Student Satisfaction through Service Quality: A Review on Higher Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

Student satisfaction is a key indicator for a higher educational institutional success. As Sri Lanka is envisioning to become a global educational hub this paper attempts to find the key features of the student satisfaction. The service quality model has been applied to identify the students' satisfaction in the private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. Theoretical and empirical work studies were used in the conceptualization of the process and a comparability investigation carried out in three international educational regions in order to identify Sri Lanka's future focus in developing the students' satisfaction in higher education and thereby becoming a global educational hub as envisioned. Study identifies the global landscape and perception on student satisfaction has significantly been shifted from the fundamental satisfaction indicators. High student mobility and digital learning and teaching mechanism are identified as some of the important parameters for the student satisfaction in higher education institutes.

Keywords: Service Quality, Students Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, Higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

Service quality in the higher education is considered to be the most significance aspect of the higher education excellence (Malik, Danish & Usman, 2010). Universities and higher educational institutions have competitive advantage over their competition through the exceptional service quality (Järvinen & Suomi, 2011). Service quality was defined as offering something intangible to which gives the value to the end consumer (Brysland and Curry 2001). Earlier in 1988 Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry defined service quality as the differences between expectation and perception of quality. Few studies (Kassim & Zain, 2010; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985) argue delivering the customer expectation is the service quality. The service quality in higher education is the measured by the extent to which the expectations of the stake holders are met (Gbadamosi and Jager, 2009). Okunoye, Frolick and Crable (2008) extend this argument by claiming the higher education institutions will be competitive when the expectations of the stake holders are meeting with the values defined. Service economy plays a significant role in both developed and developing nations due to rapid environmental changes and the globalization impact (Roy, Bouma, Dhiman, & Pascual, 2015). According to international industrial standards, the service sector comprises of, "wholesale and retail trade; restaurants and hotels; transport, storage and communication, financing; insurance, real estate and business services, community, social and personal services" ((Van, Koenraad, & Petra, 2003). In general, service sector contribution to the entire economic growth contributes by the highest proportionate compared to agriculture and industrial contribution in many economies. Moreover, growth in the service sector, coupled with high demand for better delivery and the unique characteristics of services such as intangibility, variability and the inseparability of service from the provide demands a better service quality and satisfaction by the consumers. However, given the nature of service characteristics, it is challenging to define, measure and assure the quality in services unlike in products.

In the past, consumer engagement in production and the consumption of goods and services has increased, and literature has explored such activities under the heading of customer participation (Dabholkar, Shepherd, & Thorpe, 2000 and Curran and Meuter, 2005). Variety of terms have been used to explain this behavior in the past literature, namely some prefer the term customer integration, to reflect the fact that customer involvement is broader than activity, to include service enabling by the provision of resources such as property and information. Encompassing the notion of customer integration, service-dominant logic (SDL) proposes that customers share in creating the core offering itself, a concept termed customer co-production (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Co-production involves the use of resources obtained from the consumer to offer the services in variety of forms such as physical presence, the property or information.

The purpose of this paper is to provide researchers with an overview of service quality, focusing the inclusion of customer co-production and customer integration.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
Higher education in Sri Lanka is entering into a new phrase as the ministry of higher education started approving the alternative institutes (University Grants Commission, 1978). As of today there are 22 institutions (University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka, 2017) have been given the degree awarding status in the private sector. As per the internal source there are many institutions have applied for the degree awarding status and waiting for the decision from the Ministry. Service quality is being largely studies in Sri Lanka whilst knowledge gaps and the managerial significance of Sri Lankan services sector is also referred in many studies (Dissanayake & Wanninayake, 2007; Kahandawaarachchi, Dissanayake, Maitra , 2016). As the Sri Lankan government has a vision of marking the country as one of the international education hub (Kumarage & Perera, 2017), this study tries to focus on the important determinants in the academic service for the higher educational institutions. Research finding indicates measuring service quality in education is challenging (Cloutier & Richards, 1994). Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate the students' academic satisfaction factors found in empirical studies, in higher education sector in Sri Lanka

METHODOLOGY
The researcher has adopted the deductive approach in writing this paper, in which the evidences are mainly supported by existing researches empirical evidences. Hence, the author reviewed journal articles, industry publications and cases relating to a selected organization to review the concepts and applications related to student satisfaction in education industry in Sri Lanka, with reference to private higher education sector. The articles for the study were selected from the high ranked journals.

THEORETICAL REVIEW ON STUDENT SATISFACTION
Noticeable contribution to the concept of service quality was first identified by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) based on manufacturing industry. According the study indicates, service quality refers to   a customer's comparison between expectations from a service with the perceptions of what is actually delivered by the service provider. (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Accordingly, quality was defined as "zero defects" and "conformance to specification". Juran (1988) defined it as "fitness for use by the customer". However, due to differences in characteristics of products and services has necessitated a different definition and a determinant to measure the service quality. Such a broader perspective was offered by Garvin (1984) who recognized that quality can be interpreted in a variety of ways, according to the industry or service in question, and the interests of the stakeholders in question. Originated in

1980s and 1990s, increasing attempts to identify and understand quality of service have been undertaken in the last three decades.

