The Influence of Service Quality on Iranian Students Satisfaction, Loyalty and Word of Mouth Communication in Eastern Mediterranean University in Northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

In the current competition in the academic world, students have different options to choose from.Thus, the factors that help institutions in higher education to appeal to and enrol new students should be earnestly examined. Institutions in higher education, seeking competitive advantage, may have to initiate the quest for real and innovative means to appeal to, keep and nurture robust relations with their students. This study's objective is to investigate the effect of service quality (SERVQUAL) on the satisfaction of the students and behaviors post-satisfaction i.e. loyalty and word of mouth (WOM) communıcatıon. Furthermore, investigating the intervening role of loyalty in the relationship between satisfaction and WOM among Iranian students.

For this purpose, 324 Iranian students at Eastern Mediterranean University in Northern Cyprus were chosen to participate in the study. Sample was drawn from almost all faculties. IBM Spss 22 was used in examining the relationships. The findings highlighted that the dimensions of service quality are significantly related with satisfaction, likewise loyalty and WOM. Also, the relationship between loyalty and WOM was proven.

The study examined a conceptual model that tested customer satisfaction and its subsequent behaviors (loyalty and WOM) with service quality. Research was conducted among Iranian students from different faculties and degree programs. The results of this study depicted all sevice quality dimensions have relationship with satisfaction and its subsequent behaviors.

Keywords: Loyalty, Student Satisfaction, Service Quality, Higher Education and Word of mouth communication.

ÖZ

Akademik dünyadaki mevcut yarışmada, öğrencilerin seçebilecekleri farklı seçenekler bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, yüksek öğrenim kurumlarına yeni öğrencilere başvuruda bulunmaları ve yeni öğrencilere kaydolmaları için yardımcı olan etmenler titizlikle incelenmelidir. Rekabet üstünlüğü arayışında olan yüksek öğrenim kurumları, öğrencilerle sağlam ilişkilere sahip çıkmak, onları korumak ve beslemek için gerçek ve yenilikçi araçlar arayışını başlatmak zorunda kalabilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, hizmet kalitesinin, öğrencilerin tatmin ve tatmin edici davranışları, yani sadakat ve ağızdan ağıza iletişim üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Ayrıca, İranlı öğrenciler arasında memnuniyet ve ağızdan ağıza iletişim arasındaki ilişkide sadakatin rolünü araştırmaktadır.

Bu amaçla Kuzey Kıbrıs'taki Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi'ndeki 324 İranlı öğrenci çalışmaya katılmıştır. Örnek neredeyse tüm fakültelerden alınmıştır. İlişkiler SPSS İstatistik 22 kullanılarak test edildi. Sonuçlar, hizmet kalitesi boyutlarının memnuniyet, aynı şekilde sadakat ve ağızdan ağıza iletişim ile anlamlı bir ilişkisi olduğunu gösterdi. Ayrıca, sadakat ve ağızdan ağıza iletişim arasındaki ilişki kanıtlandı.

Çalışmada, müşteri memnuniyetini ve daha sonraki davranışlarını hizmet kalitesi ile test eden kavramsal bir model incelendi. Araştırma, farklı fakülte ve yüksek lisans programlarından gelen İranlı öğrenciler arasında yürütülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, tüm servis kalite boyutlarının, memnuniyet ve sonraki davranışlarıyla ilişkisini göstermektedir. Çalışma yöneticiler için iyi tanımlanmış sonuçlar sunmakta,

çalışmanın sınırlamaları hakkında bilgi vermekte ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sadakat, Öğrenci Memnuniyeti, Hizmet Kalitesi, Yüksek Öğrenim ve Ağız İfadesi.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to all those who have come to know me through this

and this achievement helps them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EMU   Eastern Mediterranean University

PharmD   Doctor of Pharmacy

SEM   Structural Equation Modeling

SERVPERF Service Performance

SERVQUAL Service Quality

SOS   Student Option Survey

SS   Student Satisfaction

SSI   Student Satisfaction Inventory

WOM   Word of Mouth Communication

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Rationale for the Study

Education is an important and worthwhile investment that keeps yielding returns in many ways. A system of education that is robust and effective in several ways, results in better performance of students. Education institutions with an effective system and administration that offer excellent services will continually have an influx of students.

In a bid to move the institution forward and meet the expectations of the student, academic predilections and perception of quality about the educational setting should be kept at the highest level by the authorities of the institution (Palacio, Meneses & Perez, 2002). Students studying in higher education institutions predominantly demand good and quality education because, such education will improve their confidence and equip them with the essentials and proficiencies to start off a good career.

Rowley (1996) stated that students in good institutions have better capabilities, perform better and are more productive because the institutions have superior educational service and offer their students what they need for a good academic and professional career. Students desire empathy, responsiveness, assurance in the course of their academic development, which assists in having a better perspective of competing well in the market (Parasuraman et al.1994). Thus, the efficiency of the

management of institutions of higher education has an enormous role to play in quality assurance and character coaching so the students can make the most of their study (LeBlanc & Nguyen 1997).

Higher education, as a service industry, is rapidly growing and becoming more exposed to globalization (Damme, 2001; O'Neil & Palmer, 2004). Service quality highlighting the satisfaction of student is a developing area of interest. In a bid to appeal to students, meet their various needs and keep them, institutions of higher education are keenly interested in knowing what the students expect and how they perceive service quality. Providers of higher education now have to adopt methods of service quality measurement and assessment like other service providers do.

Majority of the theoretical frameworks assessing the quality of service are centred on the concepts of marketing (Gummesson, 1991). These frameworks can assess the quality of service through student perceptions (Gro¨nroos, 1984) considering also that the expectations of student significantly impact their perceptions. It is argued that this criteria is important to student matters in service quality assessment (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001, p. 332) stated that services offered by educational institutions 'fall into the field of services marketing'. As a result of the distinctive features of services- heterogeneity, intangibility, perishability and inseparability (Parasuraman, 1986), quality of service is difficult to measure accurately (Patterson & Johnson, 1993). In the extant literature on service quality, the emphasis is placed on the quality of service perceived- a deduction from service expectations and the perception of the actual performance (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

In the last decade, issues on service quality have been a topic of huge discourse among professionals and academia. Satisfaction of students is regularly employed to evaluate educational quality; where addressing strategic needs is of significance (Cheng, 1990). Service quality conceptualization, its association with satisfaction and value constructs and procedures of assessment, have been a dominant subject in the education industry in the last few decades (Oldfield & Baron, 2000; Soutar & McNeil, 1996). Assessing service quality in higher education is becoming more imperative (Abdullah, 2006).

Generally, quality of service increases the satisfaction of students, spurs the intention of returning and motivates referrals (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005). When students are satisfied; lucrativeness, the share of the market and investment returns rise (Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Fornell, 1992; Hackl & Westlund, 2000; LeBlanc, 1992; Legoherel, 1998; Stevens et al., 1995). The higher education industry ought to know the significance of improving service quality in order to gain competitive edge.

