

Operational Excellence through an Evaluation of a Complaint Management System: A Case Study of Universiti Teknologi MARA

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ABSTRACT

Effective complaint management systems are increasingly recognised as critical enablers of operational excellence in higher education institutions. However, empirical evaluations of such systems within university settings remain limited. This study evaluates the performance and governance effectiveness of UiTM's e-Aduan system as the university's centralised digital platform for recording, monitoring, and resolving complaints. The study aims to assess how the system contributes to service responsiveness, resolution efficiency, and institutional accountability. Using a three-year dataset (2023–2025), the analysis examines complaint volumes, closure rates, and response timeliness, supplemented by workflow documentation, dashboard analytics, governance records of 242 moderators across 87 departments, and both internal and external audit reports. The findings indicate a steady improvement in service performance, with complaint resolution rates rising from 81% in 2023 to over 90% in 2025, alongside consistent outcomes across departments. These results suggest that a well-structured and systematically governed complaint management system strengthens transparency, enhances organisational performance, and supports the pursuit of operational excellence in university administration. This study contributes to the limited literature on digital complaint management in higher education and offers practical insights for institutions seeking to improve service quality and stakeholder trust through data-driven governance mechanisms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly assessed not only on their academic delivery but also on the quality of their organisational services, including accommodation, campus facilities, staff professionalism, administrative efficiency and overall user experience (Omoola et al., 2023). As service-based institutions, universities must provide effective mechanisms for students, staff, and the public to voice concerns, report issues, and contribute to service enhancement (NSW Ombudsman, 2016). Although complainants are often perceived negatively, the literature emphasises that systematic

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complaint handling serves as a critical feedback loop for identifying service deficiencies and enabling continuous institutional improvement.

Malaysia's national transparency agenda is operationalised through the Public Complaints Management System (SiSPAA), which reinforces the importance of accountability and responsive service delivery across public institutions (Public Complaints Bureau, n.d.). Within this broader context, higher education institutions are expected to demonstrate similar standards of transparency and operational efficiency. A structured and data-driven complaint management system within universities can therefore function as a strategic governance tool that enhances credibility, strengthens stakeholder trust, and supports operational excellence.

UiTM, as the largest public university in Malaysia, developed its own institutional complaint platform named the e-Aduan system, used to enable the structured reporting, monitoring, and resolution of complaints across its multi-campus environment. The system incorporates standardised workflows, dashboard analytics, and a distributed governance model involving moderators across faculties, departments and branch campuses. Despite the growing attention to complaint handling and dispute resolution in higher education, existing studies have largely focused on legal, conceptual, or policy perspectives, with limited empirical evaluations of institution-level digital complaint management systems that integrate governance structures, operational performance, and audit mechanisms, particularly within Malaysian public universities (Omoola et al., 2023; Found et al., 2018).

This study addresses this gap by evaluating UiTM's e-Aduan system using institutional complaint data and governance documentation. Specifically, it examines the system's operational performance, the effectiveness of its distributed governance structure, and its contribution to transparency, accountability, and service quality within the university. The findings offer ideas about how digital complaint systems can serve as mechanisms for improving institutional performance and advancing operational excellence in the higher education sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Complaints serve as an important mechanism for identifying misalignments between institutional services and stakeholder expectations (Yusof, 2021). Effective complaint management enhances organisational legitimacy, resilience, and trust (Omoola et al., 2023). Over time, complaint systems have evolved from simple reporting channels into strategic governance tools that support institutional performance. Contemporary best practices include standardised workflows, real-time monitoring dashboards, and independent audit mechanisms aimed at strengthening accountability and transparency (Miller, 2024). For public sector organisations, such systems contribute to stakeholder satisfaction, evidence-based decision-making, and institutional reputation (Found et al., 2018). Recent studies (e.g., Faheem Haider et al., 2025; Aprilina et al., 2025) similarly emphasise that structured complaint systems function as organisational intelligence frameworks that guide continuous improvement.