Service delivery is different from manufacturing in several ways, and that makes the quality issues in the service sector different from the manufacturing ones (Alzayd, Al-Hajla, Nguyen, & Jayawardhena, 2018). The service process itself demand a greater level of customization than a product, naturally resulting a heterogeneous experience to consumer during the consumption process. In other words, the interaction of the customer with the services should be considered when the service is shaped, performed and provided. Therefore, the simultaneous production and consumption of the service make it difficult to assess the quality of service before services are used. Thus, failure of quality cannot always be found and avoided before a customer uses the provided service. The below table summarizes the key literature on quality philosophies from eminent researchers.

Quality in service industries cannot be objectively measured as it can be in manufactured goods and therefore it remains a relatively elusive and abstract concept (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Akbaba, 2006, Khanand Shaikh,2011). The assessment of quality performance for services is more complex than for products because of their inherent nature of, inseparability of production and consumption, perishability and intangibility (Roy.et. al., 2015). Key literature in service quality developed the SERVQUAL scale, a survey instrument which is intended to measure the service quality in any kind of service organisation based on five dimensions, namely: reliability, tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and empathy (Parasuraman et al, 1985). However, this model has been criticized in several aspects of its measurements recently. The majority of criticisms of the SERVQUAL comprise three aspects: the number and nature of the quality dimensions; the argument that gap scores are driven by high expectation scores; and reliability. Authors have challenged the five dimensional structure, suggesting that both the number and content of dimensions may differ according to context, criticism related to the instrument concerns the basic notion of operationalizing service quality in terms of the difference between expectation and perceptions, since it is claimed that the gap scores are essentially driven by one component and Babakus and Boller (1992) doubted the reliability of individual items, and the discriminant and convergent validity of the SERVQUAL elements.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW ON SERVICE QUALITY

Various studies have been conducted to measure the student satisfaction globally. Scholars around the leading schools have identified variables that can potentially affect the students' satisfaction. Students' informal contacts with faculty members were consistently related to withdrawal/ persistence decisions (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

Retention of student often considered to be correlated to the quality of the University education (Druzdzel & Glymour, 2009). Faculty mentoring programmes have positive correlation with the academic performance and students' satisfaction and it leads to lower the drop outs (Campbell & Campbell, 1997) Aldridge and Rowley (Aldridge & Rowely, 1998) investigated a group of students in a UK university to measure their satisfaction level. The results revealed that a negative quality model is useful in managing this phenomenon. The model underlined that organizations should seek to respond to incidents that lead to dissatisfaction as they arise as continued perception of poor quality will lead to attrition. Similarly, Napoli and Wortman (Napoli & Wortman, 1998) assessed that psychological measures i.e., life events during university, self-esteem, social competence, social support, personal conscientiousness, psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with the

academic, administrative and social systems of university have impact on university persistence.

A study was conducted in German universities using a relationship quality based student loyalty model by Hennig et al (T. Hennig-Thurau, 2001) who found that quality of teaching and students' emotional commitment to their institutions were crucial for students loyalty. Yu and Dean (Yu & Dean, 2001) examined that both positive and negative emotions and cognitive component of satisfaction correlate with student loyalty and that affective component of satisfaction serves as a better predictor than cognitive factor. Palacio et al (A.B. Palacio, 2002) conducted a study on Spanish university students; the results revealed that university image influenced the student satisfaction with the university. The results of a study conducted by Mayo et al (Mayo, Helms, & Codjoe, 2004) illustrated that conflicting family/work demands, financial issues and academic concerns were the factors identified by students as possible reasons for attrition. Aldemir and Gulcan (Aldemir & Gulcan, 2004) examined the Turkish students' satisfaction in higher education. The results of study showed that for some Turkish university students, the quality of instructors, education, textbooks and being female and informed before attending university considered to important factors of satisfaction. Navarro et al (Navarro, Iglesias, & Torres, 2005)surveyed the Spanish university students for their satisfaction with educational offers made by the universities. The results of the study expressed that the teaching staff, the teaching methods and course administration were key elements to achieving student satisfaction and their subsequent loyalty.

Mai (Mai, 2005) studied the student satisfaction in higher education and its influential factors. It was found that the overall impression of the school, overall impression of the quality of the education, teachers expertise and their interest in their subject, the quality and accessibility of IT facilities and the prospects of the degree furthering students careers were the most influential predictors of the students satisfaction. Similarly Deshields et al (DeShields Jr, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005) used a satisfaction model and Herzberg's two factor theory to examine the determinants of student satisfaction with education. They found that faculty performance and classes were the key factors which determined the quality of college experience of students which in turn led to satisfaction. All these studies emphasis on certain factors of education offerings which determine the students' satisfaction with education and in turn loyalty to the institution. Therefore, as foresaid objective of this study is to analyze the student satisfaction in higher education institutions.

