001–$50,000, 10.5% earned $50,001–$60,000, 6.3% earned $60,001–$70,000, 4.9% earned $70,001–$80,000, 28.1% earned above $80,001 (the highest earning bracket), and 6% were Other, perhaps because respondents did not know their parents’ incomes or were concerned with privacy).
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<tr>
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<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative Per cent</th>
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<td>Vietnamese</td>
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<td>Hindi</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9 Enrolled in a full or part time course
   - Full time: 1214 (95.1%)
   - Part time: 63 (4.9%) 100.0%

10 Residency status currently holding
   - Citizen: 914 (71.6%)
   - Permanent residency visa: 48 (3.8%)
   - Student visa: 315 (24.7%)

11 Number of semesters completed at university
   - 1-2 semesters: 680 (53.2%)
   - 3-4 semesters: 111 (8.7%)
   - 5-6 semesters: 392 (30.7%)
   - Above 6 semesters: 94 (7.4%)

12 Employment status
   - Employed: 437 (34.2%)
   - Not employed: 840 (65.8%)

13 Your income status
   - Less than $10,000: 203 (15.9%)
   - $10,001-$20,000: 121 (9.5%)
   - $20,001-$30,000: 45 (3.5%)
   - $30,001-$40,000: 29 (2.3%)
   - Above $40,001: 42 (3.3%)
   - Other: 837 (65.5%)

14a Highest level of education achieved by a parent (Mother)
   - Secondary school: 556 (43.5%)
   - Diploma (TAFE/Polytechnic): 246 (19.3%)
   - Bachelor degree: 269 (21.1%)
   - Masters degree: 48 (3.8%)
   - Doctoral degree: 17 (1.3%)
   - Other: 141 (11.0%)

14b Highest level of education achieved by a parent (Father)
   - Secondary school: 479 (37.5%)
   - Diploma (TAFE/Polytechnic): 231 (18.1%)
   - Bachelor degree: 296 (23.2%)
   - Masters degree: 113 (8.8%)
   - Doctoral degree: 28 (2.2%)
   - Other: 130 (10.2%)

15a Parent’s occupation (Mother)
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Managers, administrators, executives</td>
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<td>15.2</td>
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<td>Professionals (e.g. doctors, scientists,</td>
<td>123</td>
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<tr>
<td>engineers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clerks/Administration</td>
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<td>assistants/Secretaries</td>
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<td>Tradespersons (e.g. electricians, mechanics,</td>
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<td>technicians)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales and related work</td>
<td>70</td>
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<td>46.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15b Parent’s occupation (Father)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers, administrators, executives</td>
<td>391</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionals (e.g. doctors, scientists,</td>
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<td>16 Your parents’ income status (combined,</td>
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<td>per year)</td>
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N = 1277

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Using the modified version of SERVQUAL, each of the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter was analysed. The major research question for this study is:

What discrepancies can be discerned between students’ expectations and their perceptions in regard to the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?
The minor research questions are:

(1) Do individual cultural tendencies have a significant impact on students’ expectations and perceptions, and on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

(2) Does students’ gender affect their service ratings of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore?

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1

(1.) There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ expectations in regard to the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho1₁: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.

Ho1₂: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.

Ho1₃: There is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.
A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference between first- and third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Table 4.3 below shows that, for Australia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance or equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.405$) and therefore is not significant; hence, the null hypothesis $H_{01}$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means there is no significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia. For Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability less than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are unequal. The two-tailed significance or unequal variances indicates that $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.044$) and therefore is significant. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis $H_{a12}$ accepted. This means there is significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia. It can be inferred that
students in first year (means score = 110.5188) have a lower expectation of the quality of service than students at third year (mean score = 113.1679) in Malaysia. For Singapore, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance or equal variances indicates that p < 0.05 (p = 0.002) and therefore is significant. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis Ha1 accepted. This means there is significant difference in expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore. The mean score indicates that students in their first year (mean score = 121.0226) have a lower expectation of the quality of service compared to students in third year (mean score = 124.4538) in Singapore.

Table 4.3 Independent Sample T-test for Expectations of the Quality of Service between First- and Third-year Students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

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<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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Australia

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<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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### Independent Samples Test

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### Group Statistics

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation 1</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>121.0226</td>
<td>8.45170</td>
<td>.73286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation 3</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>124.4538</td>
<td>9.08795</td>
<td>.79707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Hypothesis 2

(2.) There are significant differences between first- and third-year students’ perceptions in regard to the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

**Ho2\(_{1}\):** There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.

**Ho2\(_{2}\):** There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.

**Ho2\(_{3}\):** There is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.
Ha2: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha2₁: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.

Ha2₂: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.

Ha2₃: There is significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference between first- and third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore; results are shown in Table 4.4 below. For Australia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.687$) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis $Ho2₁$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means there is no significant difference in perceptions of quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia. For Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.178$) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis $Ho2₂$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia. For Singapore, given that
Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.188$) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis $H_0$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means there is no significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.

Table 4.4 Independent Sample T-test for Perception of the Quality of Service between First- and Third-year Students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>99.8915</td>
<td>12.53970</td>
<td>.67906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>99.5232</td>
<td>12.35465</td>
<td>.61090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equalities of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>1.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>94.4586</td>
<td>14.58648</td>
<td>1.26481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>96.7710</td>
<td>13.21396</td>
<td>1.15451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.3.3 Hypothesis 3

(3.) There is a discrepancy/gap (Perceptions-Expectations) between first- and third-year students in regard to the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

---

#### Singapore

**Group Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>102.8195</td>
<td>6.70689</td>
<td>.58156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>101.5615</td>
<td>8.65085</td>
<td>.75873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equal of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>-1.349</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>-2.31235</td>
<td>1.71378</td>
<td>-5.68667</td>
<td>1.06218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.350</td>
<td>260.192</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>-2.31235</td>
<td>1.71249</td>
<td>-5.68445</td>
<td>1.05976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equal of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>3.520</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>1.320</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>1.25801</td>
<td>.95325</td>
<td>-.61903</td>
<td>3.13505</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>1.316</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>243.101</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>1.25801</td>
<td>.95597</td>
<td>-.62504</td>
<td>3.14106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ho3: There is no significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho3₁: There is no significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.

Ho3₂: There is no significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.

Ho3₃: There is no significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.

Ha3: There is significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha3₁: There is significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.

Ha3₂: There is significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.

Ha3₃: There is significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore; results are shown in Table 4.5 below. For Australia, given that Levene’s
test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.346$) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis $H_{03}$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia. For Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.860$) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis $H_{02}$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia. For Singapore, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance for equal variances indicates that $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.001$) and therefore is significant. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis $H_{a3}$ accepted. This means that there is significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore. The mean score indicates that first-year students (mean score = -18.2030) have a lower discrepancy/gap than third-year students (mean score = -22.8923) in Singapore.

Table 4.5 Independent Sample T-test for Discrepancy/Gap of the Quality of Service between First- and Third-year Students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>-13.5220</td>
<td>15.99900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>-14.6675</td>
<td>17.02484</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 Independent Sample T-test for Discrepancy/Gap of the Quality of Service between First- and Third-year Students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore
### Malaysia

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>-16.0602</td>
<td>15.92585</td>
<td>1.38095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>131</td>
<td>-16.3969</td>
<td>15.10409</td>
<td>1.31965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Singapore

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>-18.2030</td>
<td>10.56779</td>
<td>.91634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>130</td>
<td>-22.8923</td>
<td>12.26279</td>
<td>1.07552</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.4 Hypothesis 4

(4) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H4a1: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.

H4a2: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.

H4a3: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.

H4a4: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Australia.

H4a5: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.

H4a6: Power distance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.
H4b₁: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.

H4b₂: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.

H4b₃: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.

H4b₄: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Australia.

H4b₅: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.

H4b₆: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.

H4c₁: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.

H4c₂: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.

H4c₃: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.

H4c₄: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Australia.
H4c5: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.

H4c6: Masculinity has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.

H4d1: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.

H4d2: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.

H4d3: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.

H4d4: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Australia.

H4d5: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.

H4d6: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.

H4e1: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.

H4e2: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.
H4e3: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.

H4e4: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Australia.

H4e5: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.

H4e6: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the expectations of quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.

Three regression analyses were performed to test H4 for Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore respectively; results are shown in Table 4.6. Expectations were entered as dependent variables while the five cultural traits were entered as independent variables. The regression model for Australian first-year students is significant (F = 4.99, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.06, meaning 6% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.6, the uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.18 (p < 0.01). This indicates that the uncertainty avoidance variable has a significant impact on students’ expectations; thus, H4d1 is supported, and suggests that the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the expectations. Power distance is also significant but has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of –0.21 (p < 0.01). This indicates that the power distance variable has a significant negative impact on students’ expectations: in other words, low power distance students have a higher expectation of the quality of service; thus, H4a1 is supported.
The regression model for Australian third-year students is significant (F = 7.37, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.07, meaning 7% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.6, the uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.15 (p < 0.01). This indicates that uncertainty avoidance positively affects students’ expectations, suggesting the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the expectations; thus, H4d is supported. The power distance variable is significant but has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.18 (p < 0.01). This indicates that power distance has a significant negative impact on students’ expectations, suggesting that low power distance students have a higher expectation of the quality of service; thus, H4a is supported. Similarly, the individualism variable is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient, of -0.12 (p < 0.05). This could indicate that individualism has a significant negative impact on students’ expectations, suggesting low individualism students have a higher expectation of the quality of service; thus, H4b is supported.

The regression model for Malaysian first-year students is significant (F = 6.35, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.17, meaning 17% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.6, the uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.30 (p < 0.01). This indicates that uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on students’ expectations, suggesting the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the expectation; thus, H4d is supported. For Malaysia’s third-year students, the
regression model is significant (F = 2.68, p < 0.05). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.06, meaning 6% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural dimensions. However, as shown in Table 4.6, the five cultural dimensions are not significant predictors of third-year students’ expectations in Malaysia. This indicates that the cultural dimensions have no significant impact on students’ expectations; thus, H4a5, H4b5, H4c5, H4d5 and H4e5 are not supported.

