SERVICE ENCOUNTER BEHAVIOUR (SEB) IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Service Encounter Behaviour (SEB) in Higher Education: A Malaysian Perspective

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

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Abstract

Nowadays, marketing activities of HE institutions are increasingly important as they operate within their competitive and regulated environment. HE institutions have borrowed service industrial concepts to focus on the services they provide to students. They need to identify and implement tools to further understanding of the issues that impact on students' experiences. Apart from, focussing specifically on the learning experience in the sense of formal learning (where most of the past research has concentrated on), studies have also shown that support services are just as important in influencing students' learning experience. Hence, one of the support services, programme administration (PA) has become increasingly important due to the diversity of programmes offered and it contributes to the learning experience of students as well as indirectly impacting upon institutions' competitiveness. In order to enhance the learning experience of students and to manage the service encounter between students and programme leaders (PLs), it is argued that there must be an understanding of the service encounter behaviour (SEB) of the interacting parties and more importantly from a dyadic perspective since a service encounter is a two-way interpretive process.

Thus, this research is set in the HE context, focussing particularly in PA, exploring the SEB (the situational definition and situational roles) of student-PL from a dyadic perspective (from student's and employee's perspective) to improve the management of service encounters as well as to enhance the learning experience of students. The conceptual framework is based on Czepiel *et al.* (1985) concept of a service encounter emphasising that it is purposeful where tasks need to be completed within a set of rules constrained by the nature of service and the behaviour bounded by roles assumed by the interacting parties. To manage a service encounter, the SEB of the interacting parties needs to be understood and from a dyadic perspective paying attention to roles represented by each participant. This research has borrowed literature from the social psychology discipline i.e. Mead (1934) SI perspective of role and McHugh's (1968) situational definition to further understanding of the dynamism of interactions to gain further understanding of the SEB (role expectations and role response of the interacting parties).

Taking the social constructionist epistemology, this research seeks to understand the meanings student-PL construct when interacting and how these meaning have led to specific SEB. By adopting the interpretivists' paradigm embedded in symbolic interactionism, the researcher tries to interpret the underlying meaning of students'-PLs' SEB from a dyadic perspective. Qualitative case study methodology is employed using the critical incident technique (CIT) as a method to elicit student-PL experiences in service encounters, helping them to focus on specific situations when recounting their SEB. To make sense of these data, narrative analysis is used to interpret the constructions of students-PLs in their interactions. The study has included 42 participants (26 students and 16 PLs) from 4 private colleges in Malaysia. It has yielded 63 service encounters categorised into 11 types of service encounter, covering most of the situations where a student would approach their PLs in a typical semester.

The findings have indicated that defining a service encounter is significant and is functional in shaping the situational roles to be represented, thereby influencing the outcome of the situation. It has shown that even though service encounters can be similar, different situational roles can lead to different outcomes. These key findings are evidenced in a SEB guide, giving a bundle of possible situational roles in identified service encounters. These outcomes have implications for students, PLs and the management as well as future research. This research has contributed by extending the SEB literature into PA in the HE sector and has included literatures from social psychology. Also, it has involved two parties, studying the service encounter from a dyadic perspective instead of taking either one perspective which has been mostly seen in previous research studies. More importantly, it has focussed into the 'how' of SEB instead of only looking into the 'what' which gives a more complete understanding of SEB.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The beginning of this chapter is intended to orientate the reader in terms of material to follow in the main body of this thesis. It begins by explaining the motivation of this study, then discussing the overview of services in the economy and the permeation of services in our life. Next, the aim and objectives are detailed followed by the discussion of the conceptual framework underpinning this research. Then, the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods employed in this research are explicated. Subsequently, it indicates the focus or the scope of this study and provides the definition of terms used in this research. The chapter highlights the distinctiveness and the significance of this research.

1.2 Motivation of this Study

This research began as a study to explore service quality. The initial interest came from the work the researcher had undertaken in her masters studies. Initially the issues of management support to employees were intended to be considered in relation to service quality. However, studying management support embraces vast issues and in order that this study is more manageable, the area of this study is further narrowed down. Consequent review of literature has indicated that in order for management to support their service providers effectively, they need to know the issues or problems during the service encounters (Schneider and White, 2004). These service encounters refer to the

juncture where employee and customer interact and where services are consumed (Shostack, 1985). In past research, it has been defined that services are distinct from products because of its intangibility but it has been highlighted by Shostack (1977) that this is not the only difference as service takes the form of *interactive process* where task-related information exchange dominates (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985). This means that the interaction behaviour of both employees and customers play an important role in determining the outcome of the service encounter. Hence, this research has shifted its focus to look into service encounter behaviour (SEB) – the interaction behaviour of both employees and customers interacting during service encounters – to increase understanding of SEB in order to improve the management of service encounters.

In particular, the central interest of this research is to study the SEB of students and PLs in programme administration (PA) in Higher Education (HE) in Malaysia. This is due to the experience of the researcher as a lecturer with responsibilities of programme administration in a tertiary institution. As a programme leader (PL), she is involved in advising students in relation to programme matters, i.e. providing academic and administrative support to students. Upon reflection, it brought up the researcher's experiences of the many face-to-face interactions between students and the researcher which have led to different outcomes. These reminiscences spurred the interest of the researcher to embark on this study to explore the SEB that have led service encounters to be remembered favourably or unfavourably. With these it is hoped that this research can provide noteworthy understanding to the managing of service encounters in programme administration.

1.3 Overview of Services

Today, an increasing proportion of our disposable income is spent on services we consume. This is evident with the growing percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that comes from our consumption of services. For example, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2005), the total GDP in the year of 2004 was RM450 billion with consumption of services accounting for 53% (RM236 billion) of Malaysia's GDP compared to 43% in year 2003, showing an increase of 10%. These figures reflect the importance of services to the economy.

Hence, we are living in an era of service society and services permeate our life. As consumers, we use services everyday. Watching television, listening to radio, taking a bus, making or receiving a telephone call, making a banking transaction, sending clothes to the laundry, patronising a restaurant, getting a haircut, using the library or gym, attending a lecture and contacting an insurance agent, are all examples of service consumption at individual level. Because services pervade our lives, improving the quality of service in society is more than just a profit and loss or market share issue. Improving service quality also is a quality of life issue (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004). The better the quality of our doctors, grocers, restaurants, retail outlets, bankers, government agencies, transportation services, educational services and other providers, the better the quality of our daily living.

Over the last three decades or more, considerable effort has been expended by academics in the services literature to discuss and establish that services are not the same

as products. Service is defined as a 'deed, a performance or an effort' (Rathmell, 1966, p. 33) and have many characteristics but as stated by Gronroos (2001) there is only one that is really unique i.e. services are processes, not things; meaning that a service firm has no products but only interactive processes. As such, a service consumed in an encounter or interaction between customer and employee is a critical component of service quality that shapes the service experience or outcome (Svensson, 2004; Chandon *et al.*, 1997; Bitner *et al.*, 1994) because the service encounter or service interaction itself *is* the service, from customers' point of view (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). Therefore, today's consumer is more interested than ever in the *interactive* component of the *service experience* (Solomon, 2004).

However, due to the interactive nature of the service encounters which are frequently produced by humans, there are no two services that would be exactly the same as they depend on a great deal the performance of the employee (Booms and Bitner, 1981) and no two customers are precisely alike (Rust *et al.*, 1996). Thus, every service encounter is unique and is largely influenced by the expectations or demands of customers and the responses of the employee. This means that both customer and employee play important roles in the service encounter. It is the moment of truth where services are received, consumed and evaluated against promises made by service organisations (Carlzon, 1987; Normann, 2002) and it is more difficult to manage service compared to physical goods due to their intangibility, heterogeneity and the interactive nature of their delivery (Gronroos, 2001). Due to this, customers often rely on the SEB of employees when judging the quality of a service encounter, which has received much recent attention in

the service literature (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000; Bitner *et al.*, 1994; Bitner *et al.,* 1990).

Past literature have focussed on the 'what' of SEB i.e. the dimensions of service quality or expectations of customers (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Parasuraman *et al.,* 1991; Bowers *et al.,* 1994; Brady and Cronin, 2001), just to name a few but little has been explained about the 'how' i.e. the service responses of employees. Moreover, past research in SEB has been dedicated to a one way incident usually emphasising either the customer's perspective (Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000; Bitner *et al.*, 1990) or employee's perspective (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Bitner *et al.*, 1994), and both customer's and employee's perspectives examined together are often neglected. In other words, only one of the two principal perspectives in a dyadic service encounter is considered which is not sufficient. Since service encounters involved at least two parties, it is suggested that research should be conducted from a dyadic perspective (Solomon *et al.,* 1985) to further understanding of the 'how' SEB to reflect the reality of SEB between both parties that led to favourable or unfavourable outcomes. To date, research into SEB from a dyadic perspective (i.e. both the customer's and employee's perspective examined together) is limited in the service literature.

Thus, understanding SEB from a dyadic perspective is a critically important task that no service organisation can afford to leave to chance (Shostack, 1985) and many organisations are realising its importance but it is not always clear how to manage it. Previous studies have been conducted in the context of hotel, retail, bank, restaurant, airline and health services, but there is lack of research dealing with SEB in the context

of HE. Hence, this research seeks to explore SEB from a dyadic perspective (i.e. employee's and customer's perspectives) in the HE sector, attempting to fill the gap of past research and add to the body of knowledge in this area, and this gives the distinctiveness of this research.

1.4 Research Context

Traditionally, formal education was available only to the few who had the time and money to pursue it. Today, qualifications from HE become one of the important necessities for job opportunities and career development. As a result, the number of students attending tertiary institutions such as universities and colleges has increased tremendously and in particular governments are concerned that HE in their countries is worthy of respect (Yorke, 1999). The assurance of quality of standards is important and over the past two decades, HEIs (higher education institutions) have been preoccupied with performance evaluation by governments. As the demand for HE increases which is driven by expectations of its ability to improve the lives and work opportunities of graduates, HE is seen as simply another service industry that operates within competitive markets and requires service management and marketing strategies to ensure its success in attracting both domestic and international students (Bassin, 1985; Huber, 1992).

One outcome of this pressure has been an attempt by tertiary institutions to apply or borrow service concepts, formulae and techniques that focus on customer orientation. It has not been an easy transition with many tertiary insitutions still questioning the legitimacy of a customer orientation and whether this approach is well suited to HE. As

the HE industry matures, service quality has become a fundamental way of differentiating among HEIs (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). This notion can no longer afford to be ignored and has to be treated as an ongoing effort as the issue of quality in HE has received increasing attention due to the development by service industries. There have been discussions around topics such as quality management frameworks (Owlia and Aspinwall, 1996; Crawford and Shutler, 1999), quality dimensions (Rowley, 1997; Rodgers and Ghosh, 2001), quality implementation problem (Roffe, 1998), customer satisfaction (Aldridge and Rowley, 1988) and whether a customer focus is appropriate for this sector (Emery *et al.*, 2001).

The debates about the relevance of service quality in tertiary institutions are similar to the debates about the relevance of marketing when it was first introduced in HE which is now an established concept in HE (Davies and Scribbins 1985). For example, nowadays marketing activities of tertiary institutions are increasingly important especially where courses and programmes within HEIs are required to be financially solvent. It is obvious that new ideas or concepts gain acceptance slowly. Therefore, if quality is perceived as making positive contributions to service sector's competitive position, it implies that for institutions such as HE where the interaction of staff-student forms a major part of the total service offered, should give prime importance to providing service excellence (Slade *et al.*, 2000).

This means that practitioners in HE need to identify and implement suitable tools to gain more insights of the quality issues that impact on students' experiences because according to Woods (1993) the ethos of student environment has an impact on students'

achievement. Apart from focussing specifically on the learning experience in the sense of formal learning, studies have also shown that the quality of support service is just as important in influencing students' learning experience (Park and Lessig, 1977; Woods 1993; LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999). Thus, this research takes the latter aspect as its focus, to study the quality of interaction between staff-student in programme administration in HE. This is because as stated by Meyer and Rowan (1978, 1983), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Weick (1976), student learning experience is indirectly influenced by administrative work. Moreover, programme administration has become increasingly important due to the diversity of programmes offered in tertiary institutions (Kuh, 1993, 1995, 1996). If a programme has been well administered, it contributes to the learning experience of students as well as indirectly impact on the competitiveness of institutions. Therefore, this research is set in the HE context, focussing particularly in programme administration, studying the SEB of student-employee from a dyadic perspective to improve the management of service encounters as well as enhancing the learning experience of students.

1.5 Aim and Objectives

Therefore the aim of this research is:

> *To explore the SEB (the situational definition and situational roles) of student-employee in programme administration in HE from a dyadic perspective (from student's and employee's perspectives) to improve the management of service encounters as well as to enhance the learning experience of students.*

The aim is to gain insight into the SEB of face-to-face interaction between students and programme leaders (PLs) which is influenced by the situational definition and situational

roles (i.e. role expectations of students and role responses of PLs) of both parties. This means that this research is studying SEB from a dyadic perspective i.e. from students' and employees' perspectives. In essence the research objectives are:

- To define the service encounters where students approach their PL during their course of study.
- To understand from a dyadic perspective, the 'what' SEB (i.e. role expectation of students) and the 'how' SEB (i.e. role response of PLs) in a defined situation i.e. asking the question of what students expected from the PLs when they approached them and how the PL responded.
- To develop a SEB guide that facilitates the management of service encounter in programme administration in HE and to enhance the learning experience of students.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is based on Czepiel *et al.,* (1985) work on service encounter in the service literature as well as borrowing literatures from the social psychology discipline i.e. Mead's (1934) study on perspective of role and McHugh's (1968) research on definition of situation. In Czepiel *et al.,* (1985) work, they stated that interactions are basically a human activity and it can occur for a wide variety of reasons. However, they emphasised that in the context of service, when a service encounter takes place, the interaction is purposeful where certain task needs to be completed and they take place within a fundamental set of rules that are constrained by the nature of service being delivered and the behaviour bounded by roles assumed by the interacting parties.

This is to say that in order to understand a service encounter, researchers need to gain understanding of the behaviour of the interacting parties which is labelled as the service encounter (SEB) in this research.

Moreover, Solomon *et al.,* (1985) highlighted that service encounters need to be understood from a dyadic perspective paying attention to role performances in which each participant has a role to play. This work is adapted from a social psychological perspective on human interaction i.e. the role theory (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). They placed much emphasis on the functional role theory or the defined positions rather than of the individuals who occupy these positions. In view of this, role theory has been criticised for its rigid cultural and mechanical determinism of how interacting parties should act (Allport, 1955), neglecting the individuals and the dynamics of interaction. Instead Mead's (1934) work has been considered as he takes the symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective to study the dynamism of interactions to gain further understanding of the role expectations and role responses of the interacting parties. This enables the researcher to study staff-student service encounters from a dyadic perspective, focussing on taking the role of the other (know what the other party expect of them) and making the self-role (to respond respectively). However, in order to know what to expect and how to respond, McHugh (1968) argues that it is important for the interacting parties to define the situation in order to coordinate i.e. to behave or response to accordingly to fit their own line of behaviour to that of others. In other words, this concept explains how and why the interacting parties do what they do and failure of definition will cause failure of interaction. So the symbolic interactionists' concepts about human behaviour mentioned above i.e. Mead (1934) and McHugh (1968) looked into the dynamics of

interactions, focussing on how individuals behave in relation to the definition of situations.

This is to say that when students approached their PLs they are in fact interacting purposefully as students sees their PLs for some reasons and expect their PLs to help or assist them in some ways and the PLs in one way or another within the setting they are in, try to respond respectively. Both parties attempt to fit their respective lines of behaviour to one another by defining the situation then representing their situational roles (the role expectation of students and role response of PL). Therefore, in order to understand the SEB of student-PL in a typical situation and studying it from a dyadic perspective, this study has adapted and put together the work of (a) Czepiel *et al.,* (1985) service encounter concept; (b) Mead (1934) SI perspective of role; and (c) McHugh (1968) concept of defining situations, as the conceptual framework of this research.

1.7 Research Methodology

This research has taken the social constructionist epistemology to understand the meanings student-PL construct when interacting and how these meanings have led to specific SEB (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Different students and PLs participating in a service interaction construct meanings or SEB in different ways even in relation to a same event/incident. They are continually interpreting the SEB they experience during service interactions and then act in terms of these imputed meanings. Hence, by taking the interpretivists' paradigm (Crotty, 1998), the researcher tries to interpret the underlying meaning of student's-PL's SEB (what they expect, how they responded and

why they do what they do). More specifically, this research takes the interpretivist approach that is embedded in symbolic interactionism to gain understanding of SEB from a dyadic perspective (Blumer, 1969). This means that this research is sited in the interpretive paradigm and embedded in symbolic interactionism that is thoroughly social constructionist in character. It is the social constructionist *understanding of meaning* and the interpretivist *understanding of reality* wherein this research is rooted.

The nature of the topic under investigation was such that a qualitative research strategy is proposed, based on case study methodology employing the critical incident technique (CIT) for data collection. The roots of this approach are within the symbolic interactionist viewpoint which gives primacy to the view that individuals act on the basis of meanings. These meanings arise out of the process of interaction and are gained and modified through an interpretative process which involves self reflective individuals symbolically interacting with each other so that verbatim stories are uncovered (Blumer, 1969). Thus, to achieve its objective, this research has employed qualitative methodology and in particular using the multiple-case design to gain rich understanding of the context of the research and the complex social phenomena of SEB (Yin, 2003). CIT interviews are used to elicit student-PL experiences in service encounters, helping them to focus on specific situations when recounting their SEB. To make sense of these data, narrative analysis is used to interpret the perspectives of the meaning student-PL construct in their interactions i.e. the definition of situations, the role expectations of students and how PLs responded.

1.8 Scope of Study

This study is set in the HE context, targeting four different private colleges in Malaysia. It looks into the face-to-face interaction between student-PL in programme administration. According to Shostack (1985), there are many different mode of service encounter e.g. direct personal encounter (face-to-face), indirect personal encounter (via telephone) and remote encounter (do not involve any direct human contact but mediated through technology). Although today telecommunications and technology play important roles in service encounters, they are directed to recurring transactions (Barnes *et al.,* 2000). It is argued that face-to-face service encounters are still pertinent to look into the complex and sophisticated needs of today's customers. This is because face-to-face encounter are of the highest impact element to customer judgement of the overall experience (Czepiel *et al.,* 1985; Surprenant and Solomon 1987). Hence, face-to-face service encounter is an essential ingredient in the overall service perceived and experienced by customers. Therefore, this research concentrates on face-to-face service encounter (the point of contact) as it is interested to study the SEB between students and PLs.

Moreover, this research has focussed on programme administration instead of teaching and learning which have been frequently focussed in past research. This is due to the competitive environment of private colleges in Malaysia. Apart from competing on the programmes offered, colleges have tried to offer better educational services to students throughout their studies e.g. placement, student services, counselling, etc. However, this research focuses on programme administration because as stated by Meyer and Rowan

(1978, 1983), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Weick (1976), students' learning experience is indirectly influenced by administrative work during their studies. Moreover, with the diversity and the complexity of programmes and collaborating relationships, programme administration has become more important in contributing to the learning experience of students as well as institutions' competitiveness.

Also, when explaining SEB, this research is focussing on individuals' expectations, their responses, how they defined their situation and how they felt about the outcome. It is acknowledged that human behaviour is the collection of activities performed by human beings and influenced by culture, attitude, emotion, value, ethics, authority, rapport, persuasion or coercion (Wikipedia: Human Behaviour, 2005). However, it is not the intention of this research to look into how these have impacted SEB but to understand the what actually happened in the service encounter and the SEB of student-PL that have led to different outcomes. It also needs to be highlighted that these service encounters are one-to-one interactions instead of two or more with a PL. This is due to the focus of service encounter at individual level where specific role expectations and role responses can be drawn out.

1.9 Definition of Terms

It is useful at the outset that this research defines and familiarise readers with some of the terms used throughout this thesis and to avoid vagueness. Throughout this thesis, the word programme leader (PL) is referred to as individuals who hold positions or are appointed by the management to administer different programmes offered by the college.

They can be purely doing administrative work or can be academics who also take on programme administration responsibilities. At different institutions, they are sometimes known as programme directors, programme coordinators, programme assistants, programme head, etc. Generally, their duties and responsibilities are providing academic and administrative support to students e.g. giving advice in subject choices, students' registration, transfer and other activities that are programme related matters.

The students referred to in this study are individuals pursuing their tertiary education in private colleges in Malaysia. The group that has been targeted are students from the Business schools coming from different stages of their studies e.g. first, second or final year. There are some other terms and regulating bodies mentioned later in this thesis and will be explained in respective sections. Moreover, all through this thesis, the term service encounter refers to the actual moment where students and PLs interact and where educational services are consumed. As there are different modes of service encounter, this research is referring to the face-to-face service encounter.

1.10 Significance of Study

The discussions above have identified the gap in the service literature and therefore seek to further extend the concepts. The distinctiveness and significance of this research is:

- To extend the service literature to programme administration in HE as this is often neglected in past research. Moreover, programme administration has become increasingly important in shaping the learning experience of students throughout their studies.

- To further understanding on SEB by incorporating literature from social psychology to understand not only the 'what' of SEB (role expectation of students) but also the 'how' (role response of PL) as well. This allows the research to study the dynamism of SEB in a defined situation.
- This also highlights that this research is taking a dyadic perspective to study SEB which is important as it takes two parties in a service encounter to take the role of the other and to respond accordingly. Past research has focussed on either one of the perspectives but the dyadic perspective has been usually neglected.
- To develop a SEB guide that has incorporated views from a dyadic perspective that can help institutions to understand as well as to manage service encounters. Also this can facilitate managers to train their employees to be more effective or competent in delivering quality learning experience to students.

1.11 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 1 has introduced this research by detailing its motivation, setting the context of this research and specifying its aim and objectives. Also it has briefly explained the conceptual framework that this research is based on and the research methodology that is employed to achieve its objectives. It sets the scope and explicates the significance of this study and gives an overview of how this thesis will be organised.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature search relating to historic background of the service literature. It looks into how the service sector has evolved and developed and further explains what service is, its characteristics and classifications. Then it

explicates how services are consumed in service encounters and the different modes that service encounters can take place. It also highlights the complexities of SEB, looking into defined situations and situational roles from a dyadic perspective by bringing in viewpoints from the social psychology discipline. This chapter finishes by identifying the gap of service literature and proposing the study of SEB in programme administration in the HE context.

Chapter 3 explains the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, method, research design, research process and ethical issues of this research followed by a continuation in Chapter 4 to explain the analytical principles and procedures used. Also, the authenticity of data in this study will be looked into.

This is followed by Chapter 5 where findings and discussions are presented, highlighting the different service encounters defined by student-PL as well as student's role expectations and PL's role responses. Chapter 6 closes by making conclusions and presenting a SEB guide as a result from the findings of this research. Also, implications and contributions of this study are put forth and recommendations for future research are made.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature informing and underpinning this research is interdisciplinary. It has been drawn from the service, social psychology and higher education literature. The range of issues is wide and complex. This is managed by formulating pivotal questions about the service encounter behaviour (see Figure 2.1 below). Each of these questions then provides a focus for the literature review.

Background of services and the nature of services

- Evolution of service sector
- What is a service?
- Consumption of services
- What is service encounter?

Symbolic Interactionist (SI) perspective of SEB

- What is service encounter behaviour (SEB)?
- What is SI perspective of studying SEB?
- What are definitions of situations or service encounters?
- How the interacting parties take their situational role (what are role expectations and role responses)?

SEB in programme administration (PA) in higher education (HE) context

- Overview of the HE
- Programme administration (PA) in HE
- SEB in PA in HE context

Figure 2.1: Overview of the Literature

2.2 Evolution of Service Sector

This section concerns the development of the service sector. Most authors in the service literature emphasise the dominance of the service sector in today's economy. They state the percentage of GDP that is attributed to services and the forces that shape the service sector. However, what is lacking is what happened before a service dominated economy, i.e. what eras have taken place over time before the arrival of service sector. So the purpose of this section is to trace what happened before a service dominated economy, specifically the shift of one era to another, the activities and the concepts that have taken place. It is not to analyse the stages, rather it is to make available a background to the evolution of the service sector that can be traced from the Stone Age to today.

Barter trade existed long before there was money and may date back to the Stone Age. People were prepared to trade what was of less value to them for goods which were of more value, such as corn for meat (Jefkins, 1989). It was not long before people recognised the practical implications of consumption being the purpose of barter trade. In consequence, mushrooming of agriculture or farming and keeping livestock has been a common item for barter. Soon, money is involved in the trade and has begun the use of cowrie shells followed by first metal coins, silver, leather currency, paper currency, etc. and eventually as banknotes today (Davies, 2002).

Thus, people caught fish, grew vegetables, tended herds and flocks, hoping to find buyers. Usually, there was a seller's market where demand was greater than the ability to supply. As populations grew, expansion of towns with shops to provide a market for

buyers and sellers to meet seems obvious (Jefkins, 1989). Also, through the developments of transport by canal, road, railway, etc. and eventually air to move goods from places have fuelled the growth of mass production to satisfy the expanding demand. It became necessary to produce what people buy known as mass production that has capitalised on scientific discoveries and technological progress (Gray, 2000).

As production capacity increased and competition became more intense, more attention had to be paid to the selling process. Yet, manufacturers aim to sell what they make rather than make what customers want. Customers were essentially a problem for the sales force, whose task was to sell what had been produced as their approach is inside-out (selling what they make). In due course with the introduction of modern production, transportation, distribution and communication, competition became more intense and offered greater choice of products for customers. This drove the focus towards building reputation through product technical excellence as well as to provide economies of scale. Soon, it became economically necessary to produce what people are most likely to buy, the notion of outside-in where customer needs are considered at the initial stage of production instead of in the final stages. This fundamental principle is often referred as the *marketing* concept by renowned academics Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong who emphasise the importance of determining and delivering the needs and wants of customers better than competitors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2005). The core concept of marketing is exchange – 'the act of obtaining a desired object from someone by offering something in return' (Kotler and Armstrong, 2005, p. 8). Attention has been shifted from problems of production to problems of marketing, from making a product to producing a product consumers want, as argued by Keith (1960).

From this comes the idea that *manufacturing* industry provides tangible goods to satisfy customers for achieving and maintaining a successful and prosperous business activity. Hence manufacturers pay more attention in making the product that suits the interests of customers. As manufacturers became increasingly proficient and competition intensified, the notion of service gained prominence (Martin, 1999). Initially, services were largely considered tools to facilitate the sale of tangible goods. Then, services began to emerge as significant points of differentiation between organisations trying to augment their offerings to gain competitive advantage in the marketplace e.g. free delivery of a purchased appliance. Customers are part of a wave consciously driving manufacturers into services to gain competitive ground or the movement known as 'servitisation' by Vandermerwe and Rada (1988). It was not an easy transition for manufacturers as they consider goods production as separate from and somehow superior to the service sector (Quinn *et al.*, 1990). As suggested by Canton (1988, p. 41) the 'simplest way for a manufacturer to get into a service is to do business with its own customers', i.e. to contract with its customers to maintain and service what it sells.

The big change came with the growing market for *services* and increasing dominance of service sector in economies worldwide. Swept up by the forces of deregulation, technology, social, globalisation and fierce competitive pressure (Vandermerwe and Rada, 1988), these have spawned the need for service concepts. The idea of services is a theme which has been developed across a broad range of literature since the 1970s e.g. Levitt (1972), Berry *et al* (1976), George (1977), just to name a few. Since then, substantial part of the services literature has matured as an academic field in the marketing discipline. Since the mid 1980s, peer-reviewed marketing journals and

services management or services marketing books are published, and related conferences are held regularly, and these are some of the examples to provide evidence of the maturity of service concepts (Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000). Thus services management and marketing is now regarded as an established discipline with its own journals, books and conferences. The emergence and legitimisation of service management and marketing has over the years, blossomed and has become an established field within the marketing discipline today (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993).

Today, the size of the service sector is increasing in almost all economies around the world. Countries such as United Kingdom, United States, Japan and Malaysia have a significant proportion (i.e. more than 50%) of their GDP represented by services and account for most of the growth in new jobs (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004; Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000). It is no longer valid for either manufacturing or service industry to draw simplistic distinctions between goods and services or assume they can do one without the other. Today most organisations are to a lesser or greater extent, in both. Much of this is due to managers looking at their customers needs as a whole, moving from the old and outdated focus on goods alone or services alone to a goods-services continuum, often with services in the lead role.

2.3 Service Domain

As consumers we use services everyday and an increasing proportion of our individual income is spent on the services we consume. So to better understand the consumption of

services, this section explains the service domain, looking into the distinction between service and product, describing its characteristics and how services are consumed.

2.3.1 What is a service?

In the service literature there are numerous definitions of a service. Table 2.1 lists the definitions of service by different authors. There are some commonalities in the definitions and they are highlighted in italic fonts.

Authors	Definitions of service
Rathmell (1966, p. 33)	'a *deed*, a *performance* or an *effort*'
Shostack (1977, p. 73)	'cannot be stored on shelf, touched, tasted or tried on for size' – *intangibility*
Payne (1993, p. 6)	'an *activity* which has some element of *intangibility* associated with it, which involves some *interaction* with customers or with property in their possession, and does not result in a transfer of *ownership*'
Kasper *et al.* (1999, p. 13)	'*intangible* and relatively quickly perishable activities whose buying takes place in an *interaction* process aimed at creating customer satisfaction but during this interactive consumption this does not always lead to material possession.
Gronroos (2000, p.48)	'*processes* consisting of a series of *activities* where a number of different types of resources – people as well as other kinds of resources – are used, often in direct *interactions* with the customer, so that a solution is found to a customer's problem'
Zeithaml and Bitner (2000, p. 2)	'deeds, *processes* and *performances*' or 'services include all economic *activities* whose output is not a physical product or construction, is generally consumed at the time it is produced, and provides added value in forms (such as convenience, amusement, timeliness, comfort or health) that are essentially *intangible* concerns of its first purchaser'
Palmer (2001, p. 3)	'production of an essentially *intangible benefit*, either in its own right or as a significant element of a tangible product, which through some form of exchange, satisfies an identified need'
Lovelock and Wirtz (2004, p. 9)	'an *act* or *performance* offered by one party to another. Although the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is transitory, often *intangible* in nature, and does not normally result in *ownership* of any of the factors of production' or 'an economic *activity* that creates value and provides *benefits* for customers at specific times and places by bringing about a desired change in, or on behalf of, the recipient of the service'
Kotler and Armstrong (2005, p.223)	'any activity or *benefit* that one party can offer to another that is essentially *intangible* and does not result in the *ownership* of anything'

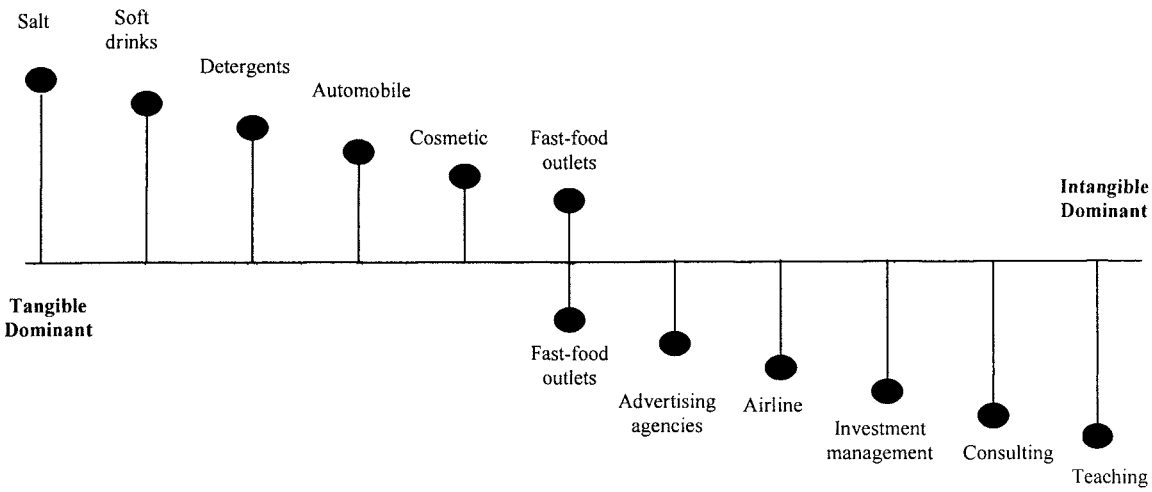
Table 2.1 Definition of service by different authors

In reviewing the definitions above, it is observed that there is no single universally accepted definition. There is considerable debate and disagreement as to what constitutes a service. Many authors have sought to develop definitive descriptions of a service, yet no adequate agreed definition has emerged. However, the commonalities in the definitions as highlighted are: *deed, performance, effort, activity, benefit, act, processes, intangibility, interaction and no ownership.* The nature of these commonalities is intangible and service is indeed something that is intangible, *not* things. For example, service can be something (deed, performance, effort, benefit or act) done for us (e.g. getting the car repaired, sending clothes to the laundry, etc.) or to us (e.g. obtaining a treatment from the doctor, getting a haircut, etc.) via interactive *processes.* This is to say that the consumption of services by consumers does not necessarily result in a transfer of ownership by means of a physical transfer of the object but still creates benefit during or after a particular *interaction* and *experience.* It will be further discussed in later sections.

2.3.2 Tangibility-Intangibility continuum

From Table 2.1, it implied that intangibility is the key determinant to define a service. In principle, services are indeed intangible (Berry, 1980; Lovelock 1981; Shostack 1977) but as argued by Rathmell (1966) very few services are purely intangible or very few products are purely tangible i.e. there are very few pure services or pure products. However, services tend to be more intangible (intangible-dominant) compared to manufactured products that tend to be more tangible (tangible-dominant) (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). For example, the fast-food industry, while classified as a service, also has

many tangible elements such as the food and the packaging. On the other hand, car manufacturers while classified within product sector, also supply many intangibles such as warranties, repair services and loan facilities (Levitt, 1981). The tangibility-intangibility continuum shown in Figure 2.2 captures this idea.



Source: Shostack (1977)

Figure 2.2: Tangibility-Intangibility Continuum

This continuum was first suggested by Shostack (1977) as a useful way to distinguish between services and products. It remains as a valuable perspective for making the distinction and understanding the nature of services. The essence of the continuum is that tangibility decreases as one moves from left to right. Every organisation on the continuum delivers some degree of service as part of its total offer. However, it is the organisations toward the right that are more intangible-dominant and can therefore truly bear the hallmark 'service organisations' (Mudie and Cottam, 1999). This thesis is directed towards service organisations on the right side i.e. the more intangible-dominant

side, of the continuum. However, there seems to be an increasing awareness that it is almost impossible and even unnecessary, to continue to debate service definitions. Gronroos (2000) suggested that instead of a definition it will be more useful to look into the characteristics of services and gain an understanding of the nature of service consumption as a starting point for the knowledge of how to manage and market services, which is explained in the following sections.

2.3.3 What are the characteristics of services?

Services have four key characteristics, namely, intangibility, inseparability, variability/heterogeneity and perishability (Palmer, 2001). These distinctive characteristics are useful for highlighting differences between services and products and they are discussed below:

- *Intangibility:* Services are intangible. As the above definition of a service and tangibility-intangibility continuum suggest, intangibility may represent the most critical difference between services and products. Because services are effort or actions rather than objects, they cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner that we can sense tangible goods. Services when bought are never owned by the customer. They only buy temporary access to the service (Collier, 1994).

- *Inseparability:* Another characteristic of services is inseparability. The interpretation of this term is the inseparability of customers from the service delivery process as they occur simultaneously (Regan 1963; Gronroos 1978; Carmen and

Langeard 1980; Upah 1980; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). In particular, many services require the participation of the customer in the service delivery process.

- *Variability/Heterogeneity:* Because services are actions, frequently produced by humans, no two services will be precisely alike. People may differ in their performance from day to day or even hour to hour (Booms and Bitner, 1981). Variability or heterogeneity also results because no two customers are precisely alike, each will have unique demands and experience the service in a unique way (Rust *et al.*, 1996). Thus variability or heterogeneity connected with services is largely the result of human interaction (between and among employees and customers).

- *Perishability:* A survey of service organisations found that the greatest operational challenges facing them were posed by the perishability of their service (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1985). This is because services cannot be inventoried since they are performed in real time and if they are not consumed, revenue-earning potential is lost forever as periods of peak demand cannot be prepared for in advance by producing and storing services. A service opportunity occurs at a point in time and when it is gone, it is gone forever. Thus, services are extremely perishable.

From the characteristics and the tangibility-intangibility continuum discussed above, the situation in the service sector in contrast to products, is sharply different and therefore merits different attention. The characteristics of services pose great challenges to customers and employees because employees are unable to produce services before they

are consumed by customers thereby not able to provide a service, check it for defects, and then deliver it to a customer (Zeithaml, 1981). On the other hand, customers cannot see, feel, taste or touch services and thus not able to check for defects in the similar way that they can sense tangible goods before consuming the services because the service delivery process and consumption occur simultaneously (i.e. inseparability). The situation becomes more complex when considering the variability or heterogeneity of services delivered by employees. Clearly, the *intangibility* of services alongside *inseparability* and *variability* have created great challenges to organisations to ensure the quality of service delivered and that the service is consumed when available as services are *perishable* and cannot be inventoried for later use.

Moreover, besides their characteristics, there are different nature of how services are offered and consumed depending on their tangibility or intangibility as explained in Section 2.3.2. They can be classified in many ways. For example:

- According to industry sectors such as retailing and wholesaling; transportation, distribution and storage; banking and insurance; real estate; communications and information services; public utilities, government and defence; health care; business, professional and personal services; recreational and hospitality services; education; and other non-profit organisations (Payne, 1993).

- Based on tangibility (pure goods) to intangibility (pure service) e.g. pure tangible goods (soap, toothpaste or salt) where no services accompany the product; tangible goods with accompanying services to enhance its consumer appeal e.g. computers;

major services with accompanying minor goods and services such as first class airline travel; and pure services like baby-sitting and psychotherapy (Kotler, 1991).

These examples of classifications have made it clear that it is difficult either to define or generalise about services. Services vary considerably over a range of factors, including whether they are directed at businesses or individual consumers; whether they require the customer's physical presence; and whether they are equipment intensive or people intensive (e.g. a launderette versus a masseur). So, instead of only learning from service organisations in the same industry, there is a need to develop service classification schemes that enable service managers to compare their organisation with those in other service industries sharing common characteristics and learn from them. Thus Lovelock and Wirtz (2004) argued that simple classification schemes of grouping services by industry are not sufficient because this approach can lead to tunnel vision. So in Lovelock's award-winning article (Lovelock, 1983), he has identified five different ways that services can be classified:

1. by the nature of the service;
2. by the relationships which the service organisation has with its customers;
3. by the degree of freedom for customisation and judgement in service deliver;
4. by the nature of demand for the service relative to supply; and
5. by the method of service delivery.

The main point from these various classification methods is that there are many different types of services and obviously the way they are classified will impact upon the management and marketing decisions that are made in relation to the service offering.

These differences also impact upon how customers are likely to relate to the service. Therefore, one hallmark of innovative service organisations is that their managers are willing to look outside their own industries for effective strategies that they can adapt for use in their own organisations (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004). Additionally, in order to comprehend what can be adapted for used in their service organisations, one has to know how services are consumed by their consumers which are discussed in the subsequent section.

2.3.4 How are services delivered and consumed?

From the discussions so far, it can be seen that there are no clear distinctions between services and goods or even between service industries. Instead, Lovelock (1983) argues that it depends on how services are delivered and consumed. Managers of manufactured products do not necessarily need to know the specifics of how physical products are manufactured because that is the responsibility of the people who run the factory but the situation is different in services because as stated in Sections 2.3.3 there is inseparability of service delivery and consumption of services. Therefore, managers in service organisations do need to understand the nature of the service delivery and to whom the services are delivered. In other words, managers need to know what the nature of the service act is and who or what is the direct recipient of the service. This is depicted in Figure 2.3.

	Who or What Is the Direct Recipient of the Service?	
What Is the Nature of the Service Act?	People	Possessions
Tangible Actions	*People Processing* (services directed at people's bodies): Passenger transportation, Health care, Lodging, Beauty salons, Physical therapy, Fitness centres, Restaurants/bars, Barbers, Funeral services	*Possession processing* (services directed at physical possessions): Freight transportation, Repair and maintenance, Warehousing/storage, Office cleaning services, Retail distribution, Laundry and dry cleaning, Refueling, Landscaping/gardening, Disposal/recycling
Intangible Actions	*Mental stimulus processing* (services directed at people's minds): Advertising/PR, Arts and entertainment, Broadcasting/cable, Management consulting, Education, Information services, Music concerts, Psychotherapy, Religion, Voice telephone	*Information processing* (services directed at intangible assets): Accounting, Banking, Data processing, Data transmission, Insurance, Legal services, Programming, Research, Securities investment, Softwware consulting

Source: Lovelock and Wirtz (2004)

Figure 2.3: Understanding the Nature of the Service Act

According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2004), a *process* is a particular method of operation or a series of actions, typically involving multiple steps that often need to take place in a defined sequence. A process implies taking an input and transforming it into output. As represented in Figure 2.3, two broad categories of things get processed in services, namely people and possessions (i.e. objects that belong to consumers). In many cases, ranging from health care to music concerts (i.e. the left column of the matrix), customers themselves are the principal input to the service process where consumers are the direct

recipient of the service and they usually have to be present at the time of service delivery. These services are delivered to people's bodies via tangible actions (e.g. beauty salons and barbers) or people's mental stimulus (minds) via intangible actions (e.g. management consulting and psychotherapy). In other occurrences, the key input is an object, such as faulty computer that needs repair or financial data that needs preparation of financial statements (i.e. the right column of the matrix). These processes are directed to consumers' possessions but usually consumers have to be present together with their possession at the time of service delivery or giving enough information and instruction for the services to be delivered. These services are delivered via tangible actions (e.g. freight transportation and laundry) or intangible assets via intangible actions (e.g. banking and insurance). Each section of the matrix proposed by Lovelock (1983), i.e. people processing, possession processing, mental stimulus processing and information processing, involves fundamentally different processes with vital implications for the management and marketing of services. It has yielded better insights to the understanding of the service consumption by consumers and the service delivery by service organisations.

The discussions so far have indicated the nature and characteristics of services and have highlighted that the point where an interaction takes place when services are consumed is critical. This is when consumers interact with the service employees where they simultaneously consume the service and evaluate how well it is delivered. In other words, it is at or during the interaction where customers consume the services provided thereby evaluating the service. This critical moment is sometimes referred to as the 'moment of truth' (Carlzon, 1987; Normann, 2000) or 'service encounter' (Evans, 1963;

Lutz and Kakkar, 1976; Shostack, 1977). Thus understanding the consumption of services at the point of service encounters is important for service organisations' success (Bowen and Schneider, 1985; Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Bove and Johnson, 2000) and this is the central focus of this thesis. The following sections further explain service encounter in detail.

2.4 Service Encounter

Academics in service literature are giving increasing attention to the interaction between customer and employee in the frontline of the service businesses (Martin, 1999; Chandon *et al.*, 1997; Dobni *et al.*, 1997; Murray *et al.*, 1996; Price *et al.*, 1995). Known as the *service encounter*, this interaction often becomes a focal point in consumer evaluations of the entire service organisation (Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1988). This acknowledges the notion, from previous section, that services are consumed during service encounters and from customer's viewpoint it is the most vital juncture where services are received, consumed and evaluated against promises made by service organisations. So understanding service encounters is a critical task that no service organisation can afford to leave to chance (Shostack, 1985). Thus the following sections attempt to describe service encounter, the different modes of service encounter and its complexities.

2.4.1 What is service encounter?

In the broadest sense, service encounter is the actual juncture where the customer and the service provider interact and where services are consumed. A useful definition of

the service encounter provided by Shostack (1985, p. 243) is 'a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service'. Both definitions imply that the actual interaction juncture takes place within certain time and space. Moreover, they indicate that interaction is a basic human activity, be it formal or informal interaction. It can happen for a broad diversity of reasons. According to Czepiel *et al.* (1985) and Mills (1986), a service encounter in its most elementary level is one human being interacting with another.

However, to be considered a service encounter as opposed to any other form of interaction, Czepiel *et al.* (1985) assert that service encounters are purposeful and service providers are not altruistic. This means that service encounters belong to a specific form of human interaction which is goal orientated and not altruistic i.e. the service provider is to provide a specified service as part of a job for which he or she is paid and the customer has a need to fulfil. This fact is usually recognised by both parties to the encounter. Moreover, Czepiel *et al.* (1985) emphasised on prior acquaintance is not required and the interacting parties in service encounters do not necessarily know each other, i.e. a special kind of stranger relationship. While one does not normally have interactions with strangers but in a service encounter it is accepted with societal approval as long as the approach occurs within the limits of the service setting.

2.4.2 What are the different modes of service encounter?

Service encounters can take place in different modes. Generally, there are three different modes of service encounters identified by Shostack (1985, p248) i.e. direct

personal encounter, indirect personal encounter and remote encounter. The direct personal encounter is where customers interact face-to-face with service providers. This involves personal visits by customers to the service facility and actively involved with the service provider. In this type of service encounter, customers have the opportunity of visualising service providers and evaluating the service that may be made from the appearance and behaviour of the service provider. For example services such as health care, beauty salon and psychotherapy. The second mode of service encounter, i.e. indirect personal encounter consists solely of verbal interaction. Although the service provider deals with a customer, it is not a face-to-face interaction, but interacts verbally via telephone or mobile phone. One good example will be telephone banking. The third mode is the remote encounter which does not involve any direct human contact. The interaction between consumer and the service organisation is mediated in some way by a representation of the service provider usually in the form of technology, such as vending machine and ATM (automated teller machine).

Service organisations can provide purely one mode of service encounter, or a mix of two modes, or a mix of all three modes. Hence, nowadays there are very few service organisations providing purely one mode of service encounters as they often offer a mix of at least two. However, it is argued that out of these different modes, the exchange between customer and service provider is the most important because it is the core of service consumption (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985; Solomon *et al.*, 1985; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Bitner *et al.* 1990; Gabbott and Hogg, 1998). Gronroos (2000) concurs and stresses that the situations in which customers meet the service providers are critical to their experience. This is due to the inseparability of customers from the service

delivery process and their involvement has originated the importance of consuming services that takes place in service encounters between consumers and service providers. As a consequence of its importance, the service encounter between consumer and service provider has attracted significant ongoing academic attention (Czepiel *et al*, 1985; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Bitner *et al*, 1990; Grove *et al*, 1992; Arnould and Price, 1993; Mattsson, 1994). For example, Mattsson (1994) stressed that the core of most services is the person-to-person encounter and Czepiel *et al.* (1985) emphasised those service encounters which involve face-to-face interaction are of particular importance.

Hence, the educational services provided in the context of PA in HE can be delivered in several modes. The nature of service encounters can be in the mode of (a) direct personal encounter such as face-to-face interaction when a student approached a PL on programme related matters; (b) indirect personal encounter e.g. verbal interaction between the student and the PL via telephone or written communication through email; and (c) remote encounter where there is no direct human contact between the student and the PL i.e. the educational service is mediated through technology, in occasions such as online applications. Yet, in line with the discussion above, this research has focussed on the direct personal encounter mode between student-PL i.e. the event where students approached their PL with regards to programme related matters. It is argued that the face-to-face service encounter is the core of educational service consumption and is the highest-impact element to students' judgment of the overall experience (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987) with other modes of service encounter supplementing the overall delivery of educational services. As such, the face-to-face

service encounter is an essential ingredient in enhancing the learning experiences of students (Woods, 1993).

So, generally, understanding what a service encounter is and the different modes it can take are crucial for improving service encounters that shape the service experience of customers. In addition to these, according to Czepiel *et al.* (1985, p. x), 'to study the service encounter is to study the behaviour of human beings interacting' which is labelled as service encounter behaviour (SEB) throughout this thesis. This is due to the intangibility and the interactive nature of services and customers often rely on the SEB of employees when judging the service encounter. This is especially true in many service situations, particularly those characterised by a high degree of face-to-face interaction whereby no tangible object is exchanged, such as the consultancy, medical and HE, to name a few. In such encounters, the service provider *is* the service from the customer's point of view (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003; Bitner *et al.*, 1990). Therefore, the SEB in face-to-face interaction is a crucial component in the overall assessment of service encounters and it has received much attention in the recent service literature (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000; Bitner *et al.*, 1994; Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Siehl *et al.*, 1991). This is also the main focus of this research and the following section discusses it in detail.

2.5 Service Encounter Behaviour (SEB)

According to Czepiel *et al.* (1985) service encounters provide behavioural boundaries as purposeful interactions between interacting parties require rules if a *task* is to be

completed. The fundamental set of rules that give configuration to the interaction are constrained by the nature of service being delivered and the behaviour bounded by *roles* assumed by interacting parties. Therefore, the following sections unpack the meaning of SEB, look into past research in this area, identify the gap in past studies, adapt the SI perspective to study SEB from a dyadic perspective and explain the notion of SEB in programme administration in HE.

