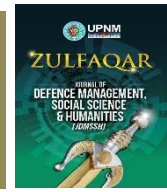




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INFLUENCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (HRM) PRACTICES ON SERVICE QUALITY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AT FOOD BASED DOWNSTREAM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Lack of emphasis on the service quality performed by the organizational employees that involves in food based downstream activity leads to negative implications in product and customer perspectives. Therefore, the organization will not be able to maintain its competitiveness in running the business. Determination of the strategic factors that would promote service quality among the employees in the organization is very crucial. This research aims to examine the impact of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices on service quality among employees in food based downstream industry. Investigating HRM practices in this study are based on the dimensions namely recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal. Questionnaires were adapted from previous empirical research instruments and data were analyzed using the "Statistical Package for Social Science" (SPSS) version 26.0. This study involved a total of 162 employees from the industry as respondents. The results of the correlation and regression analyses revealed that recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal had a positive relationship and significant effect on service quality respectively. In addition, the result of this study showed that the most dominant determinant factor of human resource management practices on service quality was training and development. The results of this study were seen to be able to contribute within the scope of knowledge in managing HRM practices and the importance of the impact of HRM practices on the quality of services in an organization.

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Introduction

Recently, providing a quality of service has been getting high consideration by organizations in both public and private sectors in Malaysia (Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia, 2015; Siti Rapidah & Siti Naemah, 2020). It has been understood that organizations are moving forward to focusing on service instead fully look on selling the goods due to emphasizing customers' satisfactions (Anderson, 1996). It can be said that organizations pay serious attention on service quality in attaining its competitiveness and customer value. According to recent figures show that services has contributed to an acceptable percentage of gross domestic product for the country and has been revealed for more than one quarter of world trade

(Winsted, 2000). Essentially, the service status should not be looked at one eye because its contribution to the economy development has significantly proven. For example, the banking companies have transformed quality of service provision to their customers which made the banking sector among the source of economic growth in the country lately (Kheng, Mahamad, Ramayah & Mosahab, 2010). However, promoting service quality still become the issue in today organizational management when the organizations fail to put that customer is the first in their businesses. Basically, service quality is defined as the level at which customers feel their service expectations are met by an organization (Jusoh & Sulaiman, 2020). Service quality is also known as the overall level of service provided by an organization will be surely and finally perceived by the customer based on his/her interpersonal interactions with the employees (Andrew, 2001). Previous empirical studies have proven that how good the employee perform during this interaction become the important factor for how satisfied the customer feels from the service (Johnston, 1995). Customer satisfaction should be prioritized because it leads to the organizational competitiveness and business sustainability (Jusoh & Sulaiman, 2020). Therefore, providing service quality for customer satisfaction (Famiyeh, Asante-Darko & Kwarteng, 2018) and business sustainability is still considered as a meaningful today's research perspective and it must be continuously conducted.

Competition in downstream industries including food processing is very intense as barriers to entering the sector are less strong and can be ventured into by various levels of traders. Competitors consist of fast food operators as well as existing upstream food manufacturers. In order to ensure business continuity and in turn get a reasonable profit, entrepreneurs need to strive to provide services that can at least meet customer expectations. If the customer's expectations can be met, then the customer will be satisfied. If the dealer can provide more than what the customer expects then the customer will be very happy (delighted). On the other hand, if customer expectations cannot be met then they will feel dissatisfied. The cost to get customers is higher than the cost to retain them (Farber & Wycoff, 1991) and that is why most of food providers that opened a few decades ago no longer exist because they do not pay attention to this aspect.