The regression model for Singaporean first-year students is significant (F = 12.34, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.43, meaning 43% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.6, the uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.18 (p < 0.01). This indicates that uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on students’ expectations, suggesting the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the expectation; thus, H4d3 is supported. The individualism variable is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.07 (p < 0.05). This indicates that individualism has a significant negative impact on expectations; thus, H4b3 is supported, suggesting low individualism students have higher expectations of the quality of service.

The regression model for Singapore third-year students is significant (F = 10.14, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.26, meaning 26% of the variance in the dependent variables (expectation) can be predicted from the combination of all
five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.6, the power distance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.46 (p < 0.01). This indicates that power distance has a significant impact on expectations; thus, H4a6 is supported, suggesting the higher the power distance, the higher the expectation. The long-term orientation variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.22 (p < 0.01). This indicates that long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations; thus, H4e6 is supported, suggesting the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the expectation.

To summarise these findings, the standardised regression coefficient show, firstly, that power distance has no significant impact on first-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Malaysia (H4a2) or Singapore (H4a3). Secondly, individualism has no significant impact on first-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia (H4b1) or Malaysia (H4b2), or third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore (H4b6). Thirdly, masculinity has no significant impact on first-year students’ expectations in Australia (H4c1), Malaysia (H4c2) or Singapore (H4c3), nor on third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia (H4c4) or Singapore (H4c6). Fourthly, uncertainty avoidance has no significant impact on third-year students’ expectation of the quality of service in Singapore (H4d6). Fifthly, long-term orientation has no significant impact on first-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia (H4e1), Malaysia (H4e2) or Singapore (H4e3), nor on third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia (H4e4). These hypotheses are not supported. The regression model for third-year students in Malaysia cannot be interpreted; thus H4a5, H4b5, H4c5, H4d5 and H4e5 are not supported.
Table 4.6 Standardised Regression for Expectations (H4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term orientation</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F statistic</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>7.37</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>12.34</td>
<td>10.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05                      **p<0.01

4.3.5 Hypothesis 5

(5) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on their perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H5a1: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H5a2: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H5a3: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H5a4: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H5a5: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.
H5a: Power distance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H5b1: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H5b2: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H5b3: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H5b4: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H5b5: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H5b6: Individualism has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H5c1: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H5c2: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H5c3: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.
H5c1: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H5c2: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H5c3: Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H5d1: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H5d2: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H5d3: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H5d4: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H5d5: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H5d6: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H5e1: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H5e2: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.
H5e₁: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H5e₄: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H5e₅: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H5e₆: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

The regression model for Australia first-year students is significant (F = 2.30, p < 0.05). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.19, meaning 19% of the variance in the dependent variables (perception) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.7, the long-term orientation variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.12 (p < 0.05). This indicates that long-term orientation has a significant impact on students’ perceptions; thus, H5e₁ is supported, suggesting the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the perception. The power distance variable is significant and has a negative standardised regression coefficient of -0.12 (p < 0.05). This indicates that power distance has a significant negative impact on students’ perceptions: in other words, low power distance students have a higher perception on the quality of service; thus, H5a₁ is supported. The regression model for Australian third-year students is significant (F = 7.03, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.07, meaning 7% of the variance in the dependent variables (perception) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table
4.7, the long-term orientation variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.14 (p < 0.01). This indicates that the long-term orientation variable has a significant impact on students’ perceptions; thus, H5e is supported, suggesting the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the perception of quality.

The uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.20 (p < 0.01). This indicates that uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on students’ perceptions, suggesting the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the perception; thus, H5d is supported.

The regression model for Malaysian first-year student is significant (F = 4.15, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.11, meaning 11% of the variance in the dependent variables (perception) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.7, the power distance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.32 (p < 0.01). This indicates that the power distance variable has a significant impact on students’ perceptions, suggesting the higher the power distance, the higher the perception of quality; thus, H5a is supported. For Malaysian third-year students, the regression model is not significant (F = 2.06, p > 0.05). The model cannot be interpreted, suggesting the five cultural dimensions are not significant predictors of third-year students’ perceptions in Malaysia. This means that H5a, H5b, H5c, H5d and H5e are not supported.

Among Singaporean first- and third-year students, the regression model is not significant (F = 0.48, p > 0.05; F = 2.17, p > 0.05) and the model cannot be interpreted, suggesting the five cultural dimensions are not significant predictors of
first- and third-year students’ perceptions in Singapore. This means that H5a3, H5b3, H5c3, H5d3 and H5e3 are not supported; and nor are H5a6, H5b6, H5c6, H5d6 and H5e6.

To summarise the findings above, the standardised regression coefficient shows firstly, power distance has no significant impact on third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia (H5a4). Secondly, individualism has no impact on first-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia (H5b1) or Malaysia (H5b2), nor on third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia (H5b4). Thirdly, masculinity has no significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions in Australia (H5c1) or Malaysia (H5c2), nor on third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia (H5c4). Fourthly, uncertainty avoidance has no significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia (H5d1) or Malaysia (H5d2). Fifthly, long-term orientation has no significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Malaysia (H5e2). Moreover, the regression model is not significant and cannot be predicted, so H5a5, H5b5, H5c5, H5d5 and H5e5 are not supported; H5a3, H5b3, H5c3, H5d3 and H5e3 are not supported, and nor are H5a6, H5b6, H5c6, H5d6 and H5e6.
Table 4.7 Standardised Regression for Perceptions (H5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standardised Regression - Expectations (H5)</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term orientation</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F statistic</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05  **p<0.01

4.3.6 Hypothesis 6

(6) Individual cultural tendencies of first- and third-year students have a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

H6a1: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H6a2: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap for first-year students in Malaysia.

H6a3: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H6a4: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H6a5: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.
H6a: Power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H6b1: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H6b2: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H6b3: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H6b4: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H6b5: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H6b6: Individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H6c1: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H6c2: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H6c3: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.
H6c4: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H6c5: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H6c6: Masculinity has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H6d1: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Australia.

H6d2: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H6d3: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H6d4: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H6d5: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H6d6: Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

H6e1: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Australia.
H6e2: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia.

H6e3: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Singapore.

H6e4: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia.

H6e5: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Malaysia.

H6e6: Long-term orientation has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Singapore.

The regression model for Australia first-year students is significant (F = 2.43, P < 0.05). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.02, meaning 2% of the variance in the dependent variables (discrepancy/gap) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.8, the uncertainty avoidance variable is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.12 (p < 0.05). This indicates that the uncertainty avoidance variable has a significant negative impact on the discrepancy/gap; in other words, low uncertainty avoidance students have a higher discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service; H6d1 is supported. The regression model for Australia third-year students is also significant (F = 5.17, P < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.05, meaning 5% of the variance in the dependent variables (discrepancy/gap) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.8, the power distance variable is significant and has a positive standardised
regression coefficient of 0.17 (p < 0.01). This indicates that power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap, suggesting the higher the power distance, the higher the discrepancy/gap; thus, H6a4 is supported. The individualism variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.13 (p < 0.05). This indicates that individualism has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap, suggesting the higher the individualism, the higher the discrepancy/gap; thus, H6b4 is supported.

The regression model for Malaysian first-year students is significant (F = 8.60, p < 0.01). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.22, meaning 22% of the variance in the dependent variables (discrepancy/gap) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.8, the power distance variable is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.40 (p < 0.01). This indicates that power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap, suggesting the higher the power distance, the higher the discrepancy/gap; thus, H6a2 is supported. The long-term orientation variable is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.24 (p < 0.01). This indicates that the long-term orientation variable has a significant negative impact on the discrepancy/gap: in other words, low long-term orientation students have a high discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service; thus, H6c2 is supported. The regression model for Malaysian third-year students is not significant (F = 1.16, p > 0.05) and the model cannot be interpreted, suggesting the five individual cultural tendencies do not show significance and thus have no impact on third-year Malaysian students’ discrepancy/gap. H6a5, H6b5, H6c5, H6d5, and H6e5 are not supported.
The regression model for Singapore first-year students is significant \((F = 2.75, p < 0.05)\). The model reveals an adjusted R square of 0.06, meaning 6% of the variance in the dependent variables (discrepancy/gap) can be predicted from the combination of all five cultural tendencies. As shown in Table 4.8, the power distance variable is significant and has a negative standardised regression coefficient of -0.34 \((p < 0.01)\). This indicates that power distance has a significant negative impact on students’ discrepancy/gap; in other words, low power distance students have a higher discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service. H6a3 is supported. The regression model for Singaporean third-year students is not significant \((F = 1.58, p > 0.05)\) so the model cannot be interpreted, suggesting the five cultural dimensions do not show significance and have no significant impact on third-year students’ discrepancy/gap in Singapore. H6a6, H6b6, H6c6, H6d6 and H6e6 are not supported.

To summarise the findings above, the standardised regression coefficient shows firstly, that power distance has no significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia (H6a1). Secondly, individualism has no significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia (H6b1), Malaysia (H6b2) or Singapore (H6b3). Thirdly, masculinity has no significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap in Australia (H6c1), Malaysia (H6c2) or Singapore (H6c3), nor of third-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia (H6c4). Fourthly, uncertainty avoidance has no significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Malaysia (H6d2) or Singapore (H6d3). Fifthly, long-term orientation has no significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia (H6e1) or
Singapore (H6e1), nor of third-year students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia (H6e4). These hypotheses are not supported. The regression model cannot be interpreted for third-year students in Malaysia and Singapore, and so H6a5, H6b5, H6c5, H6d5, H6e5, and H6a6, H6b6, H6c6, H6d6 and H6e6 are not supported.

Table 4.8 Standardised Regression for Discrepancy/Gap (H6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardised Regression - Expectations (H6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term orientation</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F statistic</td>
<td>2.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05                      **p<0.01

4.3.7 Hypothesis 7

(7) There are significant differences between male and female students’ expectations of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho7: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho71: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia.
Ho72: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Malaysia.

Ho73: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore.

Ha7: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha71: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia.

Ha72: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Malaysia.

Ha73: There is significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. As shown in Table 4.9 below, in Australia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.014$) and therefore is significant. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis $Ha7_1$ accepted. This means that there is significant difference in male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia: male students (mean score = 112.7513) have a lower expectation of the quality of service than
female students (mean score = 115.0393). In Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability lesser than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are unequal. The two-tailed significance of unequal variances indicates that p > 0.05 (p = 0.528) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis Ho7 is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Malaysia.

