

Quality in private higher education system; New challenges regarding student's satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The demands for quality standards in higher education are increasing due to competition as a result of massification and internalization process of universities. The expectation for better performance in quality of teaching, academic research and other related educational activities are forcing universities leadership management to rethink their strategies. Approaching the philosophy of Total Quality Management (TQM) can lead leadership management of universities to desirable results regarding continues quality improvement in higher education. In the centre of TQM philosophy in higher education is student satisfaction. Understanding and satisfying student's needs are the cause of existence for all higher education institutions. Therefore reaching quality standards in higher education is significant regard meeting the expectations of students, especially for newly established private higher education institutions. The main purpose of this study is to examine the role of student satisfaction regarding quality assurance in Albanian private higher education institutions.

Keywords: Higher education, TQM, quality, student satisfaction, private IHE's

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, in this globalized world due to the rapid development of technology, usage of social networks and new trends in communication sciences, many business institutions have revolutionized the strategies dealing with old, new and potential customers. These remarkable changes in information technologies have made it possible for businesses organizations to directly spread their marketing messages to any interested customer anywhere in the world. In the mean time the dynamic process of globalization has a grand impact on stimulating economic growth, improving quality of products, services and increasing a competitive environment among business organizations. The traditional way of dealing with costumers in this increased competitive work environment is not enough to be successful for today's institution and business organization. Many challenges face business organizations and institutions in the 21st century such as changing customer values and orientations, overpopulated society, political instability, environmental degradation, world poverty, increase of global competitiveness educational problems and job creation (Ahmed, 1993).

Many business organizations and institutions, especially those who are in service sector such as higher educational institutions are trying to identify the challenges in competitive environment regardless of their size and age they have to rethink their organizational processes and strategies, to be successful in the 21st century all higher educational institutions have to be strongly customer focused. Customer satisfaction is the indispensable part of a successful business (Wright, 2008). Understanding the customer needs and responding quickly to fulfil their changing needs and expectations is one of the Total Quality Management (TQM) basic approaches. For many HEI's the process of implementing quality standards means fundamental changes in organizational culture and in the leadership management approaches. The resistance of some institutions that have a long and strong institutional culture on fundamental changes in leadership management require a more open and comprehensive managerial approach with specific focus on identifying and satisfying costumers needs. Therefore the leadership management in higher education institutions require a fundamental way of thinking regarding designing and implementing new managerial approaches which will contribute to customer satisfaction, staff commitment and employee motivation. Therefore the role and the responsibility of leadership management is very important for successful implementation quality standards by all parts organization. The resistance regarding the implementation of total quality processes is stronger in higher educational institutions that have long institutional culture and in the essence they are more decentralized in management power as result of their multi functional structure. (Jauch, 1997) In addition the impact of customer satisfaction in small and newly established universities it may have a more decisive and profound role comparing with universities which have old institutional culture and traditions. Therefore reaching quality standards in higher

education is significant regard meeting the expectations of students, especially for newly established private higher education institutions. The main purpose of this study is to examine the student satisfaction in Albanian private higher education institutions

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today's students have more opportunities regarding selecting an appropriate university for their academic and professional development and they have the tendency to search for universities that provide a high quality of teaching, and the best student services along with affordable costs. They want to be sure when making important investment on their life such as choosing the right university for undergraduate studies. Therefore many HEI's are developing different management strategies in order to increase their organizational performance and quality in education. The use of TQM approach with specific focus on customer satisfaction has contribute on improving the quality of education and other services they provide (Koch, 2003). Below are listed some of most important strategic steps which HEI's have to follow in order to implement TQM in higher education (Ho & Wearn, 1995)

- *Obtain top leadership management commitment;*
- *Establish a quality steering committee and implementation teams;*
- *Assess the current quality system situation to identify all the existing good practices;*
- *Create a documented implementation plan;*
- *Provide training so that staff will be fully aware of the changes;*
- *Create and update quality management documentation; and*
- *Monitor progress as part of the Deming cycle (plan, do, check, and act)*

Nowadays, quality of service has received a continuous and increased attention from leadership management of many universities; especially universities are developing new strategies to measure quality with reference to student's satisfaction (Mark, 2013). Therefore many institutions are adopting new managerial approaches such as total quality management systems that tries to integrate all functional areas in an institution which is oriented towards increasing organizational performance and achievement by fulfilling customers needs based on continuous improvement philosophy (Deming, 1986) (Juran, 1989).

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is very important to understand that the concept of quality in higher education and customer needs are constantly in an interoperable and multi-functional connection based on changing trends and ongoing processes socio-economic of development of society. This does not mean that we have to see students under the notion that customer is always right and definitely we should realize their demand (Spanbauer, 1995). It is not easy to have single unique definition of quality in higher education, in addition there is no universal consensus on how is the appropriate strategy to assure and manage quality within higher education (Becket, 2006). Quality can be defined in terms of perfection, excellence, and value for money, fitness to purpose, or transformation (Harvey, 2005). The quality in education is defined as a multidimensional concept with different components. Cheng, Y.C and Tam W.M suggest seven components of educational quality: goal, mission and vision, resource, input and outputs, process, students and staff satisfaction, legitimacy, absence of problems, and organizational learning. (Cheng, 1997)

According to some researchers the most important definitions of "quality" in higher educational system are as the following (Lewis, 1994) (Sallis, 2002) (Gibbs, 2010) (Flores-Molina, 2011):

Quality is fulfilling and exceeding customer needs.

Quality is everyone's job.

Quality is continuous improvement.

Quality is leadership.

Quality is human resource development.

Quality is in the system.

Quality is fear reduction.

Quality is recognition and reward.

Quality is teamwork.

Quality is measurement.

Quality is systematic problem solving.

COSTUMER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The identification of the needs and expectations of customers is very important regarding success of HEI's. However most universities are unable to understand who the real costumers are because there are several potential groups that can be considered as customer in higher education such as inside group's which are academic and administrative staff and groups outside a HEI's such as students, parents, and those potential customers generally have different needs and expectations (Birnbaum, 2000) (Youssef, 1998)

Group	Customer Attributes
Students	Pay for service, receive educational instruction, administrative functions, purchase auxiliary services (lodging, food, etc.).
Parents	Pay for educational services, can be primary points of contact during some service interactions
Research Sponsors	Provide funds in exchange for information, service, or activities. Often have contractual arrangement
Governments	Provide funds for university to engage in service. Exercise some influence over service/ curriculum design
Society	Benefits from the services provided, pay (through taxes) for portions of the service
Future Employers of Student	'Purchase' the end product of the service process, sometimes provide funding and advise in service design.
Disciplinary Academic	
Communities	Benefit from scholarly activity of faculty members.
Accreditation Bodies	Exercise control over product/service design
Staff/Faculty Members	Control some of product/service design, consume some services

Table 1: Customers in higher education system (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen, & Johnson, 2009)

Besides all actual and potential customers in higher education system students are considered as the most important costumers (Owlia, 1996)

STUDENTS' SATISFACTION

The process quality insurance and academic accreditation requires a significant focus on students' satisfaction. Furthermore students' evaluation of educational services is an important factor that indicates the institutional quality of universities. Therefore student satisfaction has become a very significant issue for all universities and their leadership management since it is commonly used to indicate quality. However for many quality experts measuring student satisfaction at higher education institution is the biggest challenge of the quality management (Cloutier & Richards, 1994). Many researches findings indicate the existence of a perceptual gap between students' expectations and their actual experience of educational services in their home universities (Essam Ibrahim, Lee Wei Wang, & Hassan, 2013). As a results of competitive environment between universities there is an increasing tendency to be more focused on students evaluation, and to value those evaluation regarding quality improvement in higher

education system (Aultman, 2006). It is very important that the identity of students has to be reserved however others characteristics such as study program, gender, entrance years it is very important to be integrated in questionnaire for evaluation and statistical approaches (Williams, 2002). Furthermore is also important that results of students satisfaction questionnaire should be open to access with evaluation and possible attitude of leadership management regarding the steps that they have to follow in order to improve current situation (Leckey & Neill, 2001)

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHOD

The main objective of research is to understand the role of student satisfaction regarding quality assurance in Albanian private higher education institutions. For this reason a questionnaire that measure students satisfaction was developed on Likert five point scale.

The questionnaire was distributed to 300 students studying at four private higher institutions in Albania. Private universities were selected regarding their institutional age, accreditation and newly established status. The questionnaire adopted from SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1998) was focused on topics such as quality of teaching, quality of academic staff, university social life and facilities and technological infrastructure of campus and the level of students satisfaction was determined by answers given to these questions. From Gathered responses from 264 completed and usable questionnaires were transformed to SPSS 20 statistical program for advanced statistical analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

According to finding of this study there is a positive correlation between student satisfaction and perception of quality in higher education. Students are more satisfied with universities which they believe that possess a good quality.

Table 2: What is your study program?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Program Bachelor	216	81.8	81.8	81.8
	Program Master	48	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	264	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Educational Services

	N	Std. Deviation	Mean
The campus staff is caring and helpful.	262	.956	4.39
This institution has a good reputation within the community.	264	.905	4.37
Department Secretary Staff is helpful and approachable	264	.918	4.55
I am satisfied with the technology infrastructure that university offers me	264	.775	4.62
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus	236	.985	2.93
Satisfied with the on-line library	264	.821	2.68
I feel a sense of pride about my campus	236	.757	4.71
I generally know what's happening on campus	236	.805	4.44
At the beginning of each course the subject's syllabus offers the necessary information for studying the course.	264	.956	4.47
Our lecturers offer consultation hours for students	264	.912	3.75
My university encourages debate with students when important decisions are taken.	264	.823	3.45

I am satisfied with the course curriculum my university offers	236	.931	4.11
The quality of my university is based on the books and teaching materials our lecturers use	236	.778	4.26
Lecturers use appropriate teaching methods	236	.879	3.90
My exam results are according to my knowledge.	264	.910	4.23
My university organizes cultural or sportive activities for us students.	264	.876	4.55
At the end of the semester I evaluate the lecturer of the course.	264	.790	4.90
I am satisfied with my university	264	.901	4.65

Another interesting finding of this study is tending to associate the university success to their own success and to personal contribution. Only 69 % of students associate the failure of university to their personal failure but 90% of students associate the success of their university to their personal success. Besides academic activities students value also the possibility that university gives to participate at professional and social in campus activities .In addition students perceived image quality in universities is strongly related quality of teaching and academic staff. As it is found in other studies students satisfaction is positively correlated to university brand image. (Mark, 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To be successful in this competitive environment universities are changing the traditional way of dealing with students to more students' centred strategy with main focus on student satisfaction. Today's students are luckier to select the most appropriate university for their academic and professional development , they have the tendency to search for universities that have positive brand-name and provide a high quality of teaching, finest student campus services along with an appropriate economic cost. Albanian private universities that are focused on reaching quality standards by having a clear strategy with specific focus on satisfying and exceeding student's needs and expectations have more chances to successes in this competitive environment. In order to have a good institutional reputation it is very clear for all universities to have a positive image of students' satisfaction and negative image of students' satisfaction has to be minimized.

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