The significance of quality of service in service industry generally has warranted a number of studies empirically examining the quality of service in a wide-ranging scope of service backgrounds like insurance, banking, long-distance telephone companies and hotels (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 1990). Currently, the controversy lies in the way service quality ought to be measured (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991, 1994). SERVQUAL is an instrument employed in business schools in measuring the quality of service (Carman, 1990) such as fast food services, dry cleaning, banking (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and in several other service settings, although it is an exploratory research and does not offer a clear measure methodology for measuring gaps at totally different levels. This model has been refined during the years and few believe that only performance requied to be measured

as SERVPERF model so as to find perception of service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Finding in years of using this model shows SERVQUAL dimensions are inconsistent and it's not comprehensive for various applications (Dabholkar, et al., 1992 ; Shahin & Samea, 2010). The five dimensions of SERVQUAL have been analyzed by Carman (1990). He added features relevant to different situations, considering that the rate of failure among universities and colleges is quite higher than among government establishments and businesses (Cameron & Tschirhart, 1992). Measuring quality of services in higher education necessitates the investigation of the significance of quality service that is pertinent to the circumstances being studied.

In the relevant literature, examination of the real base of service quality assessment has been carried out on the meanings of higher education quality (Lagrosen et al., 2004), dimensions of service quality (Joseph & Joseph, 1997; Lagrosen et al., 2004; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996), perceived significance (Ford et al., 1999), quality of service and satisfaction of students (Rowley, 1997). This study seeks to offer a concrete basis for service quality assessment in North Cyprus' higher education sector in particular. Harvey (2003) stated that the place of students' opinions in the quality development process and policies is not quite clear. Besides, deciding under what circumstances opinions of students can result in improvement of services is really difficult. SERVQUAL might measure the views of students with regard to the quality of their universities but then, not the education's quality itself (Ford et al. 1993). Oldfield and Baron (2000) indicated that the views of students towards the quality of service in institutions of higher education, especially pertaining to features not involved directly with course units; its content and delivery, are studied by means of a performance-only variation of the SERVQUAL. As a result, this research will endeavor to examine in general, the quality of service in administrative arms as against

academic matters e.g. services delivered by the library, registry, faculty/departmental offices, dormitories, rector's office, health center, sports etc. instead of content of the courses, curriculum or teaching. The measurement of the quality of service in this current study adds to the overall quality assessment of institutions of higher education.

Similar to a number of establishments, universities and colleges are concerned about their efficiency, market share, investment returns and the service quality their students are offered, particularly because, the service quality they offer, highly affects the recommendations students will give to other people (Allen & Davis, 1991). A number of qualitative and quantitative tools are used to assess the satisfaction of the students. Student Opinion Survey (SOS) is one of the two most useful instruments employed to measure satisfaction of students. The other is the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) sold and distributed by a consultant in higher education, based in the US; the Noel-Levitz (Roszkowski 2003). SSI instrument will be used to assess the significance of several indicators related to higher education that influence the satisfaction of students in addition to determining how these indicators are viewed by students before a gap analysis is done. Therefore, this study's core objective is to provide further understanding on university students' satisfaction as well as explicating factors influencing students' judgments of quality service, satisfaction and behaviors after satisfaction. In addition, this study attempts to identify any differences in satisfaction based on the students' gender, age, the field of study and success level. This study's findings will contribute to higher education institutions' marketing strategies, concentrating on the overall emphasis placed on promotion and advertising concept, which pays attention to the satisfaction of students.

One of the highly important sectors playing a critical role in the growth of a nation is education. In regards to the significance of education, a strong relationship exists between the growth of the economy and education (Husain.et al, 2009), owing to the human resources education sector made available to the society. Many countries are transitioning their economies from manufacturing to services industry, of which education is quite prominent. In fact, education is regarded as important as any other prominent sector in the economies in most nations. Competitive rivalry within service industries is now very intense. For these reasons, practitioners and the academia are placing emphasis on the education sector.

Nowadays, establishments are faced with the new challenges posed by stakeholders and the rising competition in the business world as a result of globalization. Organizations now need managers who are very skilled, well-informed and proficient, capable of dealing with current concerns and coming up with the most suitable means of speeding up their organization's growth globally and locally. Education institutions have an important responsibility of developing and training managers for the sectors by incorporating their programs and benchmarking with the top establishments all over the world to empower their graduate to lead their industry. The evaluation of the perceptions of students as regards the quality of service in universities with reference to their students' satisfaction is this study's aim. In addition, using SERVQUAL, this study will analyze the relationship between student satisfaction, service quality as well as loyalty and WOM. The study also examined the effect of service quality on satisfaction, loyalty and WOM.

In the current highly competitive academic world which gives students many choices, factors enabling institutions of learning appeal to and keep students should be

examined. Institutions in higher education that would gain a competitive advantage might have to begin to search for real and innovative means of attracting, retaining and fostering superior relationship with their students. Privately owned establishments have to rely heavily on market interactions and mechanisms. Consequently, competition has to attract students as much as they can or supposed "prospective student" might become intense more and more. Thus, making it more difficult as privately owned institutes of learning do not have government subsidy opportunities or financial supports (Teo, 2001). The main factor for students' withdrawal is their hopes that have not been met by the institutions (Alridge & Rowley, 2001). This helps us to appreciate that students will continue to enrol in an institute of higher education based on how well the services and programs in such institution met the expectations of the students. Satisfaction with the services offered could make all the difference in a competitive market (Parasuraman, & Berry, 1996). The current study will attempt to investigate the different features of service quality and the satisfaction level amongst students enrolled in state university of higher education.

As a result of the intense market rivalry in the education service sector, institutions of higher education now focus more on satisfaction of students; creating different approaches to appeal to students and offering effective and superior environment conducive for learning as an integral piece of the strategy employed by managers of these institutions in a bid to connect success in academics to ideas like retaining and recruiting of students (DeShields Jr et al. 2005; Helgesen & Nesset 2007). The institutions of higher education can get students satisfied by offering exceptional service standards and this is a fundamental piece of acquiring a long-term competitive edge in the current education's global market (Huang et al. 2012). A group of students who have been satisfied are a source of continued advantage for the institutions via

positive word of mouth recommendations as well as offers them superior position against competitors. Given they are in a constant competition, universities should be mindful of not only the quality they offer to their students with ample principles regarding talents and skills but as well with what enrollees feel about their experience in these institutions during their study (Munteanu et al. 2010).

Arokiasamy (2012) highlighted that in the world as we have it today, to have and preserve reasonable competitiveness, establishments and businesses need to lay emphasis on quality as one of the highly important factors for success. Furthermore, the institution of higher education is concentrating more on appraising what their students think of the service quality they offer. The cause of this is education is classified as a commercial service: the increase in the amount of tuition-paying students, growing expectations from students of institutions higher education, higher education's globalized face, electronic communication and lastly, the ongoing intense competitiveness in the higher education sector (Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Zeithmal et al. (1996) claimed that the refusal of institutions of higher learning to appreciate the expectations of students is the main cause of their poor performance in the education sector. Consequently, without having an accurate knowledge of their students' requirements and expectations, they are inevitably going to keep failing. Few studies have been carried out on the level of students' perception as it concerns the quality of service (Kimani et al. 2011). Conversely, the studies carried out in emerging nations concerning the perception of students on the quality of service largely focused on students in private universities and institution, not the public institutions of higher education. Likewise, literature abounds on the subject of the perception of students on the quality of service. Nevertheless, the bulk of these studies were carried out on the

perception of quality amongst students in developed nations like Australia, UK, US and New Zealand.

The current study intends to investigate the high inflow of students to Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) from the perspective of service quality. As the number of Iranians interested in furthering their studies in North Cyprus increases, an assessment of the service quality offered to students from other countries has become imperative.