In Singapore, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that p > 0.05 (p = 0.267) and therefore is not significant. The null hypothesis Ho7 is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore.

Table 4.9 Independent Sample T-test for Male and Female Students’ Expectations of the Quality of Service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent Samples Test</td>
<td>t-test for Equality of Means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality of Variances</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-2.470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Malaysia

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>110.8163</td>
<td>12.88034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>112.0651</td>
<td>10.19783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>5.714</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-1.735</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>-1.24679</td>
<td>1.70008</td>
<td>-4.59635</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Singapore

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>122.1712</td>
<td>8.87955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>123.4017</td>
<td>8.96647</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
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<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>-1.112</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>-1.23048</td>
<td>1.10660</td>
<td>-3.40947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.8 Hypothesis 8

(8) There are significant differences between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho8: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho8₁: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia.

Ho8₂: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Malaysia.

Ho8₃: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Singapore.

Ha8: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service provided by university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha8₁: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia.

Ha8₂: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Malaysia.

Ha8₃: There is significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Singapore.
A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference between male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. As shown in Table 4.10 below, in Australia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that \( p < 0.05 \) (\( p = 0.024 \)) and therefore is significant: the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis \( H_{a1} \) accepted. This means that there is a significant difference in male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, with female students (mean score = 100.7697) having a lower perception of the quality of service than male students (mean score = 98.7157). In Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that \( p > 0.05 \) (\( p = 0.850 \)) and therefore is not significant: the null hypothesis \( H_{o2} \) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Malaysia. In Singapore, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that \( p > 0.05 \) (\( p = 0.276 \)) and therefore is not significant; the null hypothesis \( H_{o3} \) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in male and female students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Singapore.
Table 4.10 Independent Sample T-test for Male and Female Students’ Perceptions of the Quality of Service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

### Australia

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Perception</td>
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<td>98.7157</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Malaysia

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>95.2653</td>
<td>14.50111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>95.6837</td>
<td>13.84772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.9 Hypothesis 9

(9) There are significant differences between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho9: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service of university student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ho91: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia.

Ho92: There is no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Malaysia.
Ho9: There is no significant difference between male and female students’
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Singapore.

Ha9: There is significant difference between male and female students’
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service of university student
advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Ha91: There is significant difference between male and female students’
discrepancy/gap on the quality of service in Australia.

Ha92: There is significant difference between male and female students’
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Malaysia.

Ha93: There is significant difference between male and female students’
discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Singapore.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a difference between male and
female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Australia,
Malaysia, and Singapore. As shown in Table 4.11 below, in Australia, given that
Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the
population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances
indicates that \( p > 0.05 \) (\( p = 0.847 \)) and therefore is not significant; the null hypothesis
\( Ho9_1 \) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no
significant difference in male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the
quality of service in Australia. In Malaysia, given that Levene’s test has a probability
greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-
tailed significance of equal variances indicates that \( p > 0.05 \) (\( p = 0.736 \)) and therefore
is not significant; the null hypothesis $H_0$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Malaysia. In Singapore, given that Levene’s test has a probability greater than 0.05, it can be assumed that the population variances are equal. The two-tailed significance of equal variances indicates that $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.115$) and therefore is not significant; the null hypothesis $H_0$ is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in male and female students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service in Singapore.

Table 4.11 Independent Sample T-test for Male and Female Students’ Discrepancy/Gap regarding the Quality of Service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>-14.0355</td>
<td>17.63480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>-14.2697</td>
<td>15.31841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAP</th>
<th>Equal variances assumed</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11 Independent Sample T-test for Male and Female Students’ Discrepancy/Gap regarding the Quality of Service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore
### Malaysia

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-15.5510</td>
<td>15.52560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>-16.3814</td>
<td>15.52007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>262</td>
<td></td>
<td>.736</td>
<td>2.45701</td>
<td>-4.00762</td>
<td>5.66837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.71521</td>
<td>.736</td>
<td>71.521</td>
<td></td>
<td>.83037</td>
<td>2.45756</td>
<td>-4.06924</td>
<td>5.72999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Singapore

#### Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>-19.5068</td>
<td>11.52882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>-21.7863</td>
<td>11.73547</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality of Variances</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>1.581</td>
<td>261</td>
<td></td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>2.27948</td>
<td>-5.5990</td>
<td>5.11885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.578</td>
<td>246.743</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>246.743</td>
<td></td>
<td>.227948</td>
<td>1.44481</td>
<td>-5.6626</td>
<td>5.12521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4.4 Summary

This chapter comprises a brief introduction, a preliminary examination of the data cleaning and screening, reliability and normality testing, and respondents’ profiles. The testing of hypotheses including the use of independent sample t-tests and standardised regression coefficients, are also part of the discussion in this chapter.

The findings show that, for Hypothesis 1, there is significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service in both Malaysia and Singapore, but not in Australia. For Hypothesis 2 there is no significant difference on students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, or Singapore. For Hypothesis 3, there is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap of the quality of service in Singapore, but not in Australia or Malaysia.

Hypothesis 4 considers individual cultural tendencies with regard to expectations. The first of these, power distance, has a significant impact on both first- and third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia. The second, individualism, has a significant impact on first-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore, and on third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia. The third, masculinity has no significant impact on first- and third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, or Singapore. The fourth, uncertainty avoidance, has a significant impact on first-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore, and also on Australia third-year students. The fifth, long-term
orientation, has a significant impact on third-year students’ expectations of the quality of service in Singapore.

Hypothesis 5 considers individual cultural tendencies with regard to perceptions. The first, power distance, has a significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in both Australia and Malaysia. Neither individualism nor masculinity has any significant impact on any of the students surveyed. The fourth tendency, uncertainty avoidance, has a significant impact on third-year Australian students only, while the fifth, long-term orientation, has a significant impact on both first- and third-year Australian students’ perceptions of the quality of service.

Hypothesis 6 considers individual cultural tendencies in terms of the discrepancy/gap between expectations and perceptions. The first, power distance, has a significant impact on first-year Malaysian students, and also on third-year Australian students. Individualism has a significant impact on third-year students in Australia only. Masculinity has no significant impact on any of the students surveyed. Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on first-year students’ in Australia only; and long-term orientation has a significant impact on first-year students in Malaysia only.

In Hypotheses 7 and 8, significant differences are revealed between male and female Australian students’ expectations (Ha7₁) and perceptions (Ha8₁) of the quality of service; there are no significant differences in either Malaysia or Singapore. Lastly, in Hypothesis 9, no significant difference between male and female students’
perceptions of quality of service are found in any of the three countries. Table 4.12 summarises the respective hypotheses’ findings.

The next chapter will present a discussion of these results.

Papers presented:


Table 4.12 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ho1&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ho1&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ho1&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ha1&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ha1&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ha1&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ho2&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ho2&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ho2&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ha2&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ha2&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ha2&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt; There is significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ho3&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; There is no significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ho3₂: There is no significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ho3₃: There is no significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ha3₁: There is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ha3₂: There is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ha3₃: There is significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>H₄a₁: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>H₄a₂: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>H₄a₃: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>H₄a₄: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>H₄a₅: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>H₄a₆: Power distance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>H₄b₁: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>H₄b₂: Individualism has a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Individualism has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Individualism has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Individualism has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Individualism has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Masculinity has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>H4d₃ Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>H4d₆ Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>H4e₁ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>H4e₂ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>H4e₃ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
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<td>46</td>
<td>H4e₄ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>H4e₅ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>H4e₆ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>H5a₁ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>H5a₂ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>H5a₃ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>H5a₄ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>H5a₅ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>H5a₆ Power distance has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>H5b1 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>H5b2 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>H5b3 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>H5b4 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>H5b5 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>H5b6 Individualism has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>H5c1 Masculinity has a significant impact on the perceptions of quality of service for first-year students in Australia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>H5c2 Masculinity has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for first-year students in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>66</td>
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<td>68</td>
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<td>H5e₆ Long-term orientation has a significant impact on perceptions of the quality of service for third-year students in Singapore.</td>
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<td>Ho7₁ There is no significant difference between male and female students’ expectations regarding quality of service in Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
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<td>115</td>
<td>Ho8₁ There is no significant difference between male and female students’ perceptions regarding quality of service in Australia.</td>
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<td>124</td>
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Chapter 5

Interpretation and Discussion

5.1 Introduction
The previous chapter covered the preliminary steps of data cleaning and screening, reliability and normality testing, and respondents’ profiles. It also detailed the testing of hypotheses based on independent sample t-tests and standardise regression coefficients.

This chapter presents a review of the research findings and discusses issues pertaining to the hypotheses’ findings identified in Chapter 4. The discussions are divided into three parts: first, students’ expectations and perceptions, and where gaps between these arise; second, whether cultural values influence students’ expectations and perceptions and create gaps; and third, whether students’ gender affects their rating of service.

5.2 Review of Research Findings and Discussion
The analysis presented in this study was conducted on data collected from 1277 first- and third-year university students in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The study used a modified version of SERVQUAL with five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) to analyse first- and third-year students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service of university students advisors,
and identify any discrepancy/gaps between the two; this was followed by an
eexamination of the impact of cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism,
mascunlity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation) on students’
expectations and perceptions, and any discrepancy/gaps between them; it also
investigated whether students’ gender affected their expectations, perceptions of the
quality of service provided by student advisors.

5.2.1 Hypothesis 1

In the previous chapter, the findings regarding Hypothesis 1, first revealed a
significant difference between first- and third-year students in Malaysia and
Singapore with respect to the quality of service. First-year students revealed a lower
expectation of the quality of service than third-year students, and Ha12 and Ha13
were supported by the study. This finding is in line with Shank, Walker and Hayes
(1995), who found a significant difference between the expectations of students in
private and public universities. Second findings of the study showed there is no
significant difference between first- and third-year Australia students’ expectations
of quality of service (Ho1). This finding concurs with Hadikoemore’s (2001)
finding that there is no significant difference between private and public university
students’ expectations of quality of service.

In this study, first-year Malaysian and Singaporean students are found to have a
lower expectation of quality of service than third-year students. This is perhaps
because as new students they do not yet know what to expect of the university. What
expectations new students have are partly based on experiences gathered during their
years in high school or college, very different environments from a university setting. As new students gain more experience their expectations level may increase. This is borne out in Hypothesis 2, where first-year students are found to have a lower expectation of quality of service than third-year students, and Ha1₂ and Ha1₃ are supported.