2.1 Complaints as Feedback for Quality

In Malaysia, complaint management is institutionalised through the Public Complaints Bureau (PCB) under the Prime Minister's Department, which provides formal definitions, categories, and procedures for handling public-sector complaints. The PCB framework sets expectations for transparency and accountability through mandatory response timelines, systematic documentation, status notifications, and structured investigation procedures. These mechanisms support administrative consistency and restore public trust in government service delivery.

Higher education institutions, including UiTM, have adopted and adapted these principles to fit their sector-specific ecosystem. Within universities, complaints frequently relate to academic services, facilities, administrative processes, and stakeholder interactions. The PCB classification principles, such as ensuring complaint completeness, tracking responsiveness, monitoring compliance, and enforcing

timely reporting, provide universities with a structured approach that reduces ambiguity and accelerates resolution. This process is particularly relevant for large multi-campus systems, such as UiTM, where distributed governance requires standardisation to maintain consistency and reliability.

By aligning with established public-sector complaint governance principles, UiTM's e-Aduan system functions as an internal control mechanism that promotes integrity, responsiveness, and accountability across its campuses. The Australasian best-practice guidelines for university complaint handling emphasise that structured governance, clear procedures, and consistent documentation are essential for ensuring transparency, fairness, and organisational learning (NSW Ombudsman, 2016). When higher education institutions adopt systematic complaint governance frameworks, they not only improve the resolution of service failures but also enhance institutional learning by creating continuous feedback loops that support evidence-based decision-making and long-term service quality improvements.

2.2 *Operational Excellence in Higher Education*

Operational excellence refers to the systematic pursuit of efficiency, consistency, stakeholder value, and continuous improvement (Oakland et al., 2020). In higher education, operational excellence is increasingly conceptualised as a governance-driven construct that strengthens organisational credibility, service quality, and long-term sustainability (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Key dimensions include responsive service delivery, streamlined processes, evidence-based decision-making, and transparent communication.

Complaint management systems are recognised as critical enablers of operational excellence because they provide measurable indicators of performance gaps and service breakdowns (Omoola et al., 2023). When supported by structured workflows, moderator governance, and real-time analytics—as in UiTM's e-Aduan system—complaint data can improve institutional agility, reduce resolution time, optimise resource allocation, and inform strategic interventions. Recent studies (Aboalganam et al., 2024) affirm that well-governed digital complaint systems enhance responsiveness and organisational learning, both of which are central to operational excellence.

UiTM's e-Aduan platform exemplifies these principles by deploying a distributed moderation model, enabling systematic tracking of complaints, and ensuring transparency through dashboards and audit trails. When integrated into institutional decision-making, such systems reinforce service quality, strengthen stakeholder trust, and support the university's broader pursuit of operational excellence.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a case study design as proposed by Yin (2014), which emphasises the need to examine a system within its real-life operational context. The methodological approach consists of three core components: data sources, analytical procedures, and an evaluation framework aligned with operational excellence.

3.1 *Data Sources*

Data were collected from UiTM's e-Aduan system records between 2023 and 2025, covering faculties, campuses, administrative offices, and residential colleges. Each record was categorised by parameters such as the number of complaints received, resolution status, and response period. A total of 1,484 complaints in 2023, 1,537 complaints in 2024, and approximately 1,100 complaints in the period from January to September 2025 were analysed. In addition, documentation, including standard operating procedures (SOPs), guidelines, and dashboard reports, managed by 242 registered moderators across 87 departments, was evaluated.