1.2 Aims of Study

The current study's objective is to investigate the effect of service quality on student satisfaction and the effect of satisfaction on loyalty and WOM of Iranian Students in North Cyprus (Eastern Mediterranean University in particular). Self-administered questionnaires that are reliable and valid were employed in this study for data collection purposes.

1.3 Research Question

This study mainly questioned: what is the influence of service quality on the satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth communication of Iranian students in Eastern Mediterranean University and to what degree? Hence, the following four important questions were proposed :

1. Does the service quality have positive effect on student satisfaction?
2. Does student satisfaction have positive effect on loyalty?
3. Does student satisfaction have significant effect on WOM?
4. Does loyalty have significant influence on WOM?

1.4 The scope of the Study

This study's scope aims to provide relevant recommendations to managers towards managing effectively in accordance with the study findings. Given that, in the current competitive service industry, satisfaction of students and service quality remain vital thus, the SERVQUAL concept alongside its influence on student satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth communication need to be thoroughly examined. The findings provide relevant information for universities in helping them achieve a competitive advantage.

1.5 Outline of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to the study by specifying the coherence of the selected topic and preparing information on the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 provides a wording for the research by reconsidering and arguing former studies that have been overlooked by investigators in different places.These studies consist of those which have examined the model for service quality, student satisfaction and post-satisfaction (Loyalty and WOM). In this manner, we can see how the relationship between diverse variables are examined. However, the hypotheses and theoretical model of the current examination are provided in this chapter. The third chaper, including the methodology of the research which provides details of the special approach and process for the sampling, developing the questionnaire of the study and data collection. Chapter 4 depicts the results of data analysis according to the theoretical model and examined the hypotheses in terms of descriptive statistics, T test, alpha cronbach, correlation and regression. Finally, in chapter 5 the discussions about the conclusions, results and recommendations for future research were explained.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Service Quality

Definitions of quality of service focus on the idea that it should be decided according to the users' evaluation. Based on literature, quality has been conceptualized based on what is perceived by the user, hence the term perceived quality. The judgment of the user/customer of the general superiority of, or the experience of an entity has been described as perceived quality (Zeithaml, 1987; Zammuto et al. 1996). In the same way, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) similarly established that the perception of quality of service by customers arises from likening the expectations before experiencing the service to their real service experience. Perceived quality has also been comprehended as a kind of attitude in association with but not exactly like satisfaction, deduced from an assessment of what one expects against what's ones' opinion of performance (Rowley, 1996).

As a result, the quality of service perceived may be the outcome of an evaluation of some service encounters which for this study; it is that of students' encounters with tutors, the head of departments, university staff, lecturers and so on (Hill, 1995). Consequently, service consistently offered by an institution at par that surpasses expectations of students, will be valued as being of high quality. On the other hand, if an institution refuses to meet the expectations of the students, such services are considered as moderate or of low quality (Zammuto et al., 1996).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) identified the factors contributing to excellent service quality that are generally applicable to service of different kinds. The dimensions are reliability, tangibility, competence, security, understanding responsiveness, access, communication, credibility and courtesy. Furthermore, the aforementioned dimensions have been rearranged into the recognized dimensions in the model of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1990) which consists of reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibility and empathy.

- **Tangibles:** These are the physical amenities, tools and personnel guises.

- **Reliability**: This is the capability to carry out the service promised reliably and correctly.

- **Responsiveness**: This is the readiness and enthusiasm to support and deliver services quickly.

- **Assurance**: This is the understanding of service to be rendered and their ability to convey trust and confidence, as well as their courteousness in the process of service delivery.

- **Empathy**: This is the dimension of being concerned, giving personalized care to customers.

It is true that typical service-providing organizations and the institutions of higher education are not the same in terms of their unique features. Shostack (1977) stressed the significance of the intangible dimensions in the total delivery of services. One of the very intangible services, is teaching. Soutar and McNeil (1996) stated that few attempts have been made to tie teaching to quality assurance, which is very significant in the service industry from the perspectives of students. The principles of marketing suggesting that the strategy of institutions of higher education ought to stem from the

needs of the student, have not been considered much in the discourse centred around accountability in higher institutions of learning.

2.2 Student Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been described by Kotler and Clarke (1987) as a fulfilment arising from someone's experience of an outcome or a performance that satisfies the expectation he/she has. Satisfaction depends on the expectation level of the customer and the performance that has been perceived.The expectations of students in the university could go as far as prior to the time the students enrolled in the institution, signifying that it is imperative that researchers first find out the expectations of the students even before they enrolled at the institution (Palacio, Meneses and Perez, 2002).

Conversely, it has been argued that student satisfaction only involves matters of the perception of students and the experiences they have in the institution during their studies (Carey, Cambiano & De Vore, 2002). Although the majority of studies on student satisfaction concentrate on student's perspective, scholars are faced with the challenge of describing students' satisfaction, therefore, resulting in a student satisfaction theory; designated and adapted to elucidate student satisfaction (Hom, 2002). Although seeing students as customers of universities is unsafe, considering the present situation of the higher education market, it is reasonable to label students, customers, which means that they can, as clients of the institution, practically insist that the institution listens to their views and action (William, 2002).

In reverse, it is presumed that satisfaction essentially takes account of the concerns of experiences and perceptions in the course of students' study in the university (Hasan

& Ilias, 2008). Satisfaction of the students is continually being moulded by recurring campus life experiences. The findings of earlier studies have shown that satisfied students might appeal to prospective students by means of spreading positive word-of-mouth to acquaintances and friends, as well as a return to the university to further their education or enrol in extra programs (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007; Gruber et al., 2010).When the services delivered meet expectations, students are expected to be satisfied with their institutions and betterstill when the services offered exceed expectations, they are more likely to be completely satisfied (Williams, 1982). Likewise, students are not likely to be satisfied with their institutions when the institutions' services fail to meet their expectations, making the gap between expected quality of service and perceived quality of service very high and as a result, they will be prone to giving negative word-of-mouth (Petruzzellis, Uggento & Romanazzi, 2006).

Satisfaction is the gathering of the congruency between performance perceived and benefits arising from personal values of the consumer, given the makeup of the values of the consumer is heavily influenced by principal societal values (Tina & Wang 2010). Furthermore, they pointed out that, differences in culture directly impacts the satisfaction of students and their perception of services offered. Satisfying students with similar cultural background falls short of being an easy task, making the satisfaction of culturally diverse students a daunting task. Nevertheless, Navarro et al. (2005) stated that, the quality of the institutions are appraised by the students based on reliability, tangibility , and responsiveness as well as management of the organization. These different aspects directly impact student satisfaction. The quality of faculty members, academic reputation of the institution and availability of amenities are significant although, market orientation is known as a more critical standard of

satisfaction for students (Mavondo & Zaman, 2000). This study's outcomes shows that satisfied students give positive word of mouth communication.