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2

According to Pariseau and McDaniel (1997), both how students are treated during the service interaction and the actual end result experienced by them affect their judgment of the quality of service. Jalali, Islam and Ariffin (2011, p. 182) state that student status has an important influence on the perception of the quality of service, arguing that ‘student expectation increases as they have more contact with the university’. Interestingly, this is not supported in this study. In Hypothesis 2, the findings show no significant difference between first- and third-year students’ perceptions of the quality of service in Australia, Malaysia, or Singapore. This implies that the students in the Universities studied have consistently satisfactory experiences with services provided by student advisors as they progress through their university studies.

5.2.3 Hypothesis 3

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985, p.44), ‘a set of key discrepancies or gaps exists regarding executive perceptions of the quality of service and the tasks associated with service delivery to customers. These gaps can be major
hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality’. They note that if the customer’s expectations are met, the quality of service is perceived to lead to satisfaction; if the customer’s expectations are not met, the customer is dissatisfied. The key to ensuring good quality of service is to meet or exceed what customers expect. Other researchers (Teas 1993; Hill 1995) concur that when the customer’s expectations are exceeded, the quality of services is perceived to be more than satisfactory. Gap analysis may assist in making a determination between students’ expectations and perceptions of service provided by the student advisors, to reveal how well the service centre performs.

In this study, the findings in Hypothesis 3 show there is a significant difference in the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service between first- and third-year students at participating universities in Singapore: that is, $H_{a3}$ is supported ($p < 0.05$). This means that the third-year Singaporean students have a higher discrepancy/gap than first-year students, thus the third-year students’ expectations are not met; they are dissatisfied with the services provided by their university student advisors. This indicates a weak area in the participating universities’ student service centres in Singapore, where improvement can be made. The reason Singaporean students having this result could be linked to Hofstede (1980, 1984) power distance dimension. Singapore’s power distance dimension has an index score of 74 that is considered as a high level, which mean the higher the power distance dimension the higher the Singaporean students’ expectations of the quality of service. Furthermore, it may be due to high educational levels and with rapid economic growth in Singapore in which people may have high expectations level and unlikely to accept to inequalities.
The findings in Hypothesis 3 are consistent with findings from other service industries and nations: for example, in Lau, Akbar and Fie’s (2005) study of the hospitality industry, the gaps between customers’ expectations and perceptions were significant. In a study evaluating employees’ quality of work and satisfaction in the higher education industry, Comm and Mathaisel (2000) have identified significant discrepancies between employees’ expectations and perceptions. Sohail’s (2003) study of private hospitals in Malaysia finds patients’ perceived value of services received exceeds their expectations; and Shekarchizadeh, Rasli and Huam (2011) find that when international postgraduate students’ expectations were not met in the performance of education services students in five Malaysian universities, they held negative perceptions of the quality of service provided by the universities (that is, they displayed a significant gap between expectation and perception) on all five dimensions of the quality of service.

Therefore, it is important for university student advisors to be aware of the services that do not meet students’ expectations, as dissatisfied students may pass negative messages to existing and future students, affecting recruitment, retention, or even enrolment. In addition, as success in any business depends on understanding the critical factors that determine customer satisfaction and ensuring that the business meets or exceeds customers’ expectations (Choi & Chu 2000), the quality of services provided by the administrative staff should be not underestimated when trying to improve students’ satisfaction levels (Wiers-Jenssen, Stendaker & Grogaard 2002).
5.2.4 Hypothesis 4

This study examines the impact of cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation) on students’ expectations and perceptions, to identify any discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service provided by university student advisors.

The findings show the power distance dimension is significant, with a negatively standardised regression coefficient for first- and third-year Australian students (-0.21 and -0.18 respectively, p < 0.01). This means there is a significant impact on expectations of quality of service among Australian students, supporting Hypotheses 4a₁ and 4a₄, and suggesting that lower power distance students in Australia have higher expectations of the quality of service. This finding concurs with that of Donthu and Yoo (1998), that customers low on power distance have overall high expectations regarding service. In Hofstede’s (1980, 1984) cultural dimensions index, Australia scores 36 on power distance, which is considered low; this score supports the findings of this current study that students in Australia fall into the classification of a low power distance society.

For third-year students in Singapore, on the other hand, power distance is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient (0.46, p < 0.01). This finding shows that power distance has a significant impact on third-year Singaporean students’ expectations, supporting H4a₆ and suggesting that the higher the power distance, the higher the students’ expectations of service. In Hofstede’s (1980, 1984) cultural dimensions index, Singapore scores 74, and is considered a high power
distance society. This supports the findings in this study, that the higher the power distance dimension the higher the Singaporean students’ expectations of the quality of service. However, it does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998, p. 181) finding that ‘high power distance customers have lower service quality expectations than low power distance customers’. Donthu and Yoo (1998) argue that customers from high power distance cultures tend to respect service providers and think the providers’ work is beyond their grasp. Their tolerance for inequalities in power inclines them to set low levels of expectations from service providers. In Singapore, however, people have high educational levels and with advances in economic growth, it may be that they are unlikely to accept inequalities. This society may need further examination to see if it still justifies its index score of 74.

Uncertainty avoidance has a significant impact on students’ expectations, including first-year (H4d₁) and third-year (H4d₄) students in Australia, first-year (H4d₂) students in Malaysia, and first-year (H4d₃) students in Singapore. These findings suggest that low uncertainty avoidance societies have high service expectations. In Hofstede’s (1980, 1984) cultural dimensions index, Malaysia and Singapore score 36 and 8 respectively, and are classified as low uncertainty avoidance societies; Australia has an index score of 51, and is classified as moderate. Interestingly, the current findings do not support the findings of Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), that customers in low uncertainty avoidance cultures have low expectations of the quality of service because they are more accepting of uncertainty and embracing risk (Nakata & Sivakumar 1996), and thus have low expectations of the quality of service. Whilst further research would be useful to reveal the reasons for this finding,
it might be due to a number of factors, including the effects of high power distance, high education levels and Singapore’s rapid economic growth.

As for individualism, the findings show a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service for third-year students in Australia (H4b₄) and first-year students in Singapore (H4b₃). This is indicating that low individualism (i.e. collectivism) students in Singapore have high expectations. This finding is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), that collectivist customers have low expectations of the quality of service. This is because collectivists customers are readily conform to and tolerate poor services; they do not want to cause disharmony; and thus they do not have high expectations of service but conform to whatever is provided. In this study, the findings indicate in Singapore, customers’ expectations levels are is changing. This may due to higher educational levels that broaden the customers’ demands and expectations; as a country’s economy improves it provides more opportunities for its citizens to explore foreign countries’ services, comparing them to their own and raising their standards.

This study does reveal a very interesting finding regarding individualism, showing that low individualism (i.e. collectivism) third-year students in Australia have high expectations, supporting H4b₄. In Hofstede’s (1980, 1984) cultural dimension index, Australia is an individualistic society with an index score of 90. Individualistic customers primarily pursue their own interests and are not willing to accept poor service (Donthu & Yoo 1998), and so have high expectations of the quality of service. However, this current finding indicates that low individualism students are
expecting high-quality services in Australia, which is an individualistic society. This is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding, and further examination of Australian’s individualism may be indicated.

The findings regarding long-term orientation show a significant impact on third-year Singaporean students’ expectations (H4e). This suggests the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the expectation of quality of service. In Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) cultural index, Singapore has a moderate score of 48 on time orientation, which classes it as moderate to low-level. This does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding that short-term oriented customers have high overall expectations of quality of service. Whilst further research would be useful to reveal the reasons for this finding, it might be due to a number of factors, including the effects of high power distance, high education levels and Singapore’s rapid economic growth. Further examination of Singapore, incorporating recent social, educational, and financial changes, is recommended in order to identify the appropriate orientation, and determine whether a moderate score still holds.

**5.2.5 Hypothesis 5**

This study examines the impact of five cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation) on students’ perceptions on the quality of service provided by university advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
The findings show that the power distance dimension has a significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions in Australia and Malaysia, supporting H5a₁ and H5a₂. In Australia, power distance is significant and has a negative standardised regression coefficient of -0.12 (p < 0.05), suggesting that lower power distance students have higher perceptions of the quality of service. In Malaysia, the power distance dimension is also significant, but has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.32 (p < 0.01), suggesting that the higher the power distance, the higher the perceptions. Ladhari et al. (2010, p. 4) note that ‘in high power distance cultural groups; customers perceive lower service quality than their low power distance counterparts’. According to Hofstede (1991), high power distance cultural groups accept inequalities among individuals, and customers expect service providers to reflect power distance during service delivery. They expect delivery to be formal and executed at the highest possible level since they consider themselves deserving (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001; Raajpoot 2004). Given their high expectations and rigorous evaluations, this group usually perceives the quality of service to be lower than do their low distance counterparts (Raajpoot 2004). This indicates that high power distance societies have a lower perception of service delivered, which is in line with the current finding about Australia, but does not support Ladhari et al.’s (2010) finding in the case of Malaysian first-year students. Whilst further research would be useful to reveal the reasons for this finding, it might be due to a number of factors, including the effects of high power distance, high education levels and Malaysia’s rapid economic growth.

The finding on uncertainty avoidance reveals a significant and positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.20 (p < 0.01). There is a significant impact on third-year
students’ perceptions in Australia; H5d is supported. This suggests that the higher the uncertainty avoidance dimension, the higher the perception of the quality of service. According to Ladhari et al. (2010), consumers in high uncertainty avoidance groups prioritise all aspects of service delivery and expect much from the service provider, which leads to lower perceptions of the quality of service than is expressed among low uncertainty groups. Australia has a moderate level of uncertainty avoidance, with an index score of 51 (Hofstede 1980, 1984, 1991, 2001), and so it may be argued that third-year Australian students have a moderately high level of perceptions of the quality of service. The finding in this study does not support Ladhari et al. (2010).