3.2 Governance and Audit Evidence

These moderators are provided guidance and are responsible for resolving complaints within their respective departments. To ensure effective management, an auditing process is also carried out, including an external audit by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance, an internal audit by the Institute of Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA), and monitoring reports from the digital dashboard to management and related committees. This process enhances the efficiency and transparency of complaint management, in line with the established system's requirements.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a hybrid method that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative method, descriptive statistics were applied to examine the number of complaints, the closure rates of complaint tickets, and the duration of feedback during the study period. For the qualitative method, work procedures, documentation, and audit reports were reviewed to identify patterns of accountability and transparency in the system's implementation. To strengthen the study's findings, reporting to committee meetings involving top management was conducted. In this report, intervention measures and improvements to work processes, as well as continuous prevention efforts, were presented so management could evaluate. This approach allows university leadership to develop a more comprehensive action plan informed by reflection and understanding of the UiTM e-Aduan system's operation.

3.4 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the e-Aduan system is based on three dimensions that are aligned with the principles of operational excellence. The first is efficiency, assessed through response duration and complaint resolution rates. The second is accountability, measured by the roles of moderators and the presence of internal and external audit systems. The third is real-time transparency, assessed through dashboard monitoring functions and reporting features. These three dimensions provide a basis for evaluating how the UiTM e-Aduan system contributes to improving institutional governance.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Trend of Complaints (2023–2025)

Table 1 summarises three years of complaint data and demonstrates consistent utilisation of the e-Aduan system across UiTM's campuses. A total of 1,484 complaints were submitted in 2023, increasing slightly to 1,537 in 2024. For 2025 (January–September), 1,100 complaints were recorded, indicating stabilised system usage.

Table 1. Total Complaints and Resolution Rates in UiTM (2023–2025)

Year	Total Complaints	% Resolved
2023	1,484	81%
2024	1,537	84%
2025	~1,100	>90%

Complaints were dominated by issues related to ICT services, followed by facilities, equipment maintenance, and service delivery encounters. This reflects UiTM's operational complexity as a multi-campus institution where ICT infrastructure and facility management are central components of daily operations.

Complaint resolution performance also improved steadily. In 2023, 81% of complaints were successfully closed; this increased to 89% in 2024 and exceeded 90% in 2025. These patterns indicate measurable improvements in operational efficiency, driven by strengthened workflows and enhanced

moderator responsiveness. Monitoring data further confirm reduced response times across most PTJs, resulting in more consistent compliance with service expectations.

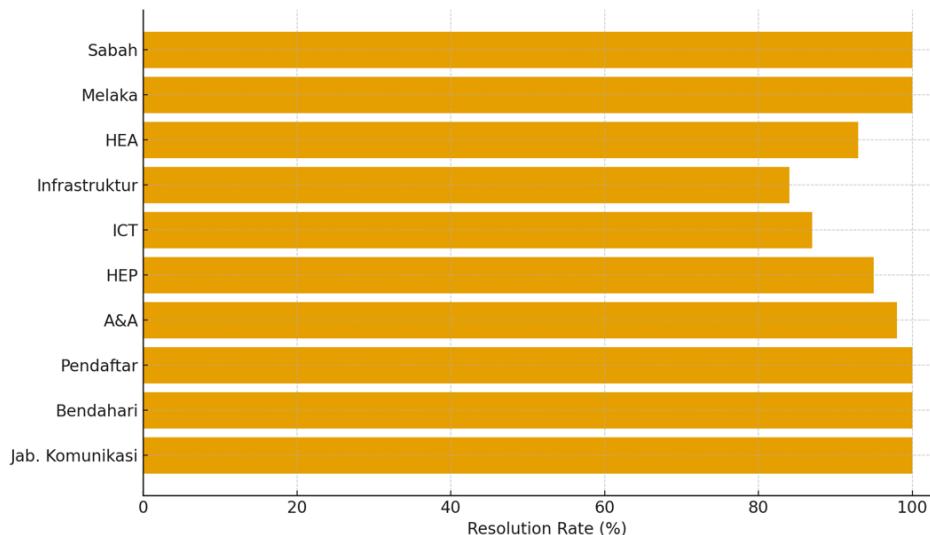


Fig. 1. Top 10 Departments by Resolution Efficiency from 2023 to 2025

4.2 Departmental Performance Variations

Table 2 shows variations in complaint volumes and resolution outcomes across faculties, campuses, administrative units, and technical departments. Despite differing operational demands, most PTJs consistently maintained high closure rates, particularly those with clearly defined workflows and well-coordinated moderator roles.