Past studies discussing on service performance is full of references that showed the role of leadership, motivated and satisfied employees and other organizational supports in promoting the effective and efficient delivery of service. Surprisingly, little research has found to formally argue and conceptualize human resource management (HRM) practices. Therefore, although HRM practices have been discussed important to the improvement of service quality (Shola, Adnan & Saad, 2017), the lack of any empirical study in testing the relationships and giving the practical implications that how HRM specialists should manage still debated. Moreover, it is related to the study perspective in the organization of food based downstream industry. Conceptually, the downstream production process involves processing the food materials distributed from the upstream level into a completed product. Further, at the downstream stage, the actual sale of that product is performed to the customers such as other businesses, governments or private individuals. The type of end user will vary depending on the finished product. Regardless of the industry involved, the downstream process has direct contact with customers through the finished product. The downstream process often includes elements such as distribution, wholesaling and retailing, all of which are involved in ensuring timely delivery to clients. Customer service is also part of the downstream process because it is the final bridge between the product and the end user. Inefficient customer service can negatively impact the sale of the final product.

The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of HRM practices on service quality in one of the food processing companies (downstream industry) in Malaysia, namely Ramly Food Industries Sdn. Bhd. In trying to explicate the HRM practices construct, a proper platform may involve providing HRM with various activities in recruitment, training and performance appraisal dimensions. It is supported by Bass (1997), mentioned that by categorizing construct into various dimensions, the effectiveness of the function of each dimension could be more understood. It has been proven when the particular HRM practices performed by the HRM department could lead and develop such job related outcomes and performance (Mohd Hamran, Khulida & Zulkifle, 2015). In addition, HRM practice is a function carried out in an organization to facilitate and to manage employees effectively by providing the best quality of service to achieve organizational goals (Shola, Adnan & Saad, 2017). Past studies have also found that good HRM practices can increase productivity, increase affective commitment to the organization, increase job satisfaction for employees and in turn reduce employees' desire to leave the organization (Ahmad, Muna & Firdous, 2020). In this study, the HRM practices consist of recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal have been revealed significantly have a potential to promote employees' effective service delivery.

Literature Review

Service Quality

Lately, educated customers really demand on the service provided by the organizations which is not only equal to the value that they paid but importantly able to make them satisfied. Therefore, the service provided is not only ensuring meeting standard infact, looking forward to satisfy the customer. Satisfied customer led by the service quality would affect a sustainable loyalty customer in the organization (Kheng Mahamad, Ramayah & Mosahab, 2010). There are various dimensions to construct service quality that must be applied comprehensively by the organizations in leading the market and achieving their businesses goals. A study by Machado-Leon, de Oña, Baouni and de Oña (2017), found that the role of readiness, information accessibility, time, comfort and security are important elements to depict service quality. Meanwhile, Geetika and Shefali (2010) argued that the dimensions namely adherence to the tangible, the reliability, the empathy, the assurance and the response as a predeterminant to service quality. Earlier, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) emphasized on five facets of service quality such as tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and emphaty which famously known as SERVQUAL dimensions. However, for a pre-study of service quality area, this study only examines the main construct of service quality without testing each dimension as listed. Importantly, the results of the study would explain the way to promote service quality in the organization. Thus, this study identified that HRM practices through recruitment and selection, training and development and also performance appraisal are essential antecedents to lead service quality in the context of organization in the food based downstream industry. This is because human resource management has been known as the facet of organizational support that able to transform the organization towards better performance (Mohd Hamran, Khulida & Zulkiflee, 2015).

The relationship between Recruitment and Selection with Service Quality

According to Alusa and Kariuki (2015), recruitment and selection is the process to make the most suitable applicant selection to fill the required vacancies. The selection is made to find the right and qualified people to ensure they provide the best quality of service in the organization. The first previous study was about Factors Influencing the Recruitment and Selection of the Quality of Public Service in the Maldives. This study was conducted by Ahmad, Muna and Firdous (2020) which aimed to find out the factors that influence the recruitment and selection practices by Human Resource Managers on the quality of employee services. The respondents of this study were civil servants in the Maldives who were 320 people involved. The results of this study found that abuse, corruption, human resource manager problems on selection practices will fail to achieve the organization's objective of producing quality employees. This indicates that recruitment and selection have a positive significant relationship with service quality.