The finding on long-term orientation is significant, with a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.12 (p < 0.5) for first-year Australian students’ perceptions, showing that long-term orientation has a significant impact on this group and supporting, H5e. This suggests that the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the perceptions of the quality of service. According to Hofstede (1984, 1991), Australia scores low on long-term orientation (and is classified as short-term), with an index score of 31. A short-term society stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face’, and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede 1991, 2001); customers tend to be intolerant of things that may seem false or unclear and poor service delivery is likely to be unacceptable, suggesting that short-term oriented customers have higher perceptions of the quality of service. On the other hand, as Donthu and Yoo (1998) point out, long-term oriented customers are not concerned if every service experience is not perfect and they are willing to give the provider time to improve; they put little
importance on past- and present-oriented values (Hofstede 1991). This suggests that long-term oriented customers have lower perceptions of the quality of service, a finding inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998).

5.2.6 Hypothesis 6

The findings of Hypothesis 6 show that power distance has a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia and third-year students in Australia. In Malaysia, power distance is significant, with a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.40 (p < 0.01); it has a significant impact on Malaysian first-year students’ discrepancy/gap and supports H6a2. This suggests that the higher the power distance, the higher the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. Among Australian third-year students, too, power distance is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient (0.17 (p < 0.01)). The power distance dimension has a significant impact on these students’ discrepancy/gap, and H6a4 is supported. As with the Malaysian first-year students, the higher power distance, the higher the discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service. The finding is supported by Ladhari et al.’s (2010, p. 4) study, ‘in high power distance cultural groups; customers perceive lower service quality than their low power distance counterparts’. According to Hofstede (1991), high power distance cultural groups accept inequalities among individuals, and customers expect service providers to reflect this distance during service delivery. They expect delivery to be formal and executed at the highest possible level since they consider themselves deserving (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001; Raajpoot 2004). Given their high expectations and tougher evaluations,
this group usually perceives lower the quality of service than their low distance counterparts (Raajpoot 2004). However, Hofstede’s (1984, 1991) ratings list Australia as a low power distance society with an index score of 36: this indicates a cultural group that sees little difference between the powerful and the weak, and all customers are likely to attach a similar level of importance to the different dimensions of service (Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001) because inequalities tend to be minimised (Hofstede 1991). This raises an interesting question about Australian students’ perceptions of quality of service, and may indicate the influence of immigrants from different power distance societies in recent years, which may have affected this finding.

The finding on individualism dimension is significant and has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.13 (p < 0.05) for third-year students in Australia. This means there is a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among this group, supporting H6b. This suggests that the higher the level of individualism, the higher the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. This is in line with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) argument that individualistic customers primarily pursue their own interests and are not willing to accept poor service, holding high expectations of quality. The finding in this study does not identify significant differences in students’ perceptions as is the case for Hypothesis 5; the finding in Hypothesis 6b is of a discrepancy among third-year students in Australia.

The finding on uncertainty avoidance is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.12 (p < 0.05) for Australian first-year students
discrepancy/gap. This means that uncertainty avoidance has a significant negative impact on this group’s discrepancy/gap supporting H6d. This suggests that low uncertainty avoidance students produce a higher discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. Australia has an index score of 51 for uncertainty avoidance and is considered a fairly pragmatic culture in which both generalists and experts are needed. So that although there is a focus on planning, plans can be altered at short notice and improvisations made. People are fairly relaxed and not averse to taking risks, and consequently there is a large degree of acceptance for new ideas and innovative products, and a willingness to try something new or different, whether pertaining to technology, business practices, or foodstuffs (Hofstede 1980, 2001). However, this finding is not consistent with Reimann, Lunemann and Chase (2008), who find that the higher the degree of uncertainty avoidance, the less satisfied the customer will be when a service is defective, as the expectation is greater than the perception and a discrepancy/gap occurs. Nor is it in line with Ladhari et al.’s (2010, p. 4) assertion that ‘in high uncertainty avoidance cultural groups, consumers perceive lower service quality than their low uncertainty avoidance counterparts’. This present study finds a gap, where expectations not met for first-year students in Australia.

The finding on long-term orientation is significant and has a negatively standardised regression coefficient of -0.24 (p < 0.01) for first-year students in Malaysia. This means that long-term orientation has a significant negative impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap in Malaysia, suggesting that low long-term orientation students have a higher discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service, and supporting H6c. Hofstede created a Chinese value survey, distributed across 23 countries. From
its results, and applying an understanding of the influence of Confucian teaching, he added a fifth cultural dimension to his already-established four: long-term vs. short-term orientation (Making sense of cross cultural communication 2011).

Unfortunately, there is no long-term orientation dimension index score listed for Malaysia. Whilst further research would be useful to reveal the reasons for this finding, it might be due to a number of factors, including the effects of high power distance, high education levels and Malaysia’s rapid economic growth. However, Malaysia is a multicultural, multi-religious and multiracial country with strong community spirit and a sense of responsibility (Lim 1998). They are concerned about the effects of their actions on the feelings of others, and take great care not to upset others (Kennedy 2002), and are concerned about the judgements of their character made by members of their circle or network (Abdullah & Lim 2001). They are socio-centric in the workplace because of their strong preference for affiliation, deep concern with social issues and the dignity of humans, and their very hospitable culture (Ismail 1988); these qualities indicate a skew towards long-term orientation in this cultural dimension.

Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) study, finds that long-term oriented customers are not concerned that every service experience is perfect, but are willing to give the provider time to improve, sacrificing today for a better future; they put little importance on past- and present-oriented values (Hofstede 1991). This suggests that long-term oriented customers have lower perceptions of the quality of service. The finding in the current study is inconsistent with that of Donthu and Yoo (1998).
5.2.7 Hypotheses 7 and 8

The findings of Hypotheses 7 and 8 reveal a significant difference between male and female students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service, supporting Ha71 and Ha81. Female students in Australia demonstrate higher expectations and perceptions of the quality of service than male students, a finding not replicated in Malaysia or Singapore. Whilst further research would be useful to reveal the reasons for this finding, it might be due to a number of factors, including the effects of high power distance, high education levels, and Malaysia and Singapore’s rapid economic growth. Webster’s (1989) and Ruby’s (1996) studies also find that female students have higher level of expectations and perceptions than male students; and a study conducted in Thailand similarly found significant differences in perceptions of the quality of service between male and female students in five universities (Khantanapha 2000).

Donthu and Yoo (1998) find that customers in low power distance cultures have a high overall expectation of quality of service. This could relate to the power distance cultural dimension defined by Hofstede (1980, 1991), and Australia’s low score of 36 for power distance. Within Australian organisations, a hierarchy is established for convenience but superiors are always accessible and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise. Both managers and employees expect to be consulted, and information is shared frequently. Communication is informal, direct and participative, and encourages involvement from male and female employees. Hofstede (1980, 1991) argues that differences between males and females within this culture are in fact greater than in more masculine countries, such as Australia with an
index score of 61. Several researchers have suggested that males and females differ in their information processing style (Iacobucci & Ostrom 1993; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy 1991; Meyers-Levy 1991): women seem to engage in more detailed elaboration of information, tend to overweigh negative information, and are more sensitive to the relational aspects of service interactions than their male counterparts.

5.2.8 Hypothesis 9

Hypothesis 9 finds no significant difference between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap in Australia, Malaysia, or Singapore, supporting Ho91, Ho92 and Ho93. This implies that male and females students’ expectations are met and the quality of service is perceived to be more than satisfactory in all three countries. However, the finding is inconsistent with that of Hadikoemoro (2001) where Indonesian male students displayed a higher discrepancy higher regarding quality of service than did females.

5.3 Summary

This chapter presented a review of the research findings and offered a discussion to support the findings identified in Chapter 4. For Hypothesis 1, the research reveals a significant difference between first- and third-year students in Malaysia and Singapore regarding quality of service (Ha12 and Ha13 were supported). This is in line with Shank, Walker and Hayes’ study (1995). However, there is no significant difference between first- and third-year Australian students’ expectations of the quality of service (Ho11 is supported), which concurs with Hadikoemore’s (2001) finding. For Hypothesis 2 the research reveals no significant difference in
perceptions regarding quality of service between first- and third-year students, or between countries. For Hypothesis 3, a significant difference in students’ discrepancy/gap regarding the quality of service appears between first- and third-year students in Singapore (Ha3 is supported), supporting studies conducted by Comm and Mathaisel (2000), Lau, Akbar and Fie (2005), and Sohail (2003).

For Hypothesis 4, the findings of the research into power distance reveals a significant impact on expectations of the quality of service among first- and third-year students in Australia (H4a1 and H4a4 were supported), concurring with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding that customers low on power distance culture have overall high levels of expectations regarding quality of service. There is also a significant impact on third-year Singaporean students’ expectations (H4a6 is supported), suggesting that the higher the power distance dimension, the higher the students’ expectations of quality of service. However, this does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998, p. 181) finding that ‘high power distance customers have lower service quality expectations than low power distance customers’. Society in Singapore has changed tremendously since 1980, when Hofstede conducted his research; it is debatable that the country should still be scoring 74 on the power distance dimension, given the changes it has undergone since Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) original classification.

The findings on uncertainty avoidance dimension reveal a significant impact on students’ expectations among first-year (H4d1) and third-year (H4d4) students in Australia, first-year (H4d3) students in Malaysia, and first-year (H4d5) students in
Singapore. These findings suggesting low uncertainty avoidance societies have high service expectations. However, interestingly, these findings do not support the work of Donthu and Yoo (1998), who find that customers in low uncertainty avoidance cultures have low expectations of quality of service.

The findings regarding individualism show a significant impact on the expectations of the quality of service among third-year students in Australia (H4b4) and first-year students in Singapore (H4b3), suggesting that low individualism (i.e. collectivism) leads to high expectations for first-year students in Singapore; again, this finding is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo (1998), who find that collectivist customers have low the expectations of quality of service. A very interesting finding is that concerning third-year students in Australia, which is that low individualism (i.e. collectivism) leads to high expectations (H4b4 is supported). According to Hofstede (1980, 1984), Australia is a highly individualistic society, with a score of 90; in such societies, customers are usually unwilling to accept poor service (Donthu & Yoo 1998) and have high expectations of quality. This is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding, and further examination should take place regarding Australian’s rating on the individualism dimension.

For long-term orientation, the findings show a significant impact on expectations among third-year students in Singapore (H4e6 is supported). This suggests that the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the expectation of quality of service. On Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) cultural index scores, Singapore has a moderate to low score of 48 for time orientation. Interestingly, the finding in this current study does not
support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998), who find that short-term oriented customers have high overall expectations of quality of service. Further examination of Singapore’s time orientation dimension is indicated.