2.5.1 What is service encounter behaviour (SEB)?

Czepiel *et al.* (1985) view service encounter as a subset of human behaviour. The behaviour of people is studied by various academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology (Homans, 1961). Typically, the word 'behaviour' is derived from the verb 'behave', from the prefix *be-* and the verb *have*, thus to 'have' or 'bear' oneself a certain way (Oxford Dictionary, 2002). It is the actions or reactions of an individual in relation to the environment that can be conscious or unconscious, overt or covert and voluntary or involuntary (Wikipedia: Behaviour, 2005). What an individual thinks or feels is what is at the back of his/her mind and can never be more than assumed or imagined (Homans, 1961). However, Kevin (1970) argued that another important form of behaviour is speech because it gives individuals capacity to communicate their thoughts and feelings, i.e. about things which go on 'inside'. Kevin further emphasised that it not only includes the capacity for speech or the act of speaking but also the content of what is said. So, in understanding human behaviour the content of speech is as much an aspect of behaviour as the act of speaking.

As mentioned in the previous sections, service encounters are interactive processes and this means that the act of speaking and the content of speech are important to the understanding of what SEB is. The service behaviour of a contact employee encompasses all interaction activities that take place, for example it includes all processes before and after service encounters as well as the actual point of contact. Therefore, service behaviour represents the overall attribute or overall service behaviour of a contact employee in a service organisation (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985). However, this research is only interested in the actual point of contact i.e. the service encounter itself because as mentioned above, services are consumed during the interaction juncture (i.e. face-to-face service encounter) and due to their intangibility and inseparability nature customers rely on the SEB (the service behaviour at the point of contact or during the service encounter) of contact employees when evaluating service encounters. It is indeed the moment of truth of what takes place and the point of contact where employees interact with customers. Hence, the act of speaking and the content of what is said is one of the important components of understanding SEB.

With this explanation of SEB thus far, the topic of SEB seems fairly straightforward, but by studying only the content of speech to understand SEB may have ignored the complexities that lie beyond surface level. This is because human behaviour is a collection of activities performed by individuals and influenced by culture, attitude, emotion, value, ethics, authority, rapport, persuasion or coercion (Wikipedia: Human Behaviour, 2005). There has been past researches on how these can impact on behaviour e.g. Azjen and Fishbein (1977), Fishbein (1983), Solomon (2006) just to name a few. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to look at how they impact on

behaviour as it can be another thesis in its own right. Instead, the aim of this research is to understand the 'what' and 'how' SEB that led service encounters to be remembered favourably or unfavourably. More specifically, this research studies SEB based on the content of speech as mentioned by Kevin (1970) in this section and the roles that the interacting parties take during the service encounter (as stated by Czepiel *et al.*, 1985 in Section 2.5). Content of speech has been discussed in this section whereas roles will be discussed later in Section 2.5.3. Before that, the following section will present the past research in SEB and its debates to reveal some of the intriguing intricacies that surround the understanding of SEB undertaken in this research.

2.5.2 A review of past research

This section reviews past research used by researchers to study service behaviour and explains why this research can be useful to fill the knowledge and practice gaps in services marketing. It should be noted that an attempt to present a complete synopsis of past studies is impossible, thus these past studies highlighted below are not exhaustive but to give a brief and concise review of the past studies of SEB.

Many researchers have attempted to identify superior service performance in specific, operational behavioural terms. Among the best known, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) conceptualised several facets of service quality and on this basis developed the SERVQUAL scale i.e. tangibles; reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, with several of these dimensions related to human behaviour indicators such as reliability, responsiveness and empathy of service providers as most important in

meeting customer expectations during face-to-face interaction (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1991). Thereafter, considerable research has been conducted to study how services can be improved in many different service sectors.

While the SERVQUAL has provided helpful insight into the kinds of behaviour that are expected of service providers through understanding the gap between customers' perception and expectations, their opponents (SERVPERF of Cronin and Taylor, 1992) claim that service quality is a performance based construct and more appropriately measured with perception rather than expectations (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Cronin and Taylor 1992). This is to say that they ignore expectations as a point of reference and question the validity of the gap between perception and expectation (see also Carman, 1990; Boulding *et al.*, 1993; Teas, 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1994). Instead, Cronin and Taylor (1992) take a single measure of service performance (SERVPERF) to circumvent the issue of gap.

There has been research to try to resolve this confusion (see Hope and Muhlemann, 1997) and it is not the intention of this research to look into this issue. However, thus far, it has highlighted that past research has pointed out the importance of behaviour in service encounters, the expectation and perception of customers as well as the performance of service providers. Based on these studies, other authors have conducted further research to study service personalisation i.e. the behaviour occurring in the interaction that make customers feel like individuals rather than 'numbers'. As a result of the work of Surprenant and Solomon (1987), they have proven that personalised service is often translated as better service. The behaviour includes allowing customers

to choose the option best suited to their specific needs (option personalisation); making small talk or using customers' names (programme personalisation); and assisting customer in attaining the best possible form of the service offering for his or her needs (customised personalisation). They found that not all these personalising behaviours necessarily result in more positive service evaluations but depending on the context in which service delivery take place. This highlights the importance of content of speech (as stated by Kevin, 1970) and the context of service setting in which the service encounter takes place.

This implies that every service encounter is unique depending on the time and place as well as the behaviour of the interacting parties. Hence, some researchers have studied the critical incidents or specific service encounters that led to satisfactory or unsatisfactory outcomes (Bitner *et al.,* 1990, 1994). Their findings suggested that proper response behaviour to customer needs and requests in service encounters can lead to customer satisfaction. Likewise proper response behaviour can also transform dissatisfactory events into satisfactory service encounters by explaining to customers what happened, what can be done and why their needs or requests can or cannot be accommodated. This emphasised the significance of response behaviour of contact employees in a service encounter and the implications to managers of the need for employee training, development and empowerment.

The recent work of Winsted (2000) reinforced on the importance of service provider behaviour relevant to customer evaluation of a service encounter. Winsted identified three dimensions of behaviour that are related to encounter satisfaction i.e. concern,

civility and congeniality. However, the review of past literature so far has indicated that most authors have (1) identified a list of the 'what' SEB that contact employees are to have during service encounters but have not looked into the 'how' SEB (how employees response in service encounters); and (2) predominantly studied from one perspective i.e. the customer's or employee's perspective. They seek to explain the different constructs of SEB in terms of various attributes to obtain a 'true' and objective assessment of SEB. Although these approaches have produced significant findings, it may be limited in its ability to reflect the reality of SEB between both parties interacting (a dyadic perspective). The objective views of SEB failed to incorporate the inherent dynamism of experiencing SEB and to attain a real understanding of the meaning of SEB during face-to-face encounters (Schembri and Sandberg 2002).

Therefore, to further understand the meaning of SEB, exploring the 'what' and 'how' of SEB and moreover from the dyadic perspective, services marketing researchers have borrowed concepts from social psychology. This is due to many authors advocating that patterns of behaviour in service encounters are probably best thought of as role behaviour and therefore best studied in a role theory framework (Dobni *et al.*, 1997). Role theory is not new to marketing. Constructs adapted from role theory have been used to explain consumer behaviour, especially with regard to expectation formation (Sheth, 1967). Solomon *et al.* (1985) spearhead this interdisciplinary activity through presenting a conceptual framework to understand and analyse face-to-face service encounters. Their framework presented is adapted from a social psychological perspective on human interaction. At a superficial level the acts of sending clothes to the laundry, patronising a restaurant or getting a haircut appear to have little in common.

However, they specify that at social psychological level, all of these incidents are conceptually similar, i.e. each act is a purposive and task oriented nature of interaction whose outcome is dependent upon the coordinated actions of both parties interacting.

More specifically, they emphasise ritualised behaviour patterns (service scripts) which govern the course of the service encounter. According to them, service encounters are role performances and each interacting party has a role to play, the *script* from which he/she is often strictly defined. This concept is adapted or reframed from social psychology's role theory approach that emphasised on the nature of people as social actors who learn behaviours appropriate to the positions they occupy in society (Biddle, 1986). Role, a term borrowed directly from the theatre is a metaphor intended to denote the conduct adhering to certain parts rather than the players who fill them (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). This means that 'actors' or service providers in service settings have to adopt a relatively standardised set of behaviour (i.e. read from a common script) when they interact during the service encounter instead of taking the role of the other (i.e. understanding the expectation of the customer and response to accordingly).

In similar vein, other authors have adapted the role theory in their study of SEB, namely, Grove's and Fisk's (1983) work on drama metaphor presented as dramaturgy in the service literature to study service encounter. The dramaturgical approach depicts social behaviour as a theatrical performance which requires actors, audience, script, setting, rehearsal and appearances. The term script is a programmed list of suitable behaviour which the contact employee is supposed to follow in order to improve service experience (Tansik and Smith, 1990). Since then many authors (Dobni *et al.*, 1997; Broderick,

1998) employed role theory to draw on behavioural perspective, focusing on explanation of social interaction as behaviour associated with specific social position (Biddle, 1979).

However, role theory has been criticised for being too focussed on the functional role such as role enactment, role expectations, role location, role demands, role skills, role conflict and role consensus, thereby forgetting the individual who take and make the role in a service encounter. It has been repudiated as a system of rigid cultural and mechanical determinism (Allport, 1955, p. 81-82), neglecting the dynamism of the interacting parties in a service encounter (how roles function normally). This leads to the work of Mead (1934) which is based on role making and role taking as processes, i.e. *how* roles function normally (Mead, 1934). Mead takes the symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective of role which considers the dynamism of interacting parties, focussing on how roles function normally at the point of contact. Also, from the SI perspective, researchers can understand SEB from a dyadic perspective.

Thus, for the purpose of this research, together with Czepiel *et al's.,* (1985) concept of service encounter, the researcher has adapted Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role to study SEB from a dyadic perspective. This is not to say that the work of authors focusing on the functional perspective or other perspectives is void but taking the SI perspective of role enable the researcher to explore the 'what' and 'how' of SEB from a dyadic perspective to achieve the objectives of this research. Mead's perspective is also consistent with the philosophical framework of this research that is rooted in social constructionism and set in the interpretivist paradigm embedded in symbolic interactionism. It is in fact an extension of the existing cultural deterministic approach

of role theory and it adds novel elements to the conception of face-to-face interaction in service encounters by not only looking at the functional role but also the dynamism of the service encounter. Hence this determines the significance to adapt Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role in this research that is further elaborated in the subsequent section.

2.5.3 SEB – The symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective of role

The most comprehensive conception of SI perspective of role to date is the posthumously published volume by George Herbert Mead on Mind, Self and Society in 1934. Before explicating Mead's concept of role, it is necessary to understand the perspective he takes i.e. symbolic interactionism. Although symbolic interactionism is also the theoretical perspective employed in this research and is discussed in further detail in the next chapter, this section briefly states the assumptions that underpin symbolic interactionism. After his demise, Mead's work was disseminated by his student Herbert Blumer and he stated that symbolic interactionism is grounded on three basic assumptions about human beings' distinctive characteristics Blumer (1969, p. 2):

- 'that human beings act toward things on the basis of the *meanings* that these things have for them';
- 'that the *meaning* of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows';
- 'that these *meanings* are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'.

The assumptions above indicate that in an interaction, individuals continually interpret the meaning and act on the basis these meanings have for them. Essentially, these meanings are attributed through their interaction i.e. the language or speech that facilitates the communicative process (Blumer, 1969). As they interact, they learn to see and respond to the meanings that are socially constructed (Sandstrom *et al.*, 2001) while modifying their own thought process. In essence, from the SI perspective, in an interaction, meaning, language and thought are the cornerstones of a symbolic interactionist (Mead, 1934). Hence, from the SI perspective, service encounters are social interactions where customers are brought into the service operation by directly interacting with service employees (Thompson, 1962; McCallum and Harrison, 1985). In each service encounter, customers are physically in the presence of service employees and the service encounter becomes the principal conduit through which resources are exchanged between the interacting parties (Mills and Morris, 1986). As they interact, they construct meaning and based on these meanings they interpret and modify their actions or SEB within the context of the service setting. In other words, both parties try to understand and represent their behaviour based on the meaning they construct out of their service encounter.

This means that an individual defines meaning for himself as well as the other individual's action. The definition of himself/herself as a specific role taker is in line with other's *expectations* in a given relationship, in what Mead (1934) calls 'me'. Once defined, the 'I' which is the perception of himself/herself as a whole takes on the task of making the self-role (role making) once the relationship is established to himself/herself. Mead (1934) distinguishes the 'I' and 'me' as follows: the 'I' is the *response* of an

individual to the behaviour of the others; the 'me' is the organised set of behaviour of others which one himself/herself assumes. The behaviour of the others constitute the organised 'me', and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'.

Thus, from the abovementioned assumptions, one can then understand Mead's SI perspective of role that refers to related meanings that guide and direct an individual's behaviour in a given *situation* (Hewitt, 1984). The central notion of SI in role is (1) role taking (the 'me'); (2) role making (the 'I') (Mead, 1934). The individual has parts of himself/herself (i.e. the 'me') which are reflections of his relationships with others, and which others can take the role of and predict fairly accurately how the individual (i.e. the 'I') is going to behave in the relationship (SEB). So the 'I', while personal (i.e. assigned by individual to himself/herself or making the self-role) is built on the individual's 'me' in relation to the expectations of others (i.e. taking the role of the other). It can be seen that the 'I' and 'me' are linked and are collaborators instead of opponents (Hewitt, 1984). For example, when a doctor takes on his/her role in a relationship, his/her pattern of behaviour is in relation to the pattern of behaviour of a patient. In fact, the role of a doctor makes no sense without the role of a patient (i.e. a dyadic perspective). The following section further elaborates on role making and role taking as collaborators.

2.5.3.1 Role expectation and role response as collaborators

As mentioned above, since the 'I' and 'me' are collaborators, they are inter-linked. The 'me' does not attempt to block the 'I' but organises and directs its activities. The relationship between the 'I' (self-conception) and the 'me' (taking the role of the other)

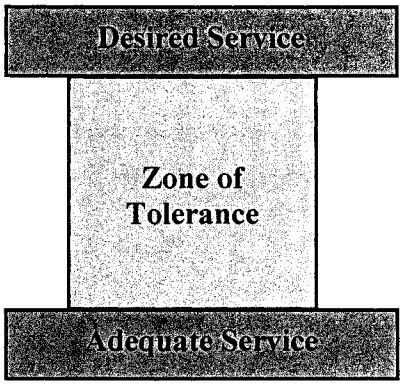
is not in conflict or massive forces pitted against one another for dominance over an individual, but fundamentally one of cooperation. For example, in an interaction, if what someone says is not understood, the individual is spontaneously moved to respond. So the *expectations* of others, as they are imagined by the individual (i.e. the 'me', taking the role of the other) determine the *response* (i.e. the 'I' to behave or respond or making the self-role). In an interaction, the 'I' and the 'me' continually alternate in ongoing behaviour which is influenced by the *role expectations* and *role response*.

Role-taking or *role expectation* is the process wherein the person imaginatively occupies the role of another (i.e. the 'me' or the role *expectation*) and looks at the situation from that vantage point. *Role-making* or *role response* is the process wherein the person constructs his or her own behaviour (i.e. the 'I' or the role *response*) in a situation so that it fits the definition of the situation, is consistent with one's own role, and meshes with the activity of others (Turner, 1962). Hence, these two processes are intimately linked. There can be no role-making without role-taking, for one cannot construct a role without occupying the perspective of the other and viewing self and *situation* from that vantage point. Thus, how an interacting individual constructs SEB is influenced to a great extent by the *expectation* from the other interacting individual in the defined situation. In the simplest sense, the role response of one of the interacting individual is shaped by the expectations of the other interacting party and those expectations are known through the act of role taking, thereby represented by appropriate role response through the act of role making.

The basic role response (i.e. role-making or the 'I') of interacting individuals is the behaviour of choice, or the process of choosing among alternatives (Naylor *et al.*, 1980). This is because thinking during service encounters is the process by which possible response, solutions and other future courses of SEB are explored, imagined or predicted by interacting parties for their relative advantages and disadvantages in terms of defined situation, role expectation and personal goals (Rose, 1962). The assessments can only be done through the use of human judgmental processes. Thinking is strictly a symbolic process because the alternatives explored are certain relevant meanings, and the exploration is made in terms of the individual's goals. In thinking, the interacting individual takes his/her own role to imagine himself/herself in various possible relevant situations. Thinking during service encounters is a kind of substitute for trial-and-error behaviour in that possible future SEB are imagined (as 'trials') and are accepted or rejected (i.e. as favourable or unfavourable service encounters). Dev and Olsen (1989) argue that the interacting individuals can rarely use a correct-incorrect criterion; rather they assess the appropriateness, propriety and convincingness of the interaction.

According to Rose (1962), thinking in service encounters is generally more efficient than actual trial-and-error SEB in that (a) imaginative trials usually occur more rapidly than SEB trials; (b) the interacting individual can select the best solution or future course of action known to him/her rather than merely the first successful solution; and (c) the interacting individual takes less risk in experimenting with trials that are likely to be dangerous. Through thinking during service encounters, interacting individuals bring the imagined or expected future into the present, so that present SEB can be a response to the defined situations and role expectations, and courses of action can be laid out into

the future. Thus, since purposeful service encounters require tasks to be completed where information exchange dominates, the role response of interacting individuals is the SEB of choice towards the completion of a task. The role expectation specifies the 'what' SEB is to be done which then guides the 'how' SEB is to be done, i.e. the role response. However, there is not always a corresponding or favourable response each time to each expectation. There can be incongruity in role expectations held by both interacting parties which affects the outcome/service encounter experience. Nevertheless, Woodruff and Cadotte (1987) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) suggested that there is zone for tolerance because customers' role expectations are characterised by a range of levels, bounded by desired and adequate service, rather than a single level. This tolerance zone (see Figure 2.4) representing the difference between desired role expectation and the level of role expectation considered to be adequate, can expand and contract within a defined situation.



Source: Zeithaml and Bitner (2000)

Figure 2.4: Zone of Tolerance

This implies that if role response exceeds what is desired or expected, customers will be very pleased and surprised which then leads to a favourable service encounter. On the other hand, if the role response that they received falls outside the range of tolerance, not

giving customers adequate service, the experience or outcome of the service encounter is unfavourable. Nevertheless, at times when customers do not get the service they expected or desired, they are still pleased as they consider the service to be adequate and the outcome is within the zone of tolerance. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) and Saxe and Weitz, (1982) this zone of tolerance will be widened if explanations are given and customers will be flexible to allow for restrictive circumstances. These explanations include collecting information about customer needs, detailing the process or procedures or helping by developing solutions that offer a range of alternatives.

From the discussions above, it has shown that self (the distinction between the 'I' and 'me') and behaviour is linked. Also it has pointed out that role expectations (role taking) and role responses (role making) are dependent on the situation of the service setting. In other words, in order to know how to role respond to the role expectation, the interacting parties need to define the situation of the service setting. Hence, defining the situation is one of the most important concepts to study to know how it is possible for SEB of interacting parties to be coordinated (McHugh, 1968) and this will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.3.2 Situation

According to McHugh (1968), the definition of the situation is a necessary component of *orderly* interaction. Failure of definition will cause failure in interaction. This is because SEB does not occur in a vacuum but in specific, concrete and well-known situations that present people with a familiar configuration of behaviour (Hewitt, 1984),

such as entering a PL's office, entering a doctor's examining room, dining in a restaurant, getting a haircut and others. Where a situation is familiar and its configuration of *meaning* is known, the interacting parties organise their own SEB and their expectations of others in relation to its definition. However, in situations where it is not clear who occupies what positions and plays what roles, the interacting parties turn their attention to figure out these matters. They decide who around them has *authority* over them, to whom they are supposed to address a question, as well as who they are in the eyes of others. In these situations, interacting individuals find themselves behaving without confident knowledge of the situation they are in and will first focus on establishing a definition.

So one of the major concepts symbolic interactionists make about SEB is that interacting individuals behave in relation to definition of situations (McHugh, 1968). A 'situation' is easier to write or tell about discursively than to define formally (Hewitt, 1988). For example, people speak commonly of this or that 'situation', signifying some particular event, incident, occasion or activity that is bounded by *space* and *time* (McHugh, 1968), within which the SEB takes place. Time is experience by both interacting parties where meanings are derived from interaction and space is to convey incidents that are located in geographical space or a situation experienced in a particular place distinguished from other meaningful places.

The importance of time and space in defining situation lies in the fact that SEB is an emergent property and is never absolutely fixed or established (Zeitlin, 1973). This explains the variability of role expectation in interaction process discussed in Section

2.5.3 and the zone of tolerance highlighted in Section 2.5.3.1. Also, it implies that at no point can one say that once the situation is defined, it is fixed. Though it has the same name, the meaning is transformed with the passing of time, i.e. it might be the same service encounter but the SEB transpired varies from one service encounter to another. What is happening 'now' is understood in relation to what has already occurred (i.e. past experience) and what is expected (or hoped) will occur later. At the same time the interacting individuals must be aware of their own role-making so that it can be adjusted to suit personal goals, the demands of the situation, and the role expectations of others.

Hence, the definition of situations enables the understanding of the 'what' and 'how' of SEB that can lead to favourable or unfavourable service encounters. Where a situation is defined and its role is known, the interacting parties organise their own response and their expectations of others in relation to its definition. So roles are the key *links* between SEB of interacting parties and the situation/service encounter in which they find themselves (Hewitt, 1984). Hence the concept of the definition of the situation stresses the fact that SEB does not occur in rootless way. Rather, SEB of interacting parties along with the role expectations, interpretations and response on which they are based on, are rooted in their cognition of the situations of which they are a part of. Thus SEB is influenced by the *situational definitions* and *situational roles* (i.e. the role expectation/the 'me' and role response/the 'I').

Moreover, this implies that SEB (role making and role taking) in defined situation is a self-conscious activity (Hewitt, 1988). In order to make an adequate role performance, i.e. one that others will interpret as appropriate and that will also be acceptable to the

one making it, there must be consciousness of self (i.e. the 'I'). The interacting individual must be aware of his or her own role performance in the making and this is where role-taking (i.e. the 'me') enters the picture. However, at the outset of a service encounter, SEB is initially unorganised and undirected until the role expectation (the 'me') gets underway to direct and organise the role response (the 'I') via the meaning constructed through the interaction. To be conscious of one's own role performance, one must have a way of conceiving it, and this is provided in concrete situations by assuming the expectation of the others.

So the definitions of situations, together with the role associated with them, provide interacting individuals with the knowledge of who is doing what, permits the interacting parties to make reasonably accurate predictions about the actual SEB of others (Hewitt, 1988). This is not to say of course, that interacting parties routinely catalogue all possible happenings in their minds before entering such service encounters, so that they are prepared for anything and everything. They do not, in fact, imagine everything that will take place, nor do they attempt to do so, nor could they do so. But they do entertain at least some ideas about what may occur, i.e. they imagine what is going to happen and they get ideas about what may happen from their knowledge of roles and situations.

In other words, when a situation is defined, roles (i.e. whether it is role-taking or role-making) provide interacting individuals with an organising framework that one can use to make a performance that will meet the needs of a particular situation. Each performance of a role has to be oriented to the particular expectations of the situation and to the SEB that are being constructed there (Hewitt, 1984). It has to be tailored to

meet particular conditions. Thus, there is no single script that provides all the required directions for action. The theatrical script emphasises the enacting of role prescribed has disregarded the peculiar conception of interaction which revolves about the improvising character of the 'I' and the continuing dialectic between 'I' and 'me' (Mead, 1934). Role-making thus becomes a very self-conscious activity in which the person is creatively engaged in making an appropriate role performance, not a blind activity in which a script is routinely enacted.

From the discussion above, it is clear that Mead's SI perspective of role speaks of role making and role taking, rather than role playing or role enactment, in order to stress two important aspects of the process (Hewitt, 1988). First, behaviour 'in role' is not always, nor seen very often, a matter of the routine enactment of lines in a *script*, where each action is well-known in advance and where there is little latitude in what one can say and do. From the SI perspective, roles may be looked at as packages of SEB in which each role is a large bundle of possible behaviours (i.e. criterion or means or principle or standard or decisive factor, as highlighted earlier, for the 'I' or role-making then to decide on what things to say and to do) in a given situation (Hewitt, 1988). However, the package is not something that dictates what one does under most circumstances. Rather it is something one uses in order to accomplish his/her purposes and coordinate his/her own behaviour with that of others.

In summary, from the discussion on SEB in the service literature and on Mead's SI perspective of role, the relevant points to note in understanding what SEB is from the SI perspective of role are:

- To be considered a service encounter as opposed to any other form of interaction, it is characterised by their purposiveness (i.e. goal orientated interaction) and not altruistic; prior acquaintance is not required (it allows strangers to interact) and task related information exchanges dominates (behaviour is bounded by roles assumed by interacting parties) (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985 in Section 2.4.1)
- *SEB is a form of human behaviour in face-to-face interaction in service encounters.* Service encounters are forms of human interaction. As stated by Czepiel *et al.,* 1985 in Section 2.4.2, to study of service encounter is to study the behaviour of interacting parties, labelled as service encounter behaviour (SEB) in this thesis.
- *In understanding human behaviour in service encounters, the content of speech is as much an aspect of behaviour as the act of speaking.* The concept of human behaviour includes not only the capacity for speech or the act of speaking but also the content of what is said. Moreover, it is this concept that is common to the special forms of behaviour which are called SEB (Kevin, 1970 in Section 2.5.1).
- *SEB are best thought of as 'taking the role of the other' and 'making the self-role'* (Mead', 1934). Central to this research is to look at how roles function normally (the actual point of contact) from SI perspective, i.e. the conception of normal role making (role response) and role taking (role expectations) as processes. As discussed in Section 2.5.3, SEB is influenced by the 'other-roles' or role-taking (the 'me' in *role expectation*) and the 'self-roles' or role-making

(the 'I' to *role response*). Both 'I' and 'me' are situational roles and are not opponents but collaborators, i.e. the 'me' organises and directs activities of 'I'.

- In order for the interacting parties to organise their role response and role expectations of others, they need to define the situation of the event in the service setting (McHugh, 1968). It is necessary for orderly interaction because SEB does not occur in a vacuum but in situations that influence the behaviour of the interacting parties (Hewitt, 1984). Failing to define the situation will cause failure in interaction. So SEB is not rootless and it is influenced by the situational definitions and situational roles (the role expectation/the 'me' and role response/the 'I') because roles are key *links* between SEB of interacting parties and the situation/service encounter in which they find themselves (Hewitt, 1984). Where a situation is defined and its role is known, the interacting parties interpret and organise their own response and expectation of others in relation to its definition.
- From the SI perspective, SEB is a two-way interpretive process and needs to be research from a *dyadic perspective* i.e. the *role expectation* and *role response* of both parties interacting in an *incident/situation*, which then determine the service experience.

Thus in understanding SEB from SI perspective of role, the meaning is anchored in situational definition and situational role and the meaning of SEB is neither fixed nor unchanging, but is determined in conduct as interacting individuals behave toward one another in a given situation. Interacting individuals are naturally active, seeking to

adjust themselves to circumstances and to alter circumstances to suit themselves in order to attain their goals in purposive SE. They do so within service encounters, each with its configuration of SEB influenced by situational definitions and situational roles (i.e. role-taking/the 'me'/role expectation and role-making/the 'I'/role response). Using Mead's SI perspective of role saw role expectation and role response as a process and not as a structure (Blumer, 1969) which is dependent on the definition of the situation.

The conceptual framework presented in this research has shown that SEB is indeed intricate and is important to influence the service experience of the interacting parties. Hence, more organisations are realising the importance of employees' SEB that shapes the service experience of customers. Yet, it is not always clear how to manage it as it is difficult to improve face-to-face service encounters without full understanding of the intricacies of SEB in a given service environment. Thus the significance of exploring SEB is crucial (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000; Bitner *et al.*, 1994; Bitner *et al.*, 1990) and it is noted that most of previous studies are conducted in the context of hotel, retail, bank, restaurant, airline, health services, but there is little research dealing with SEB in the context of HE especially programme administration, which is one of the educational services in HE institutions that involve high level of face-to-face service encounters. Hence this research attempts to fill in this gap to add to the body of knowledge in this area. The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the SEB in purposive service encounters between student and PL to demystify the intricacies of SEB in the different situations in programme administration. Taking a dyadic approach, this research gives more understanding of SEB for the purposes of

scholarly research and facilitating the management of service encounters as well as enhancing students' learning experience.

2.6 SEB in Higher Education (HE)

This section delineates the background to higher education (HE), the reason for the focus of programme administration (PA) in HE and the nature of services in PA in HE context.

2.6.1 Overview of the higher education (HE)

Long ago, formal education was available only to the few who had the time and money to pursue it as they are scarce and expensive. It was not necessary as growing up meant learning practical work skills from skilled elders. However, today, literacy is high, with almost everyone undergoing a process of formal schooling (Giddens, 2001). Qualifications from HE became one of the important criteria for job opportunities and career development. One of the main responsibilities of HE is to impart knowledge and skills that would improve the lives and work opportunities of graduates (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

Education is a top priority of the Malaysian Government and education as a whole comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MOE). This Ministry is responsible for establishing and setting in-place a comprehensive school system right from pre-school education to tertiary education at university level as well as regulating the operations of all schools and educational institutions. Children begin primary school

education at age 7 and enter into secondary school at the age of 13, enjoying free schooling for 11 years (for both primary and secondary school). These secondary school students complete their studies at the age of 17 by taking a public examination (i.e. Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia – SPM – that is equivalent to 'O' Levels) before progressing into pre-university studies (i.e. Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia – STPM – that is equivalent to 'A' Levels). Upon successful completion of pre-university studies, students advance to tertiary education in public universities (self-administered and government funded tertiary institutions) (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). However, due to the increasing demand for higher education, there are insufficient places in public universities to meet demand (Lee, 2004). Hence, this initiated the establishment of private colleges (owned by private sector) in Malaysia. They are distinct from the public universities as they are fully owned by individuals, private companies or public listed companies and there is no funding from the government. This means that apart from providing quality education to students, they are also concerned with the bottom line or the profitability of the institutions. Students pay minimal fee in public universities whereas they pay a full or high tuition fee in private colleges. Thus, students' expectations in private colleges are different from those that are in public universities as they expect better educational services (GETIS, 2000).

In 2005, there were 599 private HEIs in Malaysia and they compete to offer students a wide variety of study options and many selections of both local and foreign university qualifications to suit individual preference (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). Private HEIs conduct wide range of courses and award qualifications ranging from Certificates, Diploma and Degree qualifications. They conduct a wide range of courses which

include foreign university-awarded degree programmes (Bachelor's and Master's degree), pre-university courses, professional and semi-professional courses and English courses as well as internationally-rated internally developed diploma programmes. They also provide the most unique study opportunities where students have a range of choices of foreign degree qualifications to select from. Thus, students can opt to follow the British, American, Australian, New Zealand, etc. education system (GETIS, 2000; Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). In other words, students may pursue their studies in different education systems locally but they are bound by both the Malaysian and the Partner University's educational policy. This also means that private colleges operate within the regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) as well as the requirements of their Partner Universities. This is to ensure that students have similar learning experience compared to students in the home campus of Partner Universities. Thus the nature of the service encounter and learning experience of students in Malaysia are similar to other students in Partner Universities.

Besides competing between themselves, private colleges also face competition from foreign universities who have established their branch campuses in Malaysia. This is because Malaysia is poised to be at the centre of education excellence in the Asia-Pacific region where a majority of the institutions are using English as the medium of instruction for programmes conducted (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). Thus, besides offering study opportunities to local students, private colleges are also the favourite choice of many international students as they offer many different programmes and students are spoilt with choices. At the same time, in offering these programmes, private colleges are governed by the MOHE and are stringently governed by various

legislations (e.g. Education Act and Accreditation bodies) to ensure provision of quality education (Lee, 2001). Thus, the HE environment has undergone dramatic changes, in particular with the increasing demand in government's regulations and the assurance of quality standards (Yorke, 1999).

Thus, from the above, it can be seen that private colleges in Malaysia operates in a regulated environment and with intense competition. The HEIs have tried to apply service sector concepts and strategies to focus on students' needs. This shift has posed challenges to tertiary institutions as many still question the legitimacy of customer orientation (student orientation) and whether this commercial approach is well suited to HE as it is known traditionally for its fundamental function to increase knowledge and skills (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). However, as the demand for HE increases which is driven by expectations of its ability to improve the opportunities of graduates, the private HE sector in Malaysia is just another service industry operating within competitive markets and required management and strategies in their service to ensure its success in attracting students (Bassin, 1985; Huber, 1992). Therefore, they are customer oriented and at the same time, they need to strike a balance between meeting students' expectations and fulfilling their fundamental roles or responsibilities in transferring knowledge as well as adhering to the educational legislation to ensure quality education.

As the Malaysian HE industry matures and moving towards being a global education hub, service quality is essential for competitiveness and to differentiate among themselves, HEIs have introduced a wide range of programmes with different choices

and alternatives to suit the specific needs of students as well as supporting services to improve education quality or the learning experience of students (Kuh, 1993, 1995 and 1996). This is as emphasised by Wood (1993) that the ethos of the student environment has an impact on students' achievement. In other words, besides formal learning i.e. teaching and learning, which are frequently focussed in past research, other educational services such as programme administration (PA) also play an important role in students' learning experiences which are mostly neglected in previous studies and in which this research aims to focus.

2.6.2 Programme administration(PA) in higher education (HE)

Before illuminating the emphasis on programme administration (PA), it is useful to briefly highlight that initially administrative and teaching in HE are two separate issues in academic life (Birnbaum, 1992; Ewell, 1985). They assert that student learning outcomes commonly fall outside the administrator's function and administrators tend to set priorities on campus other than student learning. However, the work of Meyer and Rowan (1978 and 1983), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Weick (1976) highlighted that student learning is indirectly influenced by administrative work. Such conclusion stems from their findings that student environment does influence the learning experience of students.

This is because universities are made up of different schools or disciplines. Every school offers different programmes and if they are well administered, the benefits are two-fold: it contributes to learning experience of students and indirectly impact on

students' enrolment via good word-of-mouth communication (Hughes, 1988). PA is generally used in HE to describe a range of activities that are different from those of teaching and learning (Crosson, 1992). Programmes are known as courses or series of studies, lectures, etc. (Oxford Dictionary, 1992). The person who administer the programmes or courses offered in HE is usually known as programme leader (PL), head, manager or director (thereafter known as PL).

Generally the administrative activities carried out by a PL includes facilitating access to learning experiences by directing students to learning resources (such as computing facilities, library services, career and placement services), organising learning environments (e.g. giving advice in academic matters such as in subjects and career selections), and in larger or more complex HE institutions, may act as gatekeepers and mediators in the faculty-student relationship (Del Favero, 2002). These service encounters can take place in different modes (as mentioned in Section 2.4.2) such as direct personal encounter (face-to-face, where a student approached the PL in person), indirect personal encounter (through telephone or email) and remote encounter (mediated through technology e.g. online enrolment or application). However, as argued in Section 2.4.2, the face-to-face service encounter between the student and the PL is the core of educational service consumption with other modes of service encounter supplementing the overall delivery of educational services. Therefore, in line with Gronroo's (2000) and Woods' (1993) work, the services provided in these administrative activities further enhance the learning experiences of the students. The following section gives details about the nature of services in PA in HE context.

2.6.3 SEB in programme administration (PA) in HE context

From the above, it is noted that education can be classified as a service institution due to the types of services they offered. Its service is considered as intangibility-dominant (as illustrated in Figure 2.2 in Section 2.3.2). This is because the nature of service offered in PA is directed to students' minds rather than bodies via intangible actions and students themselves are the principal input to the service process. In order to consume services, students are direct recipients of the service and they usually have to be present at the time of service delivery (inseparability). It is primarily 'people based' rather than 'equipment based' (Thomas 1978) (as illustrated in Figure 2.3 in Section 2.3.4). Thus, due to the nature of how these PA services are delivered and consumed as well as its intangibility and inseparability, there is high variability in each service encounter as the nature of expectation of each student under different situations is unique.

This implies that the actual interaction juncture between students and PLs, i.e. service encounter, is when a student approaches a PL face-to-face and usually with a purpose or need (purposeful service encounter). As pointed out in Section 2.4.2, because services are intangible and as they are interactive in nature, students usually depend on the SEB of PLs when assessing the service encounter. Hence, the SEB in the face-to-face interaction between student-PL is a crucial component in the overall evaluation of service encounters.

So, when both the student and PL meet face-to-face in a service encounter, they talk of a particular situation, marking off a portion of time and space of an event, defining the

situation. For example, when a student enters a PL's office, he/she assumes that the PL is responding within his/her role as a PL and that the student will represent his/her role as student. This is a powerful set of assumptions; for it disposes the student to *interpret* whatever the PL does as an instance of his/her role. The PL's behaviour such as the things he/she asks the student to do, the questions he/she asks, the comments he/she makes, makes sense to the student because the student treats that behaviour as an illustration or instance of appropriate role behaviour (i.e. SEB that leads to *favourable* outcome). Obviously the student cannot treat everything the PL does in these terms, for it is always possible for people to fail in their roles or misinterpret expectations or incongruity in definitions of a situation (i.e. to behave in ways regarded as inappropriate, meaning SEB that leads to *unfavourable* outcome). On the other hand, if the PL is able to grasp the situation of which he/she is part of by assuming the expectations of student and response to the situation, it will lead to favourable outcomes.

Thus, defining situations is an important component before the PL is able to take the role of student, i.e. to predict the role expectation of student, in order to response to. Further, in responding, if a PL gives more than what the student desired or expected, he/she would have delighted the student (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). However, this is not the case at all times. When students' expectations are not fulfilled and fall out of their zone of tolerance, this will lead to an unfavourable service encounter. Yet, if the desired outcome is not fulfilled, but is adequate and within the zone of tolerance of students, they are flexible to allow for restrictive circumstances (as mentioned by Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003; Saxe and Weitz, 1982 in Section 2.5.3.1). For example, when a PL informs a student that he/she can only select subjects from group A and not group B

without giving any explanations, the student will attribute the restriction to the PL or the university and would not be happy with the outcome. Yet, if the PL explicated the restriction is due to the overlap of learning outcomes of certain subjects in group A and B, these explanations will help students understand the rationale behind the suggestion. Upon realising the restriction is not the fault of the PL or the university, the student's zone of tolerance will be widened and thus perceiving the role response to be acceptable. Hence, it can be seen that SEB is important to influence the outcome of the student's learning experience and that it is an emergent property. Favourable or unfavourable outcome/service encounter experience is the subjective evaluation of both student and PL. It is dependent on what is said during the face-to-face service encounter (the importance of the content of speech as mentioned by Kevin, 1970 in Section 2.5.1) and what is done (the role response of PL) within the service setting. In other words, it depends on the situational role (role responses of PL and role expectations of students) and the situation of the face-to-face interaction.

This implies that taking the perspective of both student and PL in a service encounter is useful to gain understanding of the intricate nature of SEB. Hence, the SI perspective is adopted to take a dyadic perspective (both student and PL) in a service encounter, in particular using Mead (1934) SI perspective of role. For example, when a student approached a PL, the defined situation will guide the situational role i.e. role taking (role expectation of student) and role making (role response of PL). The role each play is a way of relating to the other role in that particular situation. The role of PL makes no sense without the role of student. As emphasised by Mead (1934), service encounter is a two-way interpretive process. For example, when a student or a PL speaks of a

particular situation, he/she marks off a portion of time and space and gives it a particular label, i.e. defining the situation or incident. Both the student and PL can try to identify or grasp the situation of which they are part of by assuming the roles to be represented i.e. the PL in role taking tries to understand the role expectations of students and this directs the PL's role making to response accordingly to the defined situation.

So as mentioned by Hewitt (1984) in Section 2.5.3.2, the situational roles are key links between the SEB of student and PL in a given service encounter wherein they find themselves. Moreover, it also shows that the role taking and role making are collaborators in which student and PL takes their respective role. Hence, the relationship between the defined situations and the situated roles of students and PL is reflexive and is a self-conscious activity (as mentioned by Hewitt, 1988 in Section 2.5.3.2). As the student and PL interact, they continuously make their respective role based on the role expectations, interpretations and response to the defined situation. Hence in understanding SEB from SI perspective of role, the meaning is attached to situational definition and situational role and the meaning of SEB is not fixed but depending on the conduct of interacting individuals in a given situation.

In summary, to recap, in a purposeful service encounter (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985), SEB can be seen as a process of student and PL interacting at the point of contact, interpreting the situational definitions and situational roles to behave in specific ways. In other words, it is the process of naming the situation/service encounter, predicting the role expectation of the other interacting individual and behaving by role response to the defined situation. So, SEB is influenced by both situational definitions (McHugh 1968) and situational

roles which is Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role. Defining of situation/service encounter is illustrated as an intersection of meaningful time and space within which roles are taken and made towards a completion of a task. Service encounters are named so that students and PL can identify their role to be represented in defined situation. The 'what' SEB (the role expectations of students) guides the 'how' SEB (role response of PL) towards task completions where information exchange dominates. Hence it is argued that the SEB of both student and PL is important to determine the outcome, especially when the service encounters in PA is characterised by a high degree of face-to-face interaction. So, it is the aim of this research to study the SEB of student and PL from a dyadic perspective, seeking to understand the role expectations of students and role responses of PLs in different service encounters in PA. This is to demystify the intricacies in SEB which has meaning in different strands of service encounter where services are consumed. The ultimate objective is to develop a SEB guide to facilitate the management of service encounters in PA in HE.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework put together consist of concepts from several disciplines such as:

- The work of Czepiel *et al.* (1985) in the service literature on the description of service encounter and purposeful interaction.
- Adapting the concept of 'I' and 'me' by Mead (1934) from the social psychology discipline into the service literature.

- The concept of situation by McHugh (1968) in situational definition of a service encounter.

Pulling these literatures together, Czepiel *et al.* (1985) described that there are many forms of interaction and they conceptualised the forms of interaction considered as service encounter. This highlighted that service encounters are not any other interactions but purposeful where a task is to be completed. Also in completing these tasks the interacting parties are bounded by behavioural boundaries. These behaviours are bounded by roles assumed by interacting parties. The understanding of the roles they represent in service encounter is based on the work of Mead (1934) where he explained the relationship between the 'I' and 'me'. More specifically, taking the SI perspective he explicated that a service encounter is an interactive process where one take the role of the other (role taking) to direct the response (role making). This means that in a service encounter, an individual interprets the role expectation of the other to guide his/her role response in the service setting. Moreover, in order to response accordingly to role expectation, McHugh's (1968) work suggested that it is important to define the situation (situational definition). Therefore, in understanding SEB, it is important to know the situational definition and the situational role (role expectation and role response). In addition, the basic approach of SI in Mead (1934) enabled this research to study SEB from a dyadic perspective.

Also, from the review of past research in SEB, the researcher has identified gaps in the understanding of SEB which is worth further research.

- In past studies, research in SEB is predominantly conducted from the customer's perspective. Undoubtedly, understanding SEB from customer's perspective is important to satisfy customers, it is argued that the other side of the dyad's i.e. the contact employee's perspective is also as important since a service encounter is an interactive process. However, past research has often overlooked or one perspective of the interacting parties is of focus.
- Moreover, since past research has mainly concentrated on one perspective, they have looked into the 'what' of the SEB (a list of behaviour that contact employees are to have during service encounters) but not the 'how' of SEB (how contact employees can behave or response to the customer's expectations). Also, these studies are conducted objectively and they seek to simplify the multidimensional construct of SEB in terms of various component attributes to derive an objective assessment of SEB. While this approach has resulted in important findings, it may be limited in its ability to reflect the reality of SEB between the interacting parties. This is because they fall short to incorporate the inherent dynamism of experiencing SEB and to achieve a genuine understanding of the meaning of SEB during face-to-face encounters.
- Past research also revealed that SEB studies have been conducted in various service sectors such as hotel, retail, bank, restaurant, airline, health services, but there is lack research dealing with SEB in the context of HE especially in programme administration which involves a high degree of face-to-face interaction.

Hence, this research attempts to fill this identified gap in understanding SEB and add to the body of knowledge in this area.

- This research is set in the HE context as in the past, there are limited studies conducted in this sector, in particular programme administration (PA). It is argued that PA plays an important role in making up student's learning experience and it involves a high degree of face-to-face interaction.
- This research studies SEB from a dyadic perspective (from the student's as well as the PL's perspective). It is argued that in understanding SEB, not only student's perspective is sufficient but both student's and PL's perspective, i.e. a dyadic perspective, is equally significant. This aids the development of greater sophistication in services management to deal with SEB in face-to-face service encounters.
- By taking the dyadic perspective, this research not only studies the 'what' (what is expected in face-to-face service encounters?) but also the 'how' (how to response to the 'what'?) as well as explaining the 'why' or the underlying meaning to the 'what' and 'how' from a dyadic perspective.

Eventually, this research aims to develop a SEB guide to facilitate the management of service encounters in PA in HE. In order to achieve its objectives, this research has taken the social constructionist standpoint to understand the meaning students or PLs construct in a service encounter and adopting the interpretive paradigm embedded in symbolic interactionism, the researcher seeks to interpret these underlying meaning in their SEB. To facilitate individuals to recount the happenings of 'what' and 'how' SEB

that have taken place in their face-to-face service encounters, a method particularly suited to achieving this objective is the critical incident technique (CIT) i.e. collecting data on students' and PLs' SEB and their service experience in a situation or service encounter or incident (Flanagan, 1954; Chell, 1998). These are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodology and methods employed within research emerge from the nature of the research question (Merriam, 1998). The research *methodology* shapes the choice and use of *methods* and links them to desired outcomes. The *epistemology* inherent in the *theoretical perspective* lies behind the chosen methodology. In developing a research, considerable effort is required to think through philosophical issues. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2002) assert that failure to do so can seriously affect the quality of research outcomes. In response to this the researcher decided to employ Crotty's (1998) four elements i.e. *epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods*, to build this chapter and to justify the soundness of this research. As claimed by Crotty being clear about these four elements enables a penetrating analysis and points up the theoretical assumptions that underpin it and determine the status of its findings.

The epistemology and theoretical perspective are useful to clarify research designs and to provide good answers to research objectives explored in this research. Moreover, it can help the researcher to recognise which designs will work and which will not. It sets forth the epistemology and theoretical perspective by briefly outlining the reasons and arguments used by philosophers in seeking truth and reality. These philosophical issues have guided the methodology and methods employed in this research. This is also discussed in this chapter and their choices are justified as to why they are suitable to

help this research achieve its outcomes or objectives. More specifically, the research design and process as well as ethical issues are further discussed and detailed.

3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis (Hamlyn, 1995). It concerns the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline (Bryman, 2004) or is the way of understanding and explaining *how we know what we know* (Crotty, 1998). It is the ways of knowing and where knowledge is grounded in a discipline. Epistemology sits alongside ontology i.e. a study of human being; who the human being is; *what is* with the nature of existence; or the question of *how we view the world* (Blaikie, 1993; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Ontological and epistemological issues tend to emerge together. As the terminology has already indicated, the talk of *how we view the world* is to talk of *how we know what we know* (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology, also sometimes known as *research philosophy,* is concerned with providing the philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate (Maynard, 1994). Therefore the following paragraphs identify, explain and justify the epistemological stance the researcher has adopted. There is a range of epistemological positions and each is an attempt to explain how knowledge is known and to determine the status to be ascribed to the understandings reached (Crotty, 1998). These are *objectivism*, *constructionism* and *subjectivism*.

3.2.1 Objectivism

Objectivism is an epistemology that asserts truth and meaning reside in their objects independently of any consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Ontologically, meanings have an existence that is independent of individuals (Bryman, 2004). It implies that meanings confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence. Bryman (2004) used organisation as a tangible object that has rules and regulations. It assumes standardised procedures for getting things done. People are appointed to different jobs within a division of labour. There is a hierarchy with a mission statement and so on. The degree to which these attributes exist from organisation to organisation is variable, but this line of thinking assumes that an organisation has a reality that is external to the individuals who inhabit it. Additionally, the organisation signifies an order in that it exerts pressure on individuals to conform to the requirements of the organisation. In this objectivist view of 'what it means to know', understandings and values are considered to be objectified in the people one is studying and, if one go about it in the right way, one can discover the objective truth (Crotty, 1998).

3.2.2 Social constructionism

Social constructionism rejects objectivists' view of human knowledge as they believe that there is no objective truth waiting for one to discover. Truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of one engagement with the realities in the world. In the constructionist view, meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998) whereas Strauss *et al.* (1973) propose meaning as a 'negotiated order'. Instead of taking the view that order in organisation is a pre-existing characteristic, they argue that it is worked at.

It is an outcome of agreed-upon patterns of action that were themselves the product of negotiation between the different parties involved. The order is in a constant state of change because an organisation is a place where numerous agreements are continually being terminated or forgotten, but also continually being established, renewed, reviewed, revoked and revised. One does not create meaning but construct meaning. Order in organisations has to be accomplished in everyday *interaction* (Strauss *et al.*, 1973).

It should be noted different terms have been used to express social constructionism e.g. social constructivism is preferred by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Knorr-Cetina (1983). Irrespective of the terms used, they concur that there is no meaning without a mind and meaning is not discovered but constructed. The 'social' in social constructionism is about the mode of meaning generation, as the basic generation of meaning is always social, i.e. in an out of *interactive* human community (Crotty, 1998).

Hence, social constructionism is the epistemological stance this research takes. This is due to the nature of the research question in studying SEB, focussing on the service encounter or interaction when a student meets a PL. Also this research wants to find out how, through this interaction both student and PL construct meaning to represent their SEB (role expectation and role response) within the particular situation /interaction. This means that this research assumes that there is no objective truth but focus on the ways students and PLs make sense of the world through constructing and interacting their experience (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Watzlawick, 1984; and Shotter, 1993). It is this understanding of knowledge that this research concentrates in.