The next previous study was entitled the effects of recruitment and selection on organizational performance and quality of service of employees in the Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management conducted by Joy, Ugochukwu and Michael (2015). The objective of this study was to examine the impact of recruitment and selection on organizational performance and quality of services produced by employees. This study used a questionnaire method involving 130 randomly selected respondents in a department. The results of this study found that the recruitment and selection of employees had a significant influence on the performance of an organization as well as the quality of employee services in the organization. The chi-square result indicated $X^2=35.723$; $df=3$; $p<0.05$.

Meanwhile, David, Caroline and Fronica (2020) revealed that recruitment and selection through electronic medium had significant and positive influence on service delivery quality. Their study was conducted at the public university in Western Region of Kenya which involved 5467 respondents among university staff and students. It is found that many current practices of recruitment and selection performed by the organizations had transformed to electronic based recruitment and selection for being more transparent and effective HRM.

The relationship between Training and Development with Service Quality

Training and development is defined as a systematic process to provide opportunities to learn something such as certain skills, knowledge and abilities to perform work (Maimunah, 2011). Training and development is also an ongoing effort to give new employees an understanding of something such as the skills to carry out the work done. Previous study by (Abdullahi, 2018) entitled the impact of training and development on employee productivity in the academic staff of Polytechnic State of Kano, Nigeria. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of training and development on employee productivity among academic staff of Kano State Polytechnic, Nigeria. This study uses quantitative methods and involves

a total of 233 randomly selected respondents. The results of this study show that the training methods, training design and training delivery style will affect the quality and productivity of employees. In conclusion, training and development programs have a positive significant relationship to employee productivity among the academic staff of Kano State Polytechnic, Nigeria when their quality of works are improved through the training provided to them.

In addition, previous studies related to training and development entitled various types of in-service training and improvement of teacher professionalism after training and development. This study was studied by Sayed Abdelhamied (2019) where the purpose of the study is to evaluate the effect of training activities conducted for hotel employees in improving service quality performed for the hotel customers. This study involved a total of 220 hotel employees in Greater of Cairo and Sharm Al Shikh districts, Egypt as respondents. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS quantitatively. At the end of this study, training activities proved that there was an increase in employee’s performance that significantly able to promote service quality by hotel organization.

The relationship between Performance Appraisal with Service Quality

A study by Abdullah and Wei (2017) has defined that performance appraisal is to measure changes in a person’s behavior while undergoing a training program. In addition, they stated that performance appraisal is a process to determine the extent to which a training is done has achieved the goals set by the organization. In addition, performance appraisals can be held once or twice a year. A person’s job performance can be identified and evaluated through assessments made either through the way the employee does the task, from the observation of the employer or the observation of the colleague himself (Parveen & Inayat, 2017). After the performance appraisal is made, the results of the appraisal can be reviewed and analyzed to ensure that the HRM practice is effective on employees. In addition, performance appraisal will be positive when employees provide the quality of services that have been set by an organization (Abdullah & Wei, 2017). Therefore, performance appraisal is an important thing that every human resource manager needs to do to find out whether the employee performs the service quality for the customers.

Previous study by Rusli and Azman (2007) entitled performance appraisal system in the public sector in Malaysia. This study aimed to create an employee performance appraisal system in several government agencies to find out the quality of services produced by employees. This study also discussed the role that performance appraisal officers should play when evaluating employees. Next, this study used a questionnaire to collect data from 34 secondary schools involved and 380 respondents. At the end of this study, the researchers found that there was a positive significant relationship between performance appraisal and the quality of service of employees. Thus, performance appraisers were found to have a large role in helping employees to improve the quality of their services in the workplace.

The literature has been used to develop a conceptual framework for this study as shown in Fig. 1.