In Hypothesis 5, the findings show that power distance has a significant impact on first-year students’ perceptions in Australia and Malaysia (H5a1 and H5a2 were supported). This suggests that in Australia low power distance students have a higher perception of the quality of service, but in Malaysia, the higher the power distance, the higher the perception. Ladhari et al. (2010) find that high power distance societies have low perceptions of service delivered, which is in line with the finding in Australia; however, the finding for Malaysian first-year students does not support their finding.

The finding on uncertainty avoidance reveals a significant impact on third-year students’ perceptions in Australia (H5d4 is supported), suggesting the higher the uncertainty avoidance, the higher the perception of the quality of service. This does not support Ladhari et al.’s (2010) finding that high uncertainty avoidance cultural groups have lower perceptions of quality of service than their low uncertainty counterparts. The finding on long-term orientation shows a significant impact on first-year Australian students’ perceptions (H5e1 is supported), suggesting the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the perceptions of quality of service. Australia has a short-term orientation with an index score of 31 (Hofstede 1984, 1991), and this finding is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding that long-term oriented customers have lower perceptions of quality of service.
For Hypothesis 6, power distance is found to have a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among first-year students in Malaysia and third-year students in Australia. In Malaysia, power distance has a significant impact on first-year students’ discrepancy/gap (H6a2 is supported), while in Australia it has a significant impact on third-year students’ discrepancy/gap (H6a4 is supported). Both findings suggest that the greater the power distance, the higher the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. These findings are supported by Ladhari et al. (2010). However, Hofstede’s (1984, 1991) studies list Australia as a low power distance society with a score of 36, likely to distinguish few differences between powerful and weak customers because inequalities among people are minimised (Hofstede 1991). This raises an interesting area for further examination.

The findings on individualism dimension show a significant impact on the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service among third-year students in Australia (H6b4 is supported), suggesting the higher the individualism dimension, the higher the discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. This is in line with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) argument that individualistic customers have high expectations of quality of service. The findings in this study do not identify significant differences in students’ perceptions, as shown in Hypothesis 5’s finding; hence, the finding in Hypothesis 6b4 reveals a discrepancy/gap among third-year students in Australia.

The finding on uncertainty avoidance reveals a significant impact on first-year Australian students’ discrepancy/gap (H6d1 is supported), suggesting that low uncertainty avoidance students have a higher discrepancy/gap regarding quality of
service. This is not consistent with Reimann, Lunemann and Chase’s (2008) findings that the higher the degree of uncertainty avoidance, the less satisfied the customer will be when a service is defective.

The finding on long-term orientation shows a significant impact on first-year Malaysian students’ discrepancy/gap, suggesting that students with low long-term orientation have a higher discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service (H6e is supported). This is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding that long-term oriented customers have lower perceptions of quality of service.

For Hypotheses 7 and 8, the findings of this research reveal significant difference between male and female students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service, supporting Ha7 and Ha8. Female students have higher expectations and perceptions of quality of service than male students in Australia, but not in Malaysia or Singapore. These findings are supported by Ruby (1996) and Webster (1989), both of whom find that female students have higher levels of expectations and perceptions than male students. Lastly, for Hypothesis 9, no significant difference is found between male and female students’ discrepancy/gap in any of the three countries (Ho9, Ho9 and Ho9 are supported); this is inconsistent with Hadikoemoro’s (2001) findings that there is a higher discrepancy/gap between expectations and perceptions of the quality of service among males than females.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction
The previous chapter presented the interpretation and discussion of the research findings obtained from the data analysed in Chapter 4. It examined students’ expectations and perceptions with respect to the quality of service, and the discrepancies that arose; and the effect of culture and gender on perceptions of service in the higher education environment in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

This final chapter provides a context for the study and presents its theoretical and practical contributions. It summarises the research, highlighting the significance of the findings, discusses the limitations of the research and suggests directions for further investigation.

6.2 Context for the Study
In today’s competitive and dynamic environment, the services sector has become one of the key drivers of global economic development. As a result of globalisation, government liberalisation, and the rapid advancement of technology in communications, joint alliances, free trade agreements, demographic and social changes, the services sector has undergone rapid change; this has been reflected in the growth of research to expand our understanding of the services sector.
In 2000, The World Bank reports, over 64 per cent of the world’s total output came from the services sector. This is presently the largest contributor to Australia’s national output, generating 78.5 per cent of real gross value added in the year to June 2011 (Austrade 2011). As economies modernise, services account for an increasing proportion of economic activity.

In the area of higher education, services are important because customers judge both their treatment during the service process and the actual outcomes they experience; these affect their satisfaction with the service provided and may influence their decisions to enrol in, or continue in, a course of study. Increasingly, students’ perceptions of their educational experiences have become important as colleges and universities attempt to become more customer-oriented (Wright 1996) to gain or maintain an advantage in an ever more competitive academic environment.

Recently, with the rising costs of tuition, prospective students have begun to see themselves as consumers. Certainly, universities have been adopting customer-centric strategies and missions over the last three decades (Stodnick & Rogers 2008); but little research has been done to extend traditional service management concepts to educational settings and to evaluate the effectiveness of these paradigm shifts.

6.3 Research Overview

Without a systematic way of monitoring and understanding customers’ expectations and perceptions, the reputation and financial status of higher education institutions
may be severely limited and their ability to compete with other institutions may be compromised. It is important that they can identify and examine the actual perceptions of quality and satisfaction of their university customers. To assist them to do this, this study is designed to examine whether or not there is a discrepancy between university students’ expectations and perceptions of the service they receive, concentrating in this case on the services provided by student advisors in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Culture plays an important role in evaluating the quality of service. Research has shown that due to differences in culture and environment, customers in different countries may have different perceptions of the quality of service (Witkowski & Wolfinbarger 2002; Ueltschy et al. 2007). This study, therefore, also examines the influence of cultural dimensions on students’ perceived quality of service.

The extant literature has generally overlooked the potentially important independent variable of students’ gender. Empirical evidence suggests that men and women differ in their information processing styles (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy 1991; Meyers-Levy 1991), but little research has been conducted to identify gendered perceptions of services. This study attempts to close this gap by investigating the effect of students’ gender on their rating of service in university service centres.
6.4 Summary and Implications of the Findings

This research has resulted in a number of findings to explain students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service in the higher education environment. These are summarised as follows:

First, first-year students have a lower expectation of the quality of service than third-year students in Malaysia and Singapore, a finding supported by Shank, Walker and Hayes (1995). There is no significant difference in students’ expectations of the quality of service between first- and third-year students in Australia, which concurs with Hadikoemore (2001).

This may be because new students enter university not knowing what to expect of it, and consequently their expectations may be low. What expectations they have may be based on their years of secondary education, a very different environment from a university. Hence, the findings reveal that first-year students have a lower expectation of the quality of service than third-year students in Malaysia and Singapore.

To address this, higher education institutions might invite all new students to orientation programs, in order to introduce the services they offer. The institutions should not exclude new students who might miss the scheduled orientation program; but should be meticulous in introducing the services on offer to ‘late students’ as well so that they know where to get help if required. This strategy will show that the institutions care for their students, and this strategy may help them to
retain and attract students, sustain their competitive edge and build a reputation for good service.

Second, there is no significant difference in students’ perceptions of the quality of service between first- and third-year students, whether in Australia, Malaysia, or Singapore. Students express satisfaction with the services provided by their student advisors. Higher education institutions can build on such satisfaction by soliciting students’ feedback regularly, as this will, would help them maintain and improve their quality of service, and enhance their competitive edge.

Third, there is a significant difference in the gap between expected and actual quality of service among first- and third-year students in Singapore, with the third-year students having a higher gap than first-years. Third-year students’ expectations of the services provided by university student advisors are not being met. This finding is supported by other researchers (Comm & Mathaisel 2000; Lau, Akbar & Fie 2005; Shekarchizadeh, Rasli & Huam 2011; Sohail 2003). This indicates a weak area that the student service centre can address. As suggested by Choi and Chu (2000), it is important for the universities’ student advisors to monitor their services to ensure they meet students’ expectations, avoiding the possibility that negative feedback will adversely affect recruitment, retention, or enrolment. Success in any business depends on understanding the critical factors that determine customer satisfaction, and ensuring that the business meets or exceeds customers’ expectations.
Fourth, culture has an impact on students’ perceptions of service quality. Higher education institutions should pay attention to the cultural needs of the students when developing services, and be particularly attentive to the needs of international students. Western and Eastern students’ expectations and perceptions of services are different; as are those of students from different countries in the same region of the world. These need to be identified, and services adapted to address the various needs of cultural and national groups.

Low power distance students (like those in Australia) have a higher expectation of the quality of service than students from countries with high power distance (Singapore and Malaysia), a finding supported by Donthu and Yoo (1998) and in line with Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001). The higher the power distance dimension, the higher the third students’ expectations of quality of service in Singapore. This result does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998, p. 181) argument that the tolerance that comes from accepting inequalities in power includes setting a lower level of expectations from service providers. Low uncertainty avoidance societies have high service expectations. Again, this finding does not support Donthu and Yoo (1998), who find that customers from low uncertainty avoidance cultures have low expectations of the quality of service; such customers are willing to accept uncertainty and embrace risk (Nakata & Sivakumar 1996), including that of inadequate service. This finding might be due to the effect of higher education levels and/or generational differences in expectations more generally.
Collectivist students have high expectations, as illustrated by first-year students in Singapore. This result is inconsistent with Donthu and Yoo (1998), who find that collectivist customers have low expectations of the quality of service: perhaps because they tolerate poor services for the sake of harmony, and are prepared to accept whatever level of service is provided. This research’s new finding may indicate that customers are changing in Singapore, perhaps due to higher educational levels that broaden the customers’ demands and expectations; perhaps because the rapidly growing economy provides opportunities for Singaporeans to explore and compare other countries’ services, raising their standards.

A very interesting finding in the study concerning Australia’s third-year students has been found. That is low individualistic students have high expectations of the quality of service. This contradicts Hofstede’s (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) and Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) findings. Australia is generally considered an individualistic society, where people are generally unwilling to accept poor service (Donthu & Yoo 1998); but this new finding casts doubt on this traditional idea.