Table 2. Performance by Department Category from 2023 to 2025

Department Category	Example	Average Resolution Rate
Faculties/ Colleges	Engineering, Law, Education	85-100%
Campuses	Melaka, Sabah, Sarawak	92-100%
Administrative Offices	Registrar, Bursar, TNC (A&A)	>90%
Support/Technical Units	ICT, Facilities	25-87 %

Figure 1 highlights the top 10 departments with the highest resolution efficiency from 2023 to 2025. These departments demonstrated the ability to maintain timely complaint resolution even when handling varied or complex operational challenges. Their performance suggests that strong departmental governance, supported by the availability of resources, clear SOP adherence and proactive leadership, is a key driver of efficiency.

In contrast, technical support units especially ICT and facility-related departments, show greater variations in their resolution rates due to the complexity of technical issues and the reliance on external vendors for certain repairs. These differences are expected and provide useful insight for targeted improvements in resource planning and cross-unit coordination.

UiTM's governance structure comprising 242 moderators across 87 departments, internal SOPs, multilevel oversight, and both internal and external audits, plays a central role in sustaining system performance. Evidence from InQKA's internal audits and LRQA's external reviews shows consistent improvements in documentation accuracy, response tracking, and compliance with established

procedures. These governance mechanisms provide robust internal controls that strengthen organisational accountability, promote transparency, and ensure that complaint handling aligns with principles of good governance across the university.

5. DISCUSSION

The gradual increase in closure rates, from 81% to 89%, and subsequently to over 90% demonstrates significant gains in operational efficiency. Such improvements are consistent with prior studies which emphasise that structured complaint workflows, clear accountability mechanisms, and continuous monitoring are key drivers of operational excellence in service-based organisations (Found et al., 2018; Aboalganam et al., 2024). In this context, the observed pattern indicates that UiTM's distributed moderation model is functioning effectively, with standardised SOPs supporting greater consistency in response and resolution.

The stable volume of complaints also demonstrates the institutionalisation of the e-Aduan system as a trusted reporting mechanism. Higher visibility of complaints should not be interpreted negatively; instead, such patterns often indicate increased accessibility and stakeholder confidence, consistent with principles outlined in international complaint governance guidelines (NSW Ombudsman, 2016).

Effective governance is essential for managing complaints in large organisations such as UiTM. This finding aligns with existing governance literature, which highlights that transparent coordination structures and evidence-based reporting mechanisms enhance accountability, managerial oversight, and institutional learning in higher education institutions (Omoola et al., 2023; NSW Ombudsman, 2016). In practice, the centralised coordination of complaint processes enables improved transparency and fosters accountability at the departmental level. Continuous monitoring and committee-level reporting allow management to detect emerging issues early, supporting evidence-based decision-making.

Although UiTM does not currently operate an independent ombudsperson unit, the e-Aduan system fulfils many functions associated with ombudsperson practice, such as accessibility, fairness during investigation, confidentiality, and structured feedback loops. These features align with global standards of satisfactory complaint management and contribute to maintaining stakeholder trust.

Differences in departmental performance highlight the influence of operational complexity, resource allocation, and technical dependencies. ICT and facilities-related units often manage issues requiring diagnostic work or third-party intervention, explaining their wider performance range.

Nevertheless, departments with strong leadership, clear workflows, and effective internal coordination consistently achieve high closure rates. This suggests that governance quality, rather than complaint volume alone, is the strongest predictor of resolution performance. Similar observations have been reported in previous studies, where leadership commitment, clearly defined roles, and consistent procedural enforcement were found to significantly influence complaint resolution effectiveness and service improvement outcomes (Miller, 2024; Found et al., 2018).