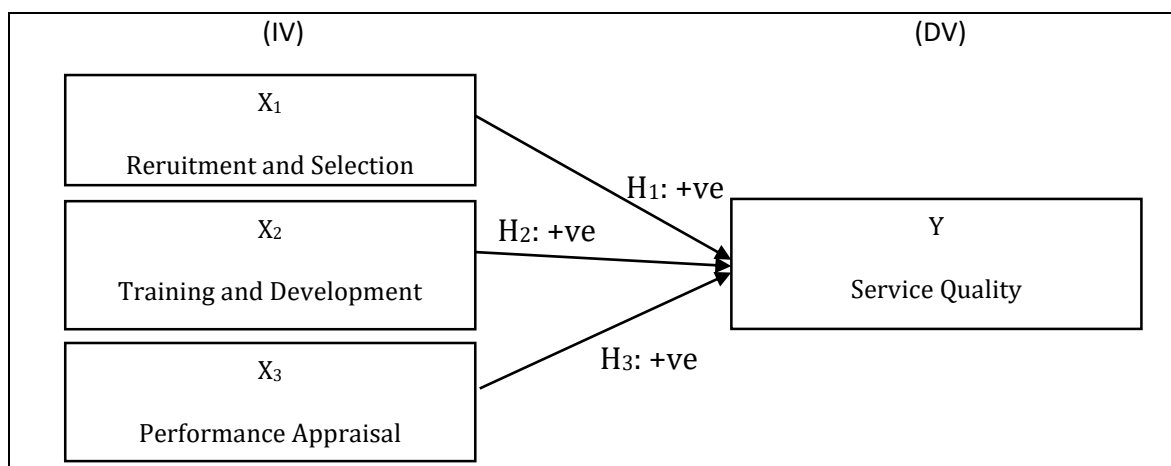


Fig. 1: Conceptual Fraework

Discussions from the above literature also drive this study to develop the hypotheses as following;

H₁: There is a positive and significant effect of recruitment and selection on service quality.

- H₂: Effect of training and development on service quality is positive and significant.
 H₃: Performance appraisal positively and significantly affects service quality.

Methodology

In this study, the author uses quantitative research design by survey method involving the distribution of questionnaires. Survey technique are best suited because respondents' data and information can be obtained in the latest and clear form that is relevant to the issues and scenarios during this study. Therefore, this study involved respondents who were randomly selected using the Minimum Determination Table for respondents suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The selected sample consists of employees who work in the factory of the company. This involved of non-production and production employees from all level of management and non-management categories. For this research purpose, the data collected was made by self-administered questionnaire. This study distributed 170 questionnaires to ensure the minimum response achieve the number of sample size (162). The questionnaire contains 32 items which every independent variable and dependent variable has 8 items respectively.

Furthermore, the testing of the reliability and validity of the study is also feasible to ensure that the two levels of testing are high and reliable. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2014) the aspect of validation should be carried out which involves the face validity and content validity. In this study, the validity of the content and face validity were done through the professional approval of each item in the questionnaire. Each item on the instrument is measured logically and precisely so that what is meant in measurement can be clearly understood (Zikmund et al. 2013). Then, pilot study was also conducted on 20 selected respondents with the result that all Alpha Cronbach values for each variable item exceeded 0.6 and above (See Table 1). This high value illustrates that all questionnaire items can be used for actual research and free from item deletion. Furthermore, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2020), if the Alpha Cronbach value exceeds 0.6 means the items have a good internal consistency level. Finally, the analysis of the data was carried out on 162 respondents comprising the company's workers who completed their answer in the questionnaire. This value of response rate meets the level suggested by the scholar (Zikmund et al. 2013) which is allowed to conduct further research. Analysis using IBM SPSS version 20 software involving data filtering, descriptive and inferential analyses.