2.3 Higher Education

Higher education is presently viewed as a crucial global phenomena. Each year, students in huge numbers pursue their higher education overseas thus, influencing the country's income, capital of native citizens and work (Katircioglu et al. 2014). Among the most relevant variables the level of family income and life expenses are the most important in the case of a demand for higher education (Beneito et al. 2001). In the past decades and particularly in Europe, the living starndards have greatly increased owing to the advancements in education (Stevens & Weals, 2003). Commonly, geographical area of the place of residence, social and financial variables such as parents' level of education, family size and structure, occupation of the essential worker and family worries about its social status are factors that influence the demand for education in families (Beneito et al. 2001). In addition to these factors, financial and political terms of the target country and other oustside components such as geographical area of the target university, scholarship opportunities, fees and the range of education and university degree may affect the choice of university abroad (Katircioglu, et al. 2014). It's also worthy of note that the volume of student migration has incredibly increased over the past decades. This development has changed the tasks of governments in both sending and accepting students. Rather than specially supporting students, governments are presently assuming the roles of controllers and facilitators (Li & Bray, 2007).

Market strengths play a vital role in coordinating the demand and supply in higher education. Normally, students movement is presently seen less as help to the economy

but more as a trade. Compared to those who have their own personal information and governments or advertising law, it is up to them to think overseas based on their personal information. The case of cultural exchange has subsequently become less outstanding as a motive, and economic improvement has gotten to be more prominent.

From an economic point of view and among the reasons for considering and seeking after higher education, the two important variables are worthy of note: decrease of imbalance of income; likewise the connection between employment market and education (Ram, 1989; Beneito et al. 2001). Thus, some investigations have concentrated on the evaluation of the grade of returns of education (Al- Qudsi 1989; Psacharopoulos & Woodhall 1985; Psacharopoulos 1989).

2.4 Studies of Higher Education in Other Countries

In the past decade, Syria's Higher Education sector has experienced significant change, a profileration in the number of institution within the sector and as a result, an upsurge in the amount of enrolling students. There has been a fast growth in the last few years in the private education sector as well. While the total number of the privately owned institutions of higher education increased from three in 2004 to seventeen in 2013, their goal was to provide a substitute route of higher education for persons who were unsuccessful in getting an admission into public institutions as well as for those who aim at getting a university education locally. For this reason, Syria's higher education sector has become more competitive, thus, it has become very important to study and understand the satisfaction of students as it pertains to tertiary education. Tertiary education institutions can rally profit from the ability to better satisfy students' expectations. High level of student satisfaction will give an institution competitive advantage, especially via giving a positive word of mouth (File & Prince,

1992); attracting new students (Boltan &Drew, 1991: Mittal . et al, 1999); reducing defection rates of students (Mittal & Kamakula, 2001) and financial profits (Anderson & Mittal, 2000).

One of the very innovative developing countries of South East Asia is Malaysia and it feels the impact of the internationalization and globalization of the education industry. One of the very crucial reactions from the Malaysian government to the challenges posed by this has been to welcome students from other countries to study in their public institutions. In addition, understanding the significant input education services makes to the economy of a country; the government intends to transform Malaysia into a global centre for excellent education. In Kanji, Abdul Malek and Wallace's (1999) study, a few things were discussed about the actual condition of the institutions of higher education in Malaysia. Majority of the institutions really consider meeting the expectations of students as extremely important in a fashion very similar to a business establishment, nonetheless, student mindfulness is still lacking amongst the staff and this has turned into a real weakness for a lot of the institutions.

Owing to the growth and development of Pakistan's service sector, Pakistani education institutions, particularly in the public sector, are up against increasing pressures from competitors in private sector and different stakeholders. It is now imperative that educational institutions in the public sector come up with policies and constantly monitor their quality to ensure their stakeholders and students are pleased and to have some strategic edge over industry rivals.

2.5 Word of Mouth Communication

Word of Mouth (WOM) has been described as the spoken communication from person-to-person, among groups like independent experts, friends and family lacking commercial objective to obtain improved services (Lampert & Rosenberg, 1975; Kotler &, 2019). This is not just about what is told to prospective students about a service or product about to be purchased, but also, it is what is said about the same service or product after purchase. Studies have reported that WOM impacts decisions of students and it is because WOM is believed to be a more reliable source of information compared to other channels of communication (Silverman, 1997). The content of WOM might be very inconstant in volume and valence; it may occur rarely or often, and it may also be negative communication or positive communication (Anderson , 1998, p.6). Satisfied students can share their experience in form of positive WOM with about four or five persons, and dissatisfied students will share their bad experiences with over 9 persons (Cengiz & Yayla, 2007). This current study will pay attention to WOM, and consider it as a driver of the promotion efforts in the higher education sector and that of student satisfaction as well.

Word of Mouth Communication is effective in keeping customers and attracting new ones through customers that have been previously satisfied (Haywood, 1989). Early adopters give valuable communications such as endorsements and individual testimonies to other customers, later adopters depend on WOM to make their buying choice. Through the spreading of WOM, the cycle of adoption is extended and accelerated (Martinez & Polo, 1996). One of the defining factors for service providers and consumers to give positive WOM in the phase of post-consumption is service satisfaction (Patti, C.H. & Chen, C.H., 2009). Consumers who don't consider

dissatisfaction a thing to complain about will not give any feedback and as a result, service providers might not get any negative WOM response, which consequently results in , flaws in the service offered going unaddressed. When protracted, the service providers could suffer an accumulated and long-term loss (Lau & Ng, 2001). Researchers state that high student satisfaction results in positive WOM and higher buying intentions (File, Cermak, & Prince, 1994; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). Consumers will possibly spread negative WOM when service quality falls below the expected standard. They can do this by directly contacting potential students, particularly those with strong social bonds with the students, with the aim of preventing the terrible customer experiences from reoccurring (Walker, 2001; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). In addition, WOM sources, who are often in proximity to students, are the main influencers and they should be counted in WOM promotion as part of the target audience (Lau & Ng, 2001).

2.6 Student Loyalty

Loyalty has been described as a sincerely held obligation to repurchase a chosen service or product constantly in future, in spite of circumstantial impacts and marketing forces' ability to warrant switching behaviour (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). In higher education industry's context, Helgesen and Nesset (2007) submitted that the loyalty of students comprises of not only the timeframe of which a student is registered at the institution of higher education but also after the completion of the students' program. The objective of the institutions of higher education is to urge their students to remain loyal while registered in their present courses and to choose to study further at the same institution as well. Previous researchers have found the links (direct and indirect) between perceptions of the quality of service by the student and their loyalty (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007; Rojas-Mendez, Vasquez-Parraga, Kara, & Cerda-Urrutia,

2009). The conceptual framework identifies a direct connection existing between loyalty and service quality.

Milliken (2007) stated that a students' dwindling loyalty to education is posing a serious threat to the survival of many universities. This development is not actually a new insight for many institutions in higher education; though, in the last decade of the last century, this issue has been given more attention, particularly in capacities touching upon the ongoing struggle between institutions in higher education and globalization (Milliken, 2007). On the other hand, a different research carried out by Schwartzman (2003) evidently explains in what manner the widespread of student dropout has turned out to be a worry, particularly as it concerns the continued existence of certain universities. In addition, worries about vacant positions, criminal behaviours and a declining number of students in lower-class are regarded as issues among universities as well.

The loyalty of a customer is his/her commitment to developing a bond, and a commitment to buying the services or products over and over again (Oliver 2007). As a result, loyalty is seen as a behavioural factor that ascertains the idea of the aim of repurchasing as well as an attitudinal factor that is built based on the impressions and predilections of someone close to them (Sheth & Mittal, 2003). Consequently, it is necessary to keep the present students in a university. Berger and Lyon (2005), defined retention within institutions of higher education as the capacity of the institution of learning to successfully graduate currently enrolled students. In a different study, Kotler and Fox (1994, p.383) showed the importance of keeping currently registered students, and its significance in appealing to and enrolling prospective students.