3.2.3 Subjectivism

The third epistemological stance is subjectivism i.e. meaning does not come out of interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject (Crotty, 1998). It is assumed that meaning is created out of something, i.e. people ascribe meaning to the object may come from dreams, planets, religious beliefs or collective unconscious. This means that meaning comes from anything *but* an interaction between the subject and the object. As this research is focussing on the face-to-face interaction, the actual point of contact during service encounter, this research believes that it is at the interacting juncture, meaning is constructed and not imagined.

Hence, the epistemology recognised in this research is social constructionism as it is the 'middle of the road' between objectivism and subjectivism and it is suitable to gain understanding of the subject matter (SEB) at hand. This research is neither seeking the objective nor the subjective truth but to explore the meaningful reality socially constructed in and out of interaction between students and PLs, as outcomes of this research.

3.3 Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical perspective is an *approach* to understanding and explaining society and the human world, and grounds a set of assumptions that researchers typically bring to their methodology of choice (Crotty, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe it as *paradigms* that represent belief systems that attach researchers to a particular world view. According to Polit and Hungler (1997) paradigms should be viewed as lenses that

help researchers to sharpen their focus on the phenomenon of interest – not as blinkers that limit our intellectual curiosity.

There is a variety of theoretical perspective approaches. The subsequent sections review a number of these approaches or paradigms and their relevance to this research. Further consideration was then given to identify the appropriate theoretical perspective to address the social constructionist epistemology that has been adopted by the researcher to address the research objectives of this study. By clarifying the theoretical perspective (i.e. the view of the human world and social life), the researcher is able to state the assumptions grounded in this research context.

3.3.1 Positivism

In the history of natural and social sciences, positivist approach encapsulates the spirit of research. There is a common string that starts with objectivism (as epistemology), passes through positivism (as theoretical perspective) and informing many of the methodologies articulated (Crotty, 1998). Positivism assumes the objective existence of meaningful reality. The key idea of positivism is that the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). To say that reality is external and objective is of course to embrace the epistemology of objectivism wherein positivism is objectivist (Crotty, 1998). From the positivist viewpoint, objects in the world have meaning prior to, and independently of, any consciousness of them.

This means that positivism is grounded in a number of assumptions (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2002): *independence* – the observer must be independent from what is being observed; *value-freedom* – the choice of what and how to study it can be determined by objective criteria rather than by human beliefs and interests; *causality* – the aim of social sciences should be to identify causal explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour; *hypothesis and deduction* – science proceeds through a process of hypothesising fundamental laws and then deducing what kinds of observations will demonstrate the truth or falsity of these hypotheses; *operationalisation* – concepts need to be operationalised in a way which enables facts to be measured quantitatively; *reductionism* – problems as a whole are better understood if they are reduced into the simplest possible elements; *generalisation* – in order to be able to generalise about regularities in human and social behaviour it is necessary to select samples of sufficient size, from which inferences may be drawn about the wider population; *cross-sectional analysis* – such regularities can most easily be identified by making comparisons of variations across samples. This is the objectivist *understanding of meaning* and the positivist *understanding of reality.*

Although positivism has been widely used in past research, it is seen to be not suitable in this research as this research cannot be conducted objectively and it is not interested to study the cause and effect of a service encounter, but the meaning individuals construct out of the interaction. Moreover, the researcher believes that the outcomes of this research cannot be quantified and deduced but needs to be looked at qualitatively where outcomes emerge from the data collected (this is further explained in Section 3.4). The outcomes of this research cannot be simplified and generalised as SEB is situated within

the context it is found and details of the settings is important to further its understanding. Hence, positivism is not appropriate in this research but another theoretical perspective that is directly in contrast with the assumptions of the positivist is considered i.e. interpretivism.

3.3.2 Interpretivism

Interpretivism emerged in contradistinction to positivism in understanding human and social reality. The interpretivist approach, in contrast, looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism would view reality as not a fixed entity but rather a construction of the individuals participating in the research where reality exists within a context and many constructions are possible.

The essence of interpretivism is that reality is determined by people rather than by objective and external factors (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Thus the task of researchers should not be to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience. The focus should be on what people, individually and collectively, are thinking and feeling, and attention should be paid to the ways they communicate with each other, whether verbally or non-verbally. One should therefore try to understand and explain why people have different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain their behaviour. Human action arises from the

sense that people make of different situations, rather than as a direct response to external stimuli (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002).

Interpretivism is based on a number of assumptions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002): *the observer* is part of what is being observed; *human interests* are the main drivers; *explanations* are aim to increase general understanding of the situation; *research progresses through* the gathering of rich data from which ideas emerged; *concepts* should incorporate stakeholder perspectives; *units of analysis* may include the complexity of 'whole' situations; *generalisation* can be made through theoretical abstraction; and *sampling requires* small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons. It is worth noting that these assumptions are not simply the view of a single philosopher; they are a collection of points that have come to be associated with the interpretivist viewpoint (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). In addition, *interpretivists* are interested to arrange talks with individuals participating in the service encounter and would attempt to gather stories about incidents that they had experienced as favourable and unfavourable. An interpretivist researcher appreciates the different constructions and meanings that individuals place upon their experience.

This main focus of this research is to study the behaviour of students and PLs to gain understanding of their SEB. This is because they are the immediate or interacting parties involved and through their interpretation of the situation and role, they recount the event or service encounter, giving details or rich data of the context of service setting. Each service encounter is treated as unique due to the intangibility and variability and the researcher seek to interpret the different meaning students and PLs

have constructed in these situations. According to Bryman (2004) there are three interpretative levels i.e. the researcher is providing an interpretation of others' interpretations (double interpretation) and the researcher's interpretations in terms of the conceptual framework of this research. Hence, the researcher acknowledges her role when gathering these stories about the service experience of students and PLs and this will be address to in Section 4.8.4.

Within the broad rubric of interpretivism there are three strands (Crotty, 1998):

- *Hermeneutics* is a method for deciphering indirect meaning, a reflective practice of unmasking hidden meanings beneath apparent ones (Kearney, 1991). They view text as means of transmitting meaning – experience, beliefs and values – from one person or community to another (Crotty, 1998). Reading a text is very much like listening to someone speak. Speakers use words to express their thoughts and listeners are able to understand because they share the language that a speaker employs. They know the words, phrases and sentences that they are hearing and they understand the grammatical rules. On this basis, they are able to put themselves in the place of the speaker and to recognise what the speaker is intending to convey. There is a kind of empathy in the *speaker-listener interchange* and is extended to the interpretation of texts (Crotty, 1998). For Dilthey (1976), the texts humans write, the speech they utter, the art they create and the actions they perform are all expressions of meaning.

- *Phenomenology* is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular researchers should bracket out *preconceptions* in his or her grasp of that world (Bryman, 2004). It requires

individuals to engage with and make sense of the phenomena in his/her world directly and immediately. Thus, phenomenologists are interested in the immediate, original data of one consciousness or in simple term it refers to *what one directly experience*. It drives phenomenological endeavour to go 'back to the things themselves' (Crotty, 1998).

- *Symbolic interactionism* suggested that interaction takes place in such a way that the individual is continually interpreting the symbolic *meaning* of his or her environment (which includes the actions of others) and acts on the basis of this imputed meaning. Because people use and rely upon symbols, they do not usually respond to stimuli in a direct or automatic way. Instead they give meanings to the stimuli they experience and then act in terms of these meanings.

It is difficult to differentiate the three strands above as they overlap with considerable commonalties. They are considered as three historical streams that have borne interpretivism along. Of the three, this research place its focus on interpretivism embedded in symbolic interactionism. However, it needs to be highlighted that this does not mean that hermeneutics and phenomenology are rejected. As mentioned in the previous chapter in Section 2.5.1, hermeneutics (the contents of speech) and phenomenology (the recounting of event by the interacting parties – students and PLs – who have directly experienced the service encounter) are important components to the understanding of SEB but the main focus of this research is on the actual point of contact i.e. the interaction or the moment of truth, thereby placing concentration in symbolic interactionism, which is further explained in the following paragraphs.

3.3.3 Interpretivism embedded in symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism originated from the work of Mead (1934) but this term is coined by one of his students, Blumer (1969) after Mead's demise. It is based on three assumptions Blumer (1969, p. 2):

- 'human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them';
- 'the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows';
- 'these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'.

These assumptions serve as the cornerstones of the symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective which can be summarised as *meaning*, *language* and *thought* (Mead, 1934). They rely heavily on *language* and the communicative processes it facilitates. Blumer (1969) believes *meaning* is negotiated through the use of language. In essence, they learn to see and respond to symbolically mediated 'realities' – realities that are socially constructed (Sandstrom *et al.*, 2001). People's interpretation of symbols is modified by their own *thought* process (Mead, 1934). In research terms, according to Blumer (1962), the position of SI requires researchers to interpret the process of interpretation through which individuals construct their actions.

Another implicit assumption that informs and guide SI is people act toward situations (Hall, 1972). They build up and construct behaviour based on the meaning they attribute

to the situation in which they find themselves. This meaning or situation emerges out of interaction with others. That is, they determine what meaning to give to a situation and how to act through taking account of the unfolding intentions, actions and expressions of others. As they negotiate and establish a meaning or situation, they also determine what goals they should pursue. People are purposive in their thoughts and actions. They select lines of behaviour based on the presumption that these will lead to anticipated outcomes and desired goals (Sandstrom *et al.*, 2001). This is not to say that people are always accurate in appraising the consequences of their chosen actions. In acting purposefully, they do not necessarily act wisely or correctly. Additionally, as they interact with others and create lines of action, they do not always pursue goals in a clear-cut or single-minded way. Once they begin acting, they encounter obstacles and contingencies that may block or distract them from their original goals and direct them toward new ones. Hence people actively shape their behaviours as they make plans, seek goals and interact with other in specific situations (Sandstrom *et al.*, 2001).

This research is sited in the interpretive paradigm embedded in symbolic interactionism that is thoroughly social constructionist in character. Different individuals i.e. students, PLs, participating in a service interaction construct *meanings* or SEB in different ways even in relation to a same event/incident. The individuals are continually interpreting the SEB they experience during service interactions and then act in terms of these imputed meanings. SEB as explained in the Chapter 2 denotes the observable activities which imply not only the act of speaking but the content of what is said (*language*). Words or content of speech is as much an aspect of service behaviour as the act of speaking in terms of *thoughts*. Students and PLs, construct meaning out of their

interaction thereby interpreting their role expectations and role responses in a defined situation. As they interact, they define the situation and the situational roles to be represented that reflect their purpose of the interaction, thoughts and actions. These constructions of meanings shape their SEB as they interact with the other in specific situations. Therefore, the multiple realities constructed are based on the time they encounter the situation; it is their reality and it is the intention of this research to interpret these realities from students' and PLs' perspective i.e. from a dyadic perspective.

Thus, it is the social constructionist *understanding of meaning* and the interpretivist *understanding of reality* embedded in symbolic interactionism wherein this research is rooted. Truth and *meaning* comes into existence in and out of interaction i.e. meaningful reality is socially constructed. These are the assumptions wherein this research is rooted in and these drive the choice of methodology in response to the nature of the research objective.

3.4 Methodology – Qualitative Case Study

Methodology is the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998). Leedy (1989) explains methodology as an operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly. Quantitative and qualitative research can be taken to form two distinctive clusters of methodology (Bryman, 2004). Quantitative research can be construed as a

research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data. By contrast, qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasises *words* rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002; Saunders *et al.,* 2003; Bryman, 2004).

Quantitative research entails a deductive approach (i.e. moving from theory to data), incorporates positivism in particular and embodies a view of reality as external (i.e. objective reality). Whereas, qualitative research predominantly emphasises an inductive approach (i.e. theory would follow data), rejecting positivism in preference for ways in which individuals interpret their world and embodies a view of reality as constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman, 2004).

Due to the nature of this study, this research adopts a qualitative methodology because the researcher is interested in the narratives or stories of students and PLs that form the data for this research. More specifically, the focus is in the service encounter experience of students and PLs and this means that this research is of a qualitative nature where its data collection methods and analysis approach are inductive to allow detail exploration of students' and PL's SEB when they recount their experience (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Hence, to achieve the outcomes of this research, the researcher believes that they cannot be quantified but rather through gathering data from individuals relating their experience in service encounters. Moreover, this is in line with the epistemological position this research has taken i.e. social constructionism which concentrates on the different constructed meanings of students and PLs in the service encounter and it is the

aim of the researcher to try to interpret these underlying meanings of their SEB (mentioned in Section 3.2 and Section 3.3).

There is a range of methodology that may be employed: experiment, survey, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, action research, etc. In this research, the case study has been employed as it is an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003). Case studies are often sites for the employment of either quantitative or qualitative research. However, from the argument above, this research employed the qualitative case study to help generate an intensive and detail exploration of a case (Bryman, 2004).

The case study has been employed because experiment as a methodology is one of the key elements of scientific method and are often an essential item of the positivist paradigm (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). The methodology that stands in direct contrast to experimental design is *ethnography* which is firmly rooted in qualitative or inductive approach and emanates from the field of anthropology (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). Ethnography has not been considered in this research because it calls for a detailed description, analysis and interpretation of the culture and social structure of a social group (Robson, 2002). It requires a researcher to immerse in a social setting for some time in order to observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group (Bryman, 2004). The purpose is to interpret the social world the research subjects inhabit in the way in which they interpret it. This is obviously a methodology that is very time consuming and takes place over an extended time period

(often many years) (Robson, 2002). Some writers suggested micro-ethnography (Bryman, 2004) or mini-ethnography (Robson, 2002) seeking to cut the extended time period down drastically, but this creates a tension with the requirement to develop an intimate understanding of the group (Robson, 2002). Hence, the researcher has chosen the case study as a methodology that provides intermediate positions between the two extremes of experimental research and ethnography (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002).

Case study is the development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single case or a small number of related cases (Robson, 2002). According to Morris and Wood (1991) the case study methodology will be a particular interest to any researcher if one wishes to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted. Since this research is interested to gain rich understanding of the SEB of students and PLs, considering their situational role (role expectations and role responses) in the defined situation, employing case study appear to be an appropriate methodology to capture all the important essentials to study SEB, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful individuals' SEB (Yin, 2003).

In essence, the case study looks in depth at one or a small number of organisations (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Since this research is studying the different service encounters that have occurred in PA i.e. the different occasions where a student approached a PL, it is in fact using a multiple case design. Additionally the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriott and Firestone, 1983).

A *case* can be virtually anything – individual, organisation, institution, school, group, community, neighbourhood, project, innovation, decision, service, programme and many other things. Every case in this research is the particular service encounter recounted by each participant i.e. either the student or the PL. The criteria used to define or select a case is based on (a) it needs to be a face-to-face interaction between a student and a PL; (b) the service encounter needs to be purposeful as stated by Czepiel *et al.* (1985) as mentioned in Section 2.4.1 i.e. for some reasons or a specific need; and (c) these service encounters need to be programme related matters. The data collection methods employed in case study methodology may be various. They may include questionnaire, interview, critical incident technique, observation or focus group. Next section discusses the method utilised in this research.

3.5 Method – Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

Qualitative case study methodology subsumes several diverse research methods. Methods are the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data dependent upon the research methodology and related to research objective (Crotty, 1998). In this research, the critical incident technique (CIT) (Chell, 2004) is the method utilised to collect data.

CIT has its origin in the method used by Flanagan (1954, p. 327). He defined CIT as:

> *...a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. The critical incident technique outlines*

procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria. By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects.

CIT as a research method is well known and has been used in many government, business, industrial and educational research projects, doctoral dissertations, professional papers, etc (Fivars and Fitzpatrick, 2004). The Critical Incident Technique Bibliography (CITBib) is a database covering more than fifty years of research on the development and use of CIT as a research method (Fivars and Fitzpatrick, 2004). The pertinent point is that CIT as a research method is well established and recognised to yield a rich data set. Initially CIT was first used in scientific study more than a half century ago (Flanagan, 1954). Since then, it has been developed further as a qualitative method in organisational analysis from a social constructionist epistemology cited in the interpretive paradigm (Chell *et al.,* 1991; Chell and Adam, 1994a, 1994b; Chell, 1998; Chell and Pittaway, 1998; Pittaway and Chell, 1999; Pittaway, 2000; Chell, 2004). This means that CIT may be used within either paradigm and that is the uniqueness of CIT method (Chell, 1998). In addition, CIT may be used in case study research and is more often used in multi case designs (Chell, 2004). From this, using CIT is consistent with the philosophy and paradigm of this research as well as its methodology.

CIT has in common with observation and interview the fact that they are all examples of qualitative techniques used by researchers to 'get closer to the subject' (Bryman 1989) but for the purpose of this research, they have their limitations. The limitation of observation, especially participant or overt observation (where participants are aware of being observed) is individuals may not feel comfortable with the presence of the researcher and may not reveal their normal SEB in the service setting. Moreover, one of the key and yet most difficult steps in participant observation is gaining access to a social setting that is important for this research (Bryman, 2004). On the other hand, covert observation raises ethical issues and it presents difficulties of recording observations (Chell, 2004). As for interviews, the limitation is that they are sometimes used to provide answer to several questions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). However, this is not the intention of the research as it requires participants to focus on a typical incident or a specific service encounter when a student approaches a PL.

Therefore, to be more specific, this research is using CIT interview as a method to collect data. This is because CIT interview facilitates the investigation of critical incidents, events, processes or issues, recalled by the participant. By an incident it is defined as discrete and separate occurrence but a critical incident is an event that individuals perceived as noteworthy and which is remembered (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). The critical incidents represent a *window* to gain understanding of the reasons behind critical incidents as individuals usually reflect on what happened, the way the incident was managed and its outcomes. The aim is to gain understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, including their behaviour (Chell, 1998).

Further, particularly in the service research literature, the current approach is to focus on service encounters and CIT has been the most frequently used method employed to study moments of truth (Edvardsson and Roos, 2001). In addition, critical incidents, defined as interaction incidents, which the customer perceives or remembers as unusually positive or negative when asked about them, have been used extensively in services management literature (Bitner, 1990; Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). CIT has often been used in research in consumer markets as it allows in-depth descriptions of critical incidents to investigate a variety of related issues including assessing favourable and unfavourable incidents in the service encounter: from customers' perspectives (Bitner *et al.*, 1990); employees' perspectives (Bitner *et al.*, 1994); to determine customer reactions to product failures (Folkes,1984); to develop waiter-waitress training programs (Goodman, 1979); to develop typology of retail failures and recoveries (Kelley *et al.,* 1993); to determine sources of communication difficulties in service encounters (Nyquist *et al.*, 1985); to identify events that detract or augment customers' service experiences (Grove and Fisk, 1997); to investigate self-gifts (Mick and DeMoss, 1990a, 1990b); to study impulse purchases (Rook, 1987); and to understand customer perception with regard to shopping at the retail chain (Wong and Sohal, 2003). The CIT has been also used to identify critical incidents included in different stages of a service delivery process (Strandvik and Liljander, 1994), to study the categories of critical incidents causing customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Johnston, 1995), and to examine the categories of interactions between the customer and the use of modern technology (Mattson, 2000).

Hence, it can be seen that CIT is an established method and has been used in past research, especially in the area of service literature. In this research CIT interview is employed because it can help to explore participants' (students' and PLs') SEB in an interaction. This method can facilitate participants to focus on a particular incidents or a particular time when they (student and PL) meet. Usually, the service encounters that are recounted are occasions that are important or for a specific purpose or need. By focusing on critical incidents, students or PL can recount the constructed realities via depending or can hook or can hang their accounts to a service encounter (Strauss, 1959). This helps the researcher to generate insights into how participants see or interpret their world which is also consistent with social constructionism and the paradigm of this research i.e. interpretivism embedded in symbolic interactionism. Thus it is basically participants' voices that the researcher is after. CIT enables the researcher to elicit verbatim stories/accounts which can yield a rich data set to explore the SEB from the individual's own words and perspective. As participants recount these service encounters, they can explain why the service encounter has taken place, what happened in the service encounter, what was done by both parties, how they felt and etc. This enables researcher to drive home unambiguously useful and rewarding interpretations of emergent themes in the realm of SEB.

Clearly, the main advantage of the CIT method is that it generates detailed process descriptions (contents of speech) of critical incidents as individuals construct meanings (the role expectation and role response). Individuals have opportunities to describe critical incidents in their own words, in their time and space (as discussed in Section 2.5.3.2). Through reiterate the critical incidents, individuals often enjoy the experience

and find it useful because they have the opportunity to reflect and review (Chell, 1998). When individuals focus on critical incidents, it puts the individuals' definition of what is significant at the forefront (Strauss, 1959). Unlike interviews, CIT method allows the researcher to focus on the nature of the research to probe pertinently and which the individual can concentrate on – a 'hook' upon which they can 'hang' their accounts (Chell, 1998, p. 55). As in this research, the 'hook' that individuals can 'hang' their account is the service encounters or the occasion when the interacting parties meet. With the 'hook' established, individuals are probed appropriately and the benefits of getting rich data of verbatim verbal accounts of individuals SEB can help to answer the research objective. The data derived from the CIT interview is descriptive but provides insights into the individual's SEB and the outcomes of behaviour in certain situations.

On the other hand, one disadvantage of CIT is that the accounts are always retrospective but the fact that the incidents are 'critical' means that individuals usually have very good recall (Chell, 2004). Moreover, remembering and recalling a particular event is subjective (Chafe and Nichols, 1986) and therefore this imposed difficulties involved in gaining access to the other interacting party who was present during the incident. However, adapting the approach used by (Brown and Swartz, 1989) the researcher tries to match the CIT accounts according to the nature of the service encounter or the similarity of the defined situation.

The CIT method requires the interviewer to have a sound understanding of the conceptual framework involved, to understand the areas which need further probing and to be able to adapt the questioning to a particular participant. Hence, based on the

conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 and the research objective in mind, the following section explicates the research design of this research.

3.6 Research Design

As stated by Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (2002), research design helps researchers to organise research activities so as to achieve the research aims. Therefore, this section discusses some of the considerations and issues when designing this research. In doing so, the research objectives, its conceptual framework and philosophical stance are considered.

3.6.1 Design of interview questions

An interview guide refers to a brief list of memory prompts (Bryman and Bell, 2003) or somewhat more structured list of issues to be addressed or open-ended questions to be asked during the interview. In this research, a CIT interview guide is prepared (see Appendix 1) to give some degree of structure to the CIT interview process so that the subject matter could be covered more inclusively. At the same time, it also allows some flexibility to allow room for the researcher to pursue pertinent topics as attuned to the unfolding events revealed by participants (Bryman, 2004).

What is essential is that the questions designed allow the researcher to glean ways in which participants view, interpret and understand the meaning they construct in the service encounter and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the CIT. Some basic elements that have been considered in the preparation of the CIT interview guide are: the flow of the questions; questions that help to answer the research objectives; and

questions that help probing. These questions are designed to encourage participants give views on their service experience. The questions focus on what happened and how it happened and why it has happened that way so that the researcher can gain understating of the situational definition and situational role (role expectation of students and role response of PLs) in the service encounter.

In fact, the questions designed are based on the conceptual framework of this research i.e. McHugh's (1968) situational definition and Mead's (1934) perspective of situational role. However, the researcher has consciously avoided using jargon in these service literatures so that students and PLs can comprehend the issue at hand. Hence simple terms such as what is the purpose of the service encounter, what did they expect the PL to help them, what were their reaction or response, what did they do and how they felt. Moreover, since this research is taking the SI perspective to study SEB in a dyadic perspective i.e. from the students' and PLs' perspective, every service encounter is a case. Two sets of similar questions are prepared (see Appendix 1) so that CIT accounts or cases can be matched (as mentioned in Section 3.5) and the multiple case design enabled the researcher to do a cross-case comparison to yield a more comprehensive outcome and a higher level of analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

3.6.2 Pilot study

The questions in the CIT interview guide were then piloted in order that it is comprehensible and relevant to participants. The changes that were made to the CIT interview guide were: the flow of some questions have been further refined; a brief

explanation of the purpose of this research and the rationale of the CIT interview were included; and jargon was replaced by simple terms to enable participants to grasp the matter at hand.

Moreover, the researcher has also learned some of the terms used in each respective HE institution in order to speak 'the language' used in participants' context. For example, the different terms used to call PLs such programme leader, programme director or coordinator; the different terms used by different universities for credit transfers or exemptions. The pilot study has provided feedback that the CIT is useful to aid the focus of attention to a particular service encounter and has indicated that this method can help to elicit the SEB of the interacting parties. In addition, the pilot study has provided the researcher with experience of using CIT and can infuse with greater sense of confidence when used to elicit verbatim stories from participants.

3.6.3 Sampling

As recommended by most writers to researchers conducting qualitative research (Chell, 1998; Bryman and Bell, 2003; Bryman, 2004; Chell, 2004) purposive and snowball sampling are usually suggested. For this research, individuals are targeted using *purposive and snowball sampling.* Purposive sampling is essential as an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research objectives and sampling whereas snowball sampling helps to trace additional participants using the participants identified (Bryman, 2004).

In purposive sampling, the researcher has made contacts with PLs in HE institutions that have granted access. Through the PLs, students and other PLs are identified, thereby creating the snowball effect. When meeting the PLs, the researcher has explained the criteria used to select students for this research i.e. students needs to be enrolled in the Business degree programme, they need to have approached the PL on programme matters, if possible students from different level of studies are sought e.g. Year 1, 2 or 3 students. Overall, 42 participants from four HE institutions were identified (26 students and 16 PLs) and there were representation of students from all level of studies.

As for the sample size, qualitative research often requires small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). However, with 42 participants recounting 63 service encounters, this is a considerable sample size for qualitative research as Warren (2002) remarked that for a qualitative interview study to be published the minimum number of interviews required seems to be between twenty and thirty. Considering it is likely to vary somewhat from research to research, the researcher believes that the most important is not only the number of the participants but the quality of data that can support convincing conclusions.

3.7 Research Process

Research process is the logical sequence that connects data to the research objective and ultimately to its conclusions (Yin, 2003). This section details the research process of this research i.e. how the CIT interviews were conducted or how the data were collected. As mentioned above, this research has targeted four private colleges in Malaysia.

Initially, the researcher has tried to gain access to these HE institutions through getting in touch with personal contacts which then introduce the researcher to the management. At this juncture, the purpose of this research and its implication or benefit was highlighted. Also, assurance was given that information will be treated confidentially. Upon this brief discussion, a formal letter (see Appendix 2) was sent to the management to seek approval and consent for this research to be conducted. Once access was gained, the management communicated to the relevant parties i.e. the Dean of schools and PLs about this research.

When meeting the PLs, the researcher has once again explained the details of this research and stressed that data will be treated with confidentiality. Once the PL has given consent to participate in this research, his/her help was sought to identify relevant students for this research based on the criteria mentioned in Section 3.6.3. Upon identifying students and PLs as well as obtaining verbal consent from both parties, appointments were set for interviews to get underway. Before the interviews, preliminary investigative work was conducted to collect some general descriptive information about the relevant programmes and its code of conduct e.g. student handbook, programme brochures and etc. to familiarise the researcher with the setting in which participants recounted. As suggested by Bryman (2004), these data are important to provide an account of participants' context or setting.

During the interview, the researcher tried to make sure as far as possible that the CIT interview is conducted in a setting that is quiet and with minimum interruption. Then the interview started by the researcher thanking participants for their verbal consent in

taking time for the interview. This is followed by a brief and concise explanation of the nature of the research and the CIT interview as well as confidentiality issues (see Appendix 1). Then the researcher seeks permission to record the CIT interview and if participants refused, then note taking is used. However, all participants have given their consent for the CIT interview to be recorded. The CIT interviews were recorded to facilitate data analysis so that participants' accounts can be captured in their own terms. Once assurances of confidentiality and anonymity have been given, the participant usually relaxes and is able to recount his or her story (Chell, 2004).

Then preliminary questions (see Appendix 1) are asked to break the ice and to get information on participants' profile such as name, the programme the student is studying, the level of their studies or for the PLs, what does their job involves or how long have they been a PL years of experience in a position. This is useful for contextualising participants' answers and helped participants to feel comfortable and take it more like a conversation, thus establishing trust and confidence. Subsequently, the researcher asked participants to recount a situation or a time that students have approached PLs to 'hook' or 'hang' his or her account. As they relate their stories or incidents, they focus their attention in a specific time and space. Follow up questions such as what is the purpose of the service encounter and what was the issue or problem aided participants to recall and to draw out the situational definition. Then questions such as what happened, what did the student expect and why, how the PL responded, what was the outcomes and how they felt helped to jog the memory of participants and to elaborate their answers. This facilitated the researcher to elicit the role expectation and the role responses of the SEB.

The main purpose and the key questions of the CIT interview are to understand how participants construct the meaningful reality of their situation. It is an opportunity to gain insights into participants' SEB. Failure to achieve this would in a superficial exchange of information, which could have been better achieved via a semi-structured questionnaire. Hence, the CIT interview guide is critical but it needs to be highlighted that it is used as a guide to steer conversations rather than structured queries. The CIT interview questions were not followed on exactly in the way outlined in the CIT interview guide. Questions that are not included in the guide were sometimes asked when the researcher picked up on things said by participants. In other words, although the researcher is pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, the actual stream of questions is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This means that throughout the CIT interview, the researcher followed the line of inquiry as reflected in the CIT interview guide and at the same time asked actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the line of inquiry. So, using CIT interview guide during the interview require the researcher to operate on two levels at the same time i.e. satisfying the needs of the line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth friendly and non-threatening questions allowing the views of the participants to become known (Yin, 2003).

Moreover, the researcher listened attentively to participants' stories so as to allow further probing questions to ensure that essential details are obtained. This helped the researcher to *understand* what participants were saying in their own terms. From time to time as patterns or uncertainties arise from the interview, the researcher checked by summarising what has been said. This has been presented as a way of seeking

clarification and is a way of safeguarding against the researcher assuming too quickly that understanding has been achieved. It is an opportunity for the researcher to probe appropriately to uncover new pointers, open up new dimensions of an issue and to secure accurate accounts that are based on participants' experiences. The probes in the CIT interview guide helped the researcher to sharpen-up participants' response. Above all offering flexibility and allowing the words of the participants to become known is the underlining purpose of the CIT interview.

Nevertheless, the researcher is aware not to interrogate participants or dominate the conversation but seeks to balance between talking too much and too little except to clarify and extend meanings of participants' accounts without imposing meaning on them. Furthermore, leading probes are consciously avoided. Hence a balance must be obtained between interrogating and probing which is essential to gain genuine understanding of another person through language. Above all it is essential to be perceptive and sensitive to events, so that lines of inquiry can be changed and adapted as the CIT interview progresses.

When there is a closure to participants' incident or story, the researcher has asked them to recall another incident. Overall, each participant has at least recounted one incident and some have recalled more than one. Towards the end of every CIT interview the researcher often thanked participants for their participation, time and valuable stories. Once again the researcher assured participants that any information revealed is treated with confidentiality and anonymity. It is worthy to note some participants continue to chew over the topic of interest even after switching off the recording device. In

managing unsolicited or uncalled-for accounts, the researcher took notes while the participant is talking and usually it tends to reveal interesting views.

Short notes were written after each interview: how the interview went (was participant helpful, quiet, talkative, nervous, etc); where the interview took place, any other feelings about the interview (like whether there were new avenues of interest being opened up by the participant); and the setting (busy, quiet, new building, use of computers, etc.). These notes were written almost immediately. Moreover, the CIT interviews were transcribed as soon as possible so that the researcher could listen and reflect on the process as well as making the necessary improvement in the next CIT interview. As the CIT interview progressed, the researcher became more skilled. Overall, 42 interviews were conducted and each lasted between 20 minutes to an hour. On average each CIT interview lasted 30-35 minutes and data transcriptions have yielded a total of 160,000 words in verbatim transcripts. When analysing these data, attention was paid to not just what participants said but also in the way that they said it, making sure as far as possible this aspect is woven into analysis that is necessary for a complete verbatim account of participants and these formed an integral part of this research's findings. The analytical principles and analysis process will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

3.8 Ethical Issues

In this section, some of the main ethical issues encountered in this research are addressed: *informed consent*; *autonomy*; *beneficence*; *anonymity* and *confidentiality*. It is particularly pertinent in the case of using CIT because of the potential freedom within

the interaction for exchanging information and interpretations. Hence the ethical issues were repeatedly weigh throughout the research process particularly in gaining access, data collection, data analysis, and the use of data obtained.

Informed consent

In gaining access, formal writing (see Appendix 2) to the management of HE institutions was carried out to seek permission before actual CIT interviews were conducted. It is not unusual for researcher to be asked for a copy of the questions asked during the CIT interview before access is granted. Hence the CIT interview guide and letter have facilitated the process of gaining access. Moreover, when approaching students and PLs, it was also ensured that they feel comfortable to participate in this research. For all parties involved, the purpose of this research, its implication and benefits were clearly explained at the upfront.

Autonomy

During data collection or at the beginning of the CIT interview, the researcher respects the individual's right whether to or not to participate in the research. Moreover, the researcher tries to be ethically sensitive, i.e. be attuned and responsive to what the participant is saying and doing so as not to place undue pressure on a participant. This is important because from a participant's facial expression or body language it may indicate that he/she is becoming uneasy or anxious about a line of questioning and the researcher is prepared to cut short that line of questioning if clearly that is a source of concern. The researcher is aware not to go overboard from probing to interrogating.

Beneficence

When conducting the CIT interview, the researcher ensures participants that the research aims are for promoting the interest and well being of others especially students, programme leaders and administrators and that it will not do any harm. It is explained that the ultimate purpose of this research is to improve SEB in service encounters.

Anonymity and confidentiality

It is also highlighted that the data obtained are kept anonymous and treated with confidentiality i.e. anonymity of participants and disguising of HE institutions.

The ultimate concern of researcher is ensuring the participants appreciate what the research is about, its purposes, and that their participation and answers are treated with utmost anonymity and confidentiality.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked into this research methodology (see Figure 3.1) encompassing epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and method. Epistemologically, this research is taking the social constructionist standpoint of individuals constructing meaning through interaction. It is rooted in the intepretivist paradigm that is embedded in symbolic interactionism where this research seek to interpret the meaning constructed by students and PLs at the point of contact during service encounter, in particular their SEB or how they behave based on this imputed meaning. Using the qualitative methodology, the researcher is able to obtain rich details on the service encounter

context as well as the SEB (role expectation of students and role response of PLs) of the interacting parties. Via CIT interview method, it has facilitated the researcher to get participants to concentrate on a particular incident or service encounter to elicit verbatim accounts of their service experience and their SEB.

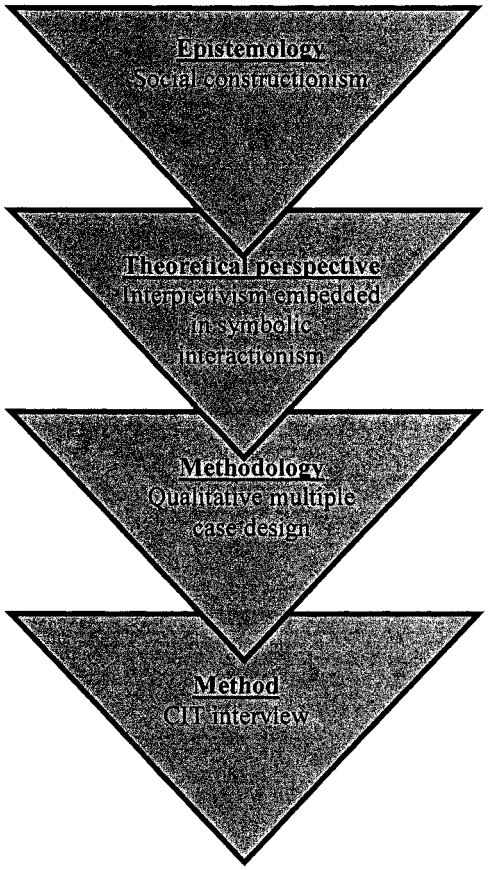


Figure 3.1: Research methodology

From the data collected, further analysis or interpretation is required to give meaning to the data to achieve the aim of this research. The next chapter looks into the analytical principles and procedures employed in this research to make sense or interpret the data collected.

Chapter 4 Analytic Principles and Procedures

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have highlighted that meaning is derived from human experience and a qualitative research strategy is employed which influenced the method of data collection and the analysis approach. This enables detailed exploration of the SEB of participants from a dyadic perspective and the manner in which they had constructed meaning from their experiences. In order to attach meaning to the data collected, they are interpreted based on the interview guide, the conceptual framework as well as the research objectives of this study. Therefore, this chapter explains the different sources of data and the analytical approach i.e. narrative analysis, employed in this research. It justifies the rationale of using narrative analysis by explaining its analytic principles. Then, the analysis process is explicated to detail the procedures taken to interpret the findings of this research. Also, authenticity issues and the issue of the researcher and the researched will be considered. The value of doing this is to make available a clear and uncomplicated background knowledge to data presented and analysed in deriving the findings.

4.2 What are Qualitative Data and Qualitative Analysis?

Data are any kind of information which researchers can identify and accumulate to facilitate answers to their queries. Qualitative researchers deal with data obtained from the environment and accessed via human senses (LeCompte *et al.*, 1992; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). These kinds of data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient

context to be *interpretable* (Patton, 2002). Qualitative data deal mainly with meanings, whereas quantitative data deal mainly with numbers (Dey, 1993). Unlike quantitative work, which can be interpreted through tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in the entire text (Richardson, 2000). This has implications in terms of analysis because meanings are analysed through conceptualisation or theorising (i.e. forming a concept or idea of), whereas the way one analyses numbers is through statistics and mathematics (Dey, 1993). Meanings are mediated mainly through language and action (Bruner, 1994) and in dealing with them one needs to pay attention to the texts (Bruner, 1987). This is to say that qualitative data have multiplicity of texts (Bryman and Burgess, 1994).

In this research, data takes the form of critical incidents that have been transcribed into transcripts, which are the main data source. Other than transcripts, *documents* are another form of data source. According to Patton (2002) documents are written materials and other documents from organisational records such as memoranda, correspondence, official publications, reports, personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia. In this thesis, programme handbooks and brochures are documents used as well to study every service encounter which is a case, the unit of analysis. As stated in the last chapter, the case study strategy is employed and in defining a case one has to locate whatever data possible about the case for analysis. Therefore the qualitative data source of this research includes transcripts and documents (i.e. programme handbook and brochures). So the analytic task, interpreting and making sense out of the collected materials or data (i.e. multiplicity of transcripts and documents), appears monumental when one is involved in *qualitative analysis*.

According to Dey (1993) *qualitative analysis* requires a dialectic between ideas and data. One cannot analyse the data without ideas, but one's ideas must be shaped and tested by the data one is analysing. So the challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of a massive amount of data or text. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2002). So in this research the *qualitative analysis* is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts and other materials that have been accumulated to increase the understanding on participants and to enable presentation of what have been discovered to others. In short, interpreting data into findings is called analysis. Analysis involves working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, identifying regularities, explaining variations, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). It is an *analysis process* of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure.

Often, qualitative researchers have been known to be lack of clear accounts of the *analysis process*, particularly in identifying their analytic principles (i.e. the main beliefs as the basis of analysing or reasoning to conceptualise meanings) and analytic procedures (i.e. the step by step data analysis) (Dey, 1993; Turner, 1994). This is because as explained by Jones (1985) qualitative data analysis involves processes of interpretation and creativity that are difficult to make explicit. Typically, qualitative data take the form of a large amount of unstructured textual material and therefore are

not straightforward to analyse. It stresses the subjective sensibilities and creativity of any researcher involved in qualitative data analysis. Thus there are few well established and wide accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data and what can be provided are broad guidelines (Okely, 1994). So, in this research, the researcher aspires to present clear accounts in identifying the analytic principles and procedures employed. In reviewing the possible analytic principles and procedures, a variety of approaches have been considered and the decision is to employ narrative analysis. The following sections explain briefly the rise of narrative analysis, what narrative analysis is, why use narrative analysis, the analytic principles of narrative analysis and the analytic procedure or step by step of using narrative analysis to analyse the qualitative data collected in this research.

4.3 The Rise of Narrative Analysis

Part of being human involves telling *stories* to others (Plummer, 2001). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 4), "people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others". As emphasised by Lieblich *et al.* (1998, p. 7) "We know and discover ourselves and reveal ourselves to others by the stories we tell". In telling stories, people make sense of their experiences.

Research interest in the analysis of stories has increased as researchers in many disciplines endeavour to see the world through the eyes of others (Riley and Hawe, 2005). Stories is now seen as one of the fundamental ways in which humans organise

their understanding of the world and the narratives represent storied ways of knowing and communicating, as it enables the study of the active, self-shaping quality of human thought (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). Storytelling is such an important activity because *narratives* help people to organise their experiences into meaningful episodes (Berger, 1997). 'Story' and 'narrative' are words often used interchangeably, but they are analytically different. Frank (2000) points out that people tell stories, but narratives come from analysis of stories. This is to say the term 'story' is usually used to describe what the person tells and the 'narrative' is the researcher's account (Pejlert *et al.*, 1999). The growing literature on narrative has touched almost every discipline, Plummer (2001) described this period as 'narrative moment' and Riessman (2004) illustrated it as 'narrative turn' in the human sciences away from positivist modes of inquiry. With greater acceptance of personal storytelling, narrative analysis is now seen as a valid means of knowledge production (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Riessman, 1993; Skeggs, 2002). Primarily, narrative analysis has become particularly prominent in connection with the life history or biographical approach or even in disruptive life events, but Mishler (1986) argues its use can be much broader than this. In his view, and that of many others (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 2002), the answers that people provide, in particular in qualitative interviews, can be viewed as stories that are potential feed for a narrative analysis. In other words, narrative analysis recounts not just to the life history but also to interview accounts relating to event, whereby narrative analysis is used to interview transcripts to uncover stories of participants and the inter-connections between them, wherein this research shares. So the following section explains what narrative analysis is in this research.

4.4 What is Narrative Analysis?

It is Bryman's (2004) definition of narrative analysis that is used in this research, i.e. narrative analysis is an approach that emphasises the stories that people use to account for events. As suggested by Riessman (1993) one of the distinctive features of narrative analysis is in its interpretive thrust. Moreover, narrative analysis allows for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004; Phinney, 2000; Riessman, 2002). Therefore, in this research, narrative analysis is employed to uncover and interpret the underlying meaning of the SEB of students and PLs within a service encounter. The focus is on *narratives* of personal experience found in the *stories* that students and programme leaders (PL) tell in critical incidents. Here, *stories* refer to the experiences in service encounters that are recounted by participants. They are the storytellers interpreting their world and experience in it.

Thus narrative analysis can be used for systematic interpretations of students' and PLs' interpretations of events. As highlighted by Riessman (2002) and Freeman (1998) this can be a powerful analysis tool because every narrative is a version or view of what happened and most narratives do not simply report events but give a teller's *perspective* on their meaning, relevance and importance. This is principally what this thesis is trying to achieve, i.e. to explore SEB from students' and employees' perspectives. This helps to gain insight into the intricacy of SEB between students and PLs when interacting. To achieve this aim, one has to understand the core of narrative analysis. The subsequent section illustrates the analytic principles of narrative analysis that are employed in this research.

4.5 What are the Analytic Principles of Narrative Analysis?

Each qualitative study is unique and therefore the analytical approach used will be unique (Patton, 2002). This brings forth a range of different analytical approaches with different ways of theorising or conceptualising meaning. For example, the interpretive approach of Patton (1980) emphasises the role of patterns, categories and basic descriptive units; the quasi-statistical approach of Miles and Huberman (1984) emphasises a procedure they call 'pattern-coding'; and the 'grounded theory' approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990) centres on a variety of different strategies for 'coding' data. Despite the differences in approach and language, the common emphasis is on *how to categorise data*. This task constitutes the core of qualitative analysis. According to Bryman (2004) the criticism that is sometimes made of categorising in relation to these traditional approaches is that it tends to fragment data and thus bring about the idea of narrative analysis. Since this approach has been introduced, it has been increasingly used as narrative analysis does not result in data fragmentation and this is a unique analytic principle of this approach in which this research shares.

Therefore in categorising data, the traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture stories in an attempt of interpretation and generalisation by taking pieces of a response edited out of *context*. They eliminate the sequential events and structural features that characterise personal narrative accounts, i.e. text organised around consequential *events* (Riessman, 1993). On the other hand, in categorising data, narrative analysis requires researchers to construct narrative segments from stories for further analysis, i.e. select and organise documents, choose sections of interview

transcripts for close inspection and *interpretation* (Riessman, 2004), wherein this research undertakes. Besides, as recommended by Riessman (1993), in order not to fragment personal narratives, researcher should include detailed verbatim quotation of speech so that readers can, to a much greater degree, see the stories apart from the analysis of them, thus including the *context* and *event*. This is one of the important analytic principles of narrative analysis and taking the suggestion of Riessman, this research has presented its findings by including quotations of participants to explain their meaning in its context and event.

According to Riessman (2004) narratives do not speak for themselves, they require *interpretation* when used as data in any research. Riessman (1993) highlights that analysis of narratives reveal forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers but asking the question *why* people tell stories in that particular way, which is another core analytic principle of narrative analysis. People tell stories according to Bruner (1986) because they are fundamental and universal way of knowing, reflecting basic categories for how one is located and behave in the world. Based on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988) on curriculum, they described the act of teachers telling stories to fulfil a variety of important psychosocial functions, i.e. to develop and make sense of their identity, making meaning of school situations and linking present and past together in anticipation of the future. According to them, the teachers' narratives have helped them to understand students educationally. They advocate that narrative analysis is increasingly used in studies of educational experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Thus it is clear the core analytic principle of narrative analysis, i.e.

going beyond interest in the content, to question *why* a story was told in a particular way, seemed to be windows into every individual's reality.

Therefore it is particularly appropriate for the research objectives in this research, i.e. especially not only to explore the 'what' and 'how' SEB but also to probe for depth and look beyond the surface in understanding the 'why' or the underlying reasons to the 'what' and the 'how' SEB has led service encounters to be remembered as either favourably or unfavourably. In achieving that, many different approaches towards doing narrative analysis have been considered i.e. Labov's (1982) structural approach paying attention to structures that hold the stories together and Gee's (1986) oral approach focussing on sociolinguistics. Also, as advocated by Burke (1945), in analysing, any complete statement should offer answers to five key questions i.e. what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he [or she] did it (agency), and why (purpose). Thus, Burke's approach is found to be the most straightforward and effective for guiding and bringing to light the horizons of meaning from the texts to answer the research objectives. For example, when recounting a service encounter, a student or PL will try to relate or tell the researcher what is important or critical to them, what happened i.e. the SEB (i.e. situational definitions and situational roles), how they felt and what the outcome was, from their perspectives. This helped the researcher to consider participants stories in context without fragmenting the data thereby gaining insights into how and why the story was told. Upon explaining what is narrative analysis and its analytic principles, it has indirectly explicated the rationale of using narrative analysis. However, the next section continues to elaborate and summarise the rationale for employing narrative analysis in this research.

4.6 Why Use Narrative Analysis?

As discussed in Section 4.5, the core of qualitative analysis is on how to categorise data. Qualitative content analysis probably is an approach commonly used to analyse documents (Bryman, 2004). It involves a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analysed. The extracted themes are usually illustrated with brief quotations. Documents are then examined to show that they contain key recurring themes that present. From the discussion in Sections 4.4 and 4.5, it is clear that narrative analysis differs from qualitative content analysis. First, narrative analysis focuses more directly on the dynamic process of interpretation (Ezzy, 2002) i.e. the integration of context and event in the construction of meaning is a distinctive narrative analysis characteristic (Simms, 2003). This concurs with the point raised in Section 4.5 on the analytic principle of narratives analysis that does not result in data fragmentation but to include the context and event. A qualitative content analysis may document themes but in narrative analysis the context and event drive the construction of narratives that potentially transforms interpretation of themes.

Second, narrative analysis begins from the standpoint of the storyteller, i.e. it contextualises the sense making process by focusing on the person, rather than a set of themes (Frank, 2000). This is an important distinction. In narrative analysis it studies the world through the eyes of storyteller and applies a theory of time. This point is similar to the discussion in section 4.5 that highlights that narratives do not only simply reveal the content or the themes but also asking the question why a story was told in that way. The intention is to gain insight into how participants interpret the world.

Qualitative content analysis in contrast, de-contextualises the data (e.g. by 'cutting and pasting' themes together) to examine the broader issues (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Hence this is to say narrative analysis does seek for themes but consider situations or service encounters that are not edited out of context and event, i.e. stressing the dynamic process of interpretation and from the standpoint of story teller. Narrative analysis focuses on what is said, who is mentioned in the telling of events, why the story is told in a particular way and the role tellers have in the telling of events (Gergen and Gergen, 1984). Precisely, because humans are essential meaning-making people, narratives must be preserved and not fractured by investigators who must respect participants' ways of constructing meaning and analyse how it is accomplished (Riessman, 1993). In short, with narrative analysis, the focus of attention shifts from 'what actually happened?' to 'how do people make sense of what happened?' (Bryman, 2004). As advocated by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) that narrative analysis can help to alert the analyst to research problems to convey particular meanings and experiences that qualitative content analysis may not uncover. Therefore, it is clear that these distinctions are the reasons that drive the usage of narrative analysis in this research. The intention is to see how students and PLs make sense of the events and SEB behaviour in their situations. This helps to open the window into interacting parties' reality of 'what' and 'how' SEB that has led service encounters to be remembered favourably or unfavourably, thus appropriate in achieving the research objectives. The subsequent section specifies the step by step in carrying out narrative analysis.