Another interesting result appears with regard to long-term orientation: the higher the long-term orientation, the higher the expectation of quality of service. This result does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) finding that short-term oriented customers have high overall expectations of quality of service.
Low power distance students in Australia have a high perception of the quality of service. In Malaysia, the higher the power distance, the higher the perceptions of quality, as illustrated in Ladhari et al. (2010). The results indicated that high power distance cultural groups accept inequalities among individuals and customers expect service providers to reflect this distance during service delivery (Hofstede 1991). They expect delivery to be formal and executed at the highest possible level since they consider themselves deserving (Donthu & Yoo 1998; Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan 2000, 2001; Raajpoot 2004). Given their high expectations and tougher evaluations, this group usually perceives lower the quality of service than their low distance counterparts (Raajpoot 2004). This means that high power distance societies have a lower perception of the services delivered, which is in line with the finding in Australia. However, the finding for Malaysian first-year students does not support Ladhari et al.’s (2010) research. This finding might be due to the effect of higher education levels and/or generational differences in expectations more generally.

The higher the uncertainty avoidance dimension, the higher the perception of the quality of service in Australian universities. According to Ladhari et al. (2010), in high uncertainty avoidance cultural groups the consumers consider all aspects of service delivery and expect more from service providers, leading to lower perceptions of the quality of service than their low uncertainty counterparts express. The finding in this study does not support Ladhari et al. (2010).

The higher the long-term orientation, the higher the perception of quality of service in the Australian sample. This contradicts Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001), who
argues that short-term oriented customers are intolerant of things that may seem false or unclear and are unlikely to accept poor service delivery, thus suggesting short-term oriented customers have higher perceptions on the quality of service for Australia.

The higher the power distance, the higher the discrepancy between expectation and experience of quality of service in Malaysia and Australia. The Malaysian result supports Ladhari et al. (2010); however, Hofstede (1984, 1991) lists Australia as a low power distance society, in which inequalities among people are minimised (Hofstede 1991). This raises a need for further examination of Australian students’ perceived quality of service, which may have undergone change with recent migration from different cultural backgrounds.

The higher the discrepancy/gap of the quality of service in Australia. This finding is in line with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998) research. Low uncertainty avoidance students in Australia have a high discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service. However, the findings do not support Reimann, Lunemann and Chase (2008), nor Ladhari et al. (2010). Expectations are not being met for first-year students in Australia.

Low long-term orientation students display a higher discrepancy/gap regarding quality of service in Malaysia, which tends to exhibit long-term orientation. Donthu and Yoo (1998) suggest that longer-term oriented customers have a lower perception of quality of service; the finding in this study is inconsistent with this position.
Fifth, there is a significant difference between male and female students’ expectations and perceptions of the quality of service. Female students in Australia have higher expectations and perceptions of the quality of service than their male counterparts, but this is not the case in Malaysia or Singapore. These results are supported by researchers such as Khantanapha (2000), Ruby (1996), and Webster (1989) and by Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) explanation of the power distance cultural dimension. Higher education institutions should be aware of the ways in which Western culture is different from Asian culture, as this influences social responses to the services they provide.

6.5 Significance (Contribution) of the Research

Although a large number of studies into the quality of service have been conducted, few consider the higher education sector. Most of the studies have focused in academic records, admissions, career services and financial aid departments (Ruby 1996), there has been little focus on front-line customer service although research shows the vital status and significant contribution of staff in front-line services to their organisations. These staff can influence customers’ evaluation of the service they can expect from the institution (Galloway 1998; Sohail & Shaikah 2004). In addition, their performance helps to attract customer groups and define corporate reputation (Nguyen 2010; Nguyen & Leblanc 2002). This research begins to fill an obvious gap in the scholarship, providing suggestions, guidelines and considerations aimed at improving the performance of front-line staff, in this case at customer service centres, to enhance the success of their educational institutions.
The study applies the SERVQUAL instrument in the higher education environment. Numerous studies have verified the use of SERVQUAL to measure quality of service, but also suggest that SERVQUAL requires modifications to suit the specific industry for which it is being used. This involves customising it by rewording and augmenting items in each of the five dimensions, to make them more germane to a particular context (Carman 1990); and provides adaptation and is supplementary to the needs of these organisations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988).

Outstanding quality of service, as perceived by the customer, gives any organisation a competitive advantage (DiDomenico & Joseph 1996). In order to acquire and maintain this competitive advantage, universities must determine where they stand in the eyes of the students. SERVQUAL is a suitable instrument to examine the quality of service in the higher education environment as it allows assessment the quality of service, from which can arise improvement. The standard five-dimensional structure is a useful framework for tracking an organisation’s service performance over time, and can be used to comparing one institution’s performance against that of its competitors. Managers in higher education institutions can use SERVQUAL results to design service strategies that will meet the students’ expectations and improve the university’s reputation.

This study’s findings regarding gender-based ratings of services provided by frontline staff provide guidelines for service managers on male and female students’ different needs. Previous research has also shown differences in perceptions of the quality of service according to gender, with female students both expecting and
perceiving higher levels of the quality of service than male students (Ruby 1996).

Knowing the expectations and perceptions of both male and female students, service managers are able to develop and design service strategies that respond to the different needs of male and female customers. Knowing these needs might be useful for designing training programs for front-line staff that address the differences between genders, so that they can be more tactful, and more effective, in providing services to the students.

Two important cultural dimensions which need further examination are revealed in this study for the first time. The first is a finding that does not agree with Donthu and Yoo’s (1998, p. 181) finding that ‘high power distance customers have lower expectations of the quality of service than low power distance customers’. This is not borne out by the data gathered from, Singaporean students, indicating a need to investigate whether Singapore still should be classified high on the power distance dimension (Hofstede 1980, 1984, 1991, 2001). The second is a finding that is not in line with Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001): this study reveals that low individualism (i.e. collectivism) students expect a high quality of service in Australia, which is an individualist society. This indicates a need to re-examine Hofstede’s (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) original concepts of individualism and collectivism, and to discern if they still apply to contemporary Australia. Hofstede’s research has contributed tremendously in the cross-cultural field; but his studies were conducted decades ago, and cannot respond to the changes which have occurred in countries since that time. The data collected in this study leads to different outcomes regarding power distance and individualism than those of Hofstede.
6.6 Research Limitations and Future Research Direction

There are several research limitations in this study, which are discussed before a consideration of future research directions is made.

6.6.1 Selection of samples and faculty

The first research limitation of this study is in the use of samples and faculty selected for inclusion. For convenience, this study was conducted with a large but limited sample: first- and third-year students in universities across Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. As well as limitations by year and country, the student participants were limited to those in business faculties in the universities selected.

For the results noted here to be generalisable, future research should replicate studies but include (1) more randomised samples of students studying at polytechnic level, and more universities from other states in Australia and Malaysia; (2) students who are undertaking part-time study; (3) students on distance learning programs; (4) students enrolled in other faculties, such as health science, engineering, languages, architecture; and (5) cross-cultural studies across various countries, to add validity to the quality of service research findings.

6.6.2 Focus groups

Because of time and geographical restrictions, it was difficult to form focus groups and conduct interviews, particularly in universities in Malaysia and Singapore, and the second university in Australia. This is viewed as a limitation of the study. According to Sekaran (2000), the aim of pre-testing questionnaires is to ensure that
there are no problems with wording or measurements, to rectify any inadequacies before the final questionnaire is distributed, and ultimately to reduce bias. Given the time and geographical freedom to overcome the barriers that limited this research, it would be possible to form focus groups and conduct interviews at the universities in Malaysia and Singapore, and so to rectify students’ understanding of the wording in the questionnaire.

6.6.3 Front-line staff as participants

The third research limitation of this study is that it invited only students to participate in answering the questionnaire, due to the time constraints of the research program. Future research could explore the concept of university services quality by surveying front-line staff at different faculties within a university. Obtaining feedback from this important group would assist services management to determine where weaknesses lie and what areas need improvement; for example, services management might find a need to provide more training to improve customer services for a particular cultural group; or to better understand a group of ‘products’ they are required to present to customers.

6.6.4 Cultural dimensions

The limitation in this study on cultural dimensions occurs with conflicts between this and previous research. Hofstede’s (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001) cultural dimensions may need to be further examined, in particular in regard to Singapore, because although this study shows high power distance, leads to high students’ expectations, in line
with Hofstede’s research (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001), it does not support Donthu and Yoo’s (1998, p. 181) finding that ‘high power distance customers have lower service quality expectations than low power distance customers’. Future research needs to investigate whether Singapore still scores high in the power distance dimension.

There is also a concern regarding Australia’s cultural dimensions as outlined by Hofstede. Australia is classified as an individualistic nation, with high expectations of quality of service. However, in this study, low individualism (i.e. collectivism) students in Australia held high expectations of quality of service. This is not in line with Hofstede’s findings on Australia. Further research is recommended to examine whether there has been any change in Australian values since Hofstede’s cultural dimensions were originally devised in 1984.

6.7 Summary

This final chapter summarised the findings of the study and explained its contribution to the literature on quality of service in the higher education environment. It highlighted the significance of the research and considered the research limitations to the study, especially those relating to research methodology and generalisation. A brief discussion of future research directions concluded the thesis.
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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Part 1
DEMOGRAPHICS

Instructions: For purpose of classification, I would like to ask you a number of questions related to your demographics. You can be assured that all information you provided will be remained confidential. Please circle the numbers representing the most appropriate responses for you in respect of the following items.

1. Your Gender:
   Male ...................................………………………… 1
   Female ...................................................... 2

2. Your Age (Years):
   18 - 20 ............................................................. 1
   21 - 23 ............................................................. 2
   24 – 26 ............................................................. 3
   27 and above .................................................. 4

3. Your Marital Status:
   Single ............................................................. 1
   Married ........................................................... 2
   Others ............................................................. 3

4. Which type of student are you?
   Local student .................................................. 1
   International student ....................................... 2

5. Your current nationality:
   Please specify______________________________________ .

6. Your nationality at birth:
   Please specify______________________________________ .
7. Your Ethnic Origin:
Caucasian ............................................. 1
Chinese ............................................... 2
Malay .................................................. 3
Indian ................................................... 4
Others ................................................... 5
(Please specify_________________________________________________________)

8. What is the official language of your country?
Please specify__________________________________________________________

9. Are you enrolled in a full-time or part-time course?
Full-time ............................................. 1
Part-time ............................................. 2

10. Which residency status are you currently holding?
Citizen .................................................. 1
Permanent Residency Visa .............................. 2
Student Visa ........................................... 3

11. Semesters currently in at university:
1 – 2 semesters ....................................... 1
3 – 4 semesters ....................................... 2
5 – 6 semesters ....................................... 3
Above 6 semesters .................................... 4

12. Your Employment Status:
Employed ............................................. 1 (Go to Q 13.)
Not employed ....................................... 2 (Go to Q 14.)