Findings

Reliability Test for Pilot Study and Actual Survey (162 respondents)

Reliability is about how well the researcher could get the consistent feedback by using an instrument of questionnaire to measure something at one time and more. On the other hand, reliability means whether or not the research method is able to yield strong and consistent results (Gorondustse & Haim, 2013). Therefore, this study assessed the consistency levels of the variables data which was famously used by the past researchers for the instrument reliability test. As usual, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value was utilized to confirm the acceptable inter-item consistency (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). In the pilot study, the researcher selected a total of 20 respondents comprising the employees from various departments in the company. By using IBM SPSS version 20 for windows to analyze the reliability of the instrument of this study, the results show the values from 0.774 to 0.901 that prove the high values of Cronbach Alpha coefficient (See in the Table 1). Interestingly, referring to the reliability levels guideline provided by the famous scholar above, this study confirmed the acceptable reliability of the constructs and for conducting further descriptive and inferential analyses in completing the findings of this study. Furthermore, the instruments used in this study are significant to be referred for future studies in the area of human resource practices and service quality.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha (Pilot Study)	Cronbach's Alpha (Actual Survey)
Recruitment and Selection	0.799	0.808
Training and Development	0.781	0.852
Performance Appraisal	0.877	0.901
Service Quality	0.774	0.782

Demographic Data

Based on the demographic profile analysis (See Table 2), the results showed that 74% of respondents are males and 26% are females. Meanwhile, most respondents, 96% are Malay and 4% are non Malay. It was found that 59% of respondents are those who work as general worker. While 66% of respondents have served the company more than 5 years.

Table 2: Respondents' Demography (N=162)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	120	74.1
Female	42	25.9
Age		
18-28	24	14.8
29-39	82	50.6
40 and above	56	34.6
Race		
Malay	155	95.7
Others	7	4.3
Positions		
General Worker	96	59.3
Manager	25	15.4
Technician	10	6.2
Quality Control Assistant	30	18.5
Year of Service		
Less than 2 years	18	11.1
2-5 years	37	22.8
More than 5 years	107	66.0

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Analysis was carried out to provide the basic ideas to research about the pattern of the inter-correlations of the study variables. Table 3 is a summary of the results from Pearson Correlation Analysis.

Table 3: Correlation Results for Examined Variables

	Service Quality	Recruitment & Selection	Training & Development	Performance Appraisal
Service Quality	1	.662**	.718**	.621**
Recruitment & Selection		1		
Training & Development			1	
Performance Appraisal				1

From Table 3 it can be confirmed that correlation between independent variables and dependent variable such as recruitment and selection ($r = 0.662$, $p < 0.01$), training and development ($r = 0.718$, $p < 0.01$) and performance appraisal ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$) are positively correlated with service quality.

Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables

The results in Table 4 indicate that recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal are significant (significant at < 0.001). They are also positively correlated and predicted to service quality variable ($\beta = .598$, $\beta = .676$ and $\beta = .475$). There is a reason to believe that recruitment and selection,

training and development and performance appraisal may explain why there are relationships between these predictors and service quality perceived by the workers of Ramly Food Industries. In this survey, service quality would be enhanced if the HRM personnel of this company really emphasize on the interventions of recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal effectively. The result also illustrates that 65% of the variance of in service quality are explained by those three predictors; recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal. On the other hand, 35% of the variance are explained by other factors.

Table 4: Regression of Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development and Performance Appraisal

IVs:	DV : Service Quality		
	Beta Coefficients	t	Sig
Recruitment & Selection	.598	5.121	.000
Training & Development	.676	6.934	.000
Perfromance Appraisal	.475	3.925	.000

R² = 0.648

Hypothesis Test

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to examine the hypotheses in this study. The results of hypotheses test were explained as followed:

- H1: There is a positive and significant effect of recruitment and selection on service quality - **Supported**
 H2: Impact of training and development on service quality is positive and significant - **Supported**
 H3: Performance appraisal positively and significantly affect service quality - **Supported**

Discussion

It focuses a solution and discussion to the existing issues that relate to this research. Moreover, it can also be supported to the expansion prospects of the research and the further reference in related studies. Determination of the findings of a relationship and an impact of recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal on service quality were the fundamental of achieving main objective of this study. The study measured the variables to allow a better understanding of the relationships and the effect of those three predictors on studied criterion. The study carried out measurements on the variables in pursuit of achieving the research objectives. The main objective of the research is discussed based the findings of the study.