4.7 Analytic Procedure of Using Narrative Analysis

Qualitative data analysis depends on theorising/conceptualising to analyse meanings. Formally the tasks of theorising or conceptualising are perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering, establishing linkages and relationships and speculating of themes (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). These are fundamental tools of any researcher and they are used to develop or confirm explanations for how and why things happen as they do (Kaplan, 1964; Zetterberg, 1966; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As highlighted in Section 4.2 the purposes of these tasks are to manage the volume of raw data, sifting trivia from significance, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, identifying regularities, explaining variations and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. In achieving this, as pointed out in Section 4.2, the researcher seeks to present clear accounts in identifying the analytic *principles* and *procedures* (i.e. the step-by-step) of using narrative analysis. The analytic *principles* of narrative analysis have been discussed in Section 4.5 while the analytic *procedures* or the step-by-step of employing narrative analysis is addressed in this section and as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The notion of utilising steps to depict the analytic procedure is to represent the steps taken when analysing and interpreting the data. The two-way arrows are to signify the concurrent flow of activities, for example, at any particular step in the process, as and when required the researcher has returned to reread the data, revise any categories and generate new categories. Thus it is an iterative process. The subsequent sections explain the steps in detail.

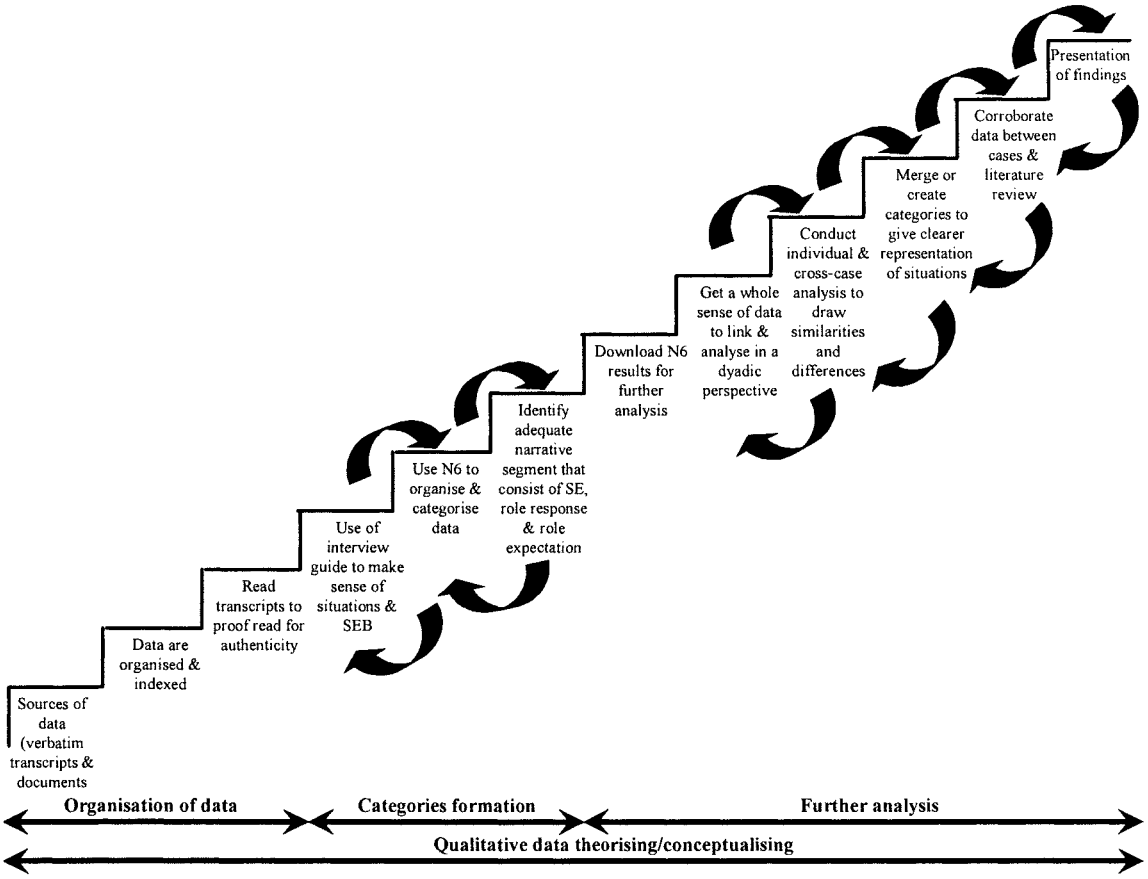


Figure 4.1 Analysis process

4.7.1 Organisation of data

Qualitative data analysis depends on *theorising/conceptualising* to interpret findings or meanings. Using narrative analysis the transcripts and documents are potential feed for *theorising/conceptualising.* Upon the completion of data transcription, they were proof read for their authenticity. Then they were properly organised and indexed. Transcripts were then read as a whole for the first time and while reading obvious categories were picked up where notes and remarks are made at the side margins of the transcripts. Besides the transcripts, documents (i.e. programme handbooks and brochures) were also

considered. The reading of these transcripts were guided by the questions asked in the interview guide in Appendix 1 and bearing in mind the research objectives of this study.

4.7.2 Category formation

The interview guide exhibited in Appendix 1 is used as a basis for category formation. These questions serve as pointers to answer the research objectives as well as identify, analyse and communicate the essence of what the data reveal in every case in this research, i.e. every service encounter recounted by students and PLs, their role expectations and role responses. In fact, the interview questions are used as an instrument that directs the researcher to find the voice of the participants in a particular event/situation and context/setting. They provided explanation of the flow of experiences and meanings based upon students' and PLs' perspectives to answer the research objectives. In realising this, the very first step is *organising data* because as stressed in Section 4.2 for qualitative analysis, in dealing with meanings, familiarity with large quantity of texts or transcripts is inevitable. Hence, the assistance of QSR NUD*IST (Qualitative Solutions in Research; Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorising) or in short N6 is used to facilitate the process of managing the huge amount of data. The following paragraphs briefly explicate why N6 is employed, its benefits, and importance as well as how it has facilitated the process of category formation.

N6 has been introduced to the researcher at a postgraduate research training session. It is through the training and reference to a N6 user guide, the researcher has gained

knowledge and skills of utilising N6. N6 is a qualitative software based on the concept of tree structures to facilitate the progressive elaboration of concepts into higher levels of abstraction (Richards and Richards, 1994). Acknowledging that there is no one qualitative software package that can support the whole scope of any analytic procedure employed in analysing qualitative data (Dey, 1993), the researcher has decided to use N6 to *manage data* and solely depend on N6 to organise the data. This is because the researcher must still use skills, knowledge and insight to decide the construction of narrative segments, what constitutes a category, what themes that emerge and so on. So the analysis job still needs to be performed by the researcher but N6 provided powerful tools to help the researcher analyse data more effectively because it facilitates data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing and linking.

The benefits of using N6 are two-fold. First, N6 is an enabler in managing massive amounts of data. The CIT interviews conducted with 42 participants in 4 HE institutions have generated 158,717 words and 369 pages of transcripts, and this is considered a huge amount of data. However, N6 offers the functions to store, browse, edit, annotate, memoing (record ongoing thoughts), code, uncode, search, and so forth, which are just a click away. Therefore, the assistance of N6 is enormous in enabling the analysis of the entire data collected from the 4 HE institutions. As emphasised by Richards and Richards (1994) N6 is increasingly used because it allows researchers to collect more data and cover more sites.

Second, one of the chief benefits of using N6 is to alleviate the laborious cutting, pasting and subsequent retrieval of transcripts. It allows the researcher to concentrate on the

interpretation of the data. Indeed this chief benefit has been advocated by many researchers such as Patton (2002), Richards and Richards (1994) and Seidel and Clark (1984). Thus, in this research, with the massive data at hand, the importance of using N6 is immense especially it has eased significantly the old hard work of manually locating a particular coded paragraph and traditional modes of cutting and pasting. This is due to N6 providing an amazing Text Search function that not only search for words or phrases but enable the search by using special characters, for e.g. the use of a full stop and 'c.re' would find words such as cure, care and core, whereas the use of square brackets and straight lines e.g. [formal/legal/policy] would find related concepts or words. Moreover the researcher can choose where N6 should search, for e.g. all the documents, selected documents or all documents except the selected document. It also offers functions such as 'Examine Selection's Coding' (this tells where else this piece of text is coded), 'Copy Selection', 'Spread Selection Coding', 'Remove this Text' or 'Jump to this Document'. Certainly, N6 speeds up the processes of categorising, locating relevant categories and comparing passages in transcripts. It is really a fast and efficient means in managing data.

To use N6 in category formation, initially all transcripts are converted from Word Document to Plain Text format. This is because N6 only permits the import of Plain Text format files as N6 document. N6 provides a filing cabinet with 2 drawers: A Document Explorer and Node Explorer. The imported documents are stored in the Document Explorer that facilitates browsing, editing, retrieving and annotating. The Node Explorer assists the creation of categories as nodes. Both the drawers are related by *coding*. It is very much like copying and pasting data from documents to nodes and

leaves documents in the Document Explorer unchanged. This is to say that at the *coding* stage, a participant's transcript is browsed or read to make sense of the situational situations, i.e. asking Q1: what the name of the SE is, as stated in the CIT interview guide in Appendix 1. Then the name of the service encounter, for example enrolment is created as a node. In other words, the categorising process is principally to browse a transcript at Document Explorer, highlight the lines related to situational definitions, then go to the Node explorer to create a category or to choose a created category and after that return to the Document Explorer to click the code button. By just clicking the code button, the highlighted lines are copied and stored in the Node Explorer. This is how both the drawers are related and are powerful tools that facilitated the coding process so as to browse every transcript and categorise all service encounters recounted by students and PLs in created nodes, i.e. names of SE such as enrolment, transfer, examination, withdrawal and so on.

The abovementioned coding process is repeated for Q2 to Q4 in the interview guide. Here, every service encounter coded at Node explorer is further coded under the categories of situation, role expectation and role response. N6 allows the coding process in the Node Explorer, meaning one can code what have been coded into other nodes or sub-nodes. This is to say, initially chunks of text are attached to broad categories of the names of service encounter (i.e. the whole story of an event recounted by participants) and within these broad categories every service encounter or story are further analysed and coded into categories of situation, role expectation and role response. Thus this makes clear how N6 facilitated the process of categories formation.

4.7.3 Making Sense of the Data

In doing categories formation, the researcher has read and re-read the texts iteratively to immerse herself in and to make sense of the data. The emerging themes resulted from NUD*IST were identified through categories formation and based on the defined service encounters. When reading the data, attention was focussed on what was said to interpret the underlying meaning of the SEB of the interacting parties, bearing in mind the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2. Based on Czepiel *et al.'s* (1985) concept of service encounter, McHugh's (1968) situational definition and Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role (the 'I' and 'me'), they have provided direction for the researcher to identify and define the service encounters, then exploring role expectations of students and role responses represented in the defined situation. This allowed incidents or service encounters to emerge from the data.

However, it needs to be highlighted that not all service encounters that are recounted are included. The process of identifying *narrative segments*, i.e. what is in and what is out depended on their adequacy. To be used in the narrative analysis, a service encounter or an event recounted by participants is required to (1) involve student-PL interaction and (2) have sufficient detail of the situation or background of the SE, the role expectation of student towards PL and the role response of PL towards student's expectation. This is merely used as a guide to decide what is in and what is out because actually the service encounters recounted by participants are not straightforward, some have negotiated to talk other issues before explaining what happened. Thus it is very much using the

questions in the interview guide to justify the choice of which segment of narrative is used to extract what meanings to answer the research objectives.

Categories were formed based on the defined service encounters and as themes emerged, under each service encounter, the respective role expectation and role response are created. When creating the categories, descriptions of service encounters were made to define clearly the situation so that similar service encounters recalled by other participants can be included and grouped together. At the same time, the researcher can compare the role expectations and role responses of different participants referring to the same type of service encounter. As categories were formed, when necessary, some categories were merged since the nature of service encounter is similar whereas some were further broken into more defined categories. During this process, memo or notes were taken to keep track of the analysis process and for the purpose of traceability i.e. what decisions were made and where the researcher has been.

When these data are assembled together, they helped to give a clearer picture of each type of service encounter. Also, the researcher is able to make comparisons between different perspectives (student's and PL's) of a particular type of service encounters, then putting both perspectives together to match the role expectation and roles responses of each service encounter. In doing so, it revealed the complexity of service encounters and gave a broader perspective of how similar or different SEB can lead to different outcomes. Therefore, the focus is on the conversations of the interacting parties (what was said), the interactions (the dynamism of the 'I' and the 'me'), the actions (what they did and why they do what they do) and the overall service encounter. Simultaneously,

the background of time, place, people and context were considered. This sense-making of data enabled further analysis to gain more insights of intricacies of SEB.

4.7.4 Further analysis

At this stage, the N6 results or output of categories formation and sense-making have been downloaded to choose sections of transcripts for close inspection and interpretation. N6 has presented each service encounter in an effective manner so that further analysis can be conducted. By having all the categories on hand, the researcher can get a sense of the whole i.e. to understand what are some of the situations students see their PLs and what are some of the concerns of students in a typical semester. The researcher has focussed on an individual service encounter to gain further insights of what happened in the service encounter, what students/PLs have done, how they have responded, why they say what they said and how they felt about the outcome.

Also, cross-case analysis was also conducted to make comparisons between the similarities or differences between service encounters. For example, in an enrolment category, every service encounter is individually analysed, followed by cross-case analysis where narratives from different participants in common service encounter are compared. This gives the researcher a broader perspective on the service encounter as well as a holistic view of the complexity and diversity of contexts thereby increasing the richness of this study's interpretation (Patton, 2002). In addition, the researcher is able to see the relevant links between the service encounters and most of all analyse the service encounters in a dyadic perspective. It enabled the researcher to stitch, link and

connect categories to see 'what goes with what', i.e. what situation goes with what role expectation and role response. This way, the coherence and significance of data are increased when placed in wider context, as emphasised by Schafer (1981). In fact, it is building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual or theoretical coherence, as stated by Riessman (1993). Thus the individual case and cross-case analysis sharpens understanding and facilitated the interpretation of SEB in the service encounter.

Furthermore, in doing this, it helped to *corroborate evidence* when interpreting findings, i.e. checking whether other researchers have made the same interpretation and in what circumstances or contexts was the interpretation made. It is truly a process of weighing the meanings or the findings interpreted through theorising/conceptualising the data of this research. In doing this, some categories were merged or created to give clearer description and representation of the situations defined by participants. For example, upon further analysis, the 'enrolment' category was further categorised into two different types of situations i.e. subject choices and getting enrolled, to enhance further understanding of that service encounter. Also, some categories were revised and the concurrent flow of activities was not simple or clear-cut but is an iterative process involving repeated returns to earlier phases of the analysis as data become more organised and ideas are clarified, as advocated by Dey (1993). The importance of the abovementioned processes has facilitated the researcher to *present the narrative accounts* effectively for further discussions. In presenting data, according to Patton (2002) *description* forms the foundation of qualitative analysis and reporting. Thick, rich description is good description (Denzin, 2001; Patton, 2002) that takes readers into the *context* or setting being described, wherein this research undertakes and it is one of

the analytic principles stressed in Section 4.5. In realising this, when *presenting narrative accounts*, verbatim quotations and categories with sufficient context to be interpretable are organised to draw conclusions and suggestion further actions (as affirmed by Miles and Huberman, 1994). These are crucial when presenting the data to facilitate readers to gain insight or to relate to the situations in the service encounters.

4.8 Trustworthiness

There has been longstanding debate on the trustworthiness of qualitative research in particular experimentalists criticise the absence of their 'standard' means of assuring reliability (consistency of a measure), validity (findings are 'really' about what it appear to be about) and hence generalisability (findings are applicable outside of the situation studied) (Robson, 2002). However, some qualitative researchers deny the *relevance* of the canons of scientific enquiry (e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1989) since measurement is not their major preoccupation as it is impossible to 'freeze' a social setting to make it replicable in the sense in which the term is usually employed (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). Moreover, Robson (2002) argued that the problem is not so much with the desirability of doing reliable, valid and generalisable research, but the fact that these terms have been operationalised so rigidly in quantitative research, the manifestations of flexible or qualitative enquiry are sidelined. In other words quantitative research is excessively concerned with what is common to the phenomena that the concept is supposed to subsume rather than variety (Bryman, 2004). An answer is to find alternative ways of operationalising them that are appropriate to the conditions and

circumstances of qualitative enquiry (Robson, 2002) so that the data collected is relevant and of quality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Given that the researcher desires to justify the interpretations of the qualitative data in this research, the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) for judging goodness or quality of an inquiry were employed. This is because it is an alternative way proposed by them to reflect concerns of alternative paradigms to assess rigour of qualitative research. The criteria of trustworthiness embrace aspects of credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability. The four criteria each of which has an equivalent criterion in quantitative research: *credibility* (which parallels internal validity), *transferability* (which parallels external validity), *dependability* (which parallels reliability) and *confirmability* (which parallels objectivity) (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that although the criteria of trustworthiness have a corresponding criterion in quantitative research but the terms and meanings vary considerably within the qualitative research. The four criteria and the issues of the researcher and the researched or reflexivity are further elaborated in the following sections.

4.8.1 Credibility

Guba and Lincoln (1989) illustrated that assessing credibility (internal validity) is the central means for ascertaining the 'truth value' of a given inquiry, i.e. the extent to which it establishes how things really are and really work. It is very much the 'truth value' of findings as known, experienced or deeply felt by the people being studied

(Leininger, 1994). Hence, there are several techniques proposed by different authors to establish the match between the constructed realities of participants and those realities as represented by researchers. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986) and Chell (2004), to establish the rapport and build the trust are necessary to uncover constructions and to facilitate immersing oneself in understanding the research context.

In this research, credibility is addressed via giving every participant the assurance of the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected (see Section 3.7). This is done at the beginning of the CIT interview when explaining the aim and purpose of this research. Thus this has established trust and confidence to be established so as to allow participants to relax when recounting the service encounters. Moreover, the 'why' questions are also used (see Appendix 1) to probe the underlying meanings behind the stories recounted by participants and when uncertainties aroused, clarifications are made through summarising what has been said by participants (see Section 3.7). Thus this way has sharpen participants' response and facilitated the understanding as well as the interpretation of their SEB or 'truth value' in different situations.

Riessman (2002) argued that there are many 'truths' rather than 'the truth' when researchers access and make sense of participants' events and experiences in the past because meanings of life events are not fixed or constant but rather they evolve. The real problem, however, is not the telling of true stories from false (Mitchell, 1981) but the very value of making sense of reality. So, in this research, the 'truth value' of a story does not lie in the facts but in the meaning and social construction impact (Gabriel, 1998). In other words, students' and PLs' narratives constitute reality or it is the telling

that the researcher come to understand them through interpretation, paying attention to the contexts that shape their creation. Hence, in this study, the researcher interprets or articulates 'truths' rather than 'the truth' of participants' narratives. The CIT method utilised has enabled participants to 'hang' or 'hook' their accounts on a particular service encounter and the probing questions facilitated participants to concentrate on the event when giving rich data of the context that shape their meaning (see Section 3.5). Thus, the CIT interview method employed and the trust as well as the confidence established at the beginning of the CIT interview is evident in enhancing the trustworthiness criterion of credibility.

Moreover, another technique recommended is contextual validation by Diesing (1972). The author stated that the credibility of a piece of data can be assessed by comparing it with other kinds of data on a same event and to evaluate a source of evidence by collecting other kinds of evidence about the source. In this research, the former is addressed through categorising the stories recounted by participants into similar service encounters to reveal the complexity of service encounters and gave broader perspective of how similar or different SEB can lead to different outcomes on a same defined event or service encounter (see Section 4.7.2). Further, the latter is dealt with by matching student's and PL's perspective (dyadic perspective) based on a same defined service encounter (see Section 3.5). This technique is similar to the term triangulation, i.e. a process of comparing and cross-checking of findings purported by Denzin's (1970) to yield credible results.

Last but not least, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the technique of using member checks or participant validation. It is a process whereby a researcher provides participants with an account of his/her findings. This is to seek confirmation that findings are congruent with the views of participants and to seek out areas that are lack of correspondence as well as the reasons for it. However, this idea is not without practical difficulties and many authors have debated on this issue because they believed that participants' validation can result to censorship (Bloor, 1978; Bloor 1997). This is to say in giving participants a second thought or consideration via sending transcripts to them may bring about occasional defensive reactions and may lead to censorship.

Truly, there were two schools of thoughts on this technique but the researcher has employed a 'critical friend' as a technique (Tripp, 1998) that provides intermediate positions between the two extremes of using and not to use participant validation. This technique provides opportunity for a researcher to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognisable to an identified person called a 'critical friend' (i.e. someone other than the participants) as adequate representations of the multiple realities or 'many truths' of participants. Thus in this research the transcripts and findings were provided to the identified 'critical friend' allowing her to view what has been said by participants and what has been interpreted so as to give her an opportunity to react to them, i.e. checking the clarity of the overall interpreted meanings and challenge what are perceived to be unclear. This technique has enabled the researcher to seek some form of corroboration of the account that the researcher has arrived at so that somehow there was a good correspondence between the findings and the perspectives as well as the experiences of participants in this research. Clearly, these techniques stated above have

been particularly appropriate to support the trustworthiness criterion of credibility of the data to derive convincing conclusions in this research.

4.8.2 Transferability

As above, the researcher is interested in the constructed meaning, so this research entails rich and deep data that is depth rather than the breadth. This means that this research does not seek to generalise but to provide in-depth understanding of students' and PLs' SEB in PA in HE context. However, this does not preclude some kind of generalisability beyond the specific setting studies. This may be thought of as the development of a theory which helps in understanding other cases or situations (Ragin, 1987; Yin, 1994), sometimes referred to as analytic or theoretical generalisation: 'here the data gained from a particular study provide theoretical insights which possess a sufficient degree of generality or universality to allow their projection to other contexts or situations' (Sim, 1998, p. 350).

In other word, this research does not seek to generalise but to provide rich details and insights into the SEB of students and PLs specifically in PA in the HE context in Malaysia. These findings and the SEB guide that will be developed are suggestive and are not universal or transferable to any context. Nevertheless, the programmes offered in private colleges in Malaysia consist of local and international curriculum such as British, Australia, etc. and there are deemed to be some similarities as they are bound by the rules and regulations of their collaborative partner universities. Hence, in some way there are some similarities in the education systems and through the qualitative approach

this research has provided sufficient details to enable users of this information to decide the transferability of relevant information into their respective situations or even to adopt them within PA in the HE sector beyond the Malaysia context.

4.8.3 Dependability

In general, researchers need to consider the dependability of methods and research practices (Robson, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose the idea of dependability and argue that researchers should use an auditing approach to establish the merit of research in terms of this criterion of trustworthiness. The audit trail entails ensuring that complete records are kept at all phases of the research process in an accessible manner.

Here, in this research as far as possible all the phases of research process as well as the procedures employed for data analysis are kept in a research diary, detailing, what took place, the explicit and implicit thoughts of the researcher, the assumptions and the sense making along the way. These procedures are detailed throughout Chapter 3 and 4 to inform researchers of the decisions that have been made and how they are derived. The pertinent point is this involves not only being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research, but also being able to show others what the researcher has done and where she has been. This helps readers to evaluate the research and the analysis that is carried out by the researcher.

4.8.4 Confirmability and Reflexivity

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that, while recognising that complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative research, researchers can be shown to have acted in good faith and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that establishing confirmability should be one of the objectives of auditors. This means that researchers have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to influence the conduct of the research and findings developed from it (Bryman, 2004).

Given the difficulty or even impossibility of interpreting objective reality, one way to overcome it is the need of researchers to be reflexive about their own work which has received growing acceptance among qualitative researchers (Czarniawska, 1998). *Reflexivity* is the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher to improve the usefulness and evaluation of research results (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). As such knowledge from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space.

Thus in this research, it is a conscious experience of the researcher's self as the researcher and the participant as the one coming to know the self within the research process. This helped the researcher to come to terms not only with the choice of the research objective and with the participants with whom she engaged in the research process but also with readers and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting (Lincoln and Guba, 1993). In other words, the researcher is reflective about the implications of the methodology and the decisions made for the

knowledge of students' and PLs' SEB in a particular situation. Also the researcher is sensitive to the context of participants and at the same time, bearing in mind the purpose of this research. Taking the suggestion of Guba and Lincoln (1989) the researcher has monitored her own developing construction via keeping records at regular intervals throughout the study. Moreover, the researcher acknowledges she engages in the study as an inquirer and interpreter, not with a blank mind but based on the conceptual framework and the philosophy this research is rooted in. In fact, the meaning that emerges, from a social constructionist point of view, is a joint construction between the researcher and the participant.

Thus in this study, the researcher has kept a diary to record the developing construction. Before engaging in any activity at the tertiary institutions in which the CIT interview was to proceed, the researcher recorded her prior construction. Then the researcher regularly recorded her developing construction all through the study. This way of recording has helped the researcher to trace the developing construction or to be reflective so that she is paying as much attention to the constructions offered by participants as they deserve and not giving much privilege to the researcher's original construction (or earlier constructions as time progresses). So this way was particularly helpful in reflecting the role of the researcher and the researched in order to improve the usefulness of the interpretation of data in this research.

Moreover, it is the intention of the researcher to be clear as to which interpretation of the data are the voices of participants and which belongs to the researchers. This has been incorporated in the Chapter 6 whereby participants' narratives are highlighted in italic

font and this enables readers to view which are the voices of participants and which are the interpretations of the researcher, what has been said by participants, how it was interpreted and why it was interpreted in such a way (Riessman, 1993). Therefore this understanding entails an acknowledgement of the role of the researcher and the researched as part and parcel of the construction of knowledge.

4.9 Summary

Narrative analysis is chosen as the approach to analyse the qualitative data collected in this research. It is concluded from the abovementioned sections that it can be an especially powerful analysis tool for analysing narratives of personal experience found in the stories recounted by students and PLs. Most importantly it has illustrated that the approach can be used to make sense of students' and PLs' interpretations of 'what' and 'how' SEB are to be represented in service encounters, thus answering the research objectives. To achieve these objectives, throughout the chapter, the interdependence and mutual enhancement of analytic principles and analytic procedure are stressed. Clear accounts are presented in identifying the analytic principles and the procedures employed. It explains how the data collected are fed into N6 to facilitate category formation and building of narratives to derive findings. It elaborates how the CIT interview guide served as pointers to drive the analysis to transform data into findings. Also issues of authenticity and the issues of the researcher and the researched are highlighted. The significance of explicating these is to provide necessary background knowledge to the analysis of the data presented which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Analysis, Findings and Discussions

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the analytic principles and procedures of narrative analysis employed to transform data into findings. Truly it is about how the researcher has analysed and worked with the data (i.e. in particular the category formation and further analysis) and this chapter continues by presenting the outcomes, i.e. interpretation of SEB from a dyadic perspective (student's and PL's perspective). First, data are presented by describing the research context and the participants' profile to set the background this research was conducted in. This is important for the understanding of the unfolding of service encounters and participants' sense of their role within them. Second, in presenting narrative accounts, verbatim quotations and categories with adequate context are included. This is to allow readers recognise what has been said by participants as well as know what has been interpreted, how and why the researcher has interpreted in that way with discussions and justifications to draw findings.

5.2 Research Context and Participants' Profiles

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the study's research context and to introduce the participants. This is to make the analysis more accessible in the sense of an 'easy read', i.e. engaging the attention and interest of readers so as to understand and empathise with the participants when recounting the service encounters, hence enhancing the impact of the findings of this research. As stated in Chapter 3, the study involved conducting CIT interview with students and PLs from four colleges in

Malaysia. As mentioned earlier, throughout the study, the researcher has undertaken to maintain the anonymity of the individuals and colleges involved through using pseudonyms. The researcher has also attempted to mask any details or identities that are obvious to knowledgeable readers such as the location of the colleges, the names of affiliated universities and the names of programmes. Section 5.2.1 intends to provide the research context of the four colleges followed by Section 5.2.2 to illustrate the profiles of the participants.

5.2.1 Research context of the four colleges

These four colleges, i.e. College A, B, C and D are private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia. The background information of HE in Malaysia, the evolution of private colleges (in particular the liberation of the sector in 1996 and the proliferation of private colleges) and the legislation that govern private colleges discussed in Section 5.2.1.3 locate the context these four colleges are situated so as to understand their prospects, constraints and challenges. This section goes on to explicate the research context in terms of the kinds of ownership, the types of programme offered and the legislation adhered to by the four colleges. These sections have been written with reference to secondary data sources i.e. journals, reports, newspapers and websites, and the documents i.e. programme handbooks and brochures collected from the four colleges.

5.2.1.1 Ownership

These four colleges are of various sizes in terms of premises, facilities and the range of programmes offered. They have their purpose-built campuses with student hostel

facilities offering multi-discipline programmes coupled with excellent teaching and learning facilities supported by well-qualified lecturers for both local and foreign students. They are considered large and reputable colleges in the private education sector. These private colleges in Malaysia are *owned* by private sector and likewise for these four colleges (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). They are owned either by individuals, private companies or publicly listed companies. They are independent legal entities offering internally developed and externally moderated pre-university Certificate and programmes leading to overseas Bachelor's Degree qualifications. Thus these four colleges are privately owned and funded whereby there is no funding from the government, and students pay a full tuition fee. They are market oriented and competition between institutions is intense.

5.2.1.2 Types of programmes offered

The four colleges offer a wide range of programmes in collaboration with established universities abroad. As highlighted in Chapter 3, to enable in-depth studies to be carried out, the focus is on the Business School of these four colleges. These Business Schools have inter-institutional collaborative arrangements with foreign universities such as UK and Australia. These arrangements allow the four colleges to offer *Bachelor's degree programmes* leading to overseas qualifications, namely British Degrees (Programme) and Australian Degrees (Programme), with Business Administration, Marketing and Accounting pathways. These programmes are offered in the form of (a) twinning degree programme, (b) credit transfer programme and (c) full franchise programme. The twinning and the credit transfer programmes are the two types of split-site degree

arrangements offered by the four Business Schools whereas full franchise is a 3+0 arrangement (i.e. completing a foreign degree locally). These different forms are generally described below (adapted from programme handbooks, programme brochures).

(a) Twinning Degree Programme

It involves a formal agreement between a local private college and one foreign university, to run a split-site degree programme. This allows students to partially complete the programme at the local college with the final year(s) at the specified foreign partner university which then awards the degree. Some key features of this type of programme are:

- Students register with both the local private college and the foreign university (dual registration), and upon successful completion of the local segment they are guaranteed admission to the next stage at the twinning university.
- Twinning can be on a 1+2 arrangement (1 year in the local private college and 2 years in the overseas twinning university) or 2+1 (2 years local and 1 year overseas).

The curriculum taught locally is identical to that in the twinning university, although in some cases, some local content of the subject is introduced to meet national requirements (e.g., Malaysian Studies and Moral Studies).

(b) Credit Transfer Programme

A credit transfer scheme is a study arrangement designed to link a local private college with a range of foreign universities. Under this arrangement, a student of a local private college, having met a required level of credit hours of subjects studied locally, can

transfer the subjects/credit hours earned (subject to acceptance by the host university) to one of the overseas linked universities to complete the degree programme. This arrangement was primarily geared towards education in the Australia under the Australian Degree Programme. In general, a student is required to achieve a certain number of credit hours before graduating with a degree. The local private college draws up a mutual written understanding for a credit transfer scheme, although no overseas university is obliged to take in a student under the credit transfer scheme unless the university is fully satisfied with the student's entry qualifications. This arrangement is more flexible than the twinning concept as it allows students to choose from a group of universities and programmes. However, students are not guaranteed a place at the overseas university and each overseas university sets its own requirements and formulates its own courses. Furthermore, what is acceptable to one university may not necessarily be acceptable to another.

(c) Full Franchise Programme ('3+0' Degree Programme)

The full franchise programme or more popularly known as the '3+0' degree programme is an arrangement that describes a foreign university degree programme that can be completed entirely at a private college in Malaysia. It is basically an extension of the '2+1' twinning degree concept in which the foreign host university allows students to complete their final year of foreign degree programme in Malaysia instead of having to go overseas. By pursuing the '3+0' degree programme, students do not have to go to host universities abroad and the foreign partner university then awards the degree. This option allows the entire foreign university degree programme to be completed in Malaysia while acquiring a foreign university undergraduate qualification, saving

substantially in the overall study costs. Therefore, it is more economical as the course fees and living standards in Malaysia are far cheaper than studying in host universities in foreign countries whilst the degrees acquired are the same. There are 26 private colleges (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006) which are included the four colleges, have been approved by the Ministry of Higher Education to conduct the 3+0 programme and the curriculum taught locally is the same as the home-campus version with the exception of introducing local subjects such as Malaysian Studies and Moral Studies to meet the government requirements.

The collaborative relationships between these four colleges and their foreign partner universities from UK and Australia have been long established. They were first initiated in 1980s based on twinning and credit transfer programmes (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006). It is the collaborative effort that led to the successful launch of '3+0' degree programme in the 1990s. It was also during this period of recession in Malaysia from 1998 to 1999 that these four colleges provided a viable option to students in obtaining an overseas degree qualification without leaving the country. Today, the overseas degree programmes (i.e. whether it is twinning, credit transfer or '3+0' programme) offered by these four colleges have gained local acceptance and government endorsement as a popular access route for higher education in Malaysia.

5.2.1.3 Adherence to legislation

The establishment, management, operation and the quality standard of these programmes offered by private colleges have to be approved by the Ministry of Higher

Education (MOHE) and the National Accreditation Board or better known as Lembaga Akreditasi Negara (LAN) via the licensing and accreditation processes (Study in Malaysia Handbook, 2006) on *legislation* that governed private colleges. In this regard, private colleges must submit the curriculum content of their programmes each year to ensure that standards of LAN are met. The programmes offered by these private colleges have been granted the Certificate of Accreditation and this is evidenced in the programme brochures. Also, they have to undergo a process of continuous evaluation (compliance assessment) to ensure that standards and quality are being maintained or improved. Both the colleges and their partner universities are also required to submit annual reports. The reports should provide details on the academic progress of students, staff development and students exchange. Should LAN have any doubts about the annual report, they have the authority to reassess or even revoke the Certificate of Accreditation. Moreover, Britain's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) also audits the quality of programmes offered by British universities involved in the collaborative programme. As such, the programmes offered by the Business Schools are constantly under the stringent scrutiny of the LAN and QAA, so students can be assured that the programmes offered by private colleges are similar to those provided by foreign university's home campus.

The abovementioned rulings are the latest government initiated measures to oversee and administer the private sector of HE in Malaysia. In this regard, the four colleges need to comply with these rulings. English is the medium of instruction in these four colleges and in twinning or full franchised programmes, the curriculum taught locally is equivalent to the home-campus version. Therefore, in order to maintain a high standard

of quality in the long term, these private colleges need to comply with the regulations set by the local government as well as overseas universities. So far, the sections above have set the context of these four colleges. The proliferation of private colleges has caused these four colleges to meet the challenges of intense competition and the constant stringent scrutiny of the LAN poses constraints. However, they see the government initiated measures as to govern, promote and regulate the sector with the underlying objective of making Malaysia the centre of educational excellence in the Asia Pacific region. Today, these four colleges in Malaysia are recognised by the Government as part of the national education system, and they are well-governed by various legislation which was enacted in the year 1996 to uphold the highest academic standards in Malaysian private colleges. Thus, having elaborated the research context of these four colleges, the subsequent section looks into the participants' profiles.

5.2.2 Profiles of participants

This section builds upon the previous research context of the four colleges, stating the profile of participants, i.e. students and PLs from the four colleges that have participated in the CIT interviews (see Appendix 3). In doing so, the profile of PLs includes the pseudonyms of participants, the college they are in, their status as student or PL and their year of study or year of experience. The purpose of these profiles is to facilitate readers to know the context of whom they are and where they are coming from, especially when the names of participants are mentioned in verbatim quotes. This is to provide background information to readers and the researcher when making sense of

what is being constructed as a case of service encounter. The following sections go on to describe the profiles of participants.

5.2.2.1 Programme Leaders

Generally a PL provides support services to students studying in the programme that he/she administers (summarised from programme handbook). They provide both academic and administrative support to students. This is confirmed by Betty as she stated that the first thing that comes to mind when asked how she defines programme administration is *"all-encompassing"*, *"comprehensive"* and *"very difficult to put it in a narrow cell like this is only academic or non-academic because when you are administrating a programme, whether you like it or not other elements come in"*. Clearly, Betty's response on programme administration can be interpreted as: for a PL to administer an academic programme it is all-encompassing, i.e. including both the academic and non-academic/administrative support services given to students in order to oversee the smooth running of the programme.

Of the 42 participants who participated in the CIT interviews, 16 were PLs from four different colleges (see Appendix 3). A PL can come into position due to appointment from the management where academic staff or lecturers are appointed into position to undertake programme administration on top of their teaching responsibilities. Also, some PLs are employed solely to administer and to ensure the smooth running of programmes. The PLs that have participated in this research have different years of experience in running the programmes, ranging from a minimum of 1 year to a

maximum of 12 years. Usually, PLs need to know their programmes well and make sure that their programme abides with the regulation and requirements of the local government as well as the overseas universities. They act as a coordinator or a liaison person who oversees and communicates with the parties involved i.e. authorities, overseas universities, management, lecturers and students. The point is whoever the PL is; he/she, in administering the programme, offers educational services (i.e. encompassing all academic and administrative matters) to students.

5.2.2.2 Students

Usually students enrolled in a particular programme are given information through the student handbook and are advised to consult their PLs with regard to programme matter or any issues arising from their programme of study (summarised from programme handbook) e.g. problems with their study, enrolment, academic counselling and etc. As shown in Appendix 3, 26 students from the four colleges participated in this research. They study in various programmes e.g. credit transfer programme, full-franchise or twinning programme. Also they cover students from a range of different stages in their studies i.e. Year 1, 2 or 3. This gives variety to the data obtained to offer a better overview of students with different issues at different phases of their studies. Similarly, this is to say, whichever programme or the level the students are in, he/she is given advice to see their PLs in any event of programme matter or in other words to utilise the support services provided by PLs.

In short, 42 individuals participated (16 are PLs and 26 are students) and their profiles fit the purpose of this research. They are selected from a range of four different colleges with PLs representing different programmes, having different levels of experience whereas students are from a range of different programmes at different level of their studies, giving diversity to the data collected. More importantly, they have approached their PLs and thus are in the best position to relate their experience and SEB in their service encounters. Typically, throughout an academic year there are a number of things that PLs require students to do to ensure the smooth running of a programme. On the other hand, students, throughout their studies, are bound to have issues arising from their studies. Thus, service encounters between PLs and students are inevitable. It is the intention of this research to study what happened in the service encounters when students and PLs interact, in particular the SEB (i.e. situational definitions and situational roles) that has taken place that leads to favourable or unfavourable outcomes. As such, the next section will present the findings of this research.

5.3 Findings and Discussions

Based on the data analysed in Section 4.7, this section details the narrative accounts or findings of this research followed by discussions of how these findings fit into or contribute to its conceptual framework. The data sets are made up of narrative accounts collected from 42 participants based on the CIT interview questions listed in the interview guide (see Appendix 1). These data are organised and presented according to the names of the situations defined by students and PLs. In other words, the following are sectioned according to the types of service encounters defined by participants. Each

service encounter is a case study in its own right and within each section or service encounter, narrative accounts or quotation are included to provide adequate context to further understanding of the situation, what students expected and how PLs responded. These quotations are highlighted in italics and as mentioned above the names used for the quotations are pseudonyms.

Thus, the findings and discussions presented in this section are based on the data collected, documents and the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter two. Generally, in each section they are structured as follows:

- Situational definitions (the definition of the service encounter, the context or setting the interaction took place, the purpose of why students have approached their PLs).
- Role expectation (what are student's expectations of their PLs, what they want their PL to do, help or act and why they expect so).
- Role response (how the PLs responded, what was done, why it was carried out in such a way).
- Outcome of service encounter (what was the outcome, how they felt and why they felt that way).

Although both students' and PLs' perspectives have been categorised under a same type of service encounter, it needs to be highlighted that they may not be referring to a same or specific event. This is because of the difficulty in gaining access to both interacting parties during the service encounter and the narrated accounts are retrospective views of service encounters. However, as argued in Section 3.5, the fact that the incidents are

'critical', participants usually have very good recall. Thus, this research is not trying to match the service encounters recalled by both students and PLs but trying to categorise the CIT accounts according to the nature of the service encounter or a similar defined situation. Yet, at times, by chance, there is a clear indication that both parties were referring to a specific or same service encounter. This is in line with the approach used by Brown and Swartz (1989) and the dyadic concept in this research is treated in terms of trying to categorise and match students' and PLs' perspective to a similar defined situation. Overall, in this research, participants have narrated 63 situations categorised in 11 types of service encounters. These service encounters are further elaborated below.

5.3.1 Enrolment

Enrolment also known as registration and admission is a term used for the administrative procedure by which a person becomes or continue to be a student of the institution for the purpose of undertaking a programme of study. Generally enrolment takes place at the beginning of a semester and occurs three times in an academic year. Student must finalise subject choices, pay their tuition fees and other fees within a certain deadline (usually the first few weeks of the semester). Often, the first two weeks of the semester will be a busy period for both students in getting enrolled and PLs in enrolling students. Basically, it is a time where students approached their PLs for various purposes and participants indicated particularly for (1) subject choices and (2) getting enrolled.

Subject choices is the name given to service encounters in which students approach PLs to select subjects to be taken during a semester. Usually a programme of study is made

up of a specified number of compulsory and elective subjects for the completion of a particular degree or certificate. Among all the subjects offered, there are also some subjects with prerequisite status. Hence, during enrolment, students have to confirm their subject choices and pay tuition fees according to the number of subjects they have enrolled in.

In getting enrolled service encounters participants talked about its busy environment. During this time, they need to complete the enrolment form before proceeding to pay tuition fees. They have to fill in their personal details and subjects to be taken for the semester, subsequently checked and signed by the PL. It is noted that in getting enrolled service encounters, participants also talked about subject choices however at a very minimal level, thus they are categorised under getting enrolled service encounter. In getting enrolled, other than talking about (a) the busy enrolment setting there are also other students who talked about (b) enrolling extra subject (by Frank), and (c) late enrolment (by Luke), while from a PL's perspective, Larry mentioned on (e) tuition fees. Hence in this context, the subject selection service encounter and getting enrolled service encounter are the names given to situations that occurred during enrolment. The following sections focus on the SEB that emerged from these service encounters that happened during the enrolment period.

5.3.1.1 Subject choices – student's perspective

Four students, Candy, Wilma, Ken and Tim narrated on subject choices service encounters. When *Candy* was asked to think of a recent time when she approached her

PL, she referred to the enrolment period and explained that she is not familiar with the subjects that are offered and had to ask the PL for advice. She expressed:

> *I wanted to register for the next semester and I did not know anything about the new subject so I approached her [PL] for advice on the subjects to take because I am only allowed to take eighteen credit hours per semester which is LAN's requirements. Certain subjects are optional and certain are not. So I have to pick the right subjects and she helped me in terms of explaining whether this subject is worth taking or not because there are few choices. Some are very hard, some are okay. So, I'll ask her whether this subject is really taxing on me or very stressful. Then she will suggest to say that I think it is okay you can do this because these two subjects are hard but the other two are okay, so I can manage my time very well if I take these four subjects next semester, something like that...For example, in terms of [Business Law], based on other students' past experience and past students' results, she is able to explain whether the subject is appropriate or suitable for me to take or not. She just talked about the level of difficulty and the combination of the subjects. I was happy because the way she explained to me is correct and she is not misleading in terms of saying that, this subject you need to take and then the next moment she said no you don't need to take this subject. She is very certain and very sure of the subjects I should take this semester.*

In the first instance, it appeared that Candy role expected the PL to help her to select the right subjects so that the credit hours do not exceed eighteen and are inclusive of both compulsory and elective subjects. In actual fact, this is not the case because Candy expected the PL to advise her to select the right subject combination so that she is able to cope with the study load. This is to say that Candy's primary concern is to select the right combination of subjects whereas the number of credit hours and whether the subjects are compulsory or elective are secondary to her. This may due to the reason that the number of credit hours and the number of subjects to be taken are fixed based on the LAN ruling. Thus, Candy is more concerned of selecting the correct combination of subjects to cope with the study load and to complete the programme successfully. From Candy's elaboration, the PL role responded by using her knowledge of the past students' performance to justify the level of difficulty of different subjects combination in relation

to her ability to cope. In other words, the PL weighted the level of difficulty of different possible subject combinations to help Candy to identify what subjects are tough or easy for her so as to suggest a probable combination of subjects. Candy thought the way the PL explained was correct and convincing and she was happy with it. It is evident that the knowledge and the certainty of the PL in explaining the level of difficulty of subjects has helped Candy in choosing subject choices.

Similarly, *Wilma* stated:

> *I ask about the subjects that I need to take in my degree programme. For example, what kind of subjects that I need to study and which one is optional and which one is not optional and how many subjects I can take...just very briefly, not so detail like this subject is for what purpose...she [PL] referred to a list of subjects [study plan] and stated very clearly what kind of subjects I need to take...this subject is mostly covered what-what-what. This is very good and I am happy with it because I can understand more and can have a rough idea on what actually I need to go through in the semester.*

According to Wilma, she only required brief information about the number of subjects she can take, whether the subjects are compulsory or elective subjects and a brief idea of each subject. This implicated that she knew that her PL has prepared a model study plan and she wanted the PL to explain it to her. But the PL has done more that expected by also describing and explaining what is involved in each subject. Obviously the role response of PL exceeded Wilma's desired role expectation and she was happy with the PL because it has given her a better idea of the subjects to enrol in and this concurs with the point raised in Section 2.5.3.1. Thus the role expectation of Wilma towards her PL is to briefly explain the number and the general idea of subjects to enrol in. The role responses of PL were (1) to show the model study plan with the list of subjects that Wilma can take and went one step further (2) to provide description of each subject.

Wilma valued the role response of PL that enabled her to know what to prepare for the semester.

In Ken's case, he knew the maximum subjects that he can enrol is six and he personally felt six subjects are quite a lot to manage. He wanted advice from his PL and he said:

> *At the early part of the semester where there are so many different subjects offered, I asked her [PL] which subject should I take, six or five or four or which portion. She just said things in term of you just take, very brief only about the subject for example, mainly about management, mainly about marketing...she could actually explain in terms of this subject is for those who actually can handle a lot of memorising, more details. This gives me confidence to decide which is more appropriate for me...she just said is up to you but I didn't quite get feedback in terms of which subjects I should take so I think never mind just take all the six...She could have given me more in terms of advice, telling me which subject I should take, in the sense actually ask me are you good at calculation are you good at memorising because the subject that I take for example in this semester four Management subjects and also one Human Resource one Business Law. The combination is actually quite bad as it is very heavy. So I didn't get the message she was telling me as she is just saying that maybe you can take this subject it's up to you that kind of answer, she didn't give me the info I needed to help me decide...if she needed to find out things before advising me, she can do so and I can see her later, at least not to leave me with no feedback at all. This is one case I am unhappy about. I mean as the programme head she could have given better advice...because basically she should know the general overview of how the subjects are like so that she can give advice to students which path to take and which not to take as students have different ability and if she kept on telling it is up to you, I think it's insufficient advice.*

In the abovementioned service encounter Ken role expected his PL to give him advice on selecting the combination of subjects so that the study load is not too heavy for him to cope, in which was similar to Candy's role expectation. Ken had this expectation because he had the impression that a PL should at least know the overview or description of the subjects offered in her programme in order to be able to advice and suggest to students as to which combination of subjects to or not to take due to the different abilities of students. Ken even explained that it was alright if the PL needed to

find out things before advising him as long as she does not leave him with any advice. This implicates that Ken thought it is acceptable for the PL to say that she does not know the answer and that she has to find things out so long as she gives a specified date for Ken to see her again. However, the PL responded by saying that *"it is up to you"*, the kind of answer that Ken stressed that did not help him decide and in which he considered as *"insufficient advice"* that led him to be unhappy. Ken was succinct as to what he expected and why he expected what he has expected. He knew what to expect from a PL and what should be given by the PL and he is able to discern what is considered sufficient or insufficient advice.

On this point, Tim shares Ken's view. Tim said he did not have a very straight point of view on what subjects he was supposed to take in particular what electives were available and which to choose. He said:

> *I went to see her [PL] at the beginning of the semester to ask for her opinion on what subjects I should take. As a student I would like to know more about a subject and the weight for it, whether I need to study more and then another subject maybe less. When I approached her I was looking at her for advice on which subject I should take...I asked and enquired on what subjects are recommended for me to take. I gave her my point of view that I like more language subject because I'm better in language and I do not want to take strenuous or calculation subjects. She was not that good in that sense, that's what I felt and the only thing she can tell me is she cant' quite help me much. She asked me to choose the subjects I wanted and then before taking or signing up she asked me to see the lecturers...the only thing that she can tell me is see the lecturer...for that particular situation it was not professionally done compared to what I expected from the head...it doesn't reach my expectation...She could have given a broader view on each subject and what did the subject hold. She asked me to go to the lecturer that is teaching the subject to give me an overall overview of it when I'll expect her to know it already...I don't think that's the right way of doing it. she is the person in charge of the whole programme, she should be expected to have a more deepen subject knowledge, you know what I mean...in terms of just an overall view will be just good...maybe like how is the workload and how the subject is taught and what's the important thing about the subject. I mean like how it would affect my career or something...which subject is core and need to take...just a general overview of all the subjects...I am not asking*

for a very direct straight to the point answer where you should take this subject, this subject is good because they give you this this this. I'm not expecting that. I'm just expecting someone to get me on the right track...But to be honest, here I don't think she helped me much in choosing the right subjects. I did make one or two mistakes like taking in extra subjects or dropping subjects that I'm supposed to take... so after that incident I'm totally shut down, whatever I choose is my decision.

Tim hoped that the advice of PL could help him choose the right combination of subjects and to avoid taking extra subject or dropping required subject. He explained that students which included him, when they approached their PL during subject choices service encounters, would like advice to know the weight of their study load (i.e. they like their PL to assess the level of difficulty of each subject in relation to their abilities to cope). This point appeared to be prominent because it has also been highlighted by Candy and Ken. Also, similar to Ken, Tim expected the PL to be knowledgeable and have the impression that the PL should know the overview of the subjects offered in the programme and based on her past experience with other students can give them appropriate advice. Both these students can discern if the PL has role responded correctly or whether the advice is sufficient. They have indicated that they are not asking the PL for specific answers but just to obtain advice on the subjects to select, hoping to be on the right track, can cope with the workload of the combination of subjects and taking subjects that are important for their pathway or career. However, in Tim's case, even after indicating to the PL his preference for language oriented subjects, his PL role responded by saying she can't help him much and asked him to see the lecturers. This role response of not taking up the responsibility to explain the overview of subjects to Tim has resulted in his disappointment, in which he believed a PL should be someone who deals with things professionally and with *"more deepen subject*

knowledge" to get him on the right track. After this incident, Tim felt put off to approach his PL and thought that it would be meaningless.

5.3.1.2 Subject choices – PL's perspective

So far, the data analysis and the findings on role expectations and role responses in subject choices service encounters are from students' perspective and the following paragraphs go on with PL's perspective. Gwen started recounting by saying that:

> *There are many students who come and see me, usually regarding the subjects that they have to take or they would prefer. They hoped I could actually tell them, specifically this semester what subjects they are doing, next semester what they are going to do and so on, so that they know their plan. So most of the time, I do have a spreadsheet that tells what are the subjects they have to take with their grades and also what are the subjects they have not taken in whichever level they are in, basically for my own reference. So that gives me at least a rough picture of what they will be doing this semester. So before the semester starts some of them come and see me and I'm actually able to tell them that the following semester this is roughly what you are going to take. Why I said it is roughly because in the event if they fail anything, I try to get them to retake the paper immediately rather than taking it after a one or two semester gap. So that is one aspect why students see me.*

Impliedly when Gwen said that students saw her regarding the subjects that they have to take, she was referring to the subject choices service encounter and the spreadsheet could be the study plan with the list of subjects that Wilma talked about in Section 5.3.1.1. As explained by Gwen, the study plan is just a rough picture of what a student should take, if there is a clear pass in the previous exam. However, in situations where a student failed a particular subject, the study plan will be disrupted as Gwen will advise them to retake immediately and the combination of subjects that they are supposed to take is different i.e. at least one subject is different because they have to drop one subject to retake the failed subject as there is a maximum credit hours or subjects that students

can take in a semester as imposed by LAN. When this happened, the timetable arrangement posed an issue and this will be discussed in Section 5.3.3. Also, Gwen is aware that briefing students on subject choices during enrolment is one aspect of educational support services that she provides to students. Thus, some of the general points raised by Gwen have in some way confirmed a few things so far discussed such as the definition of situation i.e. subject choices service encounter, study plan, credit hours enforced by LAN and her role response to advice students on subject choices.

When Gwen was asked to think of a time when a student approached her, she said:

> *One student came and saw me about the subjects. He wanted to know what he needed to do and how he can blend one or two subjects from level two that's left to the level three subjects...so he wanted to know specifically when he can finish...he wanted me to confirm his subjects.*

Then, when asked why students still come and see Gwen even though the subjects are printed in brochures or programme handbook, she answered:

> *Sometimes the study plan may change because due to programme requirement changes in [Partner University] so we may have to change subjects. So there is a little offset in the study plan...I have my spreadsheet, so from there, I told him exactly what he needs to do and I have asked him to come back because I needed to double check on certain things. So he came back the following Thursday to see me...and I managed to sort that out and he was happy because he actually wanted me to give a straightforward answer in confirming things for him. I suppose is a kind of security as he wanted to know if he's in the right path. He wanted to confirm, reassure things...I think, psychologically, different people have got different characteristics and a lot of people want to feel secure. They want to be like 101% sure that what they are doing is right...So I have to be very confident, when I answer him. Confidence with the right answers but confidence with the wrong answers in the long run will hit me back...Confidence meaning that I tell him very straightforwardly what are the subjects that he has completed and what more he needed to do and probably the fact that I have some proof to show them, the spreadsheet. Okay this is what you have done, this is the bit you need to do, so as long as it's tied in, he is able to understand then it is okay.*

The student expected Gwen to confirm the subjects that he needed to enrol in for the current semester, what are left to be taken in future semesters and when he will complete his final year studies. In short, he wanted to confirm his version of study plan model. Gwen role responded by (1) using the spreadsheet to brief him what she is sure of, (2) acknowledging to students that certain things she was not sure and needed to be checked out via (3) liaising with Partner University, (4) specifying a date for him to see her again and then (4) informing him once things were sorted out. This signified that Gwen has no problem in briefing him of the subjects he has to take for the current semester. But then for the future semesters, Gwen is careful in checking things out with Partner University before briefing the student as she illustrated earlier sometimes the study plan may change due to the change by Partner University. This confirmed the point stated at Section 5.2.1.2 that for a full franchise arrangement the subjects taught locally must also be available at Partner University and PL usually is the person who coordinates it (as mentioned in Section 5.2.2.1. In view of this, Gwen gave a date for the student to come back and see her to clarify things with the Partner University so that she can give correct answers with confidence. By doing so Gwen managed to sort things out and confirmed the student's study plan towards finishing his studies. Evidently, Gwen is trying to point out that in this subject choices service encounter the student was basically seeking for assurance or security or confirmation of subjects so as to know that he was on the right path and she even understood the reason behind it, i.e. psychologically students wanted a sign of security especially on the things that they are doing is right. Thus, with Gwen's confidence in giving the right answers and proof (such as spreadsheet) in her role responses, these are plus points to instil that assurance in the student. The unfolding of Gwen's accounts has shed light on the understanding of her role responses to the

student's expectation to seek confirmation of subjects has led to favourable outcome. The three points she raised are further elaborated below.

5.3.1.3 Subject choices: discussion – dyadic perspective

First, according to Gwen, the way to brief the student who is seeking confirmation of subjects is to be confident when talking to him. The 'confident' that Gwen meant is in line with the 'certainty' that Candy (from a student's perspective) referred to in Section 5.3.1.1. This dyadic perspective confirmed that service encounter is a dyadic interaction between student and PL (as in Section 2.5.3) and this stressed Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role, i.e. interaction is a two-way interpretive process wherein the role of PL makes no sense without the role of student. Candy talked about the way the PL explained with certainty was convincing in helping her to select the combination of subjects whereas Gwen recalled that delivering right answers with confidence gave assurance to the student that sought confirmation. The dyadic perspective affirmed that the role response of explaining with confidence to students who expected to seek confirmation of subjects when selecting their subjects is significant.

Second, as such, the role expectation of the student seeking subject confirmation is related to assurance which is one of the five service quality dimensions stated by Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) in Section 2.5.2 and this in a way helped to determine the 'what' SEB. Also highlighted in Section 2.5.2, most authors in previous SEB studies concentrated in identifying a list of 'what' SEB or the expectation whereas the niche of this research is not only to study the 'what' but the 'how' SEB from a dyadic perspective.

Thus in this situation (i.e. subject choices service encounter) the 'how' or the role responses of Gwen to the student seeking for subject confirmation were made clear by using a study plan to assure students and checked out things with Partner University on issues that she was unsure of and got back to the student as soon as possible.

Third, from Gwen's perspective, it was alright to say to the student that she was not sure and needed to check things out rather than give wrong answers. From Ken's perspective as highlighted in Section 5.3.1.1 he shared Gwen's view. The dyadic perspective proved that it is acceptable to Ken when a PL is not sure and needed to check things out, provided that the PL gives a specific date to see the PL again to clarify things. This showed that Ken understood the nature of the programme (i.e. a full franchised arrangement) in which the PL is just a coordinator who liaises with the Partner University. If to take a look at service literature, past researchers (i.e. Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988 in Section 2.5.2) stressed the responsiveness in dealing with the customer's enquiry but in contrast, promptness is not an issue in this subject choices service encounter because the dyadic perspective has proven that it is acceptable for Gwen to admit that she is not sure and needed time to check things out with a specific date given to the student. Thus, the spontaneity or promptness of role response to Gwen is not a primary issue in HE context but confidence with right information is the key basis or foundation for inspiring assurance to the student who sought for subject confirmation.

On the other hand Candy, Wilma, Ken and Tim expected their PLs to advise them to choose the right subject combination in order to cope with the study load. The PLs role response in which they explained to students the level of difficulty of the different

combination of subjects in relation to their capabilities to cope is deemed vital. As suggested by certain PLs using past students' academic records and spreadsheets with model study plans facilitated their explanation to students. In view of these, not only one but all the four students stressed that the role responses of these PLs are valuable. If the PLs did not respond in this way then the outcomes would be unfavourable as highlighted by Ken and Tim. Both thought that their PLs have given them insufficient advice and did not take up the responsibility to advise them but instead asked them to see the lecturers. This is because they considered a PL as a person in charge of the programme and should possess adequate knowledge of the subjects offered in term of the description or learning outcomes of each subject and the nature of the assessment (i.e. whether it is made up of assignment and final examination or either it is fully assignment or examination based subject). With this knowledge plus the understanding of past students' academic record and model study plan (as advocated by Gwen and Candy) the students believed the PLs are in better positions to advise them. So, to the students, they role expected that the PLs should be someone that they can depend or rely on in delivering their educational support services. This is supported by Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) in which he coined the expectation as reliability, i.e. ability to execute the promised service dependably and accurately.

Additionally, this shows that PLs' role responses or the act of role-making was very much shaped by role taking or the role expectation of students and the definition of the situation as mentioned in Section 2.5.3. Each phase of service encounter has certain student's requirements and expectations associated to it and there can be incongruity in role expectations held by both student and PL which affects the outcome of a service

encounter to be either favourable or unfavourable. So, if the role expectation is not clear then the role response would lead to an unfavourable outcome. This is evidenced in Tim's situation where the PL has not taken the responsibility to explain the description of subjects to the student but has asked him to see the lecturers and this resulted in an unfavourable outcome. Thus, managing SEB is very much on understanding the defined situation (i.e. the subject choices service encounter) and the role taking or role expectation of students that then shaped the role making or responses of PLs. This confirmed the central process of role taking and role making of Mead's (1934) SI perspective in a defined situation as advocated by McHugh (1968) in Section 2.5.3.2.

5.3.1.4 Getting enrolled – student's perspective

The abovementioned participants generally recounted service encounters that stressed the situation of finalising the subject choices whereas in this section participants discussed about getting themselves enrolled. In getting enrolled service encounters, there are students who talked about (a) the busy enrolment setting, (b) enrolling extra subject, and (c) late enrolment.

Tracy related that:

> *During enrolment, at the beginning of semester, a lot of students in the programme office, I think they are a bit frustrated because sometimes students keep on asking the same question and things like that, they will be a bit short tempered. When I wanted to get enrolled as in I wanted to fill in the enrolment form and asked her [PL] to check and sign the form then to pay my tuition fees, she looked angry, so I was afraid to approach her for that moment of time, I thought she is going to scold me, something like that...there was a lot of students and I understand that because I'm not in a rush anyway so I went away and I can come back another time, in fact the next day. I don't like people shouting at me, I don't like the situation, I hope that the person that I am dealing with is friendly...So I just go away...went back to see her*

another time, she's okay after that and it is not so crowded, she is okay, actually she is quite friendly.

Tracy illustrated the busy enrolment setting where many students visit the programme office and tend to ask similar questions that other students have asked. Presumably although they might know the answers or heard it from friends, they still asked because generally students wanted to be sure and to listen from the horse's mouth (i.e. from an original or an authoritative source). This has led her PL to be short tempered. From Tracy's statement, it is apparent that on one hand she understood that the enrolment period is a busy setting and her PL tends to be short tempered due to students asking similar questions whereas on the other hand she did not like to be caught in such a situation and chose to see her PL at another time. Clearly in recounting her experience, even though Tracy is aware of the busy enrolment setting, she still role expected her PL to be friendly when talking to her in which she stated *"I hope that the person that I am dealing with is friendly"*. So Tracy chose to go away and chose another time to see her PL again in which she considered the role response of her PL was friendlier in helping her to get enrolled.

In *Vicky's* case she mentioned:

Basically every semester I have to do enrolment, I have to fill up the enrolment form and pass it to her [PL]. Then she will check the subjects that I have chosen especially subjects that needed pre-requisite ensuring that I am on the right track and all this needed to be done within a given deadline... Sometimes she can check and sign the enrolment form on the spot whereas sometimes it was just left in her tray because at times she was in a rush and she has a lot of work to do and stressed up. So in terms of her behaviour, it must be a bit different and the queue is just so long, so she just said she's busy, just leave it there, like no personal touch...she can actually speak nicely and tell me okay you can come back what day and ensure me that it will be done or explain to me the process of doing it. I think this is lacking...she can actually tell me how long I have to wait and the procedure from

this department to another department. So it gives me a clear understanding and I also get to learn a bit of how the office is actually functioning rather than guessing...so when we know what is happening...our patience level will be there.

Vicky illustrated that she has to enrol within a given deadline in a busy environment setting where there is usually a long queue and facing the different behaviour of her PL who will often be in a rush in doing her work. She expected a more personal touch from her PL and the role respond of her PL in asking her to just leave her enrolment form in the tray without any further information is not acceptable to her. She suggested that the PL should role respond to explain the process of what will happen next will give her more understanding of the process and this will improve not only hers but other students' patience level. The patience level that Vicky referred to is the tolerance level that has been discussed in Section 2.5.3.1 where Woodruff and Cadotte, 1987 and Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) mentioned that if explanation is given the tolerance level will be widened. In Vicky's situation, she indicated that if the PL gave a clear understanding of what is involved in the enrolment process such as the waiting time and the departments concerned, will help students know what is happening thereby increasing the level of patience instead of needing to guess what will happen next. In other words, the acceptable range or the zone of tolerance of students will be widened, allowing for the busy enrolment setting.

Another student <u>*Sara*</u> gave an account on her registration and said:

When I register for the new semester, it was really very very busy, students were going in and out all the time and I have to wait for quite some time...it's the most busy time for her (PL)...sometimes she is normal but she will get grouchy but it's also normal...I see her to enrol the subjects and there's a form to fill, I did one small mistake and she said why you can't do this and that. So sometimes when I realise I

did something wrong, it's like oh no I have to see her and I fear she will shout at me...but it's normal because it is the beginning of the semester.

When asked how she felt at that particular moment, Sara replied:

I understood and accepted that it is the busiest time for her because during usual days she is friendly.

When asked if it can be summarised that she understood that her PL is a nice person and it is only during the busy enrolment period she is grouchy, she agreed and went on to explain that:

because we are all human being, when she (PL) is working with so many different types of students, they make some small illogical mistakes, then automatically she will say, you are not suppose to do this, you study here for two years you still don't know that sort of things. I must be really careful when I register or she would scold. So I tend to make sure it's correct and do it consciously.

Sara's statements reflected the fear within her when approaching the PL. However, she still thinks that it is alright and normal as she understood the situation. In finding out whether Sara is being subtle in telling her story or truly she accepted the situation, Sara is challenged with a question of if during a normal day when the same treatment was given by her PL, i.e. being grouchy and with raised voice, is it acceptable to her. She replied:

depends what I did wrong, if it is a small mistake and because I studied here for three years already if I still don't know, then it's mainly my fault. But if I am new and I really didn't know, if they scold me, of course I will get upset.

Thus, this confirmed that Sara understood that it is the busy enrolment setting that led her PL to be grouchy. As she described, during enrolment, lots of students patronise the programme office because it is the beginning of the semester and all students have to see their PL to get enrolled within a deadline which is usually in a short period of time. This

has caused long queues and long waiting time and Sara explained that on one hand students are stressful and on the other it is a heavy workload for the PL. So that is why Sara thought it is normal that her PL became grouchy and to Sara it is normal for a human being to behave that way. However, she only accepted the role responses of her PL to be grouchy if it is her mistake. Otherwise, she would get upset. Clearly, it shows that although Sara is understanding, she still expects to be treated better and fairly.

Moreover, in getting enrolled, Levin said:

> *I went to see him (PL) to ask which subject is more suitable for me to take and would like to discuss with him. At that time there was a long queue so I waited in the queue. When it was my turn, he not only talked to me but also to all other students in the queue in a very, very rude way, very aggressive, his voice was very loud and he showed an angry face...he said if you want, you can wait, and if you cannot wait come tomorrow...he looked down on us...The way he talked was very rude, very aggressive and not only I said that but a lot of students also said that...I think he does not have the experience to become the PL because the way he talk, discuss, interact with us [students] is lacking...he should be helpful and patient when I asked question and someone who can advise me what to do...So another girl who was in the queue got very fed up and then just throw the application form in front of him and then go away...because I asked him, he did not want to give me the answer so I went to [another PL] who has given me very detail explanation*

Clearly, in a busy enrolment setting the rudeness and aggressiveness of Levin's PL not only did not solve the queue issue but also aggravated Levin as well as the girl who is also stressed out by the long queue. Levin emphasised that the way his PL talked is important so as to not worsen the situation since students have patiently waited for their turn. Thus, he role expected his PL to be helpful and patient in advising him in getting enrolled even in such a busy enrolment setting particularly in long queue situations. Levin believed that the role responses of his PL was rude and aggressive and had only worsened the situation. This has led Levin to be unhappy and instead chose to see

another PL who gave him a detailed explanation to his queries. This implicates that Levin also expected his PL to have responded in this way too.

In some way similar to Levin's case, *Adam* talked about his experience of getting enrolled after the deadline and there was also a long queue. He mentioned that he was late for enrolment because he has to wait for the release of his resit results of a subject which he did not take during the actual final examination as he was ill. When he was supposed to get his enrolment form signed by the PL, he stressed that there were lots of students queuing at his office. According to Adam:

> *The PL is like pushing us (the long queue of students) out and saying don't queue a long queue inside the office...he said outside, outside and I don't like the way he communicated with us because he did not treat us as a student but treat us like a primary school student...he is very rude and raised his voice a bit. I don't like this kind of style...I mean the way he talked...he did not respect us as a student.*

Adam sensed that his PL is not sensitive to how students feel and is inconsiderate because Adam believed that since he is assuming the role as a PL, he should anticipate this kind of situation, he should solve the problem of the long queue rather than being rude to students. He was unhappy with the way his PL responded to him and belittled him as a primary school student. This shows that Adam role expected his PL to be considerate and give help rather than being rude when the queue is long in which Levin shared Adam's viewpoint.

In Frank's case, when getting enrolled he was considering taking on an extra subject so he approached his PL. *Frank* said:

> *I was not sure whether to take on an extra subject so I went to see him and he's kind of look down on me...kind of don't want to answer my question, like don't want*

tell...like he doesn't care about it, he talked in a rude way to answer my question which made me feel unhappy...I went to see [another PL], he not only talked to me but also understood what I wanted. He then explained to me before allowing me to take on extra subject and gave me encouragement. He's good because of his manners, how he talked to students is good. No need to be like a king but just talk nicely.

This illustrated that Frank role expected his PL to talk politely when explaining and to encourage him. He commented that he was not asking his PL to treat him as a king but to be polite when communicating, as a basic requirement. Evidently, the suggested role responses of PL towards Frank are (1) to talk and listen to Frank so as to understand his needs (i.e. role taking) and (2) to talk politely in explaining and to encourage (i.e. role making). Truly, by talking and listening to Frank is the source of role taking (i.e. the 'me') that helped the role-making (i.e. the 'I) i.e. to be polite when explaining and encouraging Frank. This is aligned with the point raised in Section 2.5.3.1 that SEB are best thought of as taking the role of the other and making the self-role in which both 'I' and 'me' are collaborators, i.e. the 'me' organises and directs the 'I'.

On the other hand, <u>*Luke*</u> revealed that he went to the programme office to see his PL for enrolment after the due date. He related that:

She [PL] lectured me and asked why I came so late, she told me the enrolment dateline has passed and questioned me why I didn't look at the notice board. Then I apologised and said I'm so sorry, I didn't know and overlooked this matter and she gave me a lecture...Then in the end she just said ok, this is your form, please remember next semester come back earlier. She still did it for me.

In this situation, it was obvious that the role expectation of Luke towards his PL was to enrol him even after the due date. He stated he was happy that his PL allowed him to enrol although his PL role responded by reprimanding him. Upon asking what he

thought when his PL reprimanded him, he said *"if I am in wrong then it's fine, it is okay since I am late"*. This statement is similar to Sara's statement where she can accept her PL being grouchy if it is her fault, only if it is during the busy enrolment setting whereas to Luke only when he is in the wrong for being late. This shows that both students can accept the otherwise role response of their PL when it was mainly their fault.

5.3.15 Getting enrolled – PL's perspective

This section interprets from the PL's perspective particularly on the queue issues highlighted by Levin, Adam and Frank. In actual fact, they were referring to Cain, the PL of their programme. When Cain was asked about the queue during enrolment, he said *"we have less queue already"* and to him *"problematic students will only come on the first week of class, this time is the busiest time of the semester, other than that we have less queue"*. Cain did not go into details when asked to elaborate about the queue during enrolment but only stressed the issue of problematic students that caused the queue. This may be due to the fact that other than the busy enrolment setting, his presumption or prejudgment of students in the queue as problematic students could be another criterion to the way he has role responded towards his students. Cain did not mention anything about his rudeness or aggressiveness but blamed it on students for being problematic.

Whilst <u>*Larry*</u> mentioned that there was a student who wanted to enrol but faced financial difficulties. He said:

> *This particular student came to see me because she did not have enough money to pay for her tuition fees in full during enrolment. Actually the normal procedure is*

students have to pay the full amount of tuition fee during the enrolment period. So I have asked her to ask for permission to pay by instalment by writing a letter to the Principal. She did that and then I submitted the letter on her behalf. Then, it was approved and she was happy when I told the student and I have also informed the Finance Department about this matter.

Therefore, this student role expected Larry to help her seek permission to pay her tuition fees by instalment due to financial problems. However, this is not a normal procedure as students need to pay their fees in full during the enrolment period but Larry role responded by (1) advising the student to write a letter to the Principal so that (2) he can submit it on her behalf, (3) the favourable outcome was then communicated to her once decision was made and (4) this decision was communicated to the Finance Office with regards to the student's status in paying her tuition fees. The student was happy with how Larry role responded to her expectation by explaining the procedure and the departments that are involved as well as helping her to seek approval to pay her tuition fees via instalments. This concurs with the point noted by Vicky, where she stressed the importance of giving students a clear understanding of the process. In this situation, Larry's student was clear with what she needs to do and how things were done. Despite whether she is allowed to pay by instalments or not, she is happy that Larry has made an effort to help her and is happier that the outcome is favourable.

5.3.1.6 Getting enrolled: discussion – dyadic perspective

The service encounter of getting enrolled in the busy enrolment setting has been recounted by Tracy, Vicky, Sara, Levin, Adam, Frank and Luke. These students described the enrolment setting as busy because (1) at the beginning of a new semester, many students need to enrol themselves; (2) many students go to the programme office;

(3) there is a queue with long waiting times; (4) students are stressed out while waiting; and (5) PLs are stressed out with the heavy workload. In this busy enrolment setting Tracy, Vicky and Sara expressed that they can understand the different behaviour of their PL and their role responses. Tracy mentioned her PL was short tempered, Vicky talked about no personal touch and Sara described her PL being grouchy. Although they could understand, they do not want to be in these situations, fearing of being scolded or shouted at. Tracy role expected her PL to be friendly, Vicky expected a more personal touch and Sara expected the PL not to scold her if it is not her mistake.

In Levin's, Adam's and Frank's case, they did not have a favourable experience as the role response of their PL was rude and aggressive, especially when there was a queue in which his PL did not address the issue but worsened the situation. This led these students to believe that their PL did not respect them as a student and has been rude towards them. They did not mention that they understood the condition of their PL because they thought that his actions had gone too far. How the PL role responded has exceeded their zone of tolerance and therefore it is not acceptable. If the students have made some mistakes, then they understand that they will be scolded but in the case of Levin, Adam and Frank, this is not so and they are also stressed out with the long queue. They indicated that the PL should know how to communicate especially the way he interacts with students as they role expected him to be friendly and patient in helping them to get enrolled. Hence, even though the enrolment period is busy, these students still role expected their PL to be friendly, have more personal touch and be patient in helping them in getting enrolled. Presumably this is because students considered that not only are the PLs in the busy enrolment setting, they are also affected by the

enrolment procedures i.e. to make decisions to select subjects to enrol and to bear with long waiting time. They highlighted that the PL should be courteous in the communication which is in line with one of the SERVQUAL dimension i.e. empathy (as mentioned in Section 2.5.2).

From Cain's or PL's perspective, he did not see the queue during enrolment as an issue but set his prejudgement that the students that have queued to see him as problematic and this has affected the way he communicated to the students. Thus, from a dyadic perspective, the prejudgement of Cain towards the students has directed his role responses instead of trying to understand the expectations of student to direct his role responses in order to lead to a favourable outcome. As suggested by Frank, communicating courteously as well as listening to students would enable the PL to understand the expectations of students in order to role respond by explaining and encouraging them accordingly. Moreover, in one way or another, from a dyadic perspective (i.e. from Larry's and Vicky's perspective) it confirmed that explanation of procedures to students is one of the significant role responses that PLs should take so that students can understand and comprehend the process that is involved.

Additionally, as mentioned by Frank, Levin and Adam, they pointed out that apart from being courteous in their communication, the PLs need to show some respect for them. They believed that if the PLs respected them as a student then he would communicate with courtesy. This point on respect was also raised by Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) as empathy dimension in Section 2.5.2. Clearly, in Frank's, Levin's and Adam's case, they believed that if their PL respected them and understood their individual needs, their PL

would be able to empathise with their situation and would not be rude towards them. Thus, they expected their PL to respect them as individuals and communicate courteously. With this additional insight, it is evident that both respect and courtesy in communication are closely related especially in the service encounters recounted by Frank, Levin and Adam.

On the other hand, if the student made a mistake, as in the case of Luke where he enrolled past the deadline, he thought that it is fine if he gets a lecture from the PL since he acknowledged that it is his fault. Even though he was late, he role expected the PL to still enrol him. He was given a lecture as this may pose a setback to the PL's work and the PL has deadlines to fulfil as well with the partner university. In this encounter, it can be assumed that Luke did not have a clear understanding of what were involved if he is late as the excuse he has given is a lame excuse which is not adequate thereby getting a lecture from the PL, which is acceptable to Luke as long as he can be enrolled. Hence, in this type of situation, as suggested by Vicky, by explaining the process involved will educate the student on the matter thus not continue doing it in the next semester. Thus, the role expectations and role responses discussed in this section (the 'enrolment' service encounter) have provided insights into the intricacy of SEB between the students and PLs when interacting in the busy setting of the enrolment period.

5.3.2 Transfer

Transfer is the process of progressing from one college to another university to complete a degree due to prior arrangement. This refers to the process for students that are either

studying in the twinning degree programme (i.e. either 1+2 or 2+1 arrangement with specified partner university) or credit transfer programme (i.e. to link a local college with a range of foreign universities) as discussed in Section 5.2.1.2. This particular section illustrates the (1) credit transferability service encounters (for students studying in the credit transfer programme) and (2) getting transferred service encounters (for twinning programme students).

Credit transferability service encounters are situations where students approach their PL concerning the choice of universities available and the credit transferability of subjects. These are the students who have enrolled in the credit transfer programme which permits them to select from a group of universities and programmes. Basically, they ask questions such as 'for this university that I planned to go, which subject should I take in order to be accepted by the university (meaning credit transferability of subject)' and 'for that university which subject should I take'. One credit hour is an hour of instruction given over a specific period in a semester and a subject has certain credit hours attached. Under the credit transfer programme of study, a student who has met the required level of credit hours of subjects studied locally can then transfer these subjects or credit hours earned to one of the overseas universities that are linked to complete the degree programme, thus named as credit transferability. It should be noted that it is different from the twinning programme because students do not need to be concerned of the credit transferability of the subjects because the curriculum taught is identical with the twinning university.

In getting transferred service encounters, students studying in twinning programmes approach their PLs to sort things out before transferring to their designated partner universities. For example, their documents i.e. visa, letter of offer and English test certificate; bookings i.e. accommodation, pre-departure briefings and airport pickups; and other relevant information. Basically it is a direct transfer for twinning programme students whereby they just need to fill in a transfer form that would then be sent to the partner university so that letter of offer can be issued to facilitate students in their visa applications. These situations recounted by participants in the transfer process, defined as credit transferability and getting transferred service encounters will be further elaborated in the subsequent sections.

5.3.2.1 Credit transferability – student's perspective

In this section, five students talked about credit transferability service encounter i.e. Elaine, Nancy, Felix, Willy and Cherie. *Elaine* talked about seeing her PL to find out whether the subjects that she planned to take are acceptable to the university that she wished to go. She said:

> *Actually, she [PL] helped me a lot because at first I'm very blur on all these things, after I've seen her I get a very clear picture which subject I'm going to take, why I need to take this and that, she explained a lot...She took out a schedule and I think she did it herself. The schedule shows how many subjects are there, what are the subjects to be taken in the first, second or third year. Then she just explained to me, why I need to take...I know what she tried to tell me, I know what subjects I suppose to take...because for degree transfer programme, some of the subjects are not acceptable by the foreign universities, so if I do not investigate on it, I will be wasting my time.*

The above signified that Elaine knew that only certain subjects' credits are transferable but was unsure which ones. Thus, Elaine role expected her PL to inform her which

subjects' credits are transferable as she did not want to take unnecessary subjects to waste her time which will prolong her completion time. Her PL role responded by using a schedule to explain not only the subjects to be taken but also the reason of taking those subjects. Elaine was happy with the PL's explanation as she can then understand what to do and gets a clearer study plan in mind.

In *Nancy*'s case, she explained that every university allows different subjects' credits to be transferable and she said:

> *I see her [PL] to get information on the subjects' credits that are transferable to the two universities that I have planned to go. Then I know for which university what subjects I must take here [locally] before going overseas and to get the one year exemption...because if I take the wrong subjects, the university does not accept it then I cannot get the exemption, so maybe I need to study there longer...I don't want to take the wrong subject and then waste my money...Then, she showed me some sort of table with columns of which university and which subjects the university accepts...She just looked at the table and asked me what I wanted to major in before advising me to look at the relevant columns of the university, major and subjects...Then she let me have a copy of the table so that I can select the subjects every semester. When I see the list of subjects offered in the programme, then I know which subject I want to take and need to take...it gives me a clear guide on what to do.*

Clearly, Nancy's role expectation of her PL is to explain the credit transferability of subjects according to the two universities that she had in mind. She wanted to be sure that the credits are transferable because she understood the time and cost involved. Hence the PL role responded via (1) gathering information from Nancy especially on her intended major and universities and then (2) utilising the table to explain to her the university, major and the subjects relevant and specific to her programme of study. At this, Nancy believed the role responses of her PL has given her a clear guide as to which are the relevant subjects to take according to her choice of universities and pathway.

Whereas *Felix* approached his PL to get information on the subjects that are offered next semester and the choices that he had. When Felix was asked as to why he needed that information, he related that:

> *At least I know next semester what subjects I will take and can prepare or at least know how many subjects I would take next semester...Now I have chosen my major already, then I'm sure which subjects I have to take and some are not necessary and not related to my major. Then I have to know whether those subjects that are transferable in my major are offered next semester...I found that one subject related to my major is not going to be offered next semester and I asked her [PL] to try to offer it next semester...If I can complete this subject here then I don't have to take it in Australia and it can be expensive...Then she showed me a table with subjects offered next semester and explained which subjects are for me. I also asked her to offer an additional subject and she said it depends and will try to arrange it for me. She is not sure whether the lecturer is available...she also asked me to ask my friends if they are interested to take the subject because if there is enough students then maybe she will offer it...whether my request was approve or not is okay with me because I understand her situation and at least she tried and did not ignore me.*

From this encounter, it can be seen that Felix role expected his PL to advise him on the subjects' credits that are transferable and those that he needed to take for the next semester. Moreover, he not only wanted to confirm which subjects but also to be sure if the subjects relevant to his major will be offered in the next semester. Otherwise, Felix has asked the PL to try to offer it as he wanted to complete as many subjects as possible locally before transferring to a foreign university so as save part of the tuition fees. Thus the role expectations of Felix towards his PL are progressive. His PL role responded by (1) making use of the table to impart information on the credit transferable subjects that are applicable to him. Then in responding to Felix's request to open a new class, his PL (2) asked Felix to check if his other course mates are interested and at the same time she would (3) check out the availability of lecturer to teach the new subject. This illustrated that the possibility of opening a new class is very much depending on the availability of the lecturer and the number of students interested in taking the subject. In other words,

the PL was trying to explain to Felix as to what is involved and how his request will be processed. This has given Felix a clear understanding of what arrangements are required before his request was approved. With this understanding, regardless of whether Felix's request was approved or not, he will accept whatever the outcome may be because he knew his PL has tried her best to address his request by going through the proper procedure. This demonstrated the similarity in the points raised by Vicky and Larry on the merit of explaining the procedure that students have to go through. At least Felix understood the situation of his PL because the viability of opening a class depends on the availability of lecturers with the relevant expertise to teach the new subject and the student numbers taking the new subject.

Likewise *Willy* approached his PL to enquire about the subjects that are offered next semester and which are credit transferable subjects. He said:

> *I tried to get as many subjects transferable as I can, so that I can go there [foreign university] and study lesser subjects. Not all subjects that I wanted to take are offered as certain subjects are not popular among other students in my programme. So I asked her [PL] to offer one subject that I wanted to take...She asked me what I wanted to major in and then she told me that the subjects that I can take to transfer there...For the subject that I wanted to take but was not offered, she will try her best to accommodate by asking my other classmates...Even if the subject was not offered is also okay because I know she cannot do anything due to low student number.*

Willy role expected his PL to tell him the credit transferable subjects that are offered next semester and to request his PL to offer an additional subject that he was interested to take. This shows that Willy's progressive role expectations are similar to Felix's that have been mentioned above. Truly both aimed to transfer their credits as many as possible to their choice of universities in order to save time and cost. The PL role responded by (1) asking Willy his major before explaining to him about the subjects that

are credit transferable and after that (2) explicating to him the feasibility of offering a new subject was depending on the number of students interested in taking the subject and (3) she would try to find out if other students are interested. To Willy, he was not so much concerned whether his request was approved or not because he understood the feasibility of offering a new subject explained by his PL. Thus, he will accept no matter what the outcome would be as long as his PL has tried her best to cater his request.

As for *Cherie*'s case, she said:

> *I'm quite clear about which subjects I will take...my target is clear, actually I want to do first year here [locally] and then go Australia for two years. So when I have completed my pre-university studies, I went to see her [PL] then I said I wanted to do one year here and then she showed me a list with all the level what subjects to take. So I have a copy and I know which subjects I have to take. So the first year has ten subjects and I know it's very important because other than that the university won't allow me to transfer the subjects.*

From the abovementioned service encounter, Cherie is clear about which university she wanted to transfer to and the duration she wanted to be in the foreign university. Thus this has eased the role response of her PL to give her the list of the ten credit transferable subjects in which Cherie has role expected her PL to provide. She considered the list of subjects given by her PL as vital to achieve her target of studying one year locally before transferring to an Australia university.

5.3.2.2 Credit transferability – PL's perspective

In this section, Gwen, Rina and Carol are PLs that gave accounts on credit transferability service encounters. *Gwen* recounted that Elaine was one of the students under the credit transfer programme that approached her and said:

Elaine wanted to know about the universities and the subjects that she needed to take in order to be credit transferable. That's a little sticky because for different universities the combinations are slightly different and even the grading that they expect is different. I have a chart to show me which university require which subjects and I showed it to her. It is actually a table which has got the different universities with different set of subjects...With that she would be able to take the correct combination of subjects, so that the sixteen subjects that she takes all are credit transferable. If she didn't do that, then not all subjects will be credit transferable which means she will spend a longer time in foreign university which is more money for her and she doesn't want that...I think she needed that, wanting some confidence just to make sure that she is in the right path.

This illustrated that Gwen is clear that Elaine role expected her to list out the credit transferable subjects according to the available universities. Hence Gwen role responded by (1) showing Elaine the chart, (2) explaining to her that different universities accept different set of subjects with different grade average and (3) stressed the importance of taking the correct set of subjects. Gwen not only showed the chart to Elaine but also used it to remind herself of the different transfer requirements of different universities. This implies the amount of detail involved and how using a chart facilitated the conveyance of information from Gwen to Elaine. Moreover, Gwen understood Elaine's concern with taking the right subjects that are credit transferable so as to save time and cost and that she needed assurance or confidence of what she has done is right.

Rina is responsible for the Degree Transfer Programme and stated that:

Students usually see me with regard to which university offer what courses, do they accept this kind of subjects to be transferred to Australia and what grade average is required. There was this student who was supposed to go to University 'A' to pursue his second year of degree approached me to find out what are the credit transferable subjects that he can take in order he can study locally for another semester to save tuition cost. So I asked him to show me the university's prospectus on the list of subjects required to see if there are any similarities in subjects. Because the core subjects of the degree are very specific so they are not offered but since the rule

required three electives so I told him these are the subjects that University 'A' recognised as electives and probably he can choose three from these elective subjects. So I basically gave him the options and also pointed out that if he stayed back for a semester to take these three subjects then he would miss the intake in University 'A' and he can only go next year in February to University 'A' which he would waste his time about six months. So I explained everything and it was up to him to decide. I mean there will always be answers, somehow and I would provide him options too.

The student expected Rina to inform him what are additional credit transferable subjects that he can take so that he can stay on for another semester to save money. Rina role responded by (1) asking him to show her the University's prospectus to look at the second year subjects, (2) upon looking at it, she explained that because the core subjects are too specific they are not offered locally, (3) but instead gave him the option of taking the elective subjects that are credit transferable and (4) she reminded him that he would miss the intake in University 'A' by staying on for another semester, i.e. after completing the three elective subjects he has to wait for another six months before transferring to University 'A'. In this case, Rina has laid out the possibilities (options and consequences) to the student and it was up to him to decide. She role responded with the intention of providing possible answers and options for the student. This implicated that somehow Rina believed that as a PL she has a bigger picture of the situation to provide the student with possible solutions and options to his role expectation.

When asked Rina how the student can actually save in terms of tuition fees, she mentioned that tuition fees of certain universities which includes University 'A' are calculated based on the number of subjects enrolled instead of by semester basis. So when the student transfers to University 'A' he would be taking lesser subjects which

mean lesser study load and also pay lower tuition fees. Another question posed to Rina was asking her to explain some of the difficulties she faced when advising students on this matter. She said

> *For several universities they have a list of transferable subjects. Like for University 'B' they said you have to do thirteen subjects blanket then students have one year exemption and gain direct entry into the second year. It is the same for University 'C', if you complete eighteen subjects then you can transfer or cross over for another one and half years. But now the problem is University 'C' kept changing this and it is a problem for me and also for the students. Last time students can transfer after taking ten subjects. They can transfer over for another two years but now two and a half years in University 'C'. So whatever you have advised the students have suddenly changed. So I find that a problem, there is no certain guideline and they kept on changing. Other difficulties faced were the fluctuation of the exchange rate and the sudden increased of tuition fees of partner universities.*

From Rina's illustration, this is to say that the difficulties Rina faced when advising students are due to the frequent changes in the list of credit transferable subjects that affected the duration students spend in foreign university, the uncertainties in the fluctuation of exchange rates and sudden increased of tuition fees by partner universities. Rina was then asked to relate one of such service encounter. She said:

> *There was a student who wanted to go to University 'B' and I have advised him on the subjects that he supposed to take. Later the tuition fees increased and so the student wanted to go to University 'D' in which does not recognise some of the subjects he has taken. So he came to see me and wanted to know what his options were so that he can make decisions like which university to go and which subject to take. I told him that his options were if you wanted to go to University 'D' then you have to forgo some of the money spent because certain subjects that he has completed were not acceptable but I told him if he goes to University 'E' all the subjects that he has completed are recognised as electives, meaning over there he still have to take core papers.*

In this credit transferability service encounter, Rina said the student came to see her and role expected her to provide answers or options on the credit transferability of subjects to the different universities. The sudden increase in tuition fees has caused the student

to change his choice of university from University 'B' to 'D' and this has posed a problem to transfer the subjects that he had completed to University 'D'. So Rina provided him with the options by explaining to him that (1) it was possible to transfer only certain subjects to University 'D' and (2) gave him another option of gaining entry into University 'E' that accepts all the subjects that he has completed as electives. Similar to what has been argued in the earlier service encounter, Rina has a bigger picture of the situation and she tried to list out the possibilities for the student's consideration and decision-making.

Rina was also asked to share what she was considering when providing the student with the advice, she said:

> *When I give advice, I look at student's capabilities like if he is good I don't mind recommending him, you should go to University 'D'. If the money problem, you can't afford to go to University 'D' or 'B' because the fees is too high so the best option is to go to University 'E. So I look into their personal background when advising him. Actually, if the student is sure of which university he wanted to go then it would be simpler. For example, if he said: Miss I really want to go to University 'D' then I can maybe say this is what you have to do, these are the subjects you have to complete and then make sure your minimum average is 65 and then later when you do IELTS you have to score 6.5 and above. However, it is not always so simple. I mean, that's part of the job isn't it...because I think when I give advice to him, it is not just like superficial professional, I think of him as one of the kids seeking for advice, I talk about his family too, talk about his background to understand his situation. If the university's requirement is too high and if his capability is not up to the standard, I will explain that first you are not capable but cannot say, 'hey you are not capable',...I just said the criterion is your CGPA then you have to work hard, can you do that, and he said I don't think so Miss. Okay then this is another option, University 'E', I have to give him options and he has to know that he has this option.*

This exemplified that in role responding to the student's role expectation, Rina has given advice based on the student's (i) academic capabilities, (ii) financial capacity and (iii) English requirements. So in credit transferability service encounters, Rina believed once

the student has decided which university he planned to go then it would be easier to provide advice or options to (a) the credit transferable subjects that he should take, (b) the minimum grade average that he should achieve and (c) the necessity of obtaining a certain score for the English requirement. However this is not always the case because as mentioned earlier for instance the changes in the programme, the increase in tuition fees and the fluctuation of exchange rates would affect his decision. Thus, Rina still tries her best to advise and from the abovementioned statement, a few points have been noted: (1) Rina advised the student based on his academic capabilities which she has verified earlier; (2) Rina's passion as a PL – she has high concern for students whereby she addressed the student as *"one of the kids seeking for advice"*; (3) the way Rina advised students – when she knows that he is not capable of meeting the minimum average of 65, she phrased her message in a very subtle way so that it doesn't discourage him but make him evaluate and realise his own academic capability; and (4) so far it shows that in Rina role responded by stressing the importance of giving the student answers and options for decision making.

In another service encounter, <u>Carol</u> mentioned that students usually *"come with puzzles in the beginning of the programme"* and there was *"a case where a student came and asked about the choices of universities, the subjects to be taken in his programme of study"*. She explained that:

> *So, what happen was that, I usually would have ready the study plan in terms of the different combination of subjects for the student to see...I would go through the subjects but before that I first ask the students which university he was interested in, basically which major he likes and the criteria he has in mind before he chose the university. For example, is it because of cost or is it looking at the reputation of the university, or friends who are already there and other things. So, he mentioned that money wasn't an issue but he was quite concern about the entry requirement to go to*

the universities...So I actively listen to what he was asking for which means I'm trying to get what he wanted without judgement...Since he was concern about the entry requirement, I sincerely told him that he should choose university that he is able to cope and not choosing university that he is not able to cope when his parents are spending tonnes of money over him. I try telling him the reason and I think he is mature enough and can understand and he accepted it...Then, I go through the study plan with him to explain step by step how to use it...he was happy as he knows the expectation of the university and knowing what he need to do throughout the programme. So he has less uncertainty and he can now discuss with his parents about the choices that he has and he knows exactly the entry requirements such as the English requirement and grade average he needed to go to that particular university...many semesters later he came back and told me, thank you very much.

Actually the study plan has given him a specific guideline. I have designed the study plan so that students can choose and know exactly what subjects might lead and open the door to different universities. I felt happy that after advising him, the student actually developed that skill and when he is overseas, he is so smart now using the similar technique that I have used in choosing the subjects that he is going to take per semester because there are semesters when certain subjects you want to take is not offered. So, he can plan his own study plan and actually managed to graduate on time with good results, knowing what he needs to do in his studies. He graduated and came back to thank me and told me how he has learned from me. But I must say that the study plan is not easy to understand because there are so many partner universities to choose and the requirements are so different in terms of the combination of subjects, the grade average, the duration students spent overseas according to different major and English requirement. There is no way for me to keep it all to myself without communicating to the students because they are the one eventually who need to make the choice to go to the universities. So I think from the students' point of view they need to know clearly what is lying in front of them. So the study plan is a tool for me to communicate especially knowing that students prefer to have so called written form of confirmation. I can explain verbally but students might not remember what I have said because of the complication of the programme and they need to communicate to their parents, so it is important for the student to have those information. Even though it is not easy to understand but once the students pick up the layout they know how to use that plan and they could have just go their own way. It is easier since every semester they would know exactly what they need to do the next semester. I think that is very important for student because students are afraid of uncertainties.

Carol shared her experience of a student who role expected her to brief him on the choices or options of universities and the relevant credit transferable subjects. Carol role responded by (1) asking the student to identify any particular university and major which are of his interest, followed by any decisive factors such as the amount of money

involved, the reputation of chosen university, popularity among students and entry requirements (i.e. English requirements and minimum grade average required) and (2) after actively listening to his answers without judgement, she sincerely told him to choose a university with entry requirements that he was able to cope since entry requirements was his key concern. Then Carol (3) explained step by step on how to use the study plan so that he knows how to extract relevant information from the study plan to answer his own queries.

Clearly, the study plan facilitated Carol in briefing the student on the credit transferable subjects that open the doors to different universities and showed him in particular the entry requirements of the different universities since it was his key decision factor. The student was happy with the role responses of Carol that solved most of his uncertainties wherein he can then discuss with his parents about the options of university and can work hard towards the specified entry requirements. Furthermore, she not only used the study plan to brief the student but she familiarised or educated him with the usage so that he can utilise it throughout the programme of his studies and also used the technique to plan out his own study plan when he was abroad. In other words she has not only showed him the paintings but has equipped him with the drawing toolkit.

In addition, Carol stressed that the nature of the programme (i.e. the complicated information) has initiated her to utilise the study plan as a tool to communicate with students. To Carol although it is not easy to read the study plan but she believed it is a written form of confirmation that students prefer and once they grasp how to use it, it would be a useful tool for them to take charge and schedule out their own study plan.

This was confirmed and acknowledged by the student. Truly the study plan has not only facilitated Carol in her role responses but also served as a written path of studies for the student. It was also noted that in role responding, Carol emphasised that since she is the PL and know the programme better than the student thus she has lots of information to share and she stated that the student appreciated what she has shared. In sharing she stressed the merit of actively listening to the student without judgement and sincerely telling the student what she knew. As long as the reasons are given she believed students are mature enough to understand the meaning of her message.

5.3.2.3 Credit transferability: discussion – dyadic perspective

Five students (i.e. Elaine, Nancy, Felix, Willy and Cherie) and three PLs (i.e. Gwen, Rina and Carol) recounted the credit transferability service encounters. Basically they talked about the transferability of the credits earned in the subjects taken locally to one of the linked universities. These students role expected their PL to provide them this information. All required the information but Felix's and Willy's have progressive expectations in which they then hoped that their PL would offer subjects of their interest. Thus, from a dyadic perspective the information on the credit transferability of subjects was deemed imperative to students. This is because students indicated that they were concerned about the duration and amount of tuition fees spent overseas. So, in role responding from a dyadic perspective, the PLs believed the schedule or table or chart or list or study plan was of great help in disseminating the information of the credit transferability of subjects and has facilitated them to impart the required information to

students effectively so that they can understand and also explain or discuss it with their parents.

Also, the table was of great help because of the diversity and complication of information due to the nature of the programme, i.e. students in the credit transfer programme are permitted to transfer from a local college to a range of linked foreign universities to complete their degree. These different universities have different entry requirements in terms of grade average, combination of subjects, English test and these requirements are further diversified for different majors or pathways. This has caused complication and difficulty in disseminating the information to students in which Gwen confirmed when she mentioned she used the table to remind her in responding to the student's expectation and Carol used it as a tool to communicate. Both have utilised the table as written form of confirmation to show students their study plan. In particular Carol stressed how she passed on the technique of using the table to the student who was then able to do the same when he was overseas to finish his degree on time. Moreover, Elaine, Nancy and others also appreciated how their PLs role responded by using the table. From a dyadic perspective, this further confirmed the essence of PLs using study plans in their role response to get across the diversified and complicated information to the students.

In addition, in role responding, Rina and Carol plus Willy's and Nancy's PLs, all stated that they would gather information from students (especially on their intended university and major) before referring to the table to answer students' queries. This dyadic perspective verified that students were required to provide their preferences so that the

PLs can explain to students accordingly. This was exemplified in Cherie's case whereby she was clear about her target university and the duration to be in the university that then aided the role responses of her PL in giving her the required credit transferable subjects.

However, in other cases when the students were not sure, Carol stressed the significance of listening actively to student's preference without judgement and followed by sincerely communicating to the student while Rina highlighted in listening to the students, considering their academic, financial and English capabilities. However, even though one needs to be sincere, Rina stressed that she needs to be sensitive when talking to students in order not to discourage them while Carol dealt with this matter by giving students reasons in order to make them realise. This is because Carol believed that at the tertiary education level students should be mature enough to comprehend reasons or problems put forth. These role responses shared by Rina and Carol reflected their care and passion as a PL, which is linked to the empathy dimension mentioned in Section 2.5.2. Both PLs believed that they are more informed of the programme better than students and thus they care for the students through sharing lots of information with them wherein students appreciated their role responses.

On the other hand, Rina also brought to light the difficulties in advising students especially due to uncertainties such as fluctuation of exchange rate, the increase in tuition fees and the change in transferable subjects that affected the duration students spent in overseas universities. These uncertainties can result in the advice that Rina has given to students as inaccurate. Therefore, credit transferability service encounters, advising students is not such a direct case. However, regardless of the changes, Rina

believed that it is part of her work to give answers and options that are required by students to make decisions, whilst Carol thought that giving reasons would make students realise the situation. These role responses are to be represented in the credit transferability service encounters because they are appreciated by students and as advocated by Carol that students at the tertiary education level can understand the situation as long as reasons are provided. Moreover, this notion advocated by Carol is evidenced in Willy's and Felix's case whereby they can understand the basis of offering a new subject when the rationale was given by their PLs. Although their progressive role expectations were not fulfilled but they accepted the outcome because they understood the reasons given by the PLs and believed their PLs have tried their best to help them. Thus from a dyadic perspective the role responses of PLs providing answers and options together with the reasons are deemed essential to students in credit transferability service encounters that have led to favourable outcomes.

5.3.2.4 Getting transferred – student's perspective

In this section, both Sara and Henry have recounted their experiences of approaching their PLs in order to sort out things before getting transferred to their twinning universities. Sara said:

> *I was taking '2+1' and my final year is in [Australia]. I like to have a clear view of what to do. So before going I went to see him [PL] for advice. At first I was very very blur of everything, have no idea at all and all I know is I go to Australia and study, that's it. I have no idea of accommodation, no idea of process, what to do, procedure all. Then he told in detail like, what I have to do now is to attend the briefing which I have to register, then I have to pay a lump sum and then attend this talk, then wait for a letter, try to book a flight ticket and then he'll try to tell me about my accommodation, then he would handle all the small details and would let me know...I know I have to do a lot of thing but I don't know what to do, I don't know the procedures at all then he told me step 1 is to register and to wait and then*

he told me everything...These procedures are important because if I don't do it and I don't ask, and after the due date everything will be last minute. So he let all students know the information by sticking it on the notice board. If he didn't tell me all these I will be late and I don't get to go to Australia on time...So he guided me through. Actually all students will go to him for all these transferring thing. He gives us all the information...After that talk, I am not so blur anymore, I have a whole clear view of it...It was good because after that I know what to do.

Since Sara has a clearer picture now, she was asked about the sort of information that she thought was important when she actually planned to go overseas. She said:

It is the accommodation, he covered what is it like there, he showed me the brochure, how are the rooms, what type of rooms, he advised me what was the difference in and out of campus, all sorts of things, then how much is the living expenses there and he let me know the feedback from other students...The accommodation is important because I stay there one year or more and I'm staying alone, if it's not comfortable or inconvenient, it will make my whole year not good. So with his explanation I felt more secure to go there, more comfortable and confidence to go there. Other than accommodation, he handles the flight bookings and when I reached there who will pick me up. He will ensure that I am safely brought in...This is important because it's a whole new world, whole new environment, at least I know who will pick me up and where I am going to stay as I am going to a place I know no one, no family no parents no nothing. Imagine if they don't do all these type of service, I would reach the airport not knowing what to do.

In Sara's situation, she knew that in getting transferred to twinning university there were lots of things to do but she has no idea of the actual procedures or course of actions involved. So she expected her PL to provide a clear view of the procedures that she needed to do in order to get transferred smoothly and on time. The PL role responded by explaining the procedures step by step. Some of the required procedures highlighted were bookings for accommodation, pre-departure briefing, flight tickets and pickup from the airport to the university accommodation. Sara stressed that her PL guided her through the procedures of the bookings and she was happy with the information received and this has given her a whole clear view of the processes involved in getting transferred to the twinning university which will be a new environment for her. With the

information given, Sara felt more secure and confidence to go and believed that it would give her a good one year learning experience at the twinning university.

On the other hand, in Henry's case, he was concerned with the study life at twinning university. Henry said:

> *Actually last semester I apply to transfer to UK for my final year and then I asked about the study, about how lecturers teach in the UK University and also asked about the procedures to go there. He [PL] introduced the experience to me and actually he is very good, very nice. He treated me as a friend, he never treat me as he is the head and I am the student but treat me as a friend and tell me everything about studying in UK and the procedures I have to do...he told me everything I wanted to know. So I like this type of head because he gives me knowledge about the study and teach me how to study in UK...Actually if I go to the new environment I wanted to know how to do it so that I can actually do well. So as a friend he gave me suggestions and solutions.*

Henry is more concerned of the lecturing and studying approach at the twinning university plus the procedures of getting transferred to UK and role expected his PL to provide him with this information. His PL role responded by treating Henry as a friend and shared the UK study experience and the procedures involved to gain entry to the twinning university by giving him suggestions and solutions. Particularly Henry stressed the way his PL shared those information, i.e. his PL has relaxed the distance between them by talking to him as a friend instead of between a PL and a student, he felt comfortable in asking what he wanted to know and have clearly understood the information. Furthermore in sharing the information, Henry valued the suggestions and solutions given by his PL and commented that he approved of this type of PL who not only gave him the information he wanted but taught him how to cope with the new environment.

5.3.2.5 Getting transferred – PL's perspective

Flora, Ben and Betty gave accounts on getting transferred service encounters. They talked about students seeking their help usually before transferring to twinning universities. Flora said:

> *A lot of time when they [students] are transferring over to [twinning university] they usually come to me for help. Normally, they first of all fill in the transfer form, then I will send the form to [twinning university] and later they will send the letter of offer. After that, I arrange for their pre-departure briefing and give a travel agent talk and all that. I have a situation with a student where there is something wrong with the letter of offer. The name or the date of birth is wrong and it was almost time for her to go and she didn't check her document. When I gave her the letter of offer for visa application, they are supposed to check that their name and their date of birth are correct but she didn't. So when she went to do her visa at the [embassy] and when they key in her date of birth there was no information on her. So she panicked because that means she can't do her visa at all and that means she can't go and it was just a few days before she was leaving...She actually expected me to help her with the problem of her visa, she expected me to liaise with the [twinning university] and somehow sort the problem out for her so that she can go off on the flight at the time and day she has planned. Also, she booked the flight and if she cancel it too late, there's a cancellation fee and she was worried about all that. So she expected me to help her solve the problem so that she can go to [twinning university]...she came running to me, Flora help me please. So what I did was to send an urgent email to the university's international office to say, look this student is leaving in three days and she can't get her visa done. And I called the [embassy] to explain that this is a very urgent situation. Normally it will take five to ten working days and I asked if they can get the visa done in three days. They said they are not sure also. Luckily the [twinning university] straight away sent me an online letter of offer for her and I called the student to collect the letter of offer with the correct date of birth and lucky for her, her visa got cleared within three days. She came back to me and say thank you so many times. Situations like that, that's when they come to us for help, especially the time when they are leaving, that's when everything has to go smoothly. If not, they won't get to go...so it's a bit of a panic situation at that time...towards the end she was happy that I've got it sorted out for her...It's also because I deal with these people at [twinning university] all the time so when I needed help they do help me out.*

Then, Flora was asked about her concerns when the student asked for her help, given that the student is leaving in three days as compared to five days for visa clearance. Flora said:

I was not sure actually to be honest because normally visas take five days to clear. I was not sure I could help her but I did tell her that I will do it and try and see what happens. I told her I'm not sure that she may get the visa in three days. Actually I was really not sure at that point but I just wanted to do something instead of not doing anything. I thought worse come to worse she may just have to delay her flight for a couple of days until the thing gets cleared. I told her that so that she is aware of the situation. So I went ahead and do it for her...I feel like they are my children. A lot of times, they are young and sometimes they just panic. They are not matured enough to think so usually when they come to me they expect me as the mature person to be able to sort it out for them. So they expect somebody to at least say okay I will try to do this for you and I will try to sort it out. That's what they expect.

Flora related that initially, students complete transfer forms so that she can submit them to the twinning university. This is to obtain the offer letters for the students and then make plans for pre-departure briefing and other necessary transfer arrangements for the students. She gave an example of a case where the date of birth printed on the letter of offer of a student was wrong. She emphasised that usually students are told to check their name and date of birth once the letter of offers are given to them but this student did not check and only realised the misprint when she was at the embassy. Hence she could not obtain her visa and the student panicked and approached Flora because there were only three days before leaving to the twinning university but the visa clearance required five days. Thus, this student role expected Flora to help with her visa problem so that she can travel to twinning university as scheduled. Flora role responded by (1) sending an urgent email to the university to explain the situation, (2) making a phone call to the embassy to clarify the circumstances, (3) explaining the time constraint situation to the student and (4) informing the student of the worst scenario was to delay her flight. However, the university immediately reply with an online letter of offer with the correct date of birth which the student was able to use it for her visa application. All these happened on the same day and the student's visa got cleared in three days. The

student was very thankful that Flora has sorted out her visa problem and that she was able to travel as scheduled. Truly, Flora's prompt actions and timely reply from the university together with the understanding of the embassy have permitted a speedy visa clearance in three days. This demonstrated the merit of good partnering relationship fostered between Flora and the person in charge at the twinning university whereby they helped each other as and when required. Besides, the partnership not only has facilitated the role responses of Flora (i.e. they are able to help each other) but also allowed Flora to draw on the partnership to help students especially in this type of panic situation to sort out the visa problem.

Moreover in the panic situation where it seems impossible to help, Flora chose to do something rather than do nothing. This is reflected in the role responses of Flora because she was prepared to give it a try and with her experience she believed that if the visa was not cleared in three days then it would be in five days. In her role responses, she made sure that the student was aware of the time limitation and the worst scenario. Further, Flora considered the student as her child, who was young, cannot focus and just panic. So she believed when the student approached her, she needed to somehow try to sort out the visa problem. This is why Flora chose to try and not only tried to help but managed to get the visa cleared in three days. This has caused the student to be grateful of her maturity and experience in dealing and sorting out her visa problem.

While *Ben* said:

> *I do handle students' transfer to [twinning university], they do a three years degree programme but they do two years here and then transfer there for one year. The process of transfer needs a period of time before they can actually be sent over there.*

So I do have students who come in late because the university gives us a target date by which all applications must be sent as the application is just not one page, they have lots of info to be put in, lots of documents and so on. Sometimes students do have problems, there's one incident where the student's house was burnt, in a fire...The student hoped that I can help him to get back the document but what I did was, I told him to go back to the police station make a report that these things have been lost and so on. He lost his birth certificate, all his documents and academic documents. Some of it he could go back to get it in his previous school but of course they are only copies and not original certificate. But the thing is when he goes for interview and so on, they want to see the original, so to overcome this I told him to make photocopies of the police report and keep them so when people ask for the original, he can show it to them. Also when he go to Australia, they want to see the original document...So what happen was, this student has to go to [twinning university] but he didn't have all his certificates and other academic documents. So I tried to retrieve copies from the college database and wrote to the [twinning university] asking if they could help with the photocopied documents and they agreed. So it was nothing, not much work on my part. It is a matter of team work, I have good rapport with their officers...Well basically I am here to help students, service oriented and making sure they go there smoothly and on time.

Ben stated that students studying the '2+1' degree programme would transfer to the twinning university in their final year. He stressed that it takes time to get students transferred as the application or transfer form required detailed information to be filled in and documents or certificates to be appended. There is a target date set by twinning university for the transfer form to be submitted. Presumably the target date allows enough time to issue the letter of offer to be used by students for visa clearance. Sometimes students are late in meeting the target date and some do face problems. Ben particularly recounted a student whereby his house was burnt down and he has lost all his certificates. The student role expected Ben to help him to retrieve the certificates because he needed those certificates for filling up the transfer form, to append the certified copies and to show the original copies when at twinning university. Ben responded via (1) informing the student the definite procedure to deal with it (i.e. to make a police report to prove the incident) and at the same time (2) helped him to get

back duplicates of certificates which are within his capacity from the college's database and (3) taught him how to overcome the problem of showing the original certificates by using the police report to verify what has happened. So Ben (4) retrieved whatever duplicate certificates that are stored in the college's database for the student's transfer form and (5) emailed the twinning university asking for assistance. Ben did not take credit for his help but emphasised that it was due to teamwork and the good rapport he has with the officers at the twinning university. This point is similar to the abovementioned discussion on good partnering relationship and also reflected the importance of this relationship that permitted team responses with the aim to help students. In particular Ben reinforced the purpose of his role responses was to help or to provide educational services to the student so that he can be successfully transferred to the twinning university.

In Betty's case, she said:

> *There is this girl who is doing a '2+1' degree. She is about to complete her two years here, everything is fine she has passed her fourteen subjects, she is ready to transfer to [twinning university] but she has not satisfied the English entry requirement. So she was very upset and angry because she said that when she first joined the college there was a guy, he has left the college now told her that everything is fine and she could enter without having to satisfy the 6.0 IELTS. So she came in thinking that she has satisfied it and did all the subjects only to find that now she can't go unless she satisfy the English requirement. So she was in a fit because the guy who has advised her has left and even if he is still around what could I do anyway and it is really not fair to make her to stay back. So I asked her for all her certificates and try to spot if she has done some English subjects. She did and I compiled all her English from the certificates in a list and then I wrote a long persuasive letter to [the person in charge] over there [twinning university] and I said please let this girl in because in the first place it is not her fault and it was the fault of the [counsellor]. Moreover, I told them I spoke to her and she speaks very well and in fact her English is better than the students I get in the academic English class. So on the basis of all this I asked [the person in charge] to waive that requirement and allow her to go to [twinning university], then they agreed. I was so*

pleased that after all my effort she got it and then also when I call her in, she was so thrilled about it.

Betty mentioned about a student who was supposed to pursue her final year studies at a twinning university due to a '2+1' twinning degree programme. The student has satisfied the entire entry requirement except the English proficiency test.

But she only realised that it was required when it was time for her to transfer because a counsellor by mistake has given her the wrong information. The student was greatly surprised and frustrated when she explained the situation to Betty and she expected Betty to help her out as she does not want to stay back just to do the English test. Betty considered the situation unfair to the student and put in extra effort to help her. Thus she role responded by (1) requesting the student to provide all the certificates she has to gather evidence of her English studies. Then she (2) wrote a cover letter to the twinning university explaining the situation and highlighted that it was not due to the fault of the student but a mistake of a counsellor who has left. In the letter Betty also (3) stressed the English subject the student has learnt and put herself as a witness that the student speaks good English when communicating with her. Betty (4) used these as a basis of appeal to the person in charge at the twinning university to waive the English requirement of the student. Subsequently the appeal was approved and the student was very happy with the role responses of Betty. In actual fact, not only the student was happy but Betty was very happy as well because the extra effort she put in has fulfilled the student's expectation.

In contrast, *Betty* recounted another dissimilar case but relevant to be discussed in this section in order to demonstrate how the extra effort that she has put in resulted in unfavourable outcome. She said:

> *There you have one really happy student, the extra effort that has resulted something very favourable for her but there was another student after all the extra effort I made to get an elective for him resulted in a negative situation ...This student asked me whether or not he could have an additional elective in order for him to complete his degree programme locally. He was on a '2+1' but because of financial constraint he was forced to finish it here. So he decided to stay for the '3+0' which means he is about to complete his three years here, everything locally. He really needed this elective because he is not going over to [twinning university] and therefore he will not have the privilege of partaking of the whole range of electives and courses that they have over there. Over here what students have is actually limited. So I explored all the possibilities with [the person in charge] to see if the student can take a subject which was similar to the elective but was offered in another programme in this college. They agreed but for whatever reason there were obstacles in our college and I was told that it is not feasible to offer the elective. After all I went through and the approval that I have obtained, I was disappointed. I went out of my way because I have the student at heart and I wanted to make the student happy and to provide a wider selection of subjects because it is what I myself will want if I were student here. So I wasn't thinking of myself but in the end I didn't get that, so the student didn't have the elective and he was disappointed.*

In this case, Betty mentioned that the student was supposed to transfer to the twinning university for his final year studies but due to financial constraint he has to stay back for the '3+0' arrangement. So the student role expected Betty to offer an additional elective because the choice of electives offered locally is limited. Betty responded by (1) writing to the person in charge at twinning university to enquire the possibility of taking a subject from another programme which was similar to the elective and (2) upon approval from twinning university, then Betty liaised with the PL of the other programmes to identify the subject similar to the elective. However, the responses were futile and it was not feasible to offer the subject. Both Betty and the student were disappointed with the outcome. This is because Betty took the student's matter at heart, i.e. putting herself

in the student's shoes to understand his expectation and responded by trying her best to offer the elective required by him. Clearly these two cases highlighted by Betty are good examples to reveal that it is not necessary that extra effort offered in role responses would always result in favourable outcomes.

5.3.2.6 Getting transferred: discussion – dyadic perspective

In getting transferred service encounters, the students recounted situations whereby they approached their PLs to get things sorted out so that they can transfer to the twinning university as scheduled. Sara expected to know the transfer procedures and especially to sort out the accommodation and airport pickup whereas Henry wanted to know more about the lecturing and studying approach in UK. It was interesting to know that both stressed about the uncertainty of the new environment and that this information would enable them to cope and have a good year of learning experience at the twinning university. Whilst, Flora mentioned her student required sorting out on the visa problem, Ben's student wanted him to retrieve certificates that were lost when the house of the student was burnt down and Betty's student expected English requirement clearance plus another student who called for additional elective when he failed to transfer due to financial constraints. Clearly the students wanted to sort out information, documents, bookings and other problems they faced before transferring to the twinning university. Flora and Ben, particularly in the beginning of their accounts, also stressed the help that they have provided to students when making the necessary transfer arrangements that required detailed information, documents and certificates to be sorted out. Hence from a dyadic perspective, in getting transferred service encounters there are a lot of things that

needed to be sorted out and students expected their PLs to be able to provide them with the required information and help out in the problems that they faced, with the basis that they can get transferred to the twinning university as scheduled and able to cope with the new environment as well.

Both Flora and Ben mentioned good partnering relationships with the twinning university as they have facilitated their role responses in helping the students with visa and certificate problems. From the student's perspective, Sara highlighted that she was happy with the step by step explanation provided by her PL on the transfer procedure especially in sorting out the accommodation and airport pickup while Henry emphasised the suggestions and solutions given by his PL who treated him as a friend and have taught him how to cope with the new study environment. This implicates that the information provided by their PLs was very much information acquired from the person in charge at the twinning university. In other words, there is a lot of liaison work done by the PLs in order to be able to provide students with the required information. Thus the dyadic perspective signified the importance of good partnering relationships to produce team responses to the students' expectations stated above.

Furthermore, Henry's description of his PL who has treated him as a friend and has frankly given him suggestions and solutions mirrored the role responses of Rina in giving answers and options to her students (see section 5.3.2.2), whereas the frank communication between Henry and his PL also reflected what Carol said about sincere communication. In Henry's account he specifically endorsed this type of role response of his PL. Hence the dyadic perspective verified the significance of these approved role

responses of Henry's PL, i.e. sincerely communicating suggestions and solutions to the student's query of the new environment. This demonstrated these role responses are necessary in both the credit transferability and getting transferred service encounters. Apparently when students transfer, whether it is transferability of subjects or transfer of studies from the college to twinning university, they appreciated these role responses because students are afraid of uncertainties as advocated by Carol in section 5.3.2.2 and the sincere communication via giving suggestions and solutions would help to solve most of students' uncertainties. Students can then feel more secure and confident to transfer and this has been pointed out by Sara.

Additionally, in studying Sara's statement, initially she does not have an idea about the transfer procedure but the PL has given her a whole clear view. In Flora's case, she considered the student as her child who was young, immature, cannot focus and just panic. Thus she aimed to help although when it seemed impossible to help. This demonstrated that students at this juncture needed most help from PLs and this may be because it was the students' first time preparing to go to a new environment which was also pointed out by both Sara and Henry. Thus Flora believed when the student approached her, the student expected her as a mature person to somehow try to do something to help. Evidently, Flora's understanding of the student's expectation (i.e. in role-taking or the 'me') has directed her to respond (i.e. role making or the 'I') as a mature and experience person in an attempt to try do something rather than to do nothing which the student considered her role responses as essential. Hence from a dyadic perspective the belief of Flora to respond as a mature and experienced person to extend her help whenever possible was deemed crucial in 'getting transferred' service encounter.

So the help highlighted by Flora is similar to the extra effort Betty talked about. In Betty's first case the extra effort she put in to help the student in her English requirement clearance has resulted in a favourable outcome and both were happy. Mead's (1934) SI perspective of role that stresses interaction as a two-way interpretive process (see Section 2.5.3) agrees with this finding, i.e. one must not only understand that Betty's SEB was a construction of how the student interpreted but this interpretation had also have an impact on Betty whose SEB has been interpreted in a certain way too.

In Betty's second case the extra effort she put in to try offering an additional elective for the student was unsuccessful and has resulted both to be disappointed with the outcome. This concurs with the point raised above on two-way interpretive process that not only was the student disappointed but Betty as well. As stated earlier, this was because Betty took the student's interest as her interest which reflected her enthusiasm of putting in extra effort to help him and when it was not successful, she was also disappointed. So in both cases, Betty put in extra effort to help the students but they resulted in different outcomes. This shows that the extra effort put in by Betty would not necessary result in favourable outcomes. However, this is not to say that a PL should not put in extra effort to help the students because to role respond is not based on the favourable or unfavourable outcome but based on the students' role expectations and they accept whatever the outcome as long as PLs tried their best to help. This is confirmed by Flora when she narrated that her student expected her to do something rather than nothing. Also, Ben considered the aim of his role responses was to offer educational services to help students. This was proved by Sara and Henry as well when they highlighted that

they were happy with the role responses of their PLs. Therefore, from a dyadic perspective, regardless of whether the outcome was favourable or unfavourable, the most important is that the PLs have role responded with the aim to extend help and were deemed fundamental to students' role expectations in getting enrolled service encounters. This was also clearly pointed out by Willy and Felix in credit transferability service encounters when they stated that they accepted whatever the outcome as long as their PLs have done their best to help them. This verified students' appreciation of the help extended by their PLs and signified the significance of the help provided by PLs in these service encounters. So the dyadic perspective validated the role responses discussed so far and they should be represented in credit transferability and getting enrolled service encounters in order to cater to the students' role expectations.

5.3.3 Clash of timetable

A timetable is a schedule to include the day, time and location at which each subject within a certain degree programme will take place. In preparing the timetable it is a monumental task especially when multiple subjects are offered, bearing in mind there are different schools in a college with many diverse programmes and in each programme it has a vast number of subjects offered for various levels of studies. Bearing in mind there are also scarce resources in terms of availability of classrooms, limited time slots and making sure timetable is arranged in such a way that students and lecturers are not having back to back classes for more than six hours. This is further complicated when students who did not pass their examinations will take a different combination of subjects, i.e. at least one subject is different because they have to retake the failed

subject. In view of all these criteria the issue of clashes in time table is inevitable and is addressed at the beginning of the semester in which students will approach their PLs to deal with the matter, hence described as clash of timetable service encounters.

5.3.3.1 Clash of timetable – student's perspective

Several students recounted their experiences of seeing their PLs with relation to clash of timetable. Their role expectations towards their PLs are similar, i.e. as long as the clashes are looked into and are solved then the outcomes are favourable. Their role expectations and role responses are clear-cut, not as complicated as the enrolment and transfer service encounters and thus are discussed simultaneously in this section. They said:

> *Kenneth: I saw my PL when I failed one of the subjects and I need to change the timetable...I need to retake the subject...the schedule for the semester will be different...she [PL] tried her best to make the changes and see if any class is available. That's the most important thing. Secondly if I'm the only one I won't hope that because of me she will change the timetable of the majority of students, it is a bit impossible right. So she advised me to take other subjects that won't have any clashes...I feel satisfied for whatever the outcome is so long as my timetable won't have any clashes.*

> *Tim: I'm supposed to take a subject called Organisational Behaviour and there are some clashes in the timetable. I informed her [PL] and she tried to allocate another slot for me, she did that but there were other clashes for other students. So unfortunately she had to put back that slot and I had a clash. So she somehow convinced me or persuaded me to take another subject because Organisational Behaviour was my elective and she was professional in a way, I meant by the way she went about doing it...by not just forcing me to take it, like telling me 'no you can't take this subject you have to take this even though you hate it', she [PL] gave me other options, she said that if you hate Tax so much you can take this or this or this, rather than another PL that I have encountered said 'no you can't take that you have to take this',...I'm happy with the way she [PL] did it*

Fiona: I see my PL regarding timetable...the subject that I wanted to take, the time clashes with another subject...I expected my PL to change the timetable, the time slots...She [PL] tried to change and if she can't she will tell me to change my subject. She will tell me what subjects I can take... because sometimes the lecturer is not free because having other classes of another programme...the lecturer has limited availability of time slots too...sometimes even though the lecturer is free...but there is no class available. You see it's a problem there...[anyhow] I am happy with the outcome because she managed to solve the clash of timetable for me.

Mike: Once I got to know about the clashes in my timetable I immediately report to my PL...I hope that he [PL] can solve my timetable problem...when he cannot solve the clashes that is if he cannot allocate the classes to any other slots then I have to drop that subject and take another subject...because maybe I am only part of the 1% of the class that is having the timetable problem...so I need to bear with it...[anyway] my clashes in timetable have been solved and I'm happy with that.

The abovementioned narratives confirmed that these students are relating to clash of timetable service encounters and they role expected their PL to look into the clashes in order to solve it for them. They were not so much concerned whether their PLs were able to allocate another time slot to exchange with the clash time slot because they accept the fact that sometimes they have to drop the subject and take another subject just to solve the clash of timetable. This is because they are aware of the situation in particular Fiona talked about the availability of lecturers, limited time slots and accessibility of classrooms, while Kenneth and Mike brought up the issue that it was impossible for their PLs to cater for every student, i.e. change the time slot of the minority and forgo the interest of the majority of students. Hence to them, whether via replacing another time slot or taking another subject so long as the clash of timetable is looked into and solved, they are happy with the outcome.

As for the role responses of the PLs a few points are noted: (1) initially the PLs tried to solve the clash of timetable by changing the time slot and (2) if impossible then the PLs

advised the students to drop the subject and take another subject to avoid the clash. The initial step of the PLs attempting to reallocate the time slot was an important role response considered by these students because it proved that the PLs have tried their best to make changes and accommodate to the expectation of the students. If this step is not possible the PLs advised these students professionally by giving options and convinced the students of taking a different subject instead of imposing on the students that they must take a particular subject. These role responses of the PLs have led these students to be happy with the outcomes of the clash of timetable service encounters.

5.3.3.2 Clash of timetable – PL's perspective

In this section only Cain talked about his experience of clash of timetable service encounter. Cain said:

> *When students come for enrolment I have already identified what subjects they are supposed to take. If they follow my list, there is no clash of timetable but the problem is they want to take subjects whereby the friends are in. And that's where the problem comes in...There was this student who was repeating a subject...there were clashes in her timetable...[but] she insisted that she wanted to take this subject because her friends were taking it...she wanted the time changed...first of all I tried to entertain her to see if there were other alternatives...there wasn't any so I told her very sorry that's the only time slot available, if you wanted to go to final year or you wanted to graduate, you have to take this subject...I don't think she was happy because she was forced to take whatever there was.*

In this case, the student role expected Cain to change the clash time slots for her so that she can take the same subject as her friends. Cain role responded by (1) looking at possible alternatives and (2) when it was unworkable Cain pressured the student to take the subject which was identified by Cain earlier. The student was unhappy in particular

the second role response of Cain pressuring her and she was left with no choice but to take the subject that has been proposed by Cain.

5.3.3.3 Clash of timetable: discussion – dyadic perspective

So far, the service encounters in which students approached their PLs in relation to the discord of time slots in their timetable have been defined as clash of timetable service encounters. From a dyadic perspective (i.e. from the student's and PL's perspective) these students expected their PL to address and resolve the clashes for them. The role responses stated in Section 5.3.3.1 resulted in favourable outcome whereas in Section 5.3.3.2 it was otherwise. The dyadic perspective verifies the significance of the first role response to these students seeking support from their PLs in making effort to find other possibilities to change the clash time slots. The difference that caused the unfavourable outcome was the second role response. So it is a challenge to Cain, i.e. in the event if Cain has carried out the second role response professionally (see Section 5.3.3.1) whereby instead of pressuring the student, Cain provided options and convinced the student, the outcome would be different. This is because although the student was insistent in getting the time slots changed, if Cain had attempted to tell the student the reasons, the student could have tried to understand and accepted it since the student is in his/her tertiary level of education. This was advocated by Carol in the transfer service encounter (Section 5.3.2.2). Moreover earlier Kenneth and Mike highlighted in changing the time slot their PLs gave priority to the majority of students and Fiona illustrated the problem of limited resources, all these implied that their PLs have explained the reasons to them and that is why they are not insistent on only getting the

time slot changed but also accepted the decision of taking another subject to avoid the clash. When they understood the process involved, their tolerance or acceptance range was widened allowing for the restrictive circumstances (as in Section 2.5.3.1) and they can allow either ways of resolving the clash as long as it was solved. Therefore, the role responses highlighted in Section 5.3.3.1 are to be represented in the clash of timetable service encounters so as to yield favourable outcomes.

5.3.4 Academic monitoring

A student who is enrolled in a programme of study is consequently bound to the tertiary institution's academic requirements. The process whereby PLs supervise that academic requirements are followed by students is known as academic monitoring. The participants pointed out specifically the monitoring in terms of academic progress and attendance. In monitoring academic progress, it is a case whereby if a student continuously failed a particular subject for more than three semesters, the student will risk being excluded from the programme of study. Besides, monitoring students' attendance is another situation in which if a student is absent from classes for more than a certain number of times without valid reasons, the student will face the possibility of being barred from taking the final examination. Hence students' academic progress and attendance are regularly observed by the PLs. Thus in this context, the academic progress service encounter and attendance service encounter are the names given to situations that happened during the academic monitoring and are discussed in the following sections.

5.3.4.1 Academic progress – student's perspective

Fred recounted a situation when he approached his PL because he did not do well in a paper and needed some academic help. Fred said that *"my PL was very good because he has recommended me to go for peer tutoring sessions and encouraged me to study hard"* in which Fred was happy. Fred explained that peer tutoring is something like one to one tuition sessions given by another student who is a senior or someone who is good in that particular subject. This is handled by another department and Fred's PL only referred him to the person in charge of the department. Obviously, Fred expected his PL to provide some advice to his academic difficulty in which his PL believed encouragement and direction were very much sought after by Fred.

5.3.4.2 Academic progress – PL's perspective

A few PLs recounted that there were situations where students who are academically weak in certain subjects approached them and they tried to assist the students in whatever possible ways. Their accounts are illustrated below.

In cases where students are not doing very well in their lessons, letters were sent to make known to students the risk of being excluded when they continuously failed a particular subject. Flora recounted that there was a student who after reading the letter came up to her and asked her *"what do I (student) do now Flora"*. Flora said to the student:

> *Well you [student] can see from the letter what you have to do. You have to just keep on attending classes, don't miss classes, I am like a mother figure giving them advice and the student started telling me their problems...this problem at home and blah blah blah. She [student] can't study, she can't concentrate and she can't focus and she doesn't know what to do...First of all I listened to her and somehow solve it for her. You know not to say no, I can't do anything for you...[but actually] explain*

to the student that she is at the risk of being excluded and she better buck up...about her family problem and all that, I said look you need to manage your time somehow if you can't study at home come and study in the college because you need to pass these three subjects because if you don't pass this is the third time you are doing it and next semester you would not be here. So I helped her in that way by sorting it out for her...actually that student is a smart person it's just that because of the problems at home she can't study. So I told her you need to concentrate on what you are doing, to focus as this is your life. I don't lose anything but you will lose everything you have. I told her just come to college, attend classes and sit in the library and concentrate on what you are doing because if you don't you are the one who's going to lose out. I have a job I have a career I don't have to worry about this, but you do. So then she said ok that's one way of doing it. I said well yes it is you have to. You have to really buck yourself up and do this. So she said ok, I will give it a shot...She was happy with the way I talked to her.

From the narratives, it is clear that the student expected the PL to listen to her problems and expected some solutions to her problem. This is because when Flora pointed out that 'not to say no that I can't do anything', this implied that Flora believed that when the student come to the office, she expected Flora to somehow or another sort out the problem. This is further confirmed by the notion of 'mother figure' highlighted by Flora in whom she inferred herself as a person who cares and whom the student can talk to.

Thus, Flora role responded by (1) listening to the student's problem, (2) reminding the student the consequences if she fails again (i.e. in terms of being excluded from the programme and how not obtaining a qualification affects future career) (3) encouraging the student to improve by concentrating on her studies and (4) provide probable suggestions such as studying in the library rather than at home and continue attending classes. The rationale of Flora's role responses was to obtain background information about the student before reasoning out the consequences and offering possible suggestions to students. Flora's focus is very much leading the student to grasp the nettle (i.e. tackle a difficulty boldly), helping her to digest and assimilate the problem so

that the student can see the need to concentrate studying and buck up. This way of sorting out by Flora was an option that the student was happy in which she thought is a probable solution to her problem.

Colin talked about a student who was quite weak academically, even during his previous studies. Colin said:

> *All along his [student's] studies, every semester he will fail one or two papers along the way...He's the type who like to be close to any staff for whatever purpose he has, but I will every time draw a line you know. So in terms of as a student, he's a very nice, very polite and a very street wise student in the sense that he's already helping the father doing business...So he's already probably not very focus in his studies...his weakest point was his Mathematics paper...he has failed this paper...and during that time it was his last attempt, if he fail he has to be excluded from the programme...he came and saw me so I even get peer tutoring for him and things like that...I counselled him...[actually] one thing that make him realised was, I told him straight on his face...I said you are actually is a very nice guy, as a person I like you very much but I don't like you as a student and it actually struck him off. It is not that I hate him or something like that, it's more of probably he realised at that point of time that actually I scolded him because of his laziness and he's not focussing on his academic things and all that but as a person I like him very much ...Then he realised that he's very lazy and he knows his own shortcomings, he actually missed a lot of classes and I feel that he at that point of time listened to me...When I scolded him, he was unhappy but later he was happy because he realised that I was trying to help...So after I told him, then he was a bit different...in the end he passed.*

The aforesaid statements illustrated that the student approached Colin because it was student's final attempt to sit for the paper and the student expected to get some advice from Colin. Initially Colin (1) assisted by arranging peer tutoring for the student and (2) counselled him. In the event of counselling the student, Colin ended up reprimanding the student by pointing out his absence from classes, not being focussed and lazy in his studies. Colin has reprimanded the student although he knew that the student will be unhappy because it was due to the student's own laziness in his studies that he failed and

it was not because of any other issues which were out of his control such as family problems. Colin's statement at the beginning showed that Colin has good background information of the student and has counselled the student before. Moreover the student already had a job waiting for him so he is not motivated and since he is very street wise he thought he can slip through by building good rapport but Colin is clear that the line needs to be drawn somewhere to preserve his status. This is why Colin has taken the approach to reprimand the student in order to make him aware of his own shortcomings so that he can improve on it to pass. Thus at later stage when the student was happy it confirmed that the good intention of Colin prevailed.

5.3.4.3 Academic progress: discussion – dyadic perspective

There are many sources that hinder a student's academic progress such as content-related difficulty, low motivation or family/personal problems interfering with concentration. Fred pointed out that he needed academic help in particular advice on his academic or content-related difficulty in which was similar to the student that Colin mentioned except that the student was also lazy in his studies or not motivated. But Flora talked about the student facing family problems that affected her academic progress thus seeking some kind of solution. In whichever circumstances students are searching for some sort of way out of their problems. From a dyadic perspective, it illustrated that the students expected their PLs to listen so as to understand their circumstances and advise them accordingly. Clearly Flora, Colin and Fred's PL in role taking (i.e. the 'me') did not say no to the students and that they cannot do anything for the students. Even though they know the problems students faced are personal and it is

not within the limits of their role responses, they still try to at least give some academic advice (i.e. in role making or the 'I') to minimise the impact of the situation on their studies (see Section 2.5.3). This shows the importance of listening in role responding to gather information before advising in these situations. Peer tutoring, frequent visit to the library, reminding the consequences of not adhering to the academic requirement, encouragement and help students to process the problem are some probable advices that can be given to students in which students are happy. In contrast, if there is a need as in Colin's case, reprimanding student was necessary especially to point out the student's own laziness and this resulted in an unhappy outcome which is predictable since the truth usually hurts. However because Colin was sincere and direct in saying what he meant and meant what he said, later the student was happy with Colin's good intention. In view of this, reprimanding is not necessary unless it is inevitable. Thus in academic progress service encounter listening is crucial in gathering background information before expressing concern through giving academic advice.

5.3.4.4 Attendance – student's perspective

Osin and Fred talked about their experiences of seeing their PLs due to irregular attendance. They said:

> *Osin: There was one time when I missed too many classes and my lecturer informed him [PL]. Then he [PL] sent me a reminder letter, a copy to my parents and asked me to see him. If I continue to be absent from classes then I will be barred from exam. Then he advised me to be more hardworking and don't miss too many classes. He is like my parents to advise me and I'm happy...as I have experienced last time, there were some lecturers if you don't go for classes the lecturers don't care. You can choose to go or not to go for classes as you like and the lecturers don't care at all...I like that when he sent me the reminder but not all students like that, only some.*

Fred: I have been skipping classes, he [PL] found out and send reminder letters to my parents and me...My father came and he let my father know about my academic and attendance in the college...At first I'm not happy with that but later on I think it is good because he let my father know about me in the college so that I don't have to lie to my father...I agreed with what Mr. Colin did...When I found out what he did was for my good so I have to answer to my father and also him, so that's why I went for classes and worked very hard...I pass my paper.

When Fred was asked whether he is afraid of his father or his PL, Fred said that

I'm not afraid of any; I mean I am not afraid of my father or my PL but you know when somebody cares about you and you didn't appreciate it that means you disappoint them right. So I need to work more because I know that they all care about me, so I just pass the paper.

Both of them pointed out that their PLs tracked the absenteeism with the help of lecturers. Then reminder letters are sent to students and a copy to parents stating that students face the possibilities of being barred from taking the final examinations. Thus, the letters initiated them to see their PLs and they hoped that they are not barred from taking the final examinations. In Osin's case the PL role responded by reminding Osin about the rules and redirecting her to the right course by encouraging her to continue attending classes and to be diligent in her studies. Osin expressed that she was happy with her PL taking the role as her parents to advise and care for her studies. She also highlighted that not all students are similar to her in terms of liking the PL to track her absenteeism in which was true because in Fred's case initially he was unhappy that his PL tracking his absenteeism and told his father about it. In using a different approach, the PL involved Fred's father in redirecting him to the right path. However, later Fred realised what his PL and father had done was to care and help him. In not wanting to disappoint both of them, Fred attended classes and passed his examination.

5.3.4.5 Attendance – PL's perspective

From the PL's perspective, Gwen and Colin are the PLs that narrated the attendance service encounters. Gwen said:

> *I am very particular about attendance in class, and if students don't go for classes their lecturers will inform me, I make a point to ask them why...There is this student who approached me and I took time to listen to him. I think this student was just looking for someone who can listen to him and particularly needed advice. So he outwardly asked me, what I think. So it is an opportunity for me as a PL to over set him straight on his wrong doings...I listened to him and gave him my opinion. But it cannot be too hard an opinion, because it has to be in between...I take him off in a very nice way and so that triggered him to explain. It's his way of explaining and at the same time probably sharing his problem...But the important thing is you listen and that is what he wanted...He is looking for somebody who will listen to him and understand or maybe enterprise to him...he just wanted you to understand, it's not that he has been purposely not coming for class, he felt that mentally he has not been happy and he can't focus...he wanted to feel good about you understanding whatever he has done...later his attendance improved.*

Gwen highlighted the student expected her to listen and provide advice to the problem he faced in not attending classes. In responding, Gwen stressed the importance to listen to what the student said without judgement or in a non-threatening way which trigger the student to share his problem and provided Gwen the opportunity to advise him and redirect him to the right route. Gwen also emphasised in advising it has to be done professionally without too hard an opinion because the student expected Gwen to engage in such undertakings to understand his situation in which Gwen believed it helps to ease the student's attendance problem.

In contrast Colin took a different approach in responding to the student's expectation, he talked about:

> *Ok this boy Fred, actually his previous school results are quite good. I think the boy was not focus. He does study but last minute, he does his work but to the*

minimum...I counselled this student before and even have spoken to his father also. We [Colin and the father] cornered him [Fred] because he's been missing classes and may be barred from sitting for the final examination. So the father came and he wasn't aware so I called him to the office and we cornered him there and then. There and then, not only I fired him the father also fired him. One thing about this boy is I think probably he's not focus...As a person he is nice, polite and obedient boy but the only thing is he's lazy. Of course I think the family is quite well to do so sometimes he never think of the importance of this education yet, at this point of time. I told the father your son actually is an obedient boy. The only thing is probably he was lazy...when we scolded him he was unhappy but later I think he was okay probably he knew our intention...so far he sees me at the corridor, he calls me so I think he is okay even though I don't counsel him anymore after that point of time. Probably he knows that I am trying to help him...then his attendance was okay and he passed the paper...that's why I don't know whether it was because of my counselling or because of the father that he then attended classes because the father was involved in the counselling and in front of his father I told him that he has to go for classes and buck up. Maybe you [the researcher] talk to him and find out. He's a very interesting character.

From Colin's narratives it illustrated that Fred hoped that his attendance was not monitored and he was allowed to sit for his final examination. However, Colin not only counselled him but had involved Fred's father in reprimanding him. This may be due to the fact that Colin has counselled Fred before but in vain and Colin has gathered academic information about Fred and knew that Fred is a smart boy except that he is lazy. Thus Colin believed reprimanding Fred by involving his father is necessary to make him comprehend his own circumstances and to buck up. Although Colin recognised that Fred may not immediately welcomed his interventions but he believed it is never wrong to communicate his intention to help in which Colin was right since Fred acknowledged that both of them care for him and he did not want to disappoint them (see section 5.3.4.4).

5.3.4.6 Attendance: discussion – dyadic perspective

In monitoring students' attendance, the reminder letters really prompt the students to approach their PLs. In the attendance service encounters the role expectations of students varied with Osin welcoming the PL to track her absenteeism while Fred did not like it which corresponded to what Colin said about him. Further, the student that Gwen pointed out needed advice on his problems that hinder him from attending classes. Nevertheless from a dyadic perspective the students expected that they are not barred but allowed to take their final examinations. In role responding, care has been stressed by participants with Osin liked her PL taking the role as her parents in advising and encouraging her while Fred later realised both his father and PL cared for him although initially he was unhappy with Colin's intervention. Moreover Gwen is particular about attendance thus took time to listen so as to understand and advise the student whereas Colin took a stern approach that involved the father to convey his purpose to help. From a dyadic perspective, clearly these various approaches of role responses demonstrated the weight of expressing care and concern in attendance service encounters that then led to favourable outcomes.

5.3.5 Complaint of academic staff

Students may have complaints of academic staff with regards to teaching-related provision. In view of this, students approached PLs to point out the complaint and in this context it is known as complaint of academic staff service encounters. Usually students are advised to use the informal mechanisms (i.e. take up the matter with a PL)

for resolving such concerns before they involve the formal complaints procedure which are discussed in more detail below.

5.3.5.1 Complaint of academic staff – student's perspective

Luke and Linda made known their complaints of academic staff to their PLs and the accounts are as stated below. Luke spoken in a typical way:

> *I have complained about a lecturer to him [PL]...because I really can't catch what the lecturer was trying to say...he's mumbling to himself...I expected the PL to change the lecturer...then the PL explained that he know that lecturer is like that and I am not the first person who have complained. He asked me to give the lecturer some time because he is new Then I think oh ya, maybe he is new...I was happy with that explanation, at least the PL tell me what is the lecturer doing or he's trying his best...but in the end I didn't attend this class because I just can't accept the way he presented the subject...it was terrible because I can't listen to him at all.*

Subsequently, when asked whether he has gone back to see the PL Luke answered *"no, I study on my own because the lecturer gave notes...and I attended tutorial sessions by another lecturer."* When asked why he didn't see the PL, he explained that

> *the lecturer is new and I think if I go back to the PL I think he'll just tell me to just bear with him [lecturer]...since I can study on my own and attend different tutorials...I just leave it there and let the matter pass...But I think the lecturer did improve as I see a lot of students now talking to him. Ya I think he did improve....I also didn't fail the subject...I just got to accept that he is new.*

Luke was referring here to his experience of finding difficulty in understanding lessons delivered by a lecturer and expected his PL to replace this lecturer. In response, his PL clarified that the lecturer is new and that Luke should give the lecturer some time, in which Luke was happy with the justification because the clarification of the situation has widened Luke's zone of tolerance which echoed Vicky's point (see Sections 5.3.1.4 and 2.5.3.1). Further, this is verified by Luke's approval when he not only gave time to the

new lecturer to adapt himself but he has also adapted himself to the situation and let the matter pass without reproaching his PL. This implied that Luke is an understanding and adaptive student to accept the outcome of the situation although his expectation has not been realised. His acceptance of the situation has two-fold effect by giving the new lecturer an opportunity which led to the improvement of his teaching and at the same time Luke, being adaptive passed the subject.

Linda on the other hand narrated:

> *There is another situation I went and complain to her [PL] about this lecturer...the total number of topics is eight but in ten weeks she only finished two topics...actually a lot of other students went to complain also...in this situation, I am just assuming that the lecturer has her own personal problem, and also she has been working here for quite some time as in few years so it wouldn't be ethical for the college to sack her off or just tell her this is not the right method. So I expected the PL to talk to the lecturer...after she talked to the lecturer, she [lecturer] said why are we [students] complaining to the PL and not to her and her attitude changed. At first she is patient, teach very slow, then later after we complained, she teach very fast, try to rush the syllabus so that we can finish on time...[for example] one week we have one lecture and one tutorial, she is using both for the lecture...So to me, it doesn't really make much difference, maybe if we don't complain it could be better...I'm not happy because the problem is still there, it has not changed, it has not become better. So to me there is no point complaining, making her [lecturer's] life more miserable and she is not improving. Maybe from the beginning she knows her material well, she knows how to teach and she is very friendly but after the complaint, the way she is focusing is everything should be exam base. So, as long as the student gets the material for the exam purposes and that's it my work is done. She didn't like what we did as in complain to the Head and say that her teaching is so slow. She just told us that she will just focus on exam because ultimately what we want is exam. She sort of generalise that we all come to the college to get a cert to pass the exam and that's it but which is not, not all of us, for my purposes, I will say no. I want to learn new things, to widen my knowledge and to benefit from it. Basically, more specifically it prepares me well before I go to the working force.*

When Linda was asked for her opinion on why students did not talk to the lecturer directly, she pointed out that

no one dare I think...students are just students because they will think, there are so many students out there, why me which I think quite true...they want to protect themselves because firstly I didn't want my lecturer to know that I am the culprit and I'm the one who complain about her and also I don't want to make so much trouble, making them change this change that and then in the end everybody is not happy as in the lecturer not happy and it's very hard to implement it.

By probing further, when asked if she would complain in future, she answered

No, let say I complain to the PL and she talk to the lecturer and after that, there are two things that might happen, one is that the lecturer will try to improve herself that is a positive way. But the thing is this lecturer because of this, she was hurt you know, she did not have the motivation to teach anymore then in the end, who suffered, we students suffered, so why make the lecturer go through all these things. So just take it easy, after all, those things I can just go back and read on my own.

From Linda's narratives, it is apparent that she was worried about the timeliness of the coverage of topics and expected the PL to talk to the lecturer so that the situation can improve. She made this request instead of asking for a change of lecturer as she has gathered information about the lecturer who has been teaching in the college for quite some time and Linda assumed that the lecturer may face personal problems. As requested, the PL talked to the lecturer but then Linda shared her experience of regret or disappointment to complain because after the complaint the lecturer just rushed through to finish instead of giving proper topic coverage. To Linda the situation was status quo and it would be better if she had not made the complaint. This shows that Linda did not like the lecturer either to rush or to go too slowly but if required to choose then slow is better than rush. But then in such situation (i.e. only two topics are covered in ten weeks) as a student it is a natural step taken by Linda to complain and she need not feel regretful about it. Maybe if Linda has taken the step to talk directly to her lecturer the outcome would be altered because it was stated the lecturer preferred students to communicate to her rather than via the PL. However, Linda gave her point of view that

as a student she would not approach her lecturer for fear being identified as the culprit. So after experiencing this service encounter Linda was able to rationalise and weigh the outcome in which she has become adaptive and preferred to do her own readings rather than to complain in future in which she doesn't like to hurt any party.

5.3.5.2 Complaint of academic staff – PL's perspective

In this section PLs talked about their experiences of handling students' complaints on academic staff. Rina mentioned:

> *This student that came to see me was not satisfied of how the lecturer taught and requested the lecturer to be changed...she has problem understanding him in class because he went on and on, no time to ask whether students understand or not...Okay basically there's nothing I can do but I didn't tell the student instead I have to advise the students, even if they go to public university, there will be good or bad lecturer, you have to adapt yourself, so I tell the student to talk to the lecturer first...I mean the lecturer didn't even know that you have a problem with him, so is not fair. So I said it is no harm talking to the lecturer but you don't go and tell him that you have a complain, but talk nicely to him, for example I have problem understanding you in class, you go too fast...then if you still have any problem, then only you formally complain...no action is taken, not until the student has spoken to the lecturers, I mean only after the student has spoken to the lecturer and still cannot solve the problem then only I have to report this to the Dean, there's a special report if students don't like a lecturer or something wrong, they can fill up the report and I submit on their behalf...So the student did go and see the lecturer and there's slight improvement...student was happy in a way because I understood that she has problems regarding this lecturer and she wanted to report but somehow don't want lecturer to find out afraid that the lecturer will recognise her in terms of marking, I think that's why she come and see me, just to talk about this rather than officially report to the Dean. By listening to my advice to talk to the lecturer at least the student can see slight improvement.*

Rina talked about a student who expected her to replace the lecturer because the student found trouble understanding the lecturer. Although Rina knew that the student expectation is difficult to be fulfilled but she did not tell the student. Instead Rina dealt with it in a tactful manner. Firstly, she linked the request of the student to a bigger

perspective by quoting what happened in other tertiary institutions, i.e. it is a common scenario to have both good and bad lecturers. This helps to calm down the student when knowing that it is not only her having that problem and this in fact instil the confidence in the student that Rina knows her stuff and is able to help as she was a student before. Subsequently Rina encouraged her to talk to the lecturer and at the same time educated her how to phrase her sentences when talking to the lecturer. Thus, Rina believed her role responses are appropriate and she made it clear that no actions will be taken unless the student has spoken to the lecturer and if in vain then the formal complaint procedure is initiated. However Rina is aware that the student saw her as an avenue to discuss about the problem rather than making formal complaints even though confidentiality is assured and marking are moderated. So that is why Rina highly recommend that the student communicate with the lecturer in which the student did and slight improvement was observed that led to a favourable outcome.

On the contrary, Lavina described:

> *This student came to talk to me in week ten about a lecturer who was only teaching topic two out of eight topics, this was very serious...she wanted me to talk to the lecturer because she was worried that she will be victimised in marking...I promised that her identity will definitely be kept confidential...I didn't want to tell the lecturer that it is the student that has complained and I do not know who to blame as well, so I called the lecturer and told her that a parent didn't complain but was just concern and did not want the child to know that's why they refused to give me the name. But I told the lecturer the point here is, whether is it true that you are only in topic two, so, the lecturer said it is true. Then I said how are you going to catch up as you still have four more weeks and you have got six more topics to go, can you explain what is going on...I actually asked her what I can do to help...Then the lecturer at the end explained that she is not that far behind actually, she showed me the new planner from the partner university, actually topic one and two are very massive topics, very detail and needed almost seven to eight weeks to cover, topic three, four and five actually just need two classes to cover because they actually break down the subject into too detail. So it is the new planner and there is a new guy who took over at the partner university and he broke down the weeks into a very imbalance weeks' topic.*

So in a way the lecturer can actually finish and will be able to catch up, so it is not a problem but a misunderstanding and misconception of the student because when they see topic two but actually it is very intensive, a lot of content inside. So I told the lecture, in that case it is her duty to explain to the student in the class where she is and how she actually wanted to handle the remaining topics. So she said she will explain again as she has explained before at the very beginning of week one or week two but maybe the students are not there because at that time attendance was quite poor. So I suggested to her to do one more round to explain where she is and how she is going to handle the rest of the topics so that students will not be worried. So she did the explanation to students, after that, she came and thanked me and told me, she said that now only she realised that so many of the students do not know. All the while she took it for granted and assumed that the students knew what she is doing. So by the time she explained to them, the whole class felt quite okay. So she actually thanked me, then she said or else she cannot imagine her evaluation how it will look like...the student also thanked me.

In this case, because of fear being victimised in marking by the lecturer, the student role expected Lavina to have a discussion with the lecturer with regards to the timeliness of topic coverage. Lavina role responded by giving the student the assurance of confidentiality and consequently draw on the excuse of a concerned parent instead of the student to seek clarification from the lecturer. This shows that Lavina is trying her best to render help. From the clarification it illustrates that the change of planner at the Partner University (the alteration that caused the imbalance of week's topic) and the lack of communication have placed students in anxiety which Lavina classified as miscommunication and proposed the lecturer to give one more round of explanation to rationalise the matter to students. The outcome of the encounter has proven that Lavina was right as the lecturer realised students were not aware of the matter.

5.3.5.3 Complaint of academic staff: discussion – dyadic perspective

In the complaint of academic staff service encounters and from a dyadic perspective, (1) Luke and the student that Rina mentioned expected the lecturers to be changed whereas

(2) Linda and the student that Lavina stated wanted the PL to talk to the lecturer. The first two cases (Luke and Rina's student) have similar role expectations, i.e. to get the lecturer replaced, although the role expectation has not been realised but the outcome was accepted by students and this validates the role responses used. In these situations concerning teaching, the PLs strive to create an environment of communication rather than an atmosphere of complaint, i.e. especially Rina stressed that she declined to take action requested by the student unless informal discussions with the lecturer has proven unsuccessful. Rina's role responses that encouraged and educated students to discuss the matter with the lecturer and the frank explanation of Luke's PL by making known that the lecturer was new have alleviated the problems faced by the students.

On the other hand, the second role expectation of wanting the PL to talk to the lecturer has been executed but the outcome was contradictory (Linda was not happy with the outcome but Lavina's student is happy with the outcome) although they are talking about the same matter. Thus definitely it was not Linda that Lavina is referring to and it could be another student since Linda mentioned there are other students that made the same complaint of that particular academic staff. The role responses of Lavina have cleared the miscommunication in which some students were happy but not Linda because although Lavina thought she has tried her best to keep the identity of students confidential but the lecturer knew the complaint is definitely from students, otherwise parents would not know. Also, according to Linda the matter is still there and she regretted that she complained as the lecturer was rushing through the topics. On the other hand, there are students who are happy with the outcome and the confusion has been dealt with. Anyhow, the lecturer stressed that she preferred students to talk to her

directly instead of going through the PL thus the role responses rendered by Rina would be more appropriate as compared to Lavina in cultivating the environment of communication between students and academic staff, encouraging and educating students to talk to the lecturers constructively but on the other hand the lecturer will also need to take it constructively.

5.3.6 Examination

Examination is a formal assessment under supervision occurring after the teaching in a course has been completed, i.e. usually at the end of the academic year. It is an assessment taken under formal and controlled conditions, usually a timed paper with questions to determine what students know or have learned. Examination timetables, giving the dates, times and locations of all examination will appear on the notice boards before the examination periods begin. Students are usually advised to check the notice board from time to time and it is extremely important that students are available on the dates specified for their examinations. Pass lists for examinations will be published a few days after the Examination Board meetings have taken place and later students will be sent printed transcripts of their examination results, indicating the grades they have achieved. In all these events, although they are dealt by the Examination Department, should students have any query they can approach their PL and thus known as examination service encounters which are discussed in detail below.

5.3.6.1 Examination – student's perspective

In the examination service encounters, students talked about approaching their PLs with reference to transcript, exam timetable and resit. Lily recounted two instances:

> *In December we [students] have got our results and I have three subjects exempted and in the result slip it supposed to show 'exempted', but the results slip showed 'withdrawn no penalty'. Therefore I went to him [PL] and he tried to do something...I asked him: what is this 'withdrawal no penalty'. I'm not withdrawing the subject but I have got exempted. Then, he said: this has to be changed and this should not be like that. So he photocopied my result slip and asked me to wait for the answer from head office [Partner University]. Then he asked me not to worry as he will settle it for me. Later I received the correct result slip. Another time was about exam timetable. I have to check with him the actual exam dates so that I can prepare, study and get ready. He knew all this because he is in charge of this and the exam timetable is sent from the head office. After asking him, he said he will ask the head office and then paste the timetable on the notice board which is good because I can refer to that board anytime.*

In the first instance, Lily mentioned about incorrect status of three subjects printed on the transcript in which she was given exemption. She then sought clarification from the PL and expected the incorrect status amended. What the PL did was (1) photocopied the transcript to facilitate his writing and liaison with partner university on the matter and (2) gave assurance to Lily not to be bothered as it will be solved in no time in which he did and Lily was happy with the outcome. Another instance was when Lily wanted to know the exam timetable earlier than the release date. Despite that the PL agreed to Lily's request and wrote to the partner university to check if it is ready and assured Lily that it would be put on the notice board once he has received it. This is because he understood the concern and reasoning of Lily that it would assist her preparation for exam. This also implied that he believed it would not only benefit Lily but also other students.

For *Linda*, she narrated:

> *I went to see her [PL] regarding the exam timetable and I have two subjects which is quite tough, I can say need a lot of reading...[subject 1] is on the first day and then [subject 2] is on the second day...and I was thinking maybe she could separate the time, as in maybe, this tough subject put it in the first week, the second one put it in the second week...So basically she said this situation is very hard because the lecturer cannot come on the following week so she cannot separate the timetable, so in the end I still have to stick to the old one...because the lecturer cannot come on the second week so I have to just do it myself, just prepare earlier. I asked some of my friends what do they think, they think this is unfair because we are the students and we paid the fees and why the lecturer has the say and if she cannot come and that's it. We just have to suit it you know, that's what some of my friends actually said. Basically they [PL] are friendly, they help the students to find ways to solve our problems and they are also willingly to listen, open up the topic, you have anything you can come and talk to me, that sort of things, that's what they told me.*

When asked, what she expected from the PL, she stated that

> *Of course I will expect her to solve my problem but I have to be considerate as well so basically give and take, as in if she cannot help me, maybe there's some reasons so I'm willing to take it. Because it is not about what I want, sometimes the college cannot provide because of some reasons...Of course, which I think the lecturer won't be so bad as in purposely don't want to come on the second week so maybe there is a reason behind it and that's why I'm willing to accept the fact...is not a big deal maybe I just prepare earlier.*

This shows that Linda role expected her PL to change the examination timetable especially the two difficult subjects so that they are not examined in two consecutive days but in different weeks. She reckoned this would enable her to have more preparation time for the two tough subjects. The PL role responded by explaining the situation whereby the lecturer was not available on the second week thus the examination timetable remained status quo. It was interesting to know that Linda heard both sides' opinion where her friends viewed it as unfair whilst the PL viewed it as inevitable in which she accepted the justification given by the PL. Although Linda is aware that she has the right to voice out or complain if the examination dates of the two

subjects are too close together, she is also considerate to think from the lecturer and college standpoint. This explicates her maturity and sensitivity of as a student to identify with the situation.

In another case, *Tracy* recounted:

> *There was once where, I almost failed one of my subjects which is [Subject A]...in my transcript it is actually a pass...but the results printed out on the notice board is 49 so I fail the subject so I see her [PL] and ask her and she checked for me...[because] the result that she is keeping, the copy is fail so she ask me to show my copy and she photocopied it and after all she let me know is a 50...she deal with the officer over there [at partner university], so after checking she let me know that it is actually a pass, they officially upgraded my results from 49 to 50. So she is the middle person who has helped me to clarify my result and also someone that I can consult if I have not passed the subject and will need to see her to appeal for my results to be upgraded and on what shall I do for the procedure and things. I heard from my friend it is not easy, you have to go through several procedures and something like that, because you have to deal with examiners...I'm very happy with her as the middle person and I didn't have to retake the subject.*

From Tracy's account she highlighted the ambiguity of the grade of a subject printed on her transcript as 50 but 49 on the board. Tracy has dual role expectation with one was compulsory and the other was conditional, i.e. she expected the PL to clarify the border line case and only if it was a fail grade then she also expected the PL to advise her on the appeal procedure to upgrade her result. The PL role responded by photocopying Linda's transcript to aid her correspondence to partner university to resolve the confusion. Thus Tracy perceived the role response of the PL as a middle person to make clear the grade and as a consultant to the appeal procedure if she failed. However in this case the role response of the PL as a middle person was sufficient that led to favourable outcome.

While *Edwin* described:

I failed my [Subject B] and is printed on the transcript as 'supplementary' so I went to see her [PL]...because I failed by less than few marks to pass so I have to resit...I expect her to give me the information that is what I need to do, because this is my first time failing and there's no information on what is supplementary, what I have to do next, how much I need to pay, when is the supplementary date...she told me that when she received information from [partner university] she will post a notice on the board to inform students with supplementary status on when to go to the programme office to collect a letter for the supplementary and the letter I received has all the information I need. The information on supplementary can be obtained via the academic handbook but a lot of people don't read...it's boring, word, word, word...people will delay in reading it or don't need to read until something very serious then only flip the book.

The abovementioned narratives show that Edwin was not familiar with the academic jargon and wished to seek clarification and once understood he wanted explanation on the procedure. The PL informed him to look out at the notice board so that he would know when to collect the letter which has the information he required. In fact the PL coordinated the giving out of the letter received from Partner University to students with supplementary status. To Edwin, he preferred to walk into the programme office to obtain information rather than refer to the student academic handbook that is wordy and he commented that generally students do not read the handbook unless deemed necessary. Thus it is an issue to managers of tertiary institutions to look into this matter because this can help students to assume responsibility to know and make their own academic decision and simultaneously to free up the time of PL.

5.3.6.2 Examination – PL's perspective

From the PL's perspective, Larry illustrated an incident on examination timetable and *Larry* said:

There was a time where a student came to see me about the exam dates because she wanted to plan out her time and prepare for the exam. Usually Partner University

will send it to us but since the student wanted so I asked on her behalf to see whether it was finalised and I told her once I have received it I will put it on the notice board...later it came...she was happy with how I have helped her...I am running an international programme and standing on behalf of students in requesting things that students want from the other part of the world. I am actually doing a service which is related to the students, so whatever that students want, I am the only link to Partner University. So whatever students want, I am the only one that can assist them. So in that sense...students rely on me, they trust me that's why they come to see me...what I am trying to do is listen to them and just support them.

In Larry's narratives, he talked about a student who have requested for the examination timetable. Even if Larry knew that the partner university will send once it is ready yet he still took the initiative to check if it was finalised because it would help the student's preparation for examination. Larry sees himself as the only link to the Partner University whereby he implied that he is the middleman or contact point that provides assistance required by students. Further he stressed that the administrative service act he provided is very much directed at students which are their minds rather than bodies (see Section 2.3.4). Thus Larry tried his best to listen to student's request and support in terms of liaising with Partner University.

5.3.6.3 Examination: discussion – dyadic perspective

From the student's perspective, clearly they were seeking for clarification whether it was in Lily's (on transcript) or Tracy's (on border line marks) or Edwin's (on academic jargon) cases and requesting for examination timetable as in Lily's case. In role responding these students talked about their PL liaising with Partner University especially Tracy highlighted that her PL as the middleman and the consultant in dealing with her situation. Similarly Larry also stressed that he is the only link or middleman to the Partner University, i.e. the contact person who is in a position to provide the

assistance required by students. It was noted photocopied relevant document was preferred as evidence to facilitate the correspondence of PL to refer the matter to the Partner University. Thus from a dyadic perspective the PLs are seen as a middleman in responding to student's expectation in each mentioned examination service encounter with the exception of Linda's case. Linda's situation is quite similar to the clash of timetable service encounter discussed earlier in Section 5.3.3.1. Even though what Linda expected has not been fulfilled but with the role response of her PL she accepted the outcome which signifies the point raised by Carol in the transfer service encounter (Section 5.3.2.2), i.e. students who are at tertiary education can accept and understand the problem faced in addressing the situation if the PL explicates to them.

5.3.7 Appeal

A request to review the decision of an awarding body is an appeal. Thus the majority of appeals can only be lodged once the relevant Assessment or Examination Board has confirmed the results. Decisions made at the Examination Board are based on the academic requirements of a College (see Section 5.3.4) thus both appeal and academic progress service encounters are related. Academic progress is monitored once a student is enrolled in a college and before the final examination takes place whereas an appeal only takes place after the final examination in particular after the publication of official results. Thus an appeal service encounter is a situation whereby a student appealed on the decisions of the Examination Board on the student's status i.e. exclusion when they failed a subject for more than three semesters or the allowance to enrol for additional subjects, and they need to make these appeals within a certain time frame. In each

instance students should contact the PL who gives impartial advice and guidance on the College's procedures related to appeals. An appeal is required to be resolved locally or within the school level, as this is often in the interests of both parties especially if the student is concerned of an evaluation or grade and wished to appeal, the very first step is to discuss it with the lecturer making the decision. However, it is recognised that sometimes this is not possible and so there are appeal processes in place to allow for the review of local decisions. Ultimately, the internal procedures must be exhausted before an appeal can be made. It should be noted that students disagreeing with their results are not a valid ground for appeals however, if they would like to check the accuracy of their marks then they can apply for a review process which is a separate process to appeals. The following sections cover these issues in more detail.

5.3.7.1 Appeal – student's perspective

Luke shared his experience of appealing against exclusion, he said:

> *I was having problem because I got excluded from my programme and I'm suppose to appeal but the date to apply for re-admission was over as I went outstation for two months so didn't know I was excluded...Therefore I went to see [PL1] and what I got from him was shocking, he said: I'm sorry this means that you are out of the college. It was like wow why are you saying this, I am just a student and I am just consulting you. Then I went to see another [PL2], I insisted on seeing her...because it's good to get her advice on what should I do, what is my next step and what are my hopes...she said the other side [Partner University] were saying: I'm sorry you are not supposed to sign any appeal form after the application date...she [PL2] was very nice, she said okay she will help but she can't sign as that will be over using her power...the other side didn't approved...after that I decided to write to the head of the other side...then nearly two weeks I didn't get any answer, then I expected the worse but it's like there's still hope and I just didn't want to give up. Then I went to another [PL3]...then she said I think I can help you...She wrote the letter and she signed it...after just a few days, two or three days she got the response...then she refer me back to see [PL2]...I am relieved actually that I can continue...she's a great help actually...you see I got to know that my other friends who failed four subjects and got excluded but when they appeal it was before the date due so they*

were allowed them to retake all the four papers again and their status was reinstated...I appeal after the date due therefore there was a problem...what [PL1] said was shocking...he is a nice person, I just don't know why that day he's like that...when I come to you [PL1] as a counsellor you should say: I'm sorry to say that I think you can appeal but without my signature, you still can appeal and see what the other side says. You know he [PL1] just said: I'm sorry you are out of the college. Very bad, really hurt...but [PL2], she tried to calm me down, she tried to help, she tried to do her best to help out...it's how she communicated, how she talked and how she tried to do things for me...she just said that you must understand my situation, she tells about her own problem first, like she can't over use her power...Ya, what she said is true because rules are rules you can't bend it...she has her boundaries, I actually bypass the rule and want her to bypass the rule to do that...Ya I'm not supposed to do that but I still need to appeal because I need to wait for another six months to study, six months, wow that's a very very long time. Not really short, therefore she said: okay I'll try my best to help you but without my signature...actually I rather she [PL2] explained the situation. Because like [PL1] telling me off and leaving me unknown about the situation that usually caused trouble...but at least she [PL2] told me what she is doing or she's trying her best.

Luke talked about his experiences of seeing three PLs with the expectation that they can help him to appeal against exclusion. He knew he has way passed the due date to appeal for re-admission and recognised that he was not supposed to do that because he has bypassed the rule but he still need to appeal because the duration of six months before he can study again was considered too long for him. That is why he was very insistent in going to different avenues to see who can advise and help him. PL1's response was shocking to Luke but what PL1 said was the truth. PL2 role responded by (1) explaining the situation to make known to student what has taken place (i.e. the approval of re-admission and the due date were decided by Partner University) and (2) what she can do and what she cannot do (i.e. she cannot sign after the due date which is over using her power but she can help to submit the appeal). The rationale of PL2's role responses were intended to convey the message that rules are rules and one cannot bypass the rule and it cannot be bent. Luke understood the fact that he has gone over the deadline and there would be a problem appealing and therefore accepted the explanation of PL2 when

he compared his situation with his friends' whose appeal have been approved when done within the deadline. Clearly, Luke understood the importance of meeting deadlines.

When it was not approved he attempted to write to Partner University but to no avail and without giving up he finally obtained help from PL3 to have his re-admission approved which was a relief beyond words to Luke. The outcome of what PL3 has done was favourable but although PL1 and PL2 did not get his appeal approved nevertheless Luke preferred the help extended by PL2 and was happy with it. He returned a few times in his interview that he is unhappy with PL1's refusal to help and even gave examples of how PL1 should phrase his sentences and not using discouraging words to put him off. Comparing these two encounters, Luke emphasised that it was really what was said and how it was said or the tone of the speech that led him to think the outcome of talking to PL2 was favourable although his appeal was not approved. This is because Luke can see and know that PL2 was trying her best to help which is most important to him as a student. Thus it is suffice to say that the manner the message was conveyed and the significance of making clear the situation to students and what can and cannot be done to help is a preferred way to say 'No' to students rather than telling them off and leaving them unknown about their own situation that led to unfavourable outcome.

5.3.7.2 Appeal – PL's perspective

The following looks into Laura sharing an account on exclusion (or re-admission), Carol on enrolling extra subject and Rob and Rina sharing accounts on review of marks. *Laura* recounted on:

So every time end of the semester when the results are released students will come and they will ask for help, to me one way it's easier because I'm not the one to say 'Yes' or 'No'. So students will write the appeal, I put my remarks and then hand it over to that side [Partner University]...students are appealing for grade to pass, and for terminated students they wanted to be reinstated back to continue their studies, all these things have to be done within ten days of the date of the release of results. Because the other side don't have a clear guideline to say who can appeal and who cannot appeal, basically everyone is entitled to appeal, so our office will be flooded with people with all sorts of excuses. Last semester alone I sent about one hundred and sixty appeals and majority of it, they rejected as they don't entertain them...a lot of students, don't know whether they are ignorant or whatever, they didn't check their results online. So the appeal came in two months later...The other side what they did was, they just ignored the student, because to them you are supposed to be an adult, you know what you are supposed to do, so normally they will just ignore the students.

So there's this student facing some family problems, at the same time the parents also came, that's why I am willing to help...he wanted to continue his studies but he already missed all the deadlines to enrol and he will definitely be terminated...So I wrote a letter to the other side, to tell that the student was left with two semesters, to appeal on behalf of the student to allow the student to continue to enrol. So I send it over and follow up with a phone call and then quite fast, the next day the student got approved.

But then, after that I still have four to five students that come with reasons like 'I forgot' or 'I didn't check', and I think that's not a very good reason, so these kind of cases if the students don't care, I just put it down for consideration, normally the other side will not approve and the other side will definitely suspend them for one semester and I will tell the students to come back next semester...I will talk to them and tell them that you have missed the deadline and these are the consequences, if you are in my position how will you do, trying to teach them to realise the importance of knowing what they are supposed to do for the next semester...it is a good lesson for them so in future they will know that if it's a deadline, it's a deadline...So I try not to appeal on their behalf if without good reasons.

If I help every student in such a way, my job will be endless and the other side is doing the same thing, only when I call then they will entertain the appeal...it is not difficult for me to make a call to ask the other side to allow students to continue but it is just that students will never learn a lesson that they actually have to check their results, follow the deadlines and they cannot simply just come and say 'I forgot'. If I allow that then every student knows that after the deadline, they still can come to me and I will have ways to do it then I will have many-many cases and all my favours with the other side will be used up. In the end, in the future, the other side will received my phone call, they will know that another one, then I become the person

that they should give me a lesson...because too many appeal cases if I use my name too often, it becomes no value anymore and next time when I call the other side, I don't think anyone will answer my call...So sometimes it is tough, as an administrator it is just like doing the parents job, teaching the students that deadlines mean deadlines because if you don't train them now, in future when they go out, they always think they can miss the deadlines but they don't know that in actual fact in the industry if you miss the deadline, that's it. People just close the door. But the students here...they thought that because they paid the tuition fees, they should get the privilege that I should open the side door for them to go through or get by or whatever. So, it's a tough call...because we are in the private education sector, the parents actually paid fees, in a sense student is the customer so it's a bit different from the government sector where they can just punish students because the parents didn't pay for all this thing you know. Here I will give them a hard time to begin with, of course I hope they will learn, maybe given the deadline, within my ability I can do, I will try my best to do it. If it is outside my ability I cannot do anything...I won't say I'm a discipline master but...my role here will be sort of a negotiator between here and there, but if the student come in after the deadline, I will have to tell the student the consequences, making sure that when they leave this room, they understand the situation and they are happy and they will come back.

Overall my role here is to help students so sometimes they come back and say thank you. I just tell them it's my job, my job here is to help them, if I can I don't want to be the one to reject their appeal, doesn't matter first or second time they come in, I just give them a very hard lesson but in the end I'll still help them, to try my best to see what can be done to help them. Some are terminated for the second time, I just tell them that they are wasting time, mind as well they go and look for other programme, check with them what's the problem.

Initially, Laura talked about the time of the year whereby appeal service encounters take place, i.e. at the end of a semester and usually after the release of official results. She explained that students are appealing against grade and exclusion and she made clear that she is not the one who decides. So she only put down her remarks on the appeal written by students before submitting to the Partner University and it must be within the ten days after the release of the results. But because there is no clear guideline on who can or cannot appeal so basically according to Laura everyone is entitled to appeal. However, to the Partner University deadlines remain as deadlines and all appeals are rejected unless there are any special circumstances recommended by Laura because they

treat students as adults and deadlines have to be adhered to. Thus in one way or another the Partner University's jurisdiction is very much influenced by the recommendation made by Laura as to whether it is a valid appeal or not. These points highlighted by Laura somehow concur with the explanation illustrated in section 5.3.7.

Then Laura continued to tell of a student who role expected her to help in appealing against exclusion as the student missed the deadline and usually Laura would not make any recommendation to the Partner University because she follows strictly to deadlines specified if not she would have endless appeal cases. But then because of special circumstances highlighted by the student and parents so she role responded by (1) writing the appeal letter on behalf of the student in particularly emphasising the reasons and (2) followed up with a phone call, in which the appeal was approved.

In comparison, Laura gave examples of other cases to show that she gives primacy to the adherence of appeal datelines. Laura mentioned that in these cases students have similar role expectations, missed the deadlines and have no valid reasons to appeal. Thus her responses were (1) to point out that they had broken the rule, (2) reminded them the consequences of breaking the rules and (3) ask them what they are going to do if they are in her position. Laura's rationale of her role response was to make students realise her situation and to point out the importance of following deadlines in future semesters. In these cases Laura stressed that she tried not to appeal on students' behalf without valid reasons so that they can learn their lessons. She justified her role responses with three convincing points: (1) it is better for students to learn how to adhere to deadlines than to learn it in their formal workplace in future, (2) rights vs. responsibilities – in

private HE sector students pay full tuition fees (see Section 5.2.1.1) in a sense they are the customers. Laura emphasised that students considered themselves as having the privileges or rights of using the side door but she sees it as a tough call for her as she needs to impart the responsibilities of following deadlines instead of rights and (3) help vs. consistency – on one hand Laura believed her role responses are to help students in their appeal, i.e. if within her ability then she will try her best to do it (for e.g. the student with family problems), but on the other hand if it is out of her ability, i.e. when rules are broken without valid reasons, it is her responsibilities to uphold the rules so to ensure consistency. To Laura, this implied that rules are needed to enable the programme to function to the benefit of *all* students and since she is managing a programme, on one side she has to help and on the other side she has to be strict (or give students a hard lesson to start with) to make sure it is consistent and fair to everyone. In view of all these, it does not only benefit the students but also the administration of the programme, i.e. clear of who can or cannot appeal if not Laura jokingly said she would be the one being taught a lesson by the Partner University in which she could be right.

Hence based on the three points justified by Laura, she recapitulated and reinterpreted her role responses as similar to a parental job, teaching students the important lesson on meeting deadlines and also suggested that instead of being known as a discipline master, she viewed her role responses as a negotiator to discuss with students to reach an agreement, i.e. she wanted to remind the students of the consequences of breaking the rules and making sure they understand and accept the outcome after talking to her.

Carol talked about:

I once have a student who was trying to bargain because he believes that he can actually cope with his studies every semester. He appealed throughout the whole programme he kept coming back every semester wanting to take more subjects but he doesn't have the right attitude...he did not actually manage to cope with it but he kept thinking that he can do it so every semester he wanted to take more subjects than the normal workload... I also show him the study plan and that doesn't seem to work out for him. He knew the expectation of the universities, during the first semester thinking that he can make it...first time he appealed, it was approved. Second, third time, he came again, every semester he failed about one subject out of the so many that he enrolled. He did not understand what I meant in the first semester when I say not to take so many subjects and he eventually felt that pressure up to about semester two or three...my concern is if he cannot handle so many subjects and the demand of those subjects, it is going to pull down his grade average and if he continuously pull down his average it's hard for him to meet the minimum entry requirement to go to the universities in Australia. So he might even at the end, end up with nothing...He wasn't happy at that time because I kept denying and discouraging him from taking more subjects. But he can't understand at that spot, so he did go through the appeal to take more subjects but eventually his cumulative average is not as good as it should be and he only realised that about his third semester which is about time to go to university, his average doesn't meet the requirements of some universities that he wanted to go so he got a bit discouraged. I think mainly it's because of the level of maturity in the sense of knowing his own self and knowing the university he wanted to go as he tried to tackle some good university with higher entry requirement and of course given that result he can't do it. So he eventually settle with universities that are of a lower ranking because of his insistence to take more subjects and unable to handle it along the way. So that is sad...the problem is not every student is mature to understand at that stage...so at one stage he was not happy because he has not understand the reason yet, why I am telling him those information but later he understood...so if I do have students like this in future, I would first show the study plan with the requirement, I will ask whether they plan to go to very good university or not so good one so that they are emotionally or mentally prepared if they wanted to take that risk...but I do think that they might have to go through the first semester to try it out as some students cannot and maybe have lower self awareness about their ability and potential and they would need to go through the first semester to experience it and to see it for themselves...there are so many that wanting to try it first, they promise you a lot of things, some manage to get through but some did not. There are times when I handle such cases, I asked students of the same country who might have gone through this programme and know the problems, like the higher requirements of that programme to explain to these newcomers. But I suspect the explaining to someone who not experienced it, it is hard to convince them. So we sometimes ask students to attend those recruitment talks by the universities...because besides shopping for universities that they are interested in, they also know the expectations from the universities. So during their studies they are more prepared before they go so that there is lesser gap in between their expectation and what they actually have. So that is easier for them to adjust if they were to choose the university.

Carol mentioned about a student who approached her to bargain for enrolling more subjects than the normal workload. Interestingly similar to Laura, Carol also noted that the service encounter as bargain or negotiating but this time the student is the negotiator. It appeared that the student was a continual negotiator who was insistent of taking maximum workload in every semester of his studies because he believed he was able to cope but in fact he could not. Carol role responded to the student by initially (1) showing him the study plan so that he was aware of the entry requirements of the different partner universities in particular the grade average but he could not grasp the reasoning put forth by Carol and insisted to proceed on his appeal. His appeal was approved and he kept coming back for the similar appeal for each semester even though he failed at least one subject along the way. By then, his grade average was pulled down which Carol was concerned and kept denying and discouraging him in his appeal that resulted him being unhappy. However, when he came to realise the purpose of Carol's role responses it was in fact too late. Carol returned a few times in her narratives to interpret that the student who was insistent could not comprehend her reason due to the student's lower awareness of his capabilities. Further, Carol gave emphasis to her role responses that she did not seem to be able to convince this type of student that is persistent in at least trying it out for one semester to experience and see it for themselves before realising it. After this incident Carol incorporated extra steps into her role responses, i.e. besides using the study plan discussed earlier, she also (2) asked if the student is aiming to go for high, middle or low ranked universities, (3) heightened students' awareness of entry requirements especially the grade average required by their preferred universities, (4) asked and seek clarification if the student is prepared to take the risk, (5) suggested and arranged for testimonial endorsement by senior students and

meetings with partner universities so that students can hear from the horse's mouth. These are deemed necessary and are the ultimate reason to the role responses of Carol which is to convince the student of the importance of grade average that will facilitate students in transferring to Partner University.

On the other hand, *Rob* mentioned that:

> *A student came to see me because she felt that she has been very lowly marked and wanted a review of her marks. She explained that she has the same revision with her friends for the case study exam however, the friends managed to pass and she did not and she didn't believe she has failed...I explained to her that you may write the same thing in terms of points but you may have explained as well as your friends but having said that the only way to determine the validity would be to look through the paper. I requested her to come back and the review process commenced...the result of the review revealed that her expectation was rather high that she was very lucky to get what she has got as a fail mark because the lecturer has been fairly lenient. She expected she did well because she wrote things but actually she didn't realise what she wrote was really not sufficient even to get the marks, i.e. there is a gap between what she think she deserve and what she actually got. Once I have explained it to her, she understood and she accepted the explanation. To me that is a favourable outcome because she was quite happy to go way.*

In this situation, Rob pointed out that the student believed that she deserved a better grade and role expected her marks to be reviewed. Although Rob knew the student's rationale to review was not valid but Rob chose not to say 'No' to the student instead decided to proceed with the review and managed the service encounter. It is clear that Rob by understanding the role expectation of the student allowed him to role response appropriately that led to a favourable outcome. In this service encounter, this signified the importance of comprehending the role expectation (or the 'me' or role taking) to direct the role response (or the 'I' or role making) when managing the SEB, in which are not opponents but collaborators (see Section 2.5.3.1).

Similarly, *Rina* stated that:

> *I think this one is unreasonable as the student was not satisfied with the marking, she thought that she deserved 'A'...she wanted her marks to be upgraded...I said you have to talk to the lecturer if not, the other way would be to call in a second marker to see if the marking is consistent and then there's nothing you can do about it...she went to see the lecturer and the lecturer did not agree to upgrade...she was not satisfied, so went for second marking...the marking was consistent so the marks remained...she was not happy, but then I said, if you deserve anything, I'm sure people already give you an 'A'...because her coursework is very high and she thought she has done well in the exam too which she did not.*

The student expected Rina to review her marks because she thought that she deserved an 'A' grade. Rina found it to be unreasonable and problematic but anyhow she role responded by asking the student to talk to lecturer first and only if the student was still dissatisfied in which the student was then only she recommended the second marking option. The second marker confirmed the marking was consistent and the student's marks remained in which the student was unhappy with the outcome. However, it is noted that Rina has a common role response (similar to section 5.3.5.2) of encouraging students to communicate with the relevant lecturer before moving on to the next step in which Rina is trying inculcate a communicative environment to get things done before using a formal procedure to address a situation. This point is highlighted earlier in Section 5.3.7, i.e. to enforce the very first step to discuss the issue with the person making the decision in this case is the lecturer so as to give the lecturer an opportunity to explain the grade or make changes before initiating the formal appeal procedure.

5.3.7.3 Appeal: discussion – dyadic perspective

Luke and the students mentioned by Laura, Carol, Rob and Rina role expected their PLs to help them in their appeal. Both Luke and Laura stressed exclusion or appeal for re-

admission after the specified dateline whereas Carol referred to a student who is insistent in appealing to enrol in extra subjects and together Rob and Rina emphasised on review of grades. Obviously, as discussed earlier and from a dyadic perspective, in these appeal service encounters students eventually hoped that their appeals would be approved. However, the different role responses of PLs have led to dissimilar outcomes.

Luke pointed out the role responses provided by PL1 have led him to remember it as unfavourable and by PL2 as favourable although Luke's role expectation has not been achieved. PL1 may felt that Luke had not forgotten the deadline and had deliberately broken the rule that is why PL1 responded in such a shocking way as perceived by Luke. However, PL2 chose to be sensitive to Luke's feeling and she responded by talking it over with Luke rather than standing over him in a discouraging way. According to Luke the role responses of PL2 (i.e. the manner the situation was make known to him) were the preferred way to say 'No' in which matches the role responses pointed by Laura. The unfolding of Laura's account heighten the understanding of her role responses as taking up a parental job to impart the value of adhering deadlines and as a negotiator to strike the balance between rights against responsibilities and help against consistency. In particular, Laura went straight to the rule-reminder and matched the consequences of breaking rules so that students would understand the situation which was also stressed by Luke. Hence from a dyadic perspective, the emphasis is on making known the situation to students and remaining friendly, helpful and understanding throughout. This shows that there is always a different way or manner to relate the same message even it is to teach the student a lesson on adhering to datelines. The right role responses have

enabled Laura to remain in control as well, i.e. even if the expectation of the student was not realised but the outcome was considered favourable by the student.

In Carol's case which was similar to Laura's case, the student was the continual negotiator insisting on appealing to take extra subjects but Carol drew his attention to how it would affect his grade average and ultimately the transfer to the Partner University. Carol's initial role responses were unable to convince the student who later only realised the intention of Carol which was too late and was interpreted by Carol as the level of immaturity of student in knowing his own self capabilities. Thus from this event Carol planned to integrate additional role responses which are deemed necessary to accentuate the knowledge of students on the worth of grade averages as one of the key requirements into partner universities. Hence, with Carol's improvement in her role responses (or the 'I' or role making), it has proven that the continuing dialectic between the 'I' and 'me' (see Section 2.5.3.2) is necessary in this appeal service encounter. Additionally, it revealed that the service encounter is a self-conscious activity wherein Carol is creatively engaged in making appropriate role responses instead of routinely enact according to script.

In the cases of Rob and Rina, they were handling similar incidents where students felt that they deserved better grades. They have used similar role responses but the outcome in Rob's case was favourable whereas in Rina's case it was unfavourable. Although the role response is similar, the way the explanation was made is different. Both understood the expectation of the students and took students' interest as their interest. However, Rob explained the reason why the student had obtained low marks whereas in Rina's

explanation she has focussed on the procedural outcome i.e. the marks are consistent, without explaining why the student did not get an 'A' grade. If Rina has considered Rob's approach to focus on explaining the situation instead of perceiving the student as problematic and unreasonable, she might have changed the outcome of the situation. Thus, the role responses of Rob and Laura are similar in putting emphasis on communicating the situation to students and chose to stay friendly right through has led to favourable outcomes and denote the plus points in managing appeal service encounters.

5.3.8 Withdrawal

At the outset, the enrolment service encounter was discussed (see Section 5.3.1) and finally the last but not least is the withdrawal service encounter. In this section students wishing to withdraw or discontinue their enrolment in the College are illustrated. There are many reasons to students' withdrawal and those that are discussed in this context are situations like students considering withdrawing: (1) after completion of diploma instead of degree, (2) after continuous subject failure, (3) before the due of transfer arrangement (i.e. going for 1+2 rather than 2+1) and (4) due to medical reasons and bereavement. In these events, students approached the PL to discuss their reasons before completing and signing a withdrawal form thereby making it an official withdrawal. Tuition fees may or may not be refunded, depending on the date of withdrawal. Withdrawal from a subject after the deadline will result in a 'fail' grade. These issues are further described in the following sections.

5.3.8.1 Withdrawal – student's perspective

From the student's perspective Adam and Angie have thought of withdrawing upon completing their diploma studies. They said:

> *Adam: I saw him [PL] because I want to stop at the diploma level. So I asked him whether after receiving diploma certificate from the college and after half or one year later, can I come back again to study my degree. He said of course can...Then he suggested that if I really cannot afford the tuition fees then I can stop for a while but don't stop for too long because he said at that time the government policy may change in the next year and I may not come in for the degree level directly. So he told me not to stop for a long time...I am happy because he told me the truth and I like this type of information so I continued, I didn't stop.*

> *Angie: I wanted to withdraw and I need to fill up many forms...it's very complicated so I followed some procedures and because I do not have experience so the head was very patient to explain step by step to me and then he told me if possible I should finish my degree because if I withdraw now and get my diploma then if government ruling changed, it will be difficult to continue my degree later...So I worry about my degree and he was frank to me in a proper manner, so he explained to me, I feel I understand him. I feel this is a kind of good attitude to treat a student.*

Adam and Angie were contemplating whether to withdraw upon completing their diploma studies. Adam gave the reason that he might face some financial difficulties whereas Angie did not give any reason. They were seeking clarification from the PL pertaining to the continuity of finishing their degree after a gap year. They mentioned that their PL has been truthful in advising them to continue and finish off their degree if possible for fear of any changes imposed by the government at later stage. Both of them liked this type of sincere information that has been conveyed and has led them to continue their studies. The patience and truthful explanation in the role responses of the PL has been considered by both students as proper and required by students.

5.3.8.2 Withdrawal – PL's perspective

Six PLs talked about withdrawal service encounters and highlighted different reasons students approached them. Rob said:

> *This student is in the second year going to the final year and he has continuously failed three subjects. So he came to see me and said he wanted to quit. So I said no, you don't quit, so I talked to him and I said you can actually do it, you take it easy, you're a bit lazy but you are capable. So I had to motivate and persuade him and he gave assurance that he would try his best because I said to him if you quit now you have nothing and it's very difficult to get a degree subsequently even when you are very successful in business. You have something missing in your life. So I said when you have the money and you found that you have everything but you don't have a paper qualification, you will feel a bit inadequate. So, he said okay, he would try his best...So he got two passes he was very happy. Then he got one more to go for the resit. Anyhow he worked very hard because he already showed that he could almost cross it. So, he went for the resit and he passed, he is in the final year and it was a happy outcome. This is a clear sign that I need to know the psychology of the student...diagnosing it, talk to the student, why he behaved like that, whether he thought it was because of a subject issue or was it because of a mental block issue. What was his feeling and how he looked at himself when he failed and when he wanted to leave. So when I found that out, then I can motivate him, change him to think positively...I think what happened was that all the lecturers have written him off, actually what he needed is just encouragement. I think a lot of students, once they do not like something they just block it out, so when they failed it was not because of inability but because of how they looked at themselves as in they're no good and that's it...this student that I have mentioned, I did a diagnostic reflection with him asking him why do you keep failing this subject, can you tell the reason why, was it because you do not like the subject or do you have difficulty understanding them. I am trying to find out, fact finding first from the student's own fault because he probably did not think about it. He just said he didn't like or cannot cope but if you go through the process of talking to them, fact finding and then giving him a bit of positive input, a bit of encouragement, then he decided to try again and he actually passed the papers subsequently and he was happy. So it is more diagnostic rather than telling...and I am more of an encouraging and a motivating role.*

In this case, Rob stated that the student wanted to withdraw from the programme because he kept failing three subjects. Rob role responded by (1) conducting a diagnostic reflection so as to get the student to talk about the problems he faced, (2) it was through talking that led to the next stage of facts finding, i.e. to help the student to

identify the rationale of the failure, as in whether it was due to subject issue or mental block issue. (3) Then, Rob took the opportunity to explain the bigger picture or the consequences of the student withdrawing without completing the degree, (4) then encouragement and motivation followed forth to influence the student's decision so as not to give up but to try his best. These role responses resulted in a favourable outcome.

Likewise *Lara* illustrated:

> *There is this particular student, she was a bit concern because she has flung a few papers and she's a bit concern on whether she can actually progress. So she came because she said she wanted to get help...she was a bit disappointed and asked what shall I do now, should I continue these few units or should I just leave it and then that's it, finish off the whole thing and then try to hunt for a job. Alright, then what I did was, I explained the whole course to her, the whole chapter of [the programme] to her. [The programme's] courses are very flexible in such a way, upon completing certain units you actually get a certification. So I actually showed her the route. I think whatever she has studied is not a waste and since she has done four basic units, she is entitled to a certificate and I can help her get Australia to issue her a certificate. Then she said she has actually completed another level and asked if she completes another two or these few units, will she then be able to get a diploma, I said yes. So I actually show her the layout, then she understood she tried hard during that semester, she actually got her diploma and she left us. She doesn't want to go further and she's very happy. Actually she's worried about her future and whether what she has studied can get her some recognition. So by helping her, she is in a better position to see what is the best solution for her...then she know that upon completing these certain units, she can actually get some recognition...the explanation helped her understood that at the end of the day, it is not wasted, she still get some recognition. I think that is very important. She was very happy.*

Lara was referring to a student that was in the midst of considering whether to continue or discontinue her studies because she failed a few papers and was planning to look for a job. The student was undecided and was seeking advice from Lara. Lara helped the student by (1) explaining the whole chapter of the programme using a layout or a table to depict the route to students and (2) in particular she stressed the certificate entitlement due to her if she has completed certain units. Indirectly, by showing her the whole

picture motivated the student to continue and finish off her diploma because it has enabled her to envisage that whatever effort she has put in is not wasted and that she is not far from achieving her diploma which will be useful to facilitate her job search. Thus, Lara has proposed a solution to the student by focusing her explanation on certification and this has led to a favourable outcome.

In another situation, *Amelia* recounted:

> *There was this one particular case in which the student enrolled for a degree programme. We [the college] have this policy as in we do not refund tuition fees once the semester begins and I have this student who quit after three weeks without wanting to tell me the reason and the student was asking for a refund of the tuition fees. So I told him that it is the college's policy is that we do not refund tuition fees and so he got quite angry as he asked me to show him our policy in which we have stated on the price list itself of the course. So I just showed him and then after that he was quite okay, he just asked what are the fees that he can actually refund. So he was only left with the library deposit. So after that, I guess in a way he was not very happy definitely because he couldn't get back his tuition fees although he has quit.*

According to Amelia this was a situation whereby the student wanted early withdrawal (i.e. to discontinue before the completion of the course) and refund of the tuition fees after three weeks into his studies. Amelia responded by (1) finding out the reason of the student's withdrawal and (2) explaining the college's policy on refund of tuition fees after the withdrawal deadline to the student. However, the student did not want to disclose the reason of his withdrawal instead he was only concern of the refund of tuition fees in which he wanted written proof from Amelia. After Amelia showed to the student the written policy on the tuition fees schedule, he was unhappy and had to accept the fact that the only fee that he can receive in return was the library deposit. From this incident Amelia has demonstrated that she is knowledgeable about the college's policy and that her role responses need to correspond to them. Also, it has highlighted that

during withdrawal service encounter, the issue of refund is one of students' main concerns.

Lavina recounted two incidents, one on a student who wanted to withdraw before the stipulated transfer arrangement (i.e. going for 1+2 rather than 2+1) and another one on medical reasons. In the first service encounter *Lavina* said:

> *I have one student who wanted to withdraw, I tried to keep her and I didn't manage to. That student actually has completed her first year of studies...she came to see me and said that she wanted to withdraw from the whole programme because she wants to go to overseas. She actually wanted something like 1+2 rather than 2+1 but because with our (college's) prior arrangements with partner universities, students need to spend a minimum of 2 years with us...she has to transfer on her own and apply on her own but she didn't realise that it will be rejected. Her application will be rejected because we do have some understanding from (Partner University) that if any student study less than 2 years there is no way they can approve the application. But that student insisted to go and eventually she will end up with one of the universities that will accept her and accept her credit transfer and she at the end transferred and she left. So that is the case I feel like, I can't help. In a way that is her choice and although she is not happy about the situation she didn't make a big fuss but just wanted to withdraw without reason...She just wanted to get out from the programme. And I asked if she is not happy with the lecturers here or things like that, she just said no, she just want to be in Australia longer time. Actually I told her the benefits of her staying another year with us, because if she studied two years here then she only need to study three years. If anybody wants to start in Australia as a fresh student, they actually end up with four years there because they need to do one year internship. So in a way if she studies with us she actually saves one year of internship which means by the time after two years when she transferred over there, she is actually sitting together with the fourth year student back in (Partner University). So actually I explained the benefits of staying with us and she looked at the whole thing but her interest is just to get out from Malaysia, she just wanted to go to Australia. She said she just planned one year here and even though three or four years there, she didn't mind. So I asked her do you plan to work there or is there any particular reason, she said that she has relatives back in Australia, so she doesn't mind going there at all. So with this kind of situation it is beyond academic reasons and it must be due to personal reasons that she doesn't want to tell me. So I asked her is it because your boyfriend is there or is it your cousin brother is there or that you really need to join them that may be possible relationship problem there or distance relationship, it could be, anything could happen to nowadays kids...She was stunned for a while then she said no-no-no, not because of boyfriend...So I just have to see is it other reasons because I cannot see the reason why she must go and she said she doesn't mind to change any major as well just to get there. So the purpose*

is no longer in the academic boundary so I think as a PL I have already explained from the academic perspective, what are the choices that would benefit her academically but she just couldn't see the point because it is not important to her so I think no point talking further so I asked her to think twice, I still sign the form because she wants to withdraw to get the library refund and I think she was happy to leave.

In this case, Lavina talked about the student who expected to withdraw before it was time to transfer to the Partner University. Lavina role responded by (1) explaining the academic benefit of following the pre-agreed '2+1' (i.e. 2 years local and 1 year overseas) arrangement and (2) finding out the reason of the student's withdrawal. However, the student cannot see the benefit of the '2+1' collaboration between the College and the Partner University explained by Lavina and insisted to transfer after the first year of her studies in which she has to apply for the transfer on her own. Without the endorsement of the College her transfer application was rejected and she was unhappy. Nevertheless in this situation, Lavina stated that she has tried her best to explain the academic benefit and to keep her but failed. This was because the student's withdrawal was not due to academic reason but personal reasons. To Lavina she has done her part to explain and since her withdrawal was not within the academic boundary, the student has to bear the consequences of her choice. This demonstrated that adhering to the policy set out by the collaboration agreement is one of the important guidelines that directed Lavina's role responses to ensure consistency in managing the programme.

In the second service encounter <u>*Lavina*</u> described:

Another case was about a student who was having thyroid problem...she wanted to withdraw...I advised her not to do that because that request came in about week ten, way pass the withdrawal deadline. About week ten she came in and explained why she has been missing classes and she needed to withdraw... She can be on leave for one semester but because she has missed the deadline of withdrawal, she will end up

with academic penalty meaning all subjects that she has enrolled in will have a fail grade and she cannot afford that because she is repeating one of the papers for the third time and [Partner University] has one rule that is, if she failed for the third time, she will be excluded from the programme, she will be suspended then she has to change to another programme. So, by looking at her situation [Partner University] suggested that instead to withdraw she can defer for the whole year until the next semester which means this semester whatever she paid is carried forward to the next semester. She can take the exam and attend classes next semester. So [management] approved this matter due to valid reasons like health problem because the medication that she take will cause drowsiness and nauseate and every two weeks she has to go for blood test. Her case is quite serious and it is genuine because she has a letter from a hospital and a physician. So we actually do give this kind of consideration to refund and we just defer the whole thing until the next semester until she comes back...so she is very grateful about the thought because she just want to withdraw and she didn't think so much of the implications so actually by looking at this case, she cannot afford to fail again or she will be excluded. So that is why I helped her and it is a waste if I just let her drop off like that. She is very grateful, she kept on saying thank you so much.

In this service encounter the student found difficulty attending classes due to her thyroid problem and hence wanted to withdraw. Lavina role responded by (1) requesting proper documentation to establish and support her claim, then (2) advising her not to withdraw but instead (3) exploring other alternatives via seeking suggestion from the Partner University and obtained approval from the management to defer the student's tuition fees and studies to the next semester. Clearly, the student may not fully comprehend the consequences of her decision to withdraw but Lavina sympathised with the student and was aware of the student's academic standing in which she particularly advised her not to withdraw because she has way passed the withdrawal deadline and this would result in a 'Fail' grade. Further, she has failed one of the subjects for more than two times and may be excluded from the programme. Thus, Lavina has made extra effort to defer both the student's tuition fees and studies to the next semester, and her role response has led the student to be grateful for what she has done.

Similarly, *Andy* also revealed that:

> *There was a case where we have got a student and she had problem with her eyes. She already paid everything but four weeks later; she found out that she had to do an operation. She wanted to totally stop and wants to ask for refund. So according to [college's] policy there is no refund after a certain date...But I then still try my very best and I do understand the student's situation because she showed me the doctor's letter. So I try my very best to help the student as much as I could and I went to see [management], and finally I manage to convince the management and I helped her to get deferment instead of a refund...I got everything done for the student and the student was very grateful and also from time to time I did call to ask about the student's condition and check with her and I try to settle a lot of things for her. So finally this student came back and she was very happy and you know she was very grateful about that. Even the parents call me and thank me a lot for helping their daughter. So from time to time I call and asked about the condition. So, that was the part I think I'm proud of myself for doing something good and I thought the student is also quite happy about that because she never expected that a PL will show so much concern or even would try to do so much. Perhaps to her, I mean they have no grounds to argue, they have no grounds to appeal, or even they appeal they would know that the outcome will be very negative...That time I told her trust me and I will try my very best to help you and finally I did and she recognised my effort. I keep updating her about the condition and also from time to time and I also tried to email to all the lecturers about her condition until she came back. That is the part that I think I really touched her...They (student and parents) have never expected that I would have done so much and I would show so much care about her condition, so, you know, that is the part I believe that it touched her so much.*

In this case the student role expected Andy to approve her withdrawal and to obtain refund for her tuition fees. Andy role responded by (1) making certain her case by requesting the student to submit a letter from the doctor, (2) asking for approval from the management to defer her studies and tuition fees instead of refund, (3) informing her lecturers via emails about her condition and her deferment status, and (4) making phone calls from time to time to show concern to her situation. The rationale of Andy's role response (i.e. to ask the student to defer) was based on his understanding that according to the College's policy there is no refund after week four and the best alternative in her situation is to trust him that he would tried his very best to help. Additionally due to the student's health condition, Andy has taken extra role responses to show concern and

care to the student. To him, at least that is the part he can help student academically and hope that the student can continue her studies in no time. Indeed Andy's role responses have impressed not only the student but also her parents and they were grateful

Whereas *Wendy* talked about:

> *One student, she wanted to stop because she cannot continue to study anymore, she cannot concentrate as her father passed away. So I talked to her and asked her not to withdraw and encouraged her because it was a few weeks before the exam and she stopped attending classes because she found difficulty to concentrate in class. I spent a lot of time with her to arrange for her to see the lecturers, I talked to the lecturers what has happened to her, and then asked the lecturers to give her extra assignments. She went home to do the assignments and only come for the final. Then finally she passed all the subjects and she came back here to thank me. If I didn't help her, she just failed all the subjects and that's it. She's a very good student and I don't want her to stop just like this. I don't want her to drop all the subjects and waste the money and her future. So I try to help her academically.*

From the abovementioned service encounter Wendy highlighted that the student wanted to withdraw due to bereavement that has caused her not to be able to concentrate in her studies and she decided to quit. Looking into such situation, Wendy role responded by (1) encouraging the student not to give up her studies but (2) assured the student of her help in which Wendy (3) explained her condition to the lecturers and (3) seek help from lecturers to make allowance for her absence in class in exchange of extra assignments. Wendy considered her role responses as one of a better option for her since she found difficulty concentrating in class. The student then sat for her final examination and passed in which she was grateful to Wendy. Clearly, Wendy saw her role responses as necessary and essential to at least help the student academically. Furthermore, Wendy understood and sympathised with the student because at that stage the student who was sad would definitely have made an emotional decision to withdraw that would cost her

money and her future. This is why Wendy extended her help and role responded according to the student's circumstances. This proves that although at that time the student's role expectation was to withdraw but she might not know that Wendy who was experienced and knowledgeable would role responded in such a way to provide her a better alternative that led to a favourable outcome.

5.3.8.3 Withdrawal: discussion – dyadic perspective

There are two students (i.e. Adam and Angie) and six PLs (i.e. Rob, Lara, Amelia, Lavina, Andy and Wendy) who recounted nine withdrawal service encounters whereby Lavina related two. These accounts revealed that students expected to withdraw because of various reasons, with Adam and Angie wanted to withdraw upon completing their diploma instead of degree studies, Rob and Lara on students who have continuously failed the subjects, Amelia on student withdrawing without reason and wanted full refund of tuition fees, Lavina on student transferring before the required time, Lavina and Andy on students with medical reasons and Wendy on student with bereavement. The different role responses executed by these PLs are very much dependent on the various reasons of withdrawal, with the PL of Adam and Angie focusing the advice in disclosing the fact of their continuity to finish their degree after a gap year. Whilst Rob used diagnostic reflection and Lara utilised a table to facilitate the students to know 'where they are now' and then showed them the big picture by matching the recognition or rewards, acting as encouragement and motivation (i.e. from talking to explaining and to motivating). Amelia and Lavina concentrated on finding out reasons of students' withdrawal and Amelia stressed on the written refund policy while Lavina on adhering

to policy in collaborative agreement. Andy and Lavina centred on establishing students' medical reasons and sought better alternatives of suggesting students to defer and tried their best to help at least academically, whereas Wendy gave attention on giving the student encouragement and assurance of academic help via making specific arrangement with lecturers.

From these role responses it is noted that the students (i.e. Adam and Angie) value the factual advice disclosed by the PL whereas the PLs (i.e. Rob, Lara, Amelia, Lavina, Andy and Wendy) see their role responses as trying their best to provide academic help to students. Thus, from a dyadic perspective the factual academic help is deemed essential in withdrawal service encounters. What PLs can or cannot help students is very much bound by the regulations that govern the programme of studies and have led to both favourable and unfavourable outcomes. Only in medical and bereavement reasons, extra efforts are made to look for better alternatives such as seeking approval from both management and/or the Partner University. This is in line with what have been discussed in Section 2.5.3.2 where role response (or role making or the 'I') is a self-conscious activity and this is exemplified in the examples above where the PLs were aware of their own role responses so as to be adjusted to suit personal goals (i.e. desire to provide good administrative services), the demands of the withdrawal situations and the role expectations (i.e. role taking or the 'me') of the students. Evidently these knowledgeable PLs have made extra effort and have given more than what the students have expected. Hence, the outcomes of these service encounters are similar and as illustrated in Section 2.5.3.1 where students were grateful and impressed. Surely these

role responses of PLs who wanted to provide good administrative help are proud of their abilities to do so, at least to contribute to the learning experience of students.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored 63 service encounters recounted by 42 participants through CIT interviews. Of the 42 participants, 26 are students and 16 are PLs. Most participants have talked about at least one service encounter but there are some who have related more than one service encounter e.g. Rina shared the most (4 service encounters) and Luke and Lavina shared 3 each. Appendix 4 details the number of service encounters shared by each participant. These 63 service encounters are categorised in 11 types of service encounter and these covered most of the situations where a student would approach their PLs in a typical semester. Of these 63 service encounters, 33 were narrated by students while 30 narrated by PLs. The 'enrolment' and 'transfer' service encounters were the two most prominent as on the whole, 13 and 15 participants have recounted them respectively. The number of service encounters shared by each participant is purely their choice and every service encounter was regarded as a case. Figure 5.1 summarises the study's profiles.

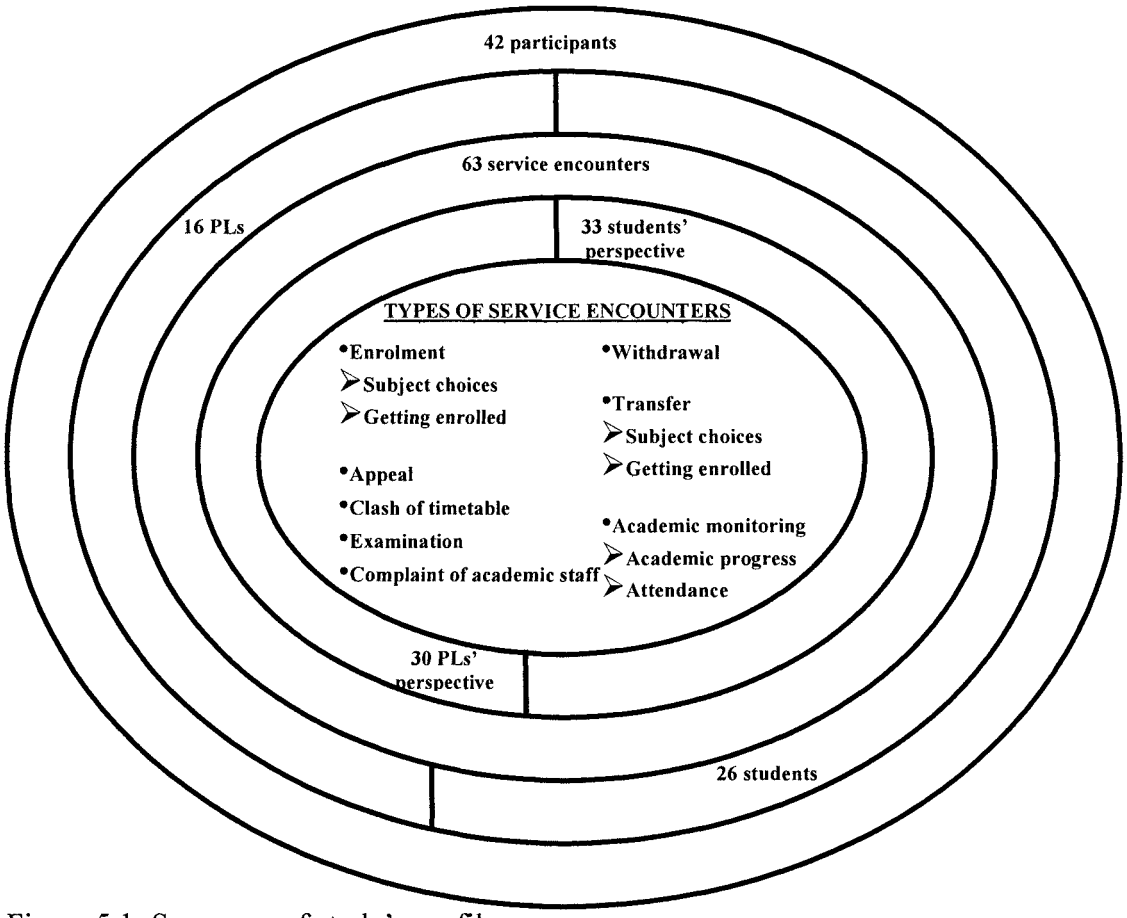


Figure 5.1: Summary of study's profiles

In each service encounter the SEB was discussed i.e. (1) the situation/service encounter is defined or named; (2) the role expectations of students; and (3) how PLs role responded were discussed. The key points that can be drawn from the findings and discussion are summarised below.

- *Situational Definition*

  The 63 service encounters were categorised into 11 types of service encounters or situations and Table 5.1 details the types of service encounter explaining its situational definition in the context of this research.

Types of service encounter		Situational Definition
Enrolment	Subject choices	Students see their PLs to select subjects to be taken in the coming semester depending on whether the subjects are compulsory, elective or with prerequisite. Also students want to obtain information on the nature of the subjects that they are going to take in order to determine the subject combination, thereby managing their study load.
	Getting enrolled	This is usually done at the beginning of a semester where students need to enrol themselves. It is often busy with long queues and high volume of work as all students need to enrol within a deadline. They have to fill a form and then get it signed by the PL before paying for their tuition fees.
Transfer	Credit transferability	This is applicable to students studying the credit transfer programme where they see their PL to choose from a group of universities and check the credit transferability of subjects that they study. It is usually complicated because students can choose from a range of foreign universities and they have different entry requirements, subjects' combination, English test and these requirements are further diversified for different majors or pathways.
	Getting transferred	Student who are studying in the twinning programmes ('1+2' or '2+1') see their PLs to sort things out before transferring to their designated partner universities. These include documents (i.e. visa, letter of offer, English requirements), bookings (accommodation, pre-departure briefings and airport pickups) and other relevant information to give them more confidence and a pleasant experience studying at overseas.
Clash of timetable		This is when there is a clash of time slots due to students not having clear passes and would like to take subjects from different levels in a programme. Timetabling is a monumental task as it involves a diverse range of subjects offered in a college with different programmes and various levels of studies and also depending on their resource i.e. space, time slots and manpower availability.
Academic monitoring	Academic progress	This is a situation where a student continuously failed a particular subject for more than three semesters. This may be due to them being academically weak or because of their personal problem. These students will risk being excluded from the programme of study and they need to see their PLs for counselling and assistance to explore their options.
	Attendance	A situation where a student is absent from classes for more than a certain number of times without valid reasons. They will face the possibility of being barred from taking the final exam.
Complaint of academic staff		This is when students have complaints on academic staff with regards to teaching-related maters.
Examination		This encounter deals with query on the exam timetable before the event takes place and solve issues on examination grades, the discrepancies in exam transcripts and procedures for resit after the examination takes place.
Appeal		Students see their PLs after the release of exam grades to appeal on the decision of the examination Board e.g. exclusion due to failing a subject for more than three semesters. Also, they appeal to be allowed to enrol for additional subjects. They seek advice and guidance of the PLs on the appeal procedures and these needed to be done within a specified deadline.

Withdrawal	This takes place when students wish to withdraw or discontinue their enrolment due to completion of their studies, continuous subject failure, transfer arrangement to twinning programme and medical or bereavement reasons. They need to see their PLs to discuss their reasons for withdrawal, fill in a form and signed by the PL.

Table 5.1: Summary of the types of service encounters

The service encounters above are the situations defined by students when they approached their PLs and these covered most of the event in a typical semester i.e. starting from the beginning, during the enrolment period to the completion of studies where students withdraw. Defining the situation is vital because as upheld by the situational definition concept advocated by McHugh (1968) in Section 2.5.3.2, it can facilitate participants to behave or response in a way that fits his/her own line of behaviour to that of others. Evidently, in this research, with a service encounter/situation being defined, both student and PL are able to grasp the service setting they are in and to identify their situational roles (i.e. role expectations and role responses) they are to make in relation to the definition. This means that each service encounter is unique depending on how participants have defined the situation thereby behaving and responding accordingly. Therefore, as indicated in this research, the role expectation and role responses represented in each service encounter have led to favourable or unfavourable outcome.

- *Situational Role: (i) Role Expectation*

Students' role expectations depend on their respective situation and their personal needs. Therefore, when approaching their PLs, they role expected their PLs to listen and respond to fulfil their role expectations. However, as evidenced in Section 5.3.1.4, students sometimes understood the intricacies or the complexity of the

situations and their zone of tolerance allow them to compromise with an acceptable solution. Hence, if the student's expectation has not been fulfilled, the outcome is still acceptable if the PL has tried their best to help. However, if the actions of a PL has gone too far (as in the cases of Adam and Levin) and have exceeded the zone of tolerance of students, the role responses of PL were not considered as acceptable. Above all, the findings revealed that apart from student's role expectation, how the PL responded, i.e. the 'how' SEB, has led the service encounter to be remembered as favourable or unfavourable and it is the 'how' notion (i.e. the role responses of PLs) which is the central theme in this research.

- *Situational Role: (ii) Role Responses*

  Hence, it is confirmed that the role responses are important to determine the outcome of a service encounter. When PLs know what are expected, they will role respond appropriately by role taking and role making (i.e. Mead's SI perspective of situational roles, stressing the 'me' and 'I') to fulfil the role expectations of students in a given service setting (i.e. situational definition). At times, when possible, PLs have gone one step further or do something out of the norm (as exemplified in Section 5.3.8.2.) to bring about a favourable and memorable encounter that makes up a positive experience of students thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

Hence, the niche of the uniqueness of this study is to find out the 'how' of SEB, from a dyadic perspective (i.e. student's and PL's perspectives). Most past research has been conducted only to study the role expectation (the 'what' SEB) from a single perspective (i.e. either student's or PL's perspective) and has used a quantitative approach to

generalise the dimensions of role expectation. However, this research has used a qualitative approach to study from a dyadic perspective, the 'what' and 'how' of SEB, i.e. the role expectation specifies the 'what' SEB that guides the 'how' SEB of the role responses. Most of the role expectations found in this research have been supported by past research, i.e. reliability, assurance, empathy and courtesy, but the role expectations highlighted in this research are unique to the HE sector particularly focusing on service encounters between students and PLs in PA. Nevertheless, it is not the intention of this study to list or modify the dimensions identified in past research but by using a qualitative approach, to detail the role expectations of students as well as the role responses of PLs in the context of this study, gaining views from a dyadic perspective that was not focussed in past research. Thus, this research seeks to fill this gap and a SEB guide has been developed which is exhibited in the next chapter.

In short, the findings confirmed that SEB is influenced by the situational definitions and situational roles, and further verified that situational roles function naturally in a service encounter as participants interact and construct meaning from it, thereby taking the role of the other (role taking) and making the self-role (role making) instead reacting according to a prescribed script as mentioned in Section 2.5.3 by Mead (1934). Therefore, in a service encounter, role making and role taking become a very self-conscious activity in which the participant is creatively engaged in taking and making their respective roles. This is consistent with the social constructionist point of view and the symbolic interactionist paradigm. The research has generated 63 service encounters by gaining insights into students' role expectation and how PL's role responded in each and these are put together in a SEB guide which is shown in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter makes conclusions on the work undertaken in this research. It highlights the key findings of this research as well as the SEB guide which is the essence of this research. Also, it would go on to point out the contribution of this study towards the theory and practice of services management. Then, the implications of this research towards PLs and management are discussed followed by making recommendations for future research.

6.2 Conclusions

The research started out to explore the SEB in programme administration in HE from a dyadic perspective (i.e. students' and PLs' perspective). The aim is to gain insight into the intricacies of SEB in face-to-face interaction between students and PLs. The research objectives were:

- To define service encounters where students approach their PL during their course of study.
- To understand from a dyadic perspective, the 'what' SEB (i.e. role expectation of students) and the 'how' SEB (i.e. the role response of PLs) in a defined situation i.e. asking the question of what students expected from the PLs when they approached them and how did the PL responded.
- To develop a SEB guide that facilitates the management of service encounter in programme administration in HE and to enhance the learning experience of students.

The conceptual framework utilised in this study is based on the work of Czepiel *et al.* (1985) on the description of purposeful service encounter, McHugh's (1968) situational definition (inline with the 1st research objective) and Mead's (1934) SI perspective of situational roles (inline with the 2nd research objective). Taking the social constructionist standpoint and using the interpretivist paradigm embedded in symbolic interactionism, this research set out to find how students and PLs through interaction construct meanings of the situations, role expectations and role responses. Further, the research sought to interpret the underlying meaning of both students' and PLs' SEB and how they have interpreted each other's SEB. Using CIT in multiple case studies has helped to elicit verbatim stories about SEB experienced by students and PLs in service encounters. Narrative analysis is employed to contextualise the sense making process and bringing out participants' perspective on their meaning, relevance and importance. This is principally what this thesis is trying to achieve, i.e. to give primacy to student's and PL's perspectives or a dyadic perspective in exploring SEB. The following conclusions highlight the key findings of this research.

Situational Definition

- The findings of this research have revealed 11 different service encounters as depicted in Figure 5.1. The names and the definition of these service encounters are as explained in Table 5.1. These 11 types of service encounters are considered noteworthy as they encompassed most of the situations in which students would approach their PLs in a typical semester. Figure 6.1 depicts the time line of a typical semester and illustrates the juncture where problems or issues tend to arise in

relation to the situation that students need to see their PLs. This confirms the heterogeneity of service encounters recounted by participants in a typical semester.

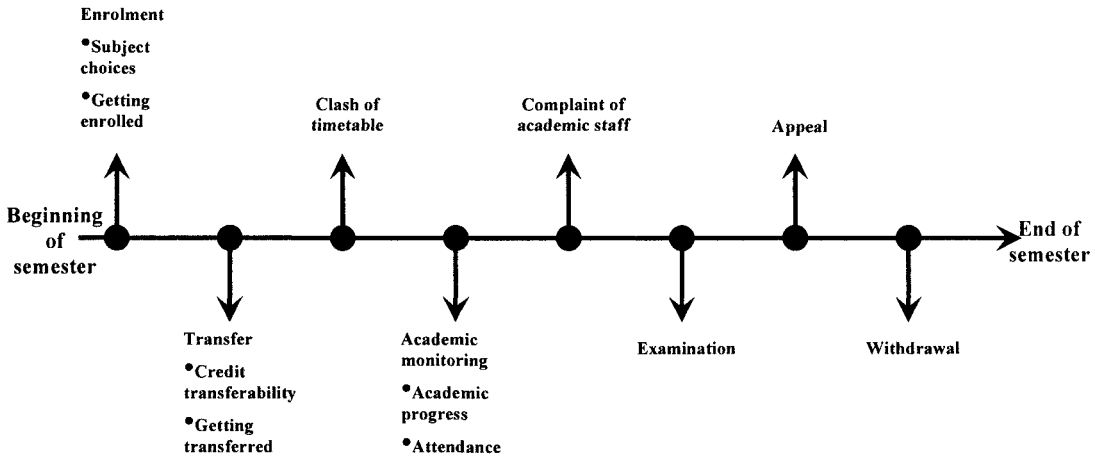


Figure 6.1: Time line of service encounters in a typical semester

- Moreover, out of the 11 types of service encounters, 'enrolment' and 'transfer' have the highest number of service encounters recounted by participants (see Appendix 4). This verifies the high density of face-to-face service encounters during the 'enrolment' and 'transfer' service encounters. These two service encounters appear to be vital as they are the two situations that are inevitable for students to approach their PLs.

- The findings of this research corroborates to the work of McHugh (1968) and Mead (1934) that defining a service encounter is significant. The service encounters listed in Table 5.1 are the service encounters defined in the context of this research and they are functional in shaping the situational roles to be represented by both students and PLs, thereby influencing the outcome of the situation.

- It is further confirmed that situational role (i.e. role expectations and role responses) represented in each defined service encounter is important as it has shown that at times, even though the service encounter is similar, the situational role have led to favourable or unfavourable outcomes. Hence, the outcomes are dependable on the role expectations and role responses and the subjective evaluation of both students and PLs.

Situational roles: Role Expectations and Role Responses

- It has been confirmed that the role responses of PLs are shaped to a great extent by the role expectations of students toward them in a defined situation and those role expectations are known through role-taking or the 'me' while the role responses are made through role-making or the 'I'. Hence it is concluded that both 'I' and 'me' are not opponents but collaborators where 'me' organises the 'I' and this is consistent with the work of Mead (1934).

- Hence, as verified in this research, each defined service encounter has student's role expectations and PL's role responses associated with it, signifying that a service encounter is a paired interaction between a student and a PL, thereby the term a dyad or a pair. So in each service encounter the role of PL makes no sense without the role of student and the significance to study SEB from a dyadic perspective is proven necessary in this research.

- This implies that in studying any service encounter, it needs to be looked from a dyadic perspective, which this research has been conducted. From a dyadic perspective, a number of conclusions were made about the role expectations of students and role responses of PLs in the identified 11 types of service encounters. The key conclusions on the role expectations of students and the role responses of PLs are used to develop a SEB guide which is presented in Table 6.1.

Name of Service Encounter*		Role Expectations (RE) of Students**	Role Responses (RR) of PLs**
Enrolment	Subject Choices	• Students need advice on the subject to take to fulfil the credit hours. • They want to select the correct combination of subjects so that they can cope with their study load. • They hope to get more information about the subjects so that they can select them base on their individual skills and the relevancy to their degree. • They want assurance that they have selected the correct subjects.	• Check and ensure that students have enrolled appropriately i.e. the subjects fulfilled the required credit hours. • Explain to students what the subjects involved, its relevancy to their studies or the level of difficulty. This can be based on past experience of other students' performance to justify their advice. • Explore students' strengths and weaknesses to get background information before making suggestions for combination of subjects. • PL used spreadsheet with model study plans to brief student. • Deliver right answers with confidence to give assurance to student. PL's confidence in giving the right answers and proof (such as spreadsheet) can instil assurance in student seeking confirmation of subjects. • When there are uncertainties, specify a date for the student to come again and liaise with Partner University as soon as possible and inform the student once things were sorted out. The most important is to give correct answers with confidence to students.
	Getting enrolled	• Students want to enrol before the deadline to avoid paying late penalty. • They expect that it will be busy, there will be long waiting time and PLs will tend to be hot tempered but they don't like to be shouted at and expect to be treated kindly and politely. • In problematic cases e.g. financial difficulty, they expect the PL to listen to	• Even though busy and having to deal with high volume, speaking to students politely and kindly will help students to co-operate and understand the situation. • Understand that students have also waited for a long time. • Listen to their problems and give appropriate advice. • Explain to students the process and procedures of what will happen so that they understand and they will have patience or can tolerate optional outcomes.

		them and try their best to help. • They hope to get information of the process involved so that they know what will happen.	
Transfer	Credit transferability	• Students are not sure or do not have a clear picture of which subjects' credits are transferable and seek advice from PL as there were too many universities, major subjects to choose. • They do not want to take the wrong subject or subjects that are not relevant thereby wasting their money and time. • They want more detail information of the study pathway so that they can discuss with their parents on the duration and the cost of their studies. • They want to get as many subjects' credits transferred so that they do not have to spend much time and money overseas. • They hope the PL can help to offer the subjects that they have selected.	• Ask students what criteria they have in mind when choosing the university i.e. cost, reputation of the university or follow their friends. • Use a study schedule to explain to students which university requires what entry requirements and the subjects' credit that they need to fulfil. • Educate them how to use the study plan and make a copy for them so that they can use it to plan their study pathway throughout their studies. • Check and ensure if the subjects' credits are transferable. If information changes, advise students on other options. • Analyse the options that students have and counsel students to see if their choices matches their academic capabilities, financial capacity or English requirements. • Try to offer subjects that students require, if possible. Otherwise, explain to students what is involved when offering a subject i.e. the availability of resources such as space, time slots and lecturer time. Also, suggest other possible options.
	Getting transferred	• Students know that they will be going to overseas universities but are not sure of the procedures involved to get transferred. • They did not know what to expect when in overseas. • They want information on accommodation, the process involved in the transfer, visa application, living cost, flight bookings, airport pickups, how do lecturers teach and etc. • They want to plan ahead of time and do not want to do it last minute so that they can transfer smoothly. • They need more information so that they feel more confidence and secure to go overseas as	• Give details or organise pre-departure briefings so that students get more information about their transfer and are more ready to go overseas. • Explain the process and procedures involved in getting transferred. • Inform students of the turnover time of each process so that they can meet the deadline to transfer. • Show students relevant brochures and share some of their experience or other students' experience at overseas universities. • Ensure that students have fulfilled all the requirements of the partner universities. • Coordinate with partner universities on students transfer or any arising problems. • Facilitate students in their visa applications or transfer application so that they can transfer smoothly.

		they are on their own. • They want to have a good experience there.	
Clash of Timetable		• Students expect PLs to resolve the clash in their timetable so that they do not have to change subjects, if possible.	• Try to change time slots to resolve the clash in timetable and to accommodate students. • If not possible, do not pressure students to take certain subjects. • Explain why it is not possible and make alternatives available, explaining why the options are suitable so that the options are acceptable to students.
Academic Monitoring	Academic progress	• Students have continuously failed a particular subject and expect some kind of solution. They seek academic help, counselling, advice or encouragement.	• Find out what is underlying reason of the problem. • Listen to their stories and explanation in order to advise accordingly. • Suggest some help e.g. peer tutoring. • Remind and highlight to students about the consequences of continue failing. • Give encouragement and highlight that they need to re-focus and give priority to their studies.
	Attendance	• Upon receiving a reminder letter due to irregular attendance, students hoped that they are not barred from taking the final examination.	• Find out the reasons why the student has not been attending classes. • Listen to students to draw out issues or problems. • Remind students about the rules and consequences of not attending classes. • Counsel and advice them to continue attending classes and work hard in order to pass. • If the matter persists, parents can be involved so that they can coordinate and cooperate to monitor the problem.
Complaint of Academic Staff		• Students have problems with the lecturer and complain to the PL. They expect them to change the lecturer or talk to the lecturer. • They expect the PL to approach the lecturer tactfully so that they are protected and not victimised.	• Listen and explain to students of the teaching style in colleges or universities compared to high school so that students understand what to expect from lecturer. • Advise students to approach lecturers directly and speak politely to them to resolve the problem before taking any action. • Approach or talk to the lecturer thoughtfully so that students are protected. • Try to clear any misunderstanding if there are any.
Examination		• Students expect PLs to solve their problems such as discrepancies of grades in their transcripts, obtain information on resits and getting the exam timetable.	• Photocopy the transcripts as supporting evidence to solve students' problems. • Explain to students what procedures, which departments are involved and the estimated waiting time to resolve the problem. • Coordinate with other departments or liaise with partner universities to look into the

		matter. • Relate the outcome or decision made. • For resit students, advise them on the guidelines and the process to go for resit exams and the deadlines involved. • Advice students on exam timetable.
Appeal	• Students who have missed the enrolment deadline are excluded. They expect the PL to help them to reinstate their status. They do not want to wait another semester before enrolling again. • Students who have appealed for review of marks expect their PL to help confirm if they are marked fairly. • Students appeal to take extra subjects but cannot cope. They hope the PL would approve their enrolment.	• In reinstating students' status, PLs need to explain the process involved and the rules or guidelines set. They need to point out the students have broken the rule and remind them of the consequences of breaking the rule. Advise them that it is the partner university who decide and appeal is only granted for valid or good reasons. • Coordinate or liaise with partner universities on appeal cases and relate decision accordingly. • For appeal of marks, explain to students that lecturers or other lecturers will confirm if they have been marked fairly. • In appeal to take extra subjects, advise students of the workload and their capabilities to cope. Explain the consequences of failing that will bring down their average grade that would then limit their choice of universities. Support advice by relating experience of other students who have had similar experiences in the past.
Withdrawal	• Students have to fill in a form and get it signed. They wanted to withdraw and expect to get a refund if any. They usually withdraw because of financial problems, complete their degree, personal problems or cannot cope with their studies.	• Find out why students want to withdraw and advice them accordingly. • Explain the procedures involved in withdrawal. • With early withdrawals, explain the guidelines and refund policy. • For students who cannot cope with their studies, try to motivate and encourage them and advice them accordingly. Point out the importance of education in their future career or prospects. • For personal problems or illness, obtain a copy of relevant supporting document to submit to management for approval of refund, if possible. Or inform lecturers if students can be deferred or make-up classes can be made to enable students to catch up with the classes that they have missed.

Note:
* For the name and definition of service encounters, see Table 5.1
** Here the terms 'students' and 'PLs' are referring to the participants of this research

Table 6.1: Service Encounter Behaviour (SEB) guide

Service Encounter Behaviour (SEB) Guide

- The SEB guide is developed based on the data collected in the context of this research i.e. the definition of service encounters, role expectations of students and role responses of PLs. Therefore, the SEB guide above is by no means universal or tended to be generalised or applicable to any context. As mentioned in Section 4.8.2, it is not the intention of the researcher to generalise but by giving rich details and insights would enable users of this information to decide the transferability of relevant information into their respective situations.

- This SEB guide is proposed to facilitate the management of service encounter in programme administration in HE. This guide may be looked at as a package of SEB as supported by Hewitt (1988) wherein each defined situation is a large bundle of possible situational roles (i.e. role expectations and role responses). However, the guide is not to dictate what one must do in a situation or as a matter of the routine enactment of lines in a script, where each action is set in advance. Comparatively the SEB guide is developed so that when a situation is defined, the guide provides one with an organising framework that can be used to make a response that will meet the expectation of another person in a particular situation.

- So the SEB guide is not like the theatrical script that emphasises the enacting of role prescribed, i.e. performing roles strictly according to defined script (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). In fact the theatrical script has disregarded the peculiar conception of interaction which revolves about the improvising character of the 'I' via the

continuing dialectic between 'I' and 'me' (Mead, 1934). Hence, the outcomes of this research are consistent with the work of Mead (1934) but in contrast with the work of Sarbin and Allen (1968). Moreover, it has proven that SEB is a self-conscious activity reflecting how roles function normally whereby the PL is aware of his/her own role response so that it can be adjusted to suit the demands of the situation and the expectations of students.

- Therefore the main purpose of developing the SEB guide is to demystify the intricacies in SEB and to give understanding to what actually happened in service encounters in particular the large bundle of possible situational roles in identified service encounters. So, the SEB guide provides possibilities and it is not a rule book.

Truly it has been confirmed in this research that SEB is influenced by situational definition and situational roles, as depicted in the SEB guide. These findings and conclusions have implications for students, PLs and the management. Before explaining its implications, the next section elaborates the contributions of this study.

6.3 Contributions of the Study

Evidently, the findings of this research have contributed to the theory, to practice and context. As shown, on one hand, in many ways the findings are supported by past research and the conceptual framework of this research but on the other hand it has also indicated the uniqueness in contributing towards the literature (studying the service literature from the social psychology perspective), the context (the HE sector) and

practice (the programme administration). The following details the contributions of this study.

- This research has extended the service encounter behaviour framework to the HE sector as in past research there is limited study conducted in this sector because it is not known for providing services. However, this study has been conducted in the HE sector in Malaysia and it has proven that PLs are indeed providing their services to students in terms of giving them education support services e.g. advice, guidance and counselling in their studies and matters arising in their programmes.

- In addition, past research in HE sector has focussed on the teaching and learning of students but little has been conducted in programme administration which is also one of the important components that contributes to the learning experience of students (stated by Wood, 1993 in Section 2.6.1). Thus, this research has focussed on programme administration looking into service encounters between students and PLs. Evidently, this research has confirmed that students' experiences in their service encounters with PLs have indeed make up their learning experience throughout their course of study. Some of them even come back to thank their PL.

- Also, past research has acknowledged that a service encounter involved two parties but they have been studied from either one perspective but this research has been carried out from a dyadic perspective, looking into SEB of both students and PLs. From a dyadic perspective, this research has proven that these service encounters are

dynamic and the roles of both students and PLs are adjusted to defined situations and the expectations of students.

- Moreover, through dyadic perspective and employing the symbolic interactionist standpoint, it has helped this research to look into not only the 'what' of the SEB but also the 'how' of the SEB which is often overlooked in past research. Hence, apart from studying students' expectations, this research has also gained understanding into how PLs can respond to different situations.

- From the results of this research, a SEB guide has been developed based on the context of this research (see Table 6.1). This SEB guide is not a rule book or a blueprint but serves as a tool to facilitate PLs or management in managing service encounters and to propose training needs for service providers.

- From the SEB guide it has confirmed that the situational role is greatly shaped toward the defined situation, influencing the role-taking (the 'me') and the role making (the 'I') as collaborators in a service encounter, supported by the work of Mead (1934) and McHugh (1968). This indicated that these authors' work, coming from a socio psychology perspective, can be used to understand SEB in the service literature. Hence, the findings of this research suggest that aspects of Mead's and McHugh's work can be adapted or reframed to supplement the existing service literature to develop greater sophistication to study services management to deal with SEB in face-to-face service encounters from a dyadic perspective.

6.4 Implications of this Research

This section considers what implications the findings of this research have for PLs and management. However, as highlighted, it is not the aim of this research to generalise but it seeks to use the data gathered from empirical research to propose a SEB guide that might be adopted within programme administration in the HE sector.

- In terms of employees or PLs, the SEB guide can help them to know what is expected of them by defining the situation at hand thereby deciding how to role respond within the situation. The SEB guide will be useful to new or experienced PLs to understand the expectations of students and the possible role responses he/she can make in a defined service encounter. This is because the situations covered in this research's SEB encompass a wide range of different service encounters students would approach their PLs in a typical semester and they are real-life issues (expectations) together with realistic solutions (role response). In other words, the SEB guide can also be a source to bring to light issues and problems as well as giving ideas and suggestions to possible solutions.

- As for management, the SEB guide highlights the demands and expectations of students. This points out the criteria and offers simple suggestions to institutions in formulating successful competitive strategy as this gives a true picture of the moment of truth, the actual service encounter. So, this information enables management to react and adapt to the changing demands or expectations of students as quickly as possible to be at the leading edge of competition. This way they can

manage the service encounters effectively and efficiently or design a system that is friendly to cater to the needs of students, thus enhancing their learning experience.

- Also, the SEB guide can serve as a venue where management identify the training needs of their service providers thereby offering effective training to improve the quality of the service provided to students as well as improving the service experience of students. Apart from training, management can also look into in the ways how they can support their service providers to be more effective and efficient in delivering quality educational support services to students.

6.5 Limitations of Research

It is acknowledged that the findings of this research do not provide conclusive evidence nor is the SEB guide an exhaustive list. Therefore, this research has its limitations and one of the limitations of this research is that its findings cannot be generalised as they have been conducted or limited to the context of this research. Therefore, it is not the intention of this research to generalise its results. However, by employing a qualitative methodology, it has included sufficient context or detail description of the situations to allow readers or users of this information to know whether they can take whatever is helpful and adapt to the context of its usage.

This research has only focussed on certain aspects of educational services delivered by PLs in administering their programmes (i.e. programme administration) but it is also believed that other aspects of educational services such as students services, placement,

etc. are also essential for the overall service quality to enhance students' learning experiences. However, due to time constraints and in order for this research to be more manageable, this study has concentrated on service encounters in programme administration. Moreover, instead of targeting all aspects of education services, this research has focussed on only one i.e. programme administration in order to gain in-depth data to further understanding on this subject matter.

6.6 Further Research

From the above, the SEB guide serves as a gateway to the understanding of service behaviour in face-to-face service encounters between students and employees. It has demystified the intricacies in SEB which has meaning in different strands of service encounter where services are consumed. There is a need for more understanding of SEB for the purposes of scholarly research and facilitating the management of service encounters. Therefore, based on the findings of this research, the following are some recommendations for further research.

- The results of this research revealed that the maturity of students and the experience of PLs seem to have influenced how both have interacted in the service encounters. It has influenced students on their expectations and helped them decide what is acceptable as a solution. As for PLs it has influenced them as to how they could advise students on possible solutions and see things from a wider perspective. Therefore, it is suggested that these characteristics should be considered in future research of SEB.

- This research has pointed out that the 'enrolment' and the 'transfer' service encounter were most recounted by participants. This indicated that they are the two main service encounters that students tend to approach their PLs and it is also noted that these are times where the number of service encounters and volume of work load is high. Hence, it is proposed that further research should be conducted to gain further understanding of these situations in order to overcome arising issues to lead to favourable SEB where students know what to expect and PLs know how to handle or cope with the workload.

- Also, it is observed that programme administration in HE is very much influenced by external factors such as the regulations that govern the HE sector and the policies of their respective partner universities. In addition, PLs have also mentioned that the relationships between them and the partner universities have also facilitated them to respond in different situations. Thus, future research can explore the impact of these forces in influencing SEB and the outcomes of service encounters.

- Last but not least it is also suggested that future research in service behaviour should consider the social psychology literature and the contribution toward gaining further insights of SEB. This cross-fertilisation of concepts and strategies should add novel elements to the conception of face-to-face interaction in service encounters.

APPENDIX 1: CIT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your verbal consent and for giving time for this interview. I hereby would like to assure you that whatever discussed in the interview will be kept confidential and names will remain anonymous. The aim of this research is to study the interaction between you and the student/PL when you approached him/her. The results of this research are to promote the interest and well being of others especially students, programme leaders and programme administrators. Then permission to record the interview was obtained.

Questions for students	Questions for PLs
Preliminary question *These introductory questions will help to get information on participants' profile.*	
• What programme are you enrolled in? • What year or level of studies are you in?	• What is your current job title? • How long have you been a PL? • What does your job involve?
Question to define situation (using CIT techniques) *These questions will help to get the background to the incident (when and where the incident happened) and name the service encounter (situational definition).*	
Think of a recent time when you have approached your PL in relation to programme matters. Please describe the situation and exactly what happened. • Why have you seen him or her? • What was the issue or problem? • What led up to this situation? • What is your purpose of seeing her?	Think of a recent time when a student has approached you in relation to programme matters. Please describe the situation and exactly what happened. • Why have the student approached you? • What was the purpose? • What was the issue or problem?
Question to establish role expectation *These questions will help to get data on role expectations of students in the service encounter.*	
• What did you expect from the PL? Why? • What did you want her to do? Why?	• What did you think the student expected from you? Why? • What did you think they want you do? Why?
Questions to find out role responses *These questions will help to explain the role responses of PLs in the service encounter.*	
• What did the PL actually do? Why? • What did the PL say? Why? • How did the PL respond? Why? • What did you say? Why?	• What did you actually do? Why? • How did you handle the situation? • How did you respond? Why? • What did you say? Why? • What did the student say? Why? • What are your concerns and thoughts at that time? • What role do you think you played?
Questions for outcomes *These questions will help to know whether students thinks the outcome of service encounter is favourable or unfavourable*	
• How did you feel about the outcome? Why?	• How did the student feel about the outcome? Why?

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO GAIN ACCESS

21st March 2005

(Management of College)

Dear _____,

Currently, I am a postgraduate student engaged in research for a PhD degree at the Newcastle Business School in the University of Northumbria, under the supervision of Dr. James O'Kane. The area of my research is to explore the service encounter behaviour in programme administration in higher education (HE) context, from the student's and employee's perspectives.

Due to the intangible and interactive nature of services provided to students by programme leaders and administrators, students often rely on the service behaviour of employees when judging the quality of service encounters. In the context of this research, service encounter behaviour refers to the performance or action considered as a particular way of doing things, with behaviour in the form of words. The findings will be helpful to managers in designing services, managing students and training employees to deliver excellent service. It will help to improve service encounter quality in programme administration, contributing to the learning experience of students.

In the current phase of my research I am seeking to undertake fieldwork within Business Schools and would be grateful if you allow me to gain access to your institutions. I hope to conduct a one-to-one interview with students, programme leaders and programme administrators to canvass their opinions with regard to service encounter behaviour. I should also require access to appropriate documents within the school, such as the school's and programme's handbooks. I would like to assure you that any data collected will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

I should be grateful if you can grant me access into your institutions. My supervisor is willing to corroborate the contents of this letter, should you wish to contact him. His contact details are:

(Supervisor's contact details)

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Ng Lai Hong

APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

No.	Name of Interviewee*	Status	College*	Name of Programme	Year of experience/study
1	Willy	Student	A	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
2	Elaine	Student	A	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
3	Candy	Student	A	British Degree Programme	Year 2
4	Wilma	Student	A	British Degree Programme	Year 2
5	Ken	Student	A	British Degree Programme	Year 2
6	Gwen	PL	A	British Degree Programme	>1 year
7	Lily	Student	B	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
8	Felix	Student	B	Australia Degree Programme	Year 1
9	Nancy	Student	B	Australia Degree Programme	Year 1
10	Cherie	Student	B	Australia Degree Programme	Year 1
11	Lara	PL	B	Australia Degree Programme	>3 years
12	Rina	PL	B	Australia Degree Programme	>5 years
13	Larry	PL	B	Australia Degree Programme	>2 years
14	Linda	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 3
15	Kenneth	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
16	Tracy	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
17	Tim	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 3
18	Fiona	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 1
19	Edwin	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
20	Sara	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
21	Mike	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 2
22	Vicky	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 3
23	Luke	Student	C	Australia Degree Programme	Year 3
24	Ben	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>1 year
25	Laura	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>12 years
26	Lavina	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>5 years
27	Flora	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>10 years
28	Betty	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>1 year
29	Amelia	PL	C	Australia Degree Programme	>1 year
30	Adam	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 3
31	Fred	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 2
32	Angie	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 3
33	Osin	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 3
34	Frank	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 3
35	Henry	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 2
36	Levin	Student	D	British Degree Programme	Year 2
37	Colin	PL	D	Foundation Programme	>5 years
38	Andy	PL	D	British Degree Programme	>1 year
39	Carol	PL	D	Australia Degree Programme	>5 years
40	Rob	PL	D	British Degree Programme	>5 years
41	Cain	PL	D	British Degree Programme	>1 year
42	Wendy	PL	D	British Degree Programme	>3 years

* Pseudonym

APPENDIX 4: NUMBER OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS SHARED BY EACH PARTICIPANT

	No.	Name of Participants	TYPES OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS											Number of SE recounted by each participant
			Enrolment		Transfer		Clash of Timetable	Academic Monitoring		Complaint of Academic Staff	Examination	Appeal	Withdrawal	
			Subject Choices	Getting Enrolled	Credit Tranferability	Getting Transferred		Academic Progress	Attendance					
STUDENTS	1	Adam											1	1
	2	Angie											1	1
	3	Candy	1											1
	4	Cherie			1									1
	5	Edwin									1			1
	6	Elaine			1									1
	7	Felix			1									1
	8	Fiona					1							1
	9	Frank		1										1
	10	Fred						1	1					2
	11	Henry				1								1
	12	Ken	1											1
	13	Kenneth					1							1
	14	Levin		1										1
	15	Lily									1			1
	16	Linda								1	1			2
	17	Luke		1						1		1		3
	18	Mike					1							1
	19	Nancy			1									1
	20	Osin							1					1
	21	Sara		1		1								2
	22	Tim	1				1							2
	23	Tracy		1							1			2
	24	Vicky		1										1
	25	Willy			1									1
	26	Wilma	1											1
PLs	1	Amelia											*1*	*1*
	2	Andy											*1*	*1*
	3	Ben				*1*								*1*
	4	Betty				*2*								*2*
	5	Cain		*1*			*1*							*2*
	6	Carol			*1*							*1*		*2*
	7	Colin						*1*	*1*					*2*
	8	Flora				*1*		*1*						*2*
	9	Gwen	*1*		*1*				*1*					*3*
	10	Lara											*1*	*1*
	11	Larry		*1*							*1*			*2*
	12	Laura										*1*		*1*
	13	Lavina								*1*			*2*	*3*
	14	Rina			*2*					*1*		*1*		*4*
	15	Rob										*1*	*1*	*2*
	16	Wendy											*1*	*1*
		Subtotal	5	8	9	6		3	4					
		TOTAL	13		15		5	7		4	5	5	9	63

NOTES:

*There are a total of 42 participants (26 are students, 16 are staff).

*A total of 63 service encounters have been recounted (33 are from student's perspective and 30 are from employee's perspective).

*The 63 service encounters are categorised into 11 types of service encounters in which a student would aproach their PL in a typical semester.

*Of the 11 types of service encounters, the 'enrolment' (13) and 'transfer' (15) are most prominent where many participants have recounted them.

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