Additionally, Herzog (2005) argues that the retention of students is institutionally and theoretically a daunting task.

Deducing from the above studies, institutions of higher education should reassess their relationships with their students and consider it very valuable particularly as it concerns the retention of students, which could mean a makeover of the institution's organizational beliefs as well.

2.7 Hypotheses

Parasuraman, Ziethmal and Berry (1994) argued that service quality is one of the principles of student satisfaction. In addressing the correlation between service quality and satisfaction, a model presented by Oliver (1993), compounds the two concepts and motions that perceived service quality is theorem to satisfaction. The results revealed that service quality leads to satisfaction.

Parasuraman et al (1988) combined service quality with satisfaction. They described service quality as form of view that is a long term overall assessment, while satisfaction as a measurement criterion. Based on such definition, it is intended that perceived service quality is a worldwide measure and so, the direction of causality was from satisfaction to service quality (Parasuraman et al, 1988). Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1991) considered that reliability was fundamentally related to the outcome of service while tangibles, empathy, assurance and responsiveness were considered a process of service delivery. The issues not only judge the accuracy and reliability (i.e.dependability) of the service, but the also ascertain to the other service factors that are being prepared (Parasuraman et al, 1991).

Therefore, student satisfaction can be related not only to the judgement of student about the reliability of the service prepared but to the experience of students of service delivery progress as well. The students will determine service quality not as positive if perceptions are less than expectation, and positively if these perceptions are higher. If service quality can be defined as the difference between perceptions and expectations, it will be essential to consider both of them. Service quality is conducted to exceed student expectations , for this reason we suggest following hypothesis:

H1: Service quality has positive effect on student satisfaction .

WOM communication is a form of student satisfaction feedback as well as a type of ultimate assessment of quality perception (Smoldt, 1998; Bowman & Narayandas, 2001; Gittell, 2002). It could be argued that, the satisfaction of students with a perceived quality of service offered will result in WOM (Athanassopoulos et al., 2001). Webster and Sundaram (1998) stated that based on the empirical investigation, the satisfaction of students will really influence repurchasing behaviours, positive WOM and loyalty. The more satisfied a student is, the more positive the WOM effect the student will spread (Mangold 1999). Usually, a number of authors have identified that satisfaction results in a higher likelihood that positive things will be spread by students about an institution and that the university will be mentioned to another prospective student (Bettencourt, 1997; Dolen et al., 2007; Dabholkar, 1995).

In general, it would be argued that satisfaction of students could be an active promoter of the institution's services and products (Dolen et al., 2007). Many scholars found a positive association between WOM and satisfaction (e.g. Swan & Oliver, 1989), though some other empirical investigations found a negative correlation between them, as a result of dissatisfied students being more actively engaged in word-of-mouth than

satisfied students (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Richins, 1983; Westbrook, 1987). Marketers, especially those of services, have since discussed the significance of positive WOM as an element highly impacting student service choice and service usage. This is mostly because services comprise of mostly credence and experience qualities (Datta et al., 2005). WOM research has focused on student dissatisfaction and compliant behaviours. According to Swanson and Davis (2003), WOM intentions describe the intent of a student to discourse an event or experience with some other individual not openly connected to the service encounter. A behavioural intention with a lot of similarities to repurchase, but then also has a lot to deal with the intent of recommendation is what positive WOM looks like the most (Berry et al., 1994; Dawkins & Reichheld, 1990; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987, 1988).

Firm profitibility comes from positive WOM as long as students speak about their great experiences with services to friends, family and other people, influencing other possible students (Anderson et al., 1994; Berry et al., 1994; Dawkins & Reichheld, 1990; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987, 1988; Fornell, 1992; Greising, 1994; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml, 2000; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Rust et al., 1995). A similar positive association has been established between positive WOM and affective commitment (Harrison-Walker, 2001). WOM has also been described by Anderson (1998) and Buttle (1998) as a casual person to person communication where one is a perceived non-commercial communicator and the other is a receiver as regards a service or an organization. Word-of-mouth has been understood to possess persuasive and influential efficiency (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Royo-Vela, 2002) and a substantial effect on the choices of students (Richins, 1983; Beale et al., 1981;) as well as on perceptions of the product or service after the purchase (Bone, 1995). As indicated by Gremler (1994), on many occasions, word-of-mouth seems to be the main

basis of information used by students. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Student'satisfaction has significant effect on WOM.

As mentioned earlier, students' satisfaction is the function of the comparative expectations level and performance perceived, whereas loyalty reveals a satisfactory attitude towards the institution (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Dick & Basu, 1994). Based on this, one part connects positive word-of-mouth to the recommendation and to loyalty (Hallowell, 1996). Specifically, students who are loyal, regularly endorse the institution by placing emphasis on the key good services of the institution. According to Hallowell (1996), this is driven by the point that student loyalty is the outcome of the student's views that the extent of obtained value after experiencing the institution's service is way better than the value of non-consuming. As a result, in reaction to the superior value gotten, the student is highly encouraged to stay loyal to the institution and to endorse it through positive word-of-mouth. The significance of student loyalty, as well as satisfaction, is that they assist institutions in higher education to realize their financial and market goals (e.g., Oliver et al., 1997; Fornell, 1992; Hesket et al., 1997).

Institutions in higher education provide satisfaction to students /clients with the hopes of gaining the loyalty of their students (Oliver, 1999). According to McDougall and Levesque (2000), students who are satisfied develop "loyalty intentions" which means the disposition to carry on their study in the institution and this should be the principal concern of the institution. Nonetheless, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) stated that, loyalty that is covetous hardly includes purchasing behaviour and hence there are two loyalty types that directly impact the institution's financial and market standings. The connection between loyalty and satisfaction is not very clear (Oliver, 1999). For

example, social forces have been said to aid the achievement of the successful conversion of satisfaction into loyalty. Based on the conceptual variance between inertia and premium loyalty, satisfaction relates with the growth of the latter for the reason that it grows because of satisfactory service encounter that helps develop a favorable attitude to the institution and educational embracement of the choice of the student. Conversely, recurring purchases owing to habits or convenience (that is inertia loyalty) could be unconnected to satisfaction (Oliver, 1977). Based on these, the following hypothesis is examined:

H3: Student satisfaction has positive effect on loyalty.

Loyalty reflects great state of mind toward the organization (Evanschitzky et al, 2006; Dick & Bassu, 1994). Thus, recommendation and positive WOM are viewpoints related to loyalty (Hallowell, 1996). Specifically, loyal students usually advance the university by placing emphasis on the most relevant service features. With this, a higher value is derived. It motivates one to remain loyal to the university hence, promoting via positive WOM acts.

Sasser and Jones (1995) accepted that loyal students will exhibit certain loyal attributes such as giving service recommendations, presenting unused understudies to a university. In the event that a university needs to fortify its WOM impact, improving understudy loyalty is primary. Certain passions are evident between a university and a loyal student, and such student will relay a positive encounter with regards to utilizing the products or services to anyone demanding information about the college (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). In case a student trusts the service of an institution, such student will communicate positively about the institution

with other people (Liu & Li, 2007). Based on the argument presented above, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4:Loyalty has positive effect on WOM.
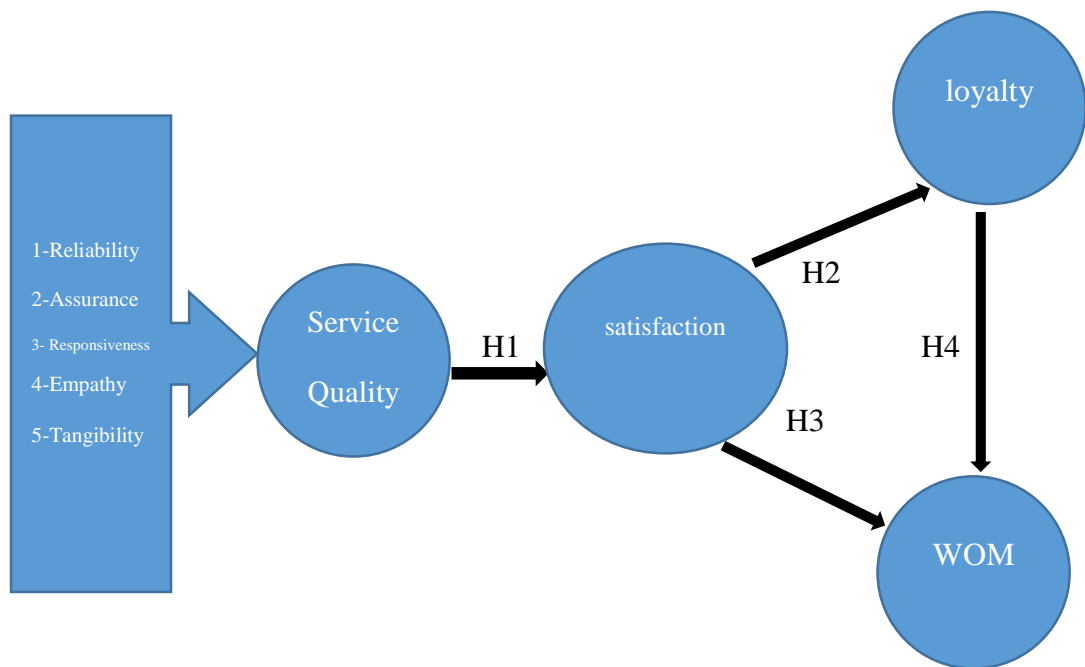
Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Study

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The methods employed in carrying out this research are properly focused on in this chapter. More specifically, it highlights detailed information on the approach used i.e. deductive. Furthermore, information is provided on sample, measures, procedures, questionnaire structure and mode of data collection. In addition, details on data anlysis are also explained, it presents information about the analysis of data.

3.1 Research Approach

The quantitative approach was employed to adequately analyze the model proposed. In line with this, a research model is conceptualized based on a theoretical framework. This current study's research model was drawn and constructed using SERVQUAL model and the hypotheses proposed were tested statistically using T test, correlation and regression.

3.2 Measurements

In order to extract items used in measuring the study variables, relevant studies were properly reviewed. Data were collected via structured questionnaire consisting of four sections. Quality of service dimensions (reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibility), students' satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth communication.

In order to generate desired empirical data, SERVQUAL questionnaire was used (tangibility 5 items, assurance 4 items, reliability 4 items, responsiveness 4 items,

empathy 2 items = 19 items), satisfaction (5 items), loyalty (2 items) and WOM (5 items). Although some slight changes were made to the order of sections, the content remained original.

Students were asked to indicate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied). Respondent's detail section asked demographic questions such as gender, age, degree program, and faculty of study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were collected from Iranian student population in different faculties, their total number is about 1600, according to the Iranian Students Association. The process of data collection took about six weeks. In total, 400 questionnaires were distributed by the researcher and 324 questionnaires were completed (the response rate is 81%). In order to ascertain if the questions used were clearly uunderstood by the respondents, a pilot study was hence conducted. This consisted of a total of 10 student participants, 4 students from Business Faculty and 3 each from Pharmacy and other faculties. Participants were briefed about the objective of this study before questionnaires were distributed. It was realized that there were no ambiguity in the questions as respondents had no problems understanding them. However, some comments were helpful in improving the questionnaire.

The analysis was conducted using 324 questionnaires. The frequency of the different cateogories of students was examined to create a respondents' profile. Standard deviations and mean of this study's variables were estimated to provide a proper descriptive analysis. Subsequently, using IBM SPSS 22 version, the composite scores

of the various variables' items were calculated in order to conduct T test, correlation and regression analyses.

Cronbach's alpha was employed to confirm the variables' reliability. It should be noted that the cutoff level for the alpha coefficient commonly accepted is .7. In addition, a combination of fit statistics i.e. X2/df, Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) Goodness of Fit Index (GFI). Finally, to test the hypotheses investigating the causal relationship between the variables of concern in this study, simple regression tests were conducted (i.e. Hypothesis 1 to 4).

Chapter 4

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 Sample

A demographic analysis of this study's sample is presented in Table 1. More than half of the respondents were male i.e. 57.4% and 42.6% female. As reported in Table 1, 58.1% of the respondents were aged between 25years and below; 20.7% of the respondents were in the age group 26-30 while the others were older than 31. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were bachelors' students who were studying in the 5-year program which is composed of 10 semesters (PharmD), while 23.5% of respondents were master students and rest of them were PhD students. Forty-one percent of them were from the Faculty of Pharmacy, 16.7% of respondents were from the Faculty of Business and Economics, 11.4% percent belonged to the Faculty of Medicine and the rest were from other faculties.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents (n = 324)

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20 AND BELOW	41	12.7
21-25	147	45.4
26-30	67	20.7
31-35	55	17.0
36 AND AB	14	4.3
Total	**324**	**100.0**
Gender		
Male	186	57.4
Female	138	42.6
Total	**324**	**100.0**
Degree programmed		
Bachelor's	222	68.5
Master's	76	23.5
Doctoral	26	8.0
Total	**324**	**100.0**
Faculty		
Architecture	20	6.2
Art and Sciences	7	2.2
Business and Economic	54	16.7
Communication and Media Studies	4	1.2
Tourism	17	5.2
Medicine	37	11.4
Health Sciences	13	4.0
Pharmacy	132	40.7
Engineering	31	9.6
Law	3	.9
Education	6	1.9
Total	**324**	**100.0**

4.2 Measurement Results

The analysis in this section emphasizes the compilation of various statistical functions in the second part of the questionnaire, which relates to the dimentions of the quality of the service, the satisfaction of the students and the actions of the EMU. Also, in the first section, to determine the reliability of service quality dimensions, student satisfaction and measure the action after satisfaction of students. In the second section, mean, standard deviation and the relationship between different variables such as correlation were examined.

4.2.1 Reliability of the Service Quality Dimensions, Student Satisfaction, Loyalty and WOM

As can be seen in the table below, all alpha coefficients are above 0.7 and much close to 0.9, which means that all variables are reliable. For instance, tangibility for this study was .902, assurance was .897, reliability was .893, responsiveness was .895, empathy was .898 and reliability for the overall of these dimensions was .882. Student satisfaction was .889, loyalty was .909 and WOM was.882. These indicate that the scale had high internal stability and we didn't need to delete any of the items to fit size to smaller.

Table 2: Reliability Results

NO	Variables	No of Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	Tangibility	5	.581	.902
2	Assurance	4	.663	.897
3	Reliability	4	.709	.893
4	Responsiveness	4	.683	.895
5	Empathy	2	.659	.898
6	Overall service quality	19	.942	.882
7	Student Satisfaction	5	.766	.889
8	Loyalty	2	.520	.909
9	WOM	5	.725	.892

4.2.2 Relationship between Service Quality Dimensions, Student Satisfaction , Loyalty and WOM

The average scores are presented to evaluate the degree of students' satisfaction with the SERVQUAL dimensions of EMU. The average scores of five SERVQUAL dimensions were computed as overall quality and then other variables that related to satisfaction. Likert scale was used to assess the degree of satisfaction for each item of service quality and other variables after satisfaction, the scale ranges from 1 = dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. This means, 1.00 indicates that students are very dissatisfied and maximum score is 5.00 which indicates that students are completely satisfied. According to the table below, mean score for each variable in the study revealed that, overall quality came highest (3.2471 with SD= .63835), followed by WOM (3.1488), student satisfaction (3.1432) and loyalty with the lowest score (3.0154 SD= .96281).

Table 3 also shows the correlation of this study's variables, the standard deviation as well as their means. All the correlations between all the variables were significant; showing that satisfaction (r =.693) is associated significantly with the overall quality, tangibility (r = .461), assurance (r = .549), reliability (r = .561), responsiveness (r = .507), empathy (r = .586) as well as with loyalty (*r* = .572). The third condition refers to the association between satisfaction and WOM variables (r=.707). In fact, all of the coefficients were positively significant at 1% confidence level. While this relationship has a great strength of half in the WOM, overall quality and then empathy with satisfaction, the correlation among loyalty, assurance, reliability and responsiveness with satisfaction shows a medium power. Therefore, the results reveal that the strongest relationship is between student'satisfaction and WOM (.707) and then on overall quality (.693) and also the weakest is tangibility (.461).

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Table 3: Correlation , SD and Mean of Study Variables

	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Tangibility	Assurance	Reliability	Responsiveness	Empathy	SS	Loyalty	WOM	OverallQuality
1	Tangibility	3.2043	.66722	1								
2	Assurance	3.3164	.86414	.469**	1							
3	Reliability	3.2477	.80259	.476**	.526**	1						
4	Responsiv..	3.3066	.84179	.489**	.524**	.662**	1					
5	Empathy	3.1605	.93794	.405**	.460**	.492**	.496**	1				
6	SS	3.1432	.83276	.461**	.549**	.561**	.507**	.586**	1			
7	Loyalty	3.0154	.96281	.271**	.349**	.351**	.267**	.425**	.572**	1		
8	WOM	3.1488	.87735	.425**	.510**	.534**	.529**	.489**	.707**	.578**	1	
9	OverallQuality	3.2471	.63835	.704**	.774**	.813**	.820**	.758**	.693**	.435**	.645**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tialed).

4.2.3 T – Test

According to the information in the Tables below, it can be deduced that based on the value of P less than .05, (P= .036 <.05) (Equal variances not assumed). Hence, satisfaction with the quality of the service between two groups of male and female is not significant (0.121 > 0.05).

Table 4: T test gender and Student Satisfaction

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
STUDENT SAT	**male**	186	3.0828	.88460	.06486
	female	138	3.2246	.75279	.06408

Table 5: Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SS	Equal variances assumed	4.430	.036	-1.519	322	.130	-.14184	.09337	-.32554	.04185
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.556	315.93	.121	-.14184	.09118	-.32124	.03755

4.2.4 Regression Results

The result of SEM in the table are as follows: overall service quality positively influences student satisfaction (β =.693, P<.001) thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. The outcome depicts student satisfaction positively and significantly connects to loyalty (β= .572 , p<.001) which is in agreement with hypothesis 2. The results also indicate there is significant association between student satisfaction and WOM thus, hypothesis 3 is supported (β=.707 , p<.001). Finally, the results revealed that loyalty has effect on WOM (β=.578 , p<.001) hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 6: Asseements of Regression Weights

Model			Constant	S.E.	Beta	T	F-statistic	Adjusted R-squared	Results
INDEPENDENT	**DEPENDENT**								
H1	Overall quality	⟹ SATISFACTION	.210	.052	.693***	17.226	296.72	.480	Supported
H2	SATISFACTION	⟹ loyalty	.937	.053	.572***	12.507	156.42	.327	Supported
H3	SATISFACTION	⟹ WOM	.809	.042	.707***	17.916	320.97	.499	Supported
H4	LOYALTY	⟹ WOM	1.56	.041	.578***	12.716	161.70	.334	Supported

Note: Standardized beta coefficients are provided; ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Evaluations of Findings

The observation of this study was to test the impact of and relationship between service quality, student satisfaction, WOM and loyalty in the services section. The findings of the research have confirmed the hypotheses proposed in the model (H1, H2, H3 and H4).

The suggested model is supported by results reported in Tables 4 and 5. According to the findings, the driver of this framework was service quality which directly on indirectly influences other variables. More specifically, four hypotheses were accepted, which were as follows:

- Service quality positively affected student satisfaction (H1 is supported). Perceived service quality is the entire assessment of a student upon receving a service. Thus, the university should concentrate on ensuring they satisfy student prerequisites and advertise the reliability of their service to the students. This confirmed previous research findings. For instance, Bitner (1990) stated that a great service quality is vital to forming student satisfaction. Sullivan and Anderson (1993) also argued that service quality would be a prediction of student satisfaction.

- Student satisfaction positively affected student loyalty (H2 is supported). Generally, loyalty of customers will result in the attitude of repurchasing a company's products or services. As Sasser Jr. and Jones (1995) argued, a satisfied customer with a service or product will normally increase his or her loyalty to the firm. The findings of the study show that a similar behavior could be seen in university loyalty too.

- The hypothesis that is related to the relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM is positively significant (H3 is supported). Customer satisfaction has direct impact on WOM as presented in Tables. Athanassopoulos et al. (2001) maintained in their study that satisfaction of customers has a direct influence on WOM. However, it should be stated that, the difficulty in creating WOM for students in an institution is more than in a common service industry for clients.

- Customer loyalty positively affects WOM (Table 5) (H4 is supported). WOM relates to the behavior of consumers in telling other people their brand experiences (Narayandas and Bowman, 2001). WOM serves as an index of buyer satisfaction and loyalty in the investigation of the impact of loyalty in return for purchase and WOM (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). Researchers moreover affirmed that WOM was significantly influenced by behavioral brand loyalty (Lin et al , 2008).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Results of this study further extended the current research on SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1990). As previously mentioned perceived service quality has five

dimensions (Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, Empathy and Tangibility) and there might be the outcome of the appraisals of different service encounters. In higher education institutions, students can encounter with instructors, professors, departmental chairs and so on (Hill, 1995). Consequently, if an institution frequently offers service at levels that surpass the expectations of the student, such services will be appraised as being of high quality. On the other hand, if an institution continually falls short at meeting the expectations of students, the services will be regarded as being of poor quality. Also, according to Kotler & Clarke (1987), satisfaction depends on the difference between the services expected and the service that has been perceived in the actual performance of the service provider.

The association between the quality of service dimensions and the satisfaction of students is explained in this research. Thus, this research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that overall service quality dimensions of the university related to student satisfaction and Behavior after purchasing.

Satisfied students have a great desire to continue the rest of their study at the previous institution (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). They are also good advertisers for the university so that they can be well-forwarded to their friends and relatives and encourage them to come and study at this university (Silverman, 1997).

5.3 Managerial Implications

Management of even top universities have to make substantial efforts to make sure their students share positive word-of-mouth about the institution. Non-private institutions of higher education hardly experience the difficulty of recruiting students when compared with their privately owned competitors especially in the period of

lower birth-rates and population. Thus, privately owned institutions in higher education have to concentrate on high service quality dimensions (Li, 2013).

All faculty members and lecturers must be trained to treat students as customers to satisfy their psychological and studying needs. Nowadays, certainly, students are steadily changing roles from being just students to assuming student-customers position in private universities because of alternatives present in North Cyprus. The faculty members need to control their ego to better meet the needs of the students, not simply by teaching them but also by respecting and assisting them; provide a quick and satisfactory answer to their rational demands in the best possible way. Faculty members have to treat students as a part of their family so as to breed loyalty to the institution. As soon as students perceive a supporting system, then they will develop a sense of being a part of the organization. Students would like to respond promptly and effectively to their problems and questions, and treat them with a very honest and polite way in order to attract their trust and confidence, the university must fulfill its promises and commitments correctly. Modern equipment and physical evidence have an impact on increasing students' satisfaction from university services and should be taken into consideration.

The manager must have noticed that a modern and dynamic relationship is used before, during and after studying, to share useful education information and programs to undergraduates all the time for keeping and enrolling them. The university can also use the points of view and experience of graduates to develop and enhance the quality of services, and word-of-mouth will be certainly encouraged. That is a real operational means of recruiting new students by a university.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study like many others, also has its own limitations. The model of SERVQUAL factors are inconsistent and it is not comprehensive for different applications, researchers can use other measuring tools such as SERVPERF and the electronic model for future research. This study examines only Iranian's students' experience of a university in North Cyprus. Findings may not be applicable to different countries such as England, USA or Germany. However, invesitgations should be done on several other various service industries.

Furthermore, all data were gathered from Iranian students which 57% were from 2 faculties only, that was another major limitation. Future research with data from students of different faculties and nationalities could be used in validating the findings in this study. Considering this study's findings show the capability of service quality for service-oriented firms, future studies that could enhance the model for determinants of service quality, loyalty, WOM can be useful for future investigation because of the evolution of the virtual world in providing customer service. Hence, research on relationship marketing within service industry is highly needed in order to aid substantiating this work.

5.5 Conclusion

In recent decades, due to the increase in the cost of advertising in different countries and the rising levels of students' expectations, the retention of students and the use of viral advertising has grown dramatically. Many companies generate service quality to keep their clients loyal and leverage them as free advertisers. The current study used a model that examines the effect of five (5) service quality dimensions (reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy and tangibility) on the satisfaction of students,

loyalty as well as eventual WOM as free and easy advertising. For this purpose, 324 Iranian students at a university in North Cyprus (Eastern Mediterranean University) were chosen conveniently as participants, the study examined the quality of service and student satisfaction in the institution, in addition to its subsequent outcomes.

Examining these interactions is significant for four reasons, the main reason is, growing demand for a quality higher education. Second, in the current competition in the higher education sector students are faced with a lot of options offered. Third, the staff of the university are not fully aware of the wishes and needs of the students, as well as the consequences of dissatisfaction. Fourth, due to the globalization of universities, the high cost of advertising and student attraction, it is necessary to give devotion to quality of service as well as behaviors after using services more than before.The last reason is that the trend of marketing traditional services to modern and word of mouth marketing is growing fast.

Results show that relationship between service quality dimensions were significantly and positively associated with loyalty and eventually WOM and student's satisfaction. The findings reveals that personalized attention with the institution's staff is really important to the students. Results also indicate that reliability of the university , the assistance to solve the student's problems and respectful encounter of the employees and lecturers are related to satisfaction, intention to either recommend the university to their friends and family or in their decision to pursue their studies to the higher degree of education. Although physical evidence has shown the least relationship with student satisfaction. loyalty is significantly associated with WOM. This work reveals that the level of students' satisfaction with the education provided in EMU mirrors the quality of method and offered services provided in EMU. Furthermore, the loyalty and

WOM as potentioal behaviors of student were examined along with their effectiveness and impact in this research. Factors considered in the current study evidently explain the correlation between quality of service, the satisfaction of students, loyalty as well as the WOM.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been employed to generate data for a thesis in marketing management. All responses are anonymous so please answer as honestly as possible. The questionnaire will only take a couple of minutes to complete. For ethical reasons, if you start to feel uncomfortable at any point of the questionnaire, feel free to quit. The questionnaire is targeted on university students only, so please do not complete if you are not currently a registered university student. Thank you for participating. Your feedback is important. Please be informed that your participation constitutes consent.

Respondent's Detail:

AGE									
20 and below		21-25		26-30		31-35		36 and above	

Gender:			
Male		Female	

DEGREE PROGRAMME:					
Bachelor's		Master's		Doctoral	

Faculty of :					
Architecture		Arts and Sciences		Business and Economic	

Communication and Media Studies		Education		Engineering	
Health Sciences		Law		Medicine	
Pharmacy		Tourism			

Iranian Students' satisfaction towards the Service Quality in Eastern Mediterranean university of Northern Cyprus

		Please indicate to what extent you are satisfied with the following using the scale provided	Very Dissatisfied	DisSatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
NO.	**Variables**	**ITEMS**	1	2	3	4	5
1	Tangibility	Appearance of Lecturers (uniform , wearing tie and good smell)					
2		Appearance of building and grounds(gardening)					
3		Appearance of personnel(uniform)					
4		The degree to which curriculum is up to date					
5		Computers adequacy provided in the lab for students					
6	Assurance	Friendly and courteous university staffs					
7		Friendly and courteous lecturers					
8		Lecturers research efficiency/productivity					
9		Lecturers are innovative and agents of change					
10	Reliability	The general reliability of lecturers keeps time/don't cancel classes					
11		Staff sincere interest in solving student's problem					
12		This university provides its services at a time it promises to do so					
13		Method of teaching of lecturers is up date and lessons are understandble					
14	Responsiveness	Availability of personnel to assist you					
15		Availability of lecturers to assist you					
16		Lecturers capacity to solve problems when they arise					
17		Channels for expressing student complaints					
18	Empathy	Lecturers' support to the students					
19		Financial or psychological help provided to students					
20	Satisfaction	I am satisfied with my decision to attend this University					
21		If have a choice to do it all over again, I still will enroll in this University					
22		My choice to enroll in this University is a wise one					
23		I am happy that I enrolled in this University					
24		I will recommend my friends to come and study in this university					
25	Loyalty	If pursuing a higher degree, I prefer to keep staying in this university.					
26		I will finish studying program regardless of higher tuition fees.					
27	WOM	I usually talk about this university with my friends.					
28		If I have chance, I will tell people about my happy campus life here.					
29		When I tell my friends about this university, I describe it in detail.					
30		I always say well for this university to people.					
31		I am honor to tell people that I am studying in this university.					