

**DYNAMICS OF QUALITY IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS OF
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ON RANKING
OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES**



SeemaRahim

ID# 050193-010

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Ph.D in Education
in the Department of Education
University of Management and Technology
Lahore**

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the research work described in this thesis is the original work of the author and has been carried out under my direct supervision. I have personally gone through all data/results/materials reported in the manuscript and certify their correctness/authenticity. I further certify that the material included in the thesis have not been used in part or full in a manuscript already submitted or in process of submission in partial/complete fulfillment of the award of any other degree from any other institution. I also certify that the thesis has been prepared under my supervision according to the prescribed format and I endorse its evaluation for the award of PhD degree through the official procedure of the university.

Signature of the Supervisor: _____

Certificate of Approval

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Education, School of Social Sciences & Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of PhD in Education

Prof. Dr. Abdul Hameed
Supervisor

Prof. Dr.
Examiner

Mr. SajidMasood
Chairman

Prof. Dr. Abdul Hameed
Dean, SSS&H

Date: _____.

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In the name of Allah the most beneficent and the merciful!

“Say [unto them, O’ Muhammad]: Can those who know and those who don’t know be deemed equal? But only those who are endowed with insight will keep this in mind.” (Quran 39: 9)

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ABSTRACT

Dynamics of Quality in Higher Education: Implications of Customer Satisfaction on Ranking of Private Universities

by

SeemaRahim

Better ranking as a measure of marketability is the prime need of private universities of Pakistan, in order to survive against the well-established public universities. The exponential expansion of higher education does not mean that all higher education institutions will sustain. The sustainability requires continuous improvement in services. Quality Assurance is a system to deal with issues related to development and improvement in higher education. Both, quality assurance and ranking of universities are emerging phenomena in Pakistan after the establishment of Higher Education Commission (HEC). Private universities are in initial stage of responding to these calls. They are taking retrospective measures for quality assurance, unmindful of the basic ingredient of quality, i.e. customer satisfaction. The concept of customer satisfaction cannot be separated from the quality of service of higher education, because private universities operate as business entities and compete for profit. The retention of loyal customers is crucial for independent revenue generation and sustenance of these higher education institutions.

The issue of consumer satisfaction is not only a concern of the multiple stakeholders but also a prime concern of HEC. The HEC must ensure that the drive to earn profits does not lead to compromise on the quality of service; and private universities do prosper in business by maintaining quality in teaching and learning? Research was carried out in seven private universities of Pakistan to determine the relationship between the perceptions of customers on service quality of higher education, i.e. students and faculty as means of satisfaction and its impact upon the word of mouth for the respective university. It seeks the answers of following research questions: 1) Whether the universities have been able to transform their consumers into loyal and engaged customers? 2) What is the role of university's perceived value in procuring student satisfaction and loyalty? 3) What are the gaps between theory and practice of QA in

private universities of Pakistan? 4) How successful the HEC measures have been to implement QA programs in private universities of Pakistan? The research used mixed method approach for data collection and its analyses. This exploratory study focused on understanding the needs of all stakeholders to generate a customer satisfaction model for private universities of Pakistan. Descriptive and interpretive analyses of qualitative data were used for this purpose. The study not only generated a model, it has tested the model through advanced inferential statistics to prove its efficacy over a larger population of students in private universities of Pakistan.

The multivariate effects of satisfaction across universities were measured through MANOVA. Discriminant analysis has been the most critical tool used for distinguishing satisfaction along six service quality indicators (teaching, management, leadership, campus life, academic services and infrastructure) across seven universities; it has predicted the strength of word of mouth and intentions to stay in the university as well. Structure Equation Models procured for student satisfaction were able to distinguish strategic paths adopted by universities in their pursuit of service quality and student satisfaction.

The findings indicate that that people and processes (teacher and teaching) are more important than infrastructure and other tangible facilities; the students' choice of institution rests upon academic and social environment rather than infrastructure or other reputational measures. The projected rankings of the universities do not correspond with subjective satisfaction of their customers. The discussion concludes that perceived educational outcomes implied most significant influence over customer satisfaction (both students and teachers), and prospective reputation of the university. Leadership strategies are critically evaluated by all customers related to planning of these outcomes. Both value for money and fitness for purpose are vital for the service higher education, but qualitative difference will be created by transformational model. The private universities of Pakistan have yet to achieve the transformational status of quality. Therefore, private universities will have to adopt prospective measures of quality assurance; more than teaching, they will have to focus upon learning of students. Unless they align their efforts to achieve transformational quality in their total environment, their sustainability will remain in danger. Unable to retain faculty and attract quality students, the private universities may keep losing their customers, which is undesirable and unhealthy for the business as well as society.

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