CASE REVIEW ON SERVICE QUALITY

European Universities understood the student satisfaction and loyalty towards the higher educational institute can be increased by being more flexible and enable more mobility. As such 29 higher education ministers in Europe signed an agreement in 1999, named Bologna Process with the objective of student satisfaction and mobility. Bologna Process currently has 45 member states with the focus on the following agenda.

1. Adaptable, readable and comparable degrees across the member state.
2. Establishing a common credit mechanism and encourage mobility among staff and students of the institutions
3. Improving the recognition of the member universities.
4. Encouraging students to spend at least one semester abroad

Based on the Bologna process Norway introduced few legislations in 2003 where the student satisfaction through student mobility was given high priority. Student's flexibility in learning was increased by introducing modular based learning. Norway established a quality assurance

agency in the country and standardized the degrees across the country. Norway also regulated the sector and legislatively empowered the students to have the rights of selecting any Universities since most of the degrees are standardize. Student financial support was revised to a greater extend to accommodate students.

The national students survey (NSS 2018) in the United Kingdom shows clearly the Universities organization and management is the key determinant in the overall satisfaction, the teaching quality is in the second criteria for the students' satisfaction. Student also given high priority for their personal development. Academic support, assessment feedback is taken the other important factors. However, based on the NSS – 2018 results the single best factor influence the student satisfaction is identified as Course design and the smooth running". Students wanted their study programs to be a well design one and must run smoothly during their studies (Langan et al. 2018). The teaching score in the UK generally high in the national student survey and the Universities are now advised to focus on the course organization. Policy change in the tuition fees in the recent years caused a significant impact in the overall confidence and satisfaction among the students' community.

In Malaysia one of the fastest growing education hub in the region has given greater emphasis in providing an efficient online support for the student engagement and there by student satisfaction. A study carried out based on three leading private University in Malaysia by indicates greater focus must have been given in the online platform where students engagement increases (Lau, Mohomad & Chew,2015). A study of Weerasinghe & Fernando, (2017) indicates the University related academic and nonacademic services has a strong relationship students learning and thereby increases their satisfaction. The skill development among the students especially with regard to the analytical IT and team spirit have taken a significant determinant in the satisfaction level.

When it comes to the Sri Lanka private higher educational institutes while small portion of institutions given degree awarding status majority of the institutions are delivering their degree with the collaboration with the British Universities. The transnational educational collaboration in Sri Lanka with the international Universities are not regulated systematically causing huge amount of confusion among the student communities in most of the organizations are not operating in a purpose built educational premises hence the students have expressed their concern with regard to the class room facilities. A study by (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017) indicates class room facilities are one of the key determinant among the Sri Lankan students in the state Universities in Sri Lanka. Some of the basic facilities such as the class room. Another major problem in the private higher education industry is the lack of common mechanism in controlling the quality assurance framework. Unqualified academic staff members, lack of understanding in the higher educational requirement and lack of professional development opportunities are some of the institutional challenges in the sector. When speaking to a Chief executive of a leading private sector institute, it was revealed that the lack of regulation in the sector causing recognition issues. There are lack of understanding with regard to the international educational system has impact on the private higher educational acceptance among the state institutions. Some of the professional bodies do not accept graduate from three years' honors UK programme for their membership. State Universities insist two years postgraduate programme for the research degree whereas most of the postgraduate qualification in the British system in a one and half year degree. While international countries are addressing the standardization and focusing on the students' mobility and exposure Sri Lanka private system seems to still in the primary stage. Students in

Sri Lankan educational system is more worried about the recognition and employability in the system.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS.

As the government is promoting Sri Lanka as the educational hub, the system doesn't seem to have geared up for the vision. Sri Lankan students faces many fundamental challengers from unregulated private sector institutes. While in the west in the United Kingdom and in the Europe the legislators and the Universities focuses more on the enhancement of student experience to increase the satisfaction level, our focus was mainly revolving in the fundamentals principles. Since the sector is unregulated in the country the students' satisfaction is largely depends on the recognition of their degree in the country than any other value additional features. The application of Information communication technology (ICT) is another important mechanism to enhance the needful for knowledge society, and future studies may examine hot ICT enables student satisfaction in higher education perspectives (Dissanayake,2011). Our students have very minimal opportunities for the mobility due to the difference in the educational framework of the British, European and the Sri Lankan system. Further research is required to provide a systematic guidance to the Sri Lankan national and private institution to make the comparable decisions in recruiting the student from various feeder programmes. The absence of the national quality assurance council in the country required further research on the implications   it might have on the students' welfare and there by the students' satisfaction.

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