5.1 A Complaint Cycle Model for Continuous Improvement

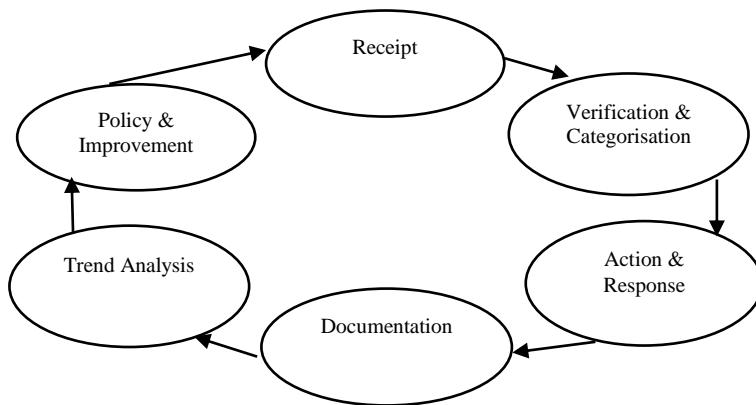


Fig. 2. A Complaints-to-Improvement Cycle Model

Figure 2 illustrates UiTM's complaint management cycle, which integrates workflows, monitoring mechanisms, and governance layers. This study proposes a Complaints-to-Improvement Cycle Model to further strengthen accountability and transparency in higher education complaint governance. This model integrates UiTM's observed practices with the broader principles of organisational learning.

The model outlines six interconnected stages:

- **Receipt** - Establish transparent, accessible, and inclusive complaint channels for all stakeholders.
- **Verification & Categorisation** - Assess validity and route complaints to the appropriate issue type or unit.
- **Action & Response** - Implement corrective actions within agreed service timeframes and provide feedback to complainants.
- **Documentation** - Maintain a centralised repository of all complaints, investigations, and resolutions.
- **Trend Analysis** - Aggregate and analyse data to identify recurring patterns or systemic concerns.
- **Policy & Improvement** - Translate findings into governance reforms, policy adjustments, and strategic decisions.

Rather than implying that UiTM's existing process is ineffective, the proposed model serves to clarify the structural logic of the system, visualise the feedback loops that underlie continuous improvement, and offer a replicable framework that can be adopted by other Malaysian public universities. Overall, this cycle reframes complaints as opportunities for organisational learning and long-term institutional enhancement rather than merely as issues requiring reactive resolution.

6. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the UiTM e-Aduan system operates as an effective complaints management mechanism that improves efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Rising closure rates over the past three years and consistent departmental performance demonstrate that structured workflows, moderator governance, and audit mechanisms strengthen service responsiveness. Complaints also function as feedback loops that support learning and inform institutional decision-making.

Theoretically, the study demonstrates how public-sector complaint governance principles can be adapted to higher education to enhance operational excellence. Practically, the findings suggest the need to institutionalise complaint management within UiTM's quality assurance framework, strengthen moderator capabilities, and regularly present data to senior management for strategic action.

The study's limitations include its dependence on system records and the lack of user satisfaction or cross-institutional comparison. Future research ought to investigate benchmarking among universities and assess the enduring effects of complaints on enhancements in governance. Overall, the findings reaffirm that structured complaint management is a strategic driver of operational excellence, enabling UiTM to enhance service quality, build trust, and support continuous institutional improvement.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefit, commercial, or financial conflicts and declare that there are no conflicts of interest with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Hayati Abd Rahman conceptualised the study, led the institutional case analysis, and contributed to the interpretation of the findings based on administrative experience in university complaint management. She also wrote and revised the manuscript for content and structure. Mohd Yusof Mustaffar provided foundational insights into the development of the university's social media complaint management system, contributed to data validation, and reviewed the manuscript for contextual relevance to institutional practices. Both authors discussed the results collaboratively, refined the conceptual framing, and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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