Main Objective: To examine the impact of recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal on service quality.

Recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal as well as service quality creates a sense of success and effectiveness of HRM and supply chain areas in food based downstream industry. Service quality allows public to perceive in a pleasant manner that indicates high performance of food service and supply of this industry. It was found from this study that recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal have a significant relationship with service quality. Effective HRM practices performed by the HRM specialists will normally have a high effectiveness of service delivered to the customers.

In addition, trusted activities employed by HRM department such as recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal play a significant role in predicting employees' service quality performed. On the other hand, the research established that HRM practices did act as a predictor as well on service quality as perceived by the employees who are responsible to performed it. The respondents claimed that there will be a bad service quality if the management of HR neglects to focus on such as green recruitment and selection, objective based training and development and trusted performance appraisal in organization. Effective recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal would be fighting the tendency of low quality of service demonstrated by the employees. Talented, motivated and satisfied employees are the significant implications of HRM practices that lead to high employees' authentic behavior in performing their works and serve the best to the

company. Thus, this contributes to the high service quality solutions. The results of the relationship were supported by the previous study by Shola, Adnan and Saad (2017) which had proven that HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal) had a direct significant impact on service quality. While, other finding by Elarabi and Johari (2014) had proven that HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal) had a direct significant impact on service quality as well.

Contributions and Recommendations

The study shares a small piece of idea regarding service quality in the context of food based downstream industry. Therefore, it would be meaningful for future study and food based downstream companies to take the lesson from the following considerations. Potential researchers should extend the study to include more relevant respondents (a bigger sample size than 162 as employed in this study) to increase consistency of the results. In terms of theoretical implication, the results of this study had proven a relationship between recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal and service quality. Effective and efficient service provided among the employees would be improved if the HRM performs recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal functions at the right track. These are the most influential independent variables in this research which have proven that the service quality is successfully yielded. The study also recommends strategies for improving service quality for food based downstream companies. Such strategies are for HRM personnel and specialists which they need to hire credible employees through proper recruitment and selection process as well as considering strongly the recommendations by the recruitment agencies pertaining the selected qualified personnel.

Besides, HRM should also emphasize on the training needs analysis because this is the determinant basis for the successful training provided to the right employees who are able to benefit the training and finally disclose quality of service. However, effective performance appraisal plays the main role as the source of significant information for training suitability to ensure the right of training and development activity. Apart of that, the findings of this study may be useful as a guideline to other employees in other departments of the company in giving fully support to improve those three practices led by the HRM.

Conclusion

This study fully attained its main objectives. The findings proved that recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance appraisal have positive and significant impact on service quality. The study proposes that the food based downstream company's management should consider for organizing extra courses regarding effective recruitment and selection, training and development as well as performance appraisal to the respective HRM personnel. This will enable them to have an extra relevant knowledge, skills and ability in managing these HRM practices and thus, lead other employees in providing quality of service to the customers. Customers are likely to feel satisfied with their suppliers when there are closed interactions and proper service provided to them. In principle, those who are involved in food based downstream activity should be motivated and satisfied with their jobs. When these employees are satisfied with their jobs, they will feel free to talk about the greatness of their jobs. This will lead to better performance in their jobs. This will yield into a superior service and quality of product provided to the customers. Thus, customers' satisfaction on the service given to them lead to high availability of repetitive customers as well as market expansion. Finally, this study reveals that recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal become important determinants in promoting service quality which the generalizability of research findings will highly benefit the food based downstream industry.

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