13. Your Income Status (Per year):
Less than $10,000 .................................... 1
$10,001 - $20,000 ................................... 2
$20,001 - $30,000 ................................... 3
$30,001 - $40,000 ................................... 4
Above $40,001 ....................................... 5
Others ................................................... 6
14. Highest Level of Education Achieved by a Parent: (a)Mother  (b)Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>(a) Mother</th>
<th>(b) Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma (TAFE / Polytechnic)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Please specify __________________________________________________________)

15. Parents Occupation:                     (a)Mother  (b)Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>(a) Mother</th>
<th>(b) Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers, Administrators, Executives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals (e.g. doctors, scientists, engineers)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks/Administration Assistants/Secretaries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons (e.g. electricians, mechanics, technicians)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and related work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and related work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Please specify __________________________________________________________)

16. Your Parents Income Status (Combined, Per year):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>(a) Mother</th>
<th>(b) Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below $30,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,001 - $40,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,001 - $50,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001 - $60,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,001 - $70,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,001 - $80,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above $80,001</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2

Instructions: This part deals with your expectations (i.e., what do students feel a student’s advisor should offer) of the services provided by University Student Customer Service Centre.

Please show the extent to which you think services offered by University Student Customer Service Centre should possess the features described by each statement. Choose one of the seven numbers next to each statement. For example, if you think a statement is “Strongly Agree”, circle the number 7. If you think a statement is “Strongly Disagree”, circle the number 1. If your feelings are not strong (i.e., neither disagree nor agree), circle the number in the middle (i.e., 3, 4 or 5). There is no right or wrong answers – all I am interested in is a number that best shows your expectations about services offered by the Student Customer Service Centre. Responses collected will be kept confidential.

Scale Instruction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. When students’ advisors promise to do something by a certain time, they should do so.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. Student Customer Service Centre should have up-to-date equipment.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Students’ advisors should not be expected to tell students exactly when services will be performed.(-)  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. Students’ advisors cannot be expected to give students personal attention.(-)  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. When students have problems, students’ advisors should be sympathetic and reassuring.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. Students should be able to trust students’ advisors of Student Customer Service Centre.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. It is not realistic for students to expect immediate service from students’ advisors.(-)  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. Students’ advisors should be well dressed and appear neat.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. Students’ advisors should be dependable
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. It is unrealistic to expect Student Customer Service Centre to have students’ best interest at heart. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. Students’ advisors are always helpful to students.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. Students’ advisors should provide their services at the time they promise to do so.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. Students should be able to feel safe in their transactions with students’ advisors.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. It is acceptable if students’ advisors are too busy to respond to students’ requests promptly. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. Students’ advisors should keep students’ records accurately.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. The appearance of the physical facilities of Student Customer Service Centre should be in keeping with the type of services provided.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. Students’ advisors should not be expected to give students individual attention. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. It is realistic to expect students’ advisors to know what the needs of the students are.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. Students’ advisors should be polite.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. Students’ advisors should get adequate support from Student Customer Service Centre to do their jobs well.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
37. Student Customer Service Centre should not be expected to have operating hours convenient to all students. (-) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

38. Their physical facilities should be visually appealing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Part 3
Instructions: The following set of statements relate to your experiences (i.e., how well has a student’s advisor performed his/her service) about services provided by University Student Customer Service Center.

For each statement, please show the extent to which you believe University Student Customer Service Centre meets the needs described by the statement. If you “Strongly Agree” that Student Customer Service Center has that feature, circle the number 7. If you “Strongly Disagree”, circle the number 1. You may circle the number in the middle (i.e., 3, 4 or 5) that shows your feelings are not strong (i.e. neither disagree nor agree). There is no right or wrong answers – all I am interested in is a number that best shows your experiences about services offering by Student Customer Service Centre. Responses collected will be kept confidential.

Scale Instruction:
Strongly            Strongly
Disagree         Disagree        Agree            Agree
1                 2                 3           4        5          6          7

39. When students’ advisors promise to do something by a certain time, they do so. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

40. Student Customer Service Centre has up-to-date equipment. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

41. Students’ advisors do not tell students exactly when services will be performed. (-) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

42. Students’ advisors do not give students personal attention. (-) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

43. When you have problems, students’ advisors are sympathetic and reassuring. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
44. Students can trust students’ advisors of Student Customer Service Centre.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

45. You do not receive immediate service from students’ advisors.(-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

46. Students' advisors are well dressed and appear neat.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

47. Students’ advisors are dependable.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

48. Student Customer Service Centre does not have students’ best interest at heart.(-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

49. Students’ advisors are not always willing to help students.(-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

50. Students’ advisors provide their services at the time they promise to do so.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

51. Students feel safe in their transactions with students’ advisors.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

52. Students’ advisors are too busy to respond to students’ requests promptly.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

53. Student Customer Service Centre keep its records accurately.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

54. The appearance of the physical facilities of Student Customer Service Centre is in keeping with the type of services provided.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

55. Students’ advisors provide students with individual attention.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
56. Students’ advisors do not know what your needs are. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

57. Students’ advisors are polite.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

58. Students’ advisors get adequate support from Student Customer Service Centre to do their jobs.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

59. Student Customer Service Centre does not have operating hours convenient to all their students. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

60. Student Customer Service Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Part 4
Instructions: The following statements relate to your culture. Please circle the number to represent how strongly disagree or strongly agree you are to the statement described. If you “Strongly Disagree”, circle the number 1. You may circle the number in the middle if you neither disagree nor agree. However, circle the number 7 if you are “Strongly Agree” with the statement. Responses collected will be remained confidential.

Scale Instruction:
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

61. Inequalities among people are both expected and desired.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

62. Less powerful people should be dependent on the more powerful.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

63. Inequalities among people should be minimized. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

64. There should be, and there is to some extent, interdependencies between less and more powerful people. (-)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
65. Everyone grows up to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family only.

66. People are identified independently of the groups they belong to.

67. An extended family member should be protected by other member in exchange for loyalty. (-)

68. People are identified by their position in the social networks to which they belong. (-)

69. Money and material things are important.

70. Men are supposed to be assertive, ambitious, and tough.

71. Dominant values in society are the caring for others and preservation. (-)

72. Both men and women are allowed to be tender and to be concerned with relationships. (-)

73. High stress and subjective feeling of anxiety are frequent among people.

74. Fear of ambiguous situations and of unfamiliar risks is normal.

75. Uncertainty is a normal feature of life and each day is accepted as it comes. (-)

76. Emotions should not be shown. (-)
77. Willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose is normal.

78. People should be perseverant toward long-term results.

79. Traditions should be respected. (-)

80. Social obligations should be respected regardless of cost. (-)

Part 5 - Open-ended Questions

81. Any other suggestions/opinions/comments that you would like to share regarding the services provided? Please write in the space provided.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

82. Any other points in this survey that you feel I have overlooked? Please write in the space provided.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2: Letter to seeking approval for students’ participants

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a research student of Doctor of Philosophy course at RMIT in Australia, Melbourne. I am writing in to seek approval to invite first and third year students to participate in data collection process of the research. The purpose of the collection is to improve quality of service by university providers, increase understanding of service needs in marketing and enrolment of students, and improved reputation of university.

The research I am undertaking is looking into, firstly, students’ expectations and experiences of service quality provided by students’ advisors from Student Customer Service Centre. Secondly, the research will examine whether cultures influence students’ expectations and perceptions of services provided by the business students’ advisors.

I would like to invite the Business School students from first and third year to participate in the data collection process for the research. The questionnaire distribution for the students will take place in week two and week three of semester one in 2007. Responses collected for the research will be kept confidential.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Wee Ming Ong
Appendix 3: Cover Letter

Dear fellow students:

I am a research student in the Doctor of Philosophy course at RMIT in Australia, Melbourne. The research I am undertaking is looking into students’ expectations and experiences of service quality provided by students’ advisors from University Student Customer Service Centre. Further, the research will examine whether cultures influence students’ expectations and perceptions of services provided by those students’ advisors. Survey collects would help to improve quality of service by university providers, increase understanding of service needs in marketing and enrolment of students, and improved reputation of university.

There are five parts to this survey. Part 1 contained questions concerning demographics information. Part 2 deals with students’ expectations of services provided by students’ advisors. Part 3 relates to students’ experiences about services provided by the students’ advisors. For both Part 2 and 3, you are to show the extent to which you think services provided by students’ advisors at Student Customer Service Centre possess the features described by each statement. Choose and underline one of the seven numbers next to each statement. Part 4 deals with questions about culture. Part 5 consists of open-ended questions, which you may provide any suggestions, opinions, and comments regarding the services provided by students’ advisors.

I appreciate your time taken to complete this survey. Please return the completed questionnaire to the lecturer/tutor/researcher that conducts the survey. Responses collected for this survey will be kept confidential. Participants will remain anonymous.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
Wee Ming Ong
Appendix 4: Ethics Approval

22 April 2008

Ms Shannice Ong
5/19 McMillan Street
Victoria Park
WA 6100

Dear Shannice

Your application for ethics approval of your research project "Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality Performance: University Business Student Advisors in Australia and Singapore" was considered by the Business Portfolio Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee (PHRESC) 06-08 Meeting on 21 April 2008.

The Sub-Committee noted that ethics approval for the project was granted by Curtin University of Technology on 6 December 2006. The Sub-Committee accepted that approval granted from an administering institution may be used as a basis for approval at a subsequent institution upon submission of the appropriate documentation. The required documentation was submitted and the project was assessed to be Risk Category Level 2 (Minimal Risk).

Approval continues for the period from 21 April 2008 until 28 February 2010. Please find attached the Annual Final report form which can be used to submit a request for extension of the approval if required. The form can also be used to request approval for amendments to the project if necessary.

Very best wishes for the remainder of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Prue Lamont
Secretary
Business Portfolio Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee