THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Perception of Students as Customers as a Moderator in the Relationship between Customer Orientation Culture and Student Satisfaction in Selected Universities in Ghana

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Abstract:
The study sought to determine perception of students as customers as a moderator in the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction in selected universities in Ghana. Data was collected from 350 students who were selected using the convenience sampling technique. The Universities were selected within Accra. Data was collected using closed ended questionnaires which were developed using adopted questionnaires. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS. The study revealed that student Perception significantly moderated the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. Besides, Age failed to moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The study also revealed that Program of study failed to moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction.

Keywords: *Student, customers, marketing orientation culture, student satisfaction*

1. Introduction

The private tertiary institutions in Ghana is going through significant problems regarding the recruitment and retention of students whereas its institutions face serious challenges and threats which made it important to pay attention to the services provided by these universities and its colleges as well as ensure the quality of education provided to their students in terms of preparing them with certain characteristics to make them able to experience the big amount of information as well as the ongoing processes of change and the massive technological advancement.

Organizational researchers have observed that the orientation developed by every organization determines how business is conducted and hence how they perceive their customers (Nair & Ragavan, 2016; Koris, Nokelainen, 2015). Thus, it is critical to determine the way firms perceive their customers as it goes a long way to affect the way they treat them. In the field of education, the much debated theme has been the fact whether students are customers of educational institutions or not. Thus, the perception held by leaders of these schools would affect the way they relate with their students. There have been several debates in the research community as to what students should really be termed as (Nair & Ragavan, 2016; Koris, Nokelainen, 2015). To some, describing them as customers do not look professional to others that is what they really are to these educational institutions. Furthermore, it is evident that some European institutions have a well laid out plan for customer service delivery towards their students but this has not yet been proved in developing countries such as Ghana. The poor level of customer engagements in the country has called the attention of several stakeholders who have begun to question the attitude of some service oriented firms. In Ghana, the Customer Service Academy (CSA) in the year 2015 conducted a survey that sought to assess the nature of customer service in some selected banks in Ghana. The results of the survey indicated that customer service in the country was very abysmal and their report indicated that out of the 10 organizations selected, none of them was able to achieve a 90% scoring on their ratings of quality customer service. Interestingly, the research revealed that most firms did not apply customer orientation approach to business and this affected the way they perceived their clients. Again, there are some researches which find out the relationship between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and it was proven that perceived service quality had a positive relationship with customer satisfaction and this supports the argument of linking service quality and customer satisfaction. They did not use the servqual model but rather the performance to assess service quality. Therefore, using the servqual model would be a contributing to existing research on the satisfaction level of students. In order to fill this research gap, the researcher will measure service quality and customer satisfaction using the servqual model from the customer's perspective in order to know their perceptions.

Put differently, the perception educational institutions have about students will greatly affect the way they deal with them. Also, after carefully analyzing various research studies conducted using various frameworks and theories in different service industries such as banking, hospitality, health care among others limited theoretical work has been done using theories such as the exchange theory, the expectancy theory and to some extent the customer orientation theory to assess whether or not students can be seen as customers as well as their level of satisfaction (Arhin, 2015). Researcher considers the education institution as a service sector providing services to students hence the need to test these theories in the higher education setting. There are some researches which find out the relationship between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and it was proven that perceived service quality had a positive relationship with customer satisfaction and this supports the argument of linking service quality and customer satisfaction. They did not use the servqual model but rather the performance to assess service quality. Therefore, using the servqual model would be a contributing to existing research on the satisfaction level of students. This the research gap and in order to fill the gap, try to measure service quality and customer satisfaction using the servqual model from the customer's perspective in order to know their perceptions (Bortey, 2016).

This study therefore seeks to contend that students are customers with professional backgrounds and not customers in the strictest sense of the word as used in the field of marketing. However, there is a great issue of contention in terms of how public and private tertiary institutions perceive their students as well as how these affect their relationship with them. It is argued that in most private institutions, the owner of the business has a profit making attitude towards the venture, hence they tend to first treat students with the same treatments a typical business would treat a customer. This is because for the private institutions, students serve as the main source of revenue for them. However, public institutions do receive funds from government and hence these funds serve as a great cushion for them, hence it would not be surprising for public tertiary institutions to treat students in such a manner as is very different from private institutions. This is an aspect that have not been fully discussed in literature, neither have studies delved into that arena.

This study therefore tends to fill the context gap by assessing the notion of students as customers in Ghana from both the private and public tertiary educational institutions perspectives. Furthermore, a pool of studies employed the use of quantitative tools without digging deeper into assessing the perception of stakeholders in student service delivery and satisfaction, this study therefore fills this methodological gap by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to this enquiry (Deen, 2015). After carefully analyzing various research studies conducted using various frameworks and theories in different service industries such as banking, hospitality, health care among others, but limited theoretical work has been done using theories such as the exchange theory, the expectancy theory and to some extent the customer orientation theory to assess whether or not students can be seen as customers as well as their level of satisfaction. Researcher considers the education institution as a service sector providing services to students. Besides, the study also seeks to raise cogent argument against the theory that 'customers are always right' as propounded by Harry Gordon Selfridge (1909). This study within the Ghanaian context will contribute immensely towards the understanding of students as customers in this part of the world, as well as provide support for the myriads of studies in the field.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- To determine whether the perception of students as customers moderates the relationship between customer orientation culture of the Institutions and student satisfaction.
- To propose a customer satisfaction model for higher educational institutions in Ghana.

1.2. Research Questions

- How the perception of students as customers does moderates the relationship between customer orientation culture of the Institutions and student satisfaction?
- Which model can rightly fit in for eliciting student satisfaction higher educational institutions in Ghana?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Exchange Theory

Exchange theory is a general theory concerned with understanding the exchange of material or non-material resources between individuals and or groups in an interaction situation. Social exchange theory has been derived from the work of sociologists Homans (1958), Blau (1964), and Emerson (1972b). Homans' explanation of exchange theory is grounded in operant psychology as developed by Skinner (1953). In Homans' view, exchange between individuals continues because each find & the others behavior reinforcing to some degree. The behavior might consist of a compliment an expression of agreement, or assistance in perfuming some task of mutual interest. Two variables have been derived from the basic propositions inherent in Homans' work. The first involves the frequency of rewards or costs, and the second look at the value attached to rewards (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Some social exchange behavior entail 'costs' while others are essentially cost-free. For example, a compliment (e.g. a flattering remark on the choice of an individual's attire) may be relatively low in cost to the individual receiving it. Other behaviors, however, may produce a substantial cost. For example, two individuals may choose to lay a game. This behavior may be thought of as social exchange. Assuming that both individuals receive pleasure from playing, each individual is rewarding the other simply by playing. However, for one of the players, the loser of the game, a cost is incurred. If, over a number of repeated matches, the same player continued to lose. the cost of losing may become too great and that player may decide to stop playing. Homans relates cost to the value of the reward obtainable, acknowledging that value is difficult to measure because there may be fluctuations in value over time for any individual. Homs' work is based on the assumption that the basic principles of human behavior can best be studied and derived from an examination of small groups of individuals and the interpersonal relations among group members.

'Exchange relations are 'balanced' if the two actors involved in exchange are equally dependent upon one another; otherwise an imbalance exists in the relation. Dependence is determined by the value one actor places on the resources provided by the other actor and the availability of these valued resources from alternative sources. Unequal dependencies result in an imbalanced exchange relation that, according to power dependence principles, creates a power advantage for the less dependent member of the relation. A power advantage gives an actor the structural opportunity to use the potential power that results from the differential dependencies' (p. 216).

Emerson's analysis begins with an already established exchange relation. This relationship is subject to two basic processes: (1) the use of power and (2) balance. If it is revealed that within an exchange relation one individual (A) is highly dependent on another (B), then individual B would be said to have a power advantage over individual A. In Emerson's view a power advantage represents an imbalanced exchange relation which, over time, tends toward balance. These balancing operations can take four forms. Jacobs (1970) summarized them as follows:

- 'Reducing the motivational dependency of the less powerful member on the more powerful one.
- A power imbalance can be reduced by finding an ultimate source of satisfaction of a need that cannot be ignored.
- A frequently occurring way to reduce power imbalance is by obtaining control over some source of satisfaction required by the more powerful member.
- A final balancing operation consists of developing a source of satisfaction on which the more powered member can be induced to become dependent, which then provides a means of reducing the unequal exchange that is thought to produce power imbalances' (pp. 218-19).

2.2. Customer Orientation Theory

The phenomenon of customer orientation at a higher educational institution (HEI) and marketization of higher education started to gain ground in the beginning of the 1970s, as more radical and progressive positions were taken in education. The emergence of neoliberalism as a new mode of governmentality resulted in institutional and workplace changes to allow more freedom necessary for individual, institutional and national economic survival (Moore, 2015). As 'for neoliberals, there is one form of rationality more powerful than any other: economic rationality' (Apple, 2015, p. 59), and neoliberal techniques involve the commercialization of education (Brenthall, 2013), HEIs found themselves face-to-face with demands for new responsibilities and low cost of entry into the business education sector.

This, in its turn, has resulted in fierce competition, efforts to recruit and retain students as well as pursuit for favorable student ratings and accreditations (see e.g. Fannin & Brown, 2014, Hawawini, 2013, Misra & McMahon, 2014, Stewart, 2015). Currently, institutions of higher education all over the world are competing for funds from both public and private sectors as well as from potential students (Conway, Mackay, & Yorke, 1994). To do so, many HEIs position themselves as value-creators, stressing academic excellence as well as practitioner orientation. However, because value-creation, academic excellence and practitioner orientation have become generic terms, a number of schools, in the hope of attracting more students, claim to be customer-oriented academic institutions where the process of acquiring education is flexible and convenient. Student-customer orientation1 is a key concept for this dissertation and is defined, using Bristow and Schneider (2014), as the degree to which a HEI makes decisions and acts upon the expectations and needs of the students as well as the goals and objectives of the institution' (p. 21).

Using Hill (2013), expectations have been defined as 'desires, wants, ideal standards' (p. 12) and the understanding of those is of substantial essence in order to provide a satisfying service experience (Palmer, 2015). Debate in existing literature on positioning a HEI as a student-customer oriented institution stands polarized. At one extreme there are those who state that when demand is falling, HEIs should focus on the customer (i.e. the students) and remarket the product (i.e. education) (Browne, 2016; Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2013; DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2013; Pesch, Calhoun, Schneider, & Bristow, 2008; Seeman, & O´Hara, 2014, Svensson, & Wood, 2015). Others at the other end of the continuum, however, oppose and claim that student-customer orientation does not contribute to professionalism and the worst approach a HEI can take to attract more students is the student-customer orientation approach.

In addition to being polarized, literature is frequently also hostile towards students executing the rights of customers and HEIs putting up with this (see e.g. Eagle and Brennan, 2015; Holbrook and Hulbert, 2014 among others). The prevailing sentiment in the existing literature is that students no longer take responsibility for their learning, but have rather deferred it to the educators and that they have taken full control of education (see e.g. Argenti, 2015; Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2013; Franz, 1998; Svensson, & Wood, 2015). Existing literature is also mainly conceptual – of the numerous academic articles published on the topic of student-customer orientation, the author has been able to identify only six empirical studies that have an immediate connection to the phenomenon at hand.

However, a detailed analysis of the existing studies reveals that, even though conclusive in their findings, existing literature may have overgeneralized student's views in several specific areas and the issue may not have been probed at a sufficiently detailed level. The problem of this research constitutes itself in the following: competition in the sector of education is fierce and to differentiate, many HEIs have decided to position themselves as student-customer orientation. Even though student-customer orientation has been studied, the existing instruments and tools fail to gain an in-depth knowledge on whether or not students as the primary beneficiaries of education expect a HEI to be customer oriented (Poul, 2014). However, this knowledge is of utmost relevance when positioning a HEI as a customer oriented institution. This problem whether a HEI should be customer oriented has been long debated on in the context of the marketized sector of education and this represents an opportunity for further investigation and insight, thus providing a significant contribution to the existing conceptual and empirical evidence.

Concerning methodological contribution, the dissertation constructs and validates the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument which can be used in other (comparative) surveys with a similar aim. In terms of practical contribution, the study conducted among undergraduate business students shows whether HEIs offering business education, which have decided to position themselves as customer-oriented institutions, should employ student customer orientation across all or only some categories of educational experience. The aim of this doctoral dissertation is therefore to contribute to the concept of student-customer orientation and to identify, at the detailed level of different educational experiences, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented.

2.3. Concept of a Customer in Education

The idea of higher education students as being customers has been and continues to be well-researched in scholarly literature (George 2015; Redding 2013; Vander Schee 2010). However, studies generally focus on perceptions and interactions within the academy; whether, it be how university staff view students (Pitman 2015), the students view themselves (Saunders 2014; White 2015) or more theoretical considerations of how the student as customer notion impacts upon understandings of what it means to be a university (O'Byrne and Bond 2014).

Greater attention needs to be paid to how the idea of student-as-customer extends outside the higher education sector and is understood by diverse stakeholders, including government, special interest groups and the wider community (Northouse, 2013). This is important because in developed, democratic nation states, it is these wider perceptions that influence public policy; more so than advocates within the sector itself. In the case of public universities especially, it is what officials within government and by extension the citizens they represent choose to do in regards to public policy that ultimately matters (Kraft and Furlong 2015). A prime example was the attempt in 2014 to reform the Ghanaian higher education sector. Central to the proposed reform package was a plan to de-regulate domestic student tuition fees by removing the maximum cap on these fees, thus allowing universities to charge what they considered to be a market price for higher education.

The reforms were proposed in May 2014, debated throughout the year and finally voted down by the Ghanaian parliament in March 2015; although at the time this paper was written the issue remained technically live in Ghanaian higher education policy. The Senate's rejection of the reforms was despite the almost unanimous support of the universities' vice chancellors. They and their institution's secretariats argued forcefully for sectoral reform; particularly for a recalibration of the balance between public and private investment in a student's education. The representations made from the within the sector were considered through a Senate inquiry that ran through the second half of 2014 and reported in early 2015. This was a public inquiry and so the Senate also considered submissions from diverse stakeholders including student unions; professional bodies relying on a graduate workforce; social welfare organizations; private higher education providers; students; parents of students and individual citizens.

This public discussion of education, markets and customers provides a critical insight into how the Ghanaian higher education sector is positioned to operate in an increasingly competitive and globalized market environment. The submissions to the public inquiry (more than 160), plus associated commentary, provide most of the data for this paper. Their analysis here has been guided by critical discourse analysis (CDA), since it explores the connection between the use of language and the social and political context within which it occurs (Paltridge, 2013). In line with such an approach, the analysis begins with the assumption that language use is always social and discourse both reflects and produces particular ideologies (Paltridge, 2013). CDA is a useful tool for exploring a particular issue and here the issue is the identity of a student as a customer. In constructing these identities, the authors of the texts choose words and representations deliberately, even if they are not consciously aware that they do so. Consequently, CDA is a means by which the intersection of social theories and linguistics can be examined. In the field of education research, it can be usefully employed as a means of answering questions about the relationships between language and society; specifically, in regards to how education plays a part (Rogers et al. 2013). Furthermore, given its focus on social power relations, CDA is a useful means of analyzing how certain groups of students might be advantaged over others, as the identity of them as a customer is interpreted.

Higher education equity is a key consideration in the construction of contemporary public policy since its emergence within policy agendas in Western societies since the early 1970s, as they started to massify (Martin 2009). Brown (2010) identifies literature dating back to the 1970s on the application of market theory to higher education. Notably, the idea that educational qualifications acted as a signal to potential employers as to the ability of the job applicant was discussed in length by Spence (1973). Scholarly interest appears concomitant with the rise in neoliberal studies; particularly in examining how social policy is formulated in societies modelled on economic competition of the market (Peters 2015).

Writers on the subject tend either to be strongly pro or anti in their views, rather than balanced (Brown 2010). Beyond theorization however, the application of market ref a 20 % low socio-economic status student enrolment shares by 2020. Widening access and participation therefore became a possible consequence, rather than a primary intention, of the massification of higher education. It is axiomatic that a market must be in evidence in order for to customers to exist, yet policy discussion surrounding the reforms tended to subsume the student- as-customer construct.

The student was not explicitly described as a customer; rather the field into which they entered was presented as a competitive, commodifiable market (White 2015). Thus, universities were encouraged to compete for students, not customers. Avoiding explicit reference of the word ''customer'' reinforced the idea that, in education at least, the term is considered pejorative by many (cf. George 2015). When students were explicitly referred to as customers, it was invariably used as a tactic by opponents to the reforms. As one individual submission to the inquiry observed, the proposed Bill would ''turn all higher education providers into companies with students as customers, with limited consumer rights, rather than making universities places of higher learning and knowledge acquisition for the benefit of society as a whole'' (Submission 133, 2014, p. 1). Again, the potential effect on policies of equity must be considered. Consumer rights are universal and assume a level playing field where the power of each consumer is generic.

Equally generic is the conceptualization of the consumer him/ herself: they are seen to represent or act on behalf of no social milieu or aspiration. In contrast, policies of equity are redistributive in design, seeking as they do to alter the social composition of the higher education sector are in line with wider demographics (Gale and Tranter 2011; Marginson 2011b).

Customers may be more or less equal in consumer law but students are not necessarily so in regards to public policy. Pro-reform discussion also highlighted other stakeholders who benefitted from increased competition, further blurring the distinction of the student as a customer. In its budget explanatory document, the Government also identified the families of students as the beneficiaries of the reforms. Increasing competition between universities would result, the Minister for Education argued elsewhere, in ''the winners being students and the parents of students as competition weaves its magic at universities'' (Heath 2014).

Furthermore, reference to a new Employer Satisfaction Survey positioned the student as a product of the education process, with the future employer as the customer demanding satisfaction. This was reinforced elsewhere in the budget document by reference to the need for higher education providers to ''work together to offer the skills and knowledge that local employers are looking for'' (Commonwealth of Australia 2014, p. 6). The idea that universities 'produced' graduates to keep the state's economy 'advancing' was put forward as a fundamental goal of higher education (Pyne 2014a). The state itself also functions as a quasi-customer of higher education since by part-paying for an individual's education, it can equally be viewed as part-customer.

Furthermore, as a primary benefactor of the resulting socio-economic benefits of having a more educated population, the state receives a significant service for that payment. Without this subsidy, public universities would cease to exist in their current form. Alternatively, the state can be considered a market investor, in the sense that it seeks a risk-adjusted return in exchange for the financing, compared to a specific set of services (Merton and Thakor 2015). However, the investor analogy is imperfect, since the state is seeking more than a risk-adjusted return. It is also seeking graduates in specific fields of study, enrolments from students from disadvantaged backgrounds and support for a mass, comprehensive system of higher education.

Like a customer therefore, the state is also seeking specific services from the market. There were in fact three representations of the relationship between the student and the market throughout submissions. The first representation, described above, positioned the student as external to the market in the sense that the service and service provider already existed, regardless of whether or not the student elected to enter the market (cf. Wambsganss and Kennett 1995). The second representation positioned the student as the product of the market, and employers the real customers (cf. Sirvanci 1996).

Typical was the submission that noted the ''increase in the demand for skilled and educated workers from employers'' (Submission 20, 2014, p. 14) or those that spoke of 'employer demand' (cf. Submission 46, 2014). The third representation synthesized the two approaches, by observing that students were both consumers of and transformed by the educational experience (cf. Lovelock and Rothschild 1980; Hoffman and Kretovics 2015). Mutual benefit was promoted, in the sense that ''Our students need the opportunity to receive the best education, and employers need those who are ready for the job'' (Submission 42, 2014, p. 2). Again however, across all three representations the constructs of student as customer was suppressed. In the more than 160 submissions made to the Senate, the word ''market'' appeared 792 times, whilst the word ''customer'' appeared only ten times.

2.4. Students as Customers

According to Mazzarol, (1998) higher or tertiary education is a service even though it is seen as having many stakeholders, customers. In the educational environment students are the core customers of the institution (Ostrom et al. 2011). Again, Ostrom et al. (2011) borrows the service blueprint concept as they see education as a service system. The service concept blueprint issued by Ostrom et al. 'highlights the steps in the process, the points of contact that take place, and the physical evidence that exists from the customer's point of view' (p. 2).

Cuthbert (2010) indicated that recognizing students as customers is a natural phenomenon of accepting the concept of marketing in the higher educational cycle. According to Mazzarol (1998) the relevance of relationship in research and education agrees upholds the concept of using the approach of relationship marketing in higher education (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Sahney et al. (2015) believed that global changes and competition are making education more like a product with students as its customers.

According to a research conducted at Hanover in 2015 indicated that 'universities are recognizing that students are also customers and the need to provide an excellent; customer experience across the student lifecycle'. Caru and Cova (2003) also stated that customer experience is produced when there is a financial exchange. Applying this viewpoint shows that tertiary education should be motivated by seeing students as customers.

Most students in the tertiary institution sees themselves as customers. For instance, Helms and Key (1994) surveyed students at Wright State University to assess how students perceive their role at the university. Students strongly identified themselves as the customers in higher education and were hesitant to even acknowledge others as possible legitimate customer groups. Nonetheless this viewpoint of the students is not accepted by many in the academics. In all these viewpoints one things seems to be certain as there is a disagreement between the integrity of academic and offering an education as well as offering quality customer service (Emery et al., 2001; Guilbault, 2010; Molesworth et al., 2009). Notwithstanding, researches are yet to prove this case (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015; Mark, 2013). Koris and Nokelainen (2015) verified a student customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ) that permits tertiary institutions 'to identify the categories of educational experience in which students expect higher educational institutions (HEI) to be student customer oriented' (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015, p. 115). The outcome of the study shows that 'students expect to be treated as customers in terms of student feedback, classroom studies, and to some extent also in terms of communication.' (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015, p. 128).

The outcome of the study also indicated that students in the tertiary institution did not recognize 'themselves as customers when it comes to curriculum design, rigour, classroom behavior and graduation' neither did they 'display specific expectations' when it comes to grading (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015, p. 128).

Mazur (1996) also believed that instructors don't view students as customers, rather as raw materials being developed into a product for the ultimate customers (industry and society). Helms and Key (1994) noted that students could be classified as a raw material, customer, or even as employees. As a raw material, students move through a process and become the end product. As customers, students purchase the service of education. Helms and Key noted that students must be engaged in their studies, must be motivated to perform, and are evaluated making them much like employees.

According to Tinto (1993) institutional commitment to students is the most principle programs for effective retention and guaranteeing the success of students. One of the findings of a study conducted by the International Center for Student Retention (2006) is the how tertiary institution reacts to student is very crucial to the persistence, retention as well as the completion of the students in the tertiary institution (Retention 101, Institutional Factors,). It is very essential to take note of the relevance of supportive campus environment in assisting the retention of students when tertiary institutions are developing strategies to retain their students. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) also indicated that the perception of students on the quality of relationship among people within the tertiary educational setting including faculty members, students, administrative staffs measures supportive campus environment. Some studies by other scholars also indicated that one most vital element in the retention of students is the trust of students. According to Ghosh et al. (2001), the trust of student in a tertiary educational setting is key to recruitment and retention. Ghosh et al. (2001) also indicated that the trust is students in tertiary institution is built on openness of then institution, the institution's friendliness to all students, the truthfulness and genuineness of the institution. The study also proposes that trust in the educational setting has a link with increased customer satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2015) 'mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies'. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems that either approach alone.

Qualitative studies provide emphasis to the social world; details of reality; meaning; experiences; and inductive in nature in relation to theory (Corbetta, 2016; Naoum, 2014). Also, emphasis on word rather than quantification in data collection and analysis. Silverman (2013) contends that qualitative studies seek to understand the meanings that people attribute to different aspects of their lives. However, quantitative studies explain the statistical patterns that underpin regularities in human lives by separating the social world into empirical components called variables (Collis and Hussey, 2016; Payne and Payne, 2015). These variables can be represented numerically as frequencies or rate, whose association with each other can be explored by statistical methods, assessed through researcher introduced stimuli and systematic measurement. Saunders et al. (2012) stated that such studies focus on testing hypothesis and generalizing the findings to a broader population.

The use of either the qualitative or quantitative method is subject to some weaknesses. In the qualitative method, findings are often not generalized as the range of participants are usually limited in number. While the quantitative method often fails to provide specific answers, reasons, explanations or examples. In consideration of the weakness of either method, combining both methods known as mixed method was adopted to take square in their advantage. However, Brannen (2013, p. 176) contended that a number of outcomes may emerge in the mixed method including (1) corroboration – as the same results may be derived; (2) elaboration or expansion – the qualitative data analysis exemplifies how the quantitative findings apply in particular case; (3) complementary – the qualitative and quantitative findings may differ but together they generate insights; and (4) contradiction – where quality data and qualitative findings conflict. According to Creswell (2016), the blend of qualitative and quantitative research is useful in creating synergy effect. The rationale for using mixed method design may be for the purpose of triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion (Greene, 2015).

Debates in literature concerning the perception of students as customers or not abound in developed countries, while limited numbers in developing countries. Thus models or framework advanced through these studies may not be able to capture some of the issues or events that possibly affect the perception of students as customers in developing countries. While adoption of students as customers in the developed countries may be simple and cultures have seemingly blended together, the same does not hold in this context, where the dynamics and status of factors are expected to be much pronounced than those in the developed countries. Hence, the thrust of this study, in its true perspective, entail investigation of critical issues related to the salient factors that influence student behavior. In addition, examines the relationship between constructs pertaining to individual and societies service quality and student satisfaction in the selected schools. The core analysis in this study is undertaking through quantitative analysis. Also, the analysis is supplemented by qualitative analysis of data collected through in-depth interview.

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises students as well as academic staff of all private and public Universities in Ghana. In all, there are 27 public and private Universities in Ghana.

3.3. Sample Size and Technique

Based on the enormity of the population of the study, the research employed the convenience sampling technique to select 350 respondents. The study employed the convenience sampling technique in the sense that it was only those respondents who are willing to participate in the study that were sampled. Bessam (2013) argued that for a study that determines to use the regression analysis, the sample size must not be less than 300 counts. Hence a sample of 350 respondents more than qualifies for the minimum cut off for a regression analysis an employed in this study.

3.4. Data Collection

The study specifically used questionnaires in collecting the data. The items in the questionnaire were designed using the closed ended method for developing questionnaires. Again, the questionnaires were standardized questionnaires which were adopted from other researchers.

3.5. Data Analysis Method

Data analysis were conducted using various inferential statistical methods including test of internal consistency, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and most importantly the structural equation modelling technique. These various inferential methods are further discussed and conclude with the summary of how they were applied to address the research questions.

4. Analysis and Results

Demographic characteristics as well as perception of students as customers moderates the relationship between customer orientation culture of the Institutions and student satisfaction

The third research objective was geared towards ascertaining whether the perception of students of customers could significantly moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture of educational institutions and student satisfaction.

- Is Age a significant moderator between student satisfaction and Customer orientation culture?

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.7543	.5690	.6592	28.1247	3.0000	56.0000	0000

Table 1: Model Summary for Age Moderation with Customer Orientation Culture

	β	se	t	p
constant	3.2635	.1313	24.8594	.0000
Student Age	.3993	.1406	2.8410	.0063
Customer O.C	.4287	.1325	3.2357	.0020
Interaction.	145	.0908	1.8112	.0755

Table 2: Coefficients Table for Student Age Moderation
Interactions: Age X Customer Orientation Culture

Age	Effect	se	t	p
-1.2101	.6278	.1246	5.0387	.0000
.0000	.4287	.1325	3.2357	.0020

Table 3: Conditional Effect of Customer Orientation Culture on Student Satisfaction at Values of Student Age

The analysis revealed that Age has a significant conditional effect on student satisfaction $\beta = .404$, $t(56) = 2.8$, $p = .006$. That is the partial effect of Age when customer orientation culture = 0. Meaning for every per unit increase in Age, student satisfaction increases by one unit when customer orientation culture = 0. In other words, it is not the direct effect of Age on student satisfaction, it is the partial effect (Hayes, 2014). On other hand, customer orientation culture also contributed partially to student satisfaction $\beta = .273$, $t(56) = 2.29$, $p = .43$. That is an increase in customer orientation culture partially affects student satisfaction behaviour when Age = 0.

When the interaction term (customer orientation culture × Age) was added to the model, it proved insignificant to the student satisfaction model $\beta = .14$, $t(56) = 1.81$, $p = .07$. That is, Age failed to moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The overall model Nonetheless is significant $F(3, 56) = 28.12$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .57$.

- Is Gender a significant moderator between student satisfaction and Customer orientation culture?

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5959	.3551	.9863	9.1413	3.0000	56.0000	.0001

Table 4: Model Summary for Gender Moderation with Customer Orientation Culture

	β	se	t	p
constant	3.0900	.1500	20.6011	.0000
Gender	.4431	.1472	3.0101	.0039
C.O.C	.2324	.1430	1.6257	.1096
Interaction	.1191	.1235	.9644	.3390

Table 5: Coefficients table for Gender Moderation
Interactions: Gender X Customer orientation culture

GEN	Effect	se	t	p
-1.2101	.0883	.165	5.5301	.0081
.0000	.2324	.1430	3.6257	.0096

Table 6: Conditional Effect of Customer Orientation Culture on Student Satisfaction at Values of Gender

The analysis revealed that Gender has a significant conditional effect on student satisfaction β = .443, t (56) = 3.01, p= 0.004. That is the partial effect of Gender when customer orientation culture = 0. Meaning for every per unit change in Gender characteristics, student satisfaction increases by one unit when customer orientation culture = 0. In other words, it is not the direct effect of Gender on student satisfaction; it is the partial effect (Hayes, 2014).

On other hand, customer orientation culture also contributed partially to student satisfaction β = .232, t (56) = 1.63, p= 0.11. That is an increase in customer orientation culture partially affects student satisfaction behavior when Gender = 0.

When the interaction term (customer orientation culture × Gender) was added to the model, it proved insignificant to the student satisfaction model β= .119, t (56) = 1.81, p=0.33. That is, Gender failed to moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The overall model Nonetheless is significant F (3,56) = 9.14, p <.001, R^2= 0.36.

- Is Year of education a significant moderator between student satisfaction and Customer orientation culture?

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6189	.3830	.9436	9.1414	3.0000	56.0000	.0001

Table 7: Model Summary for Year of Education Moderation with Customer Orientation Culture

	p	β	se	t
Constant	3.1896	.1328	24.0177	.0000
Year of educ.	.4043	.1381	2.9271	.0049
C.O.C	.2738	.1196	2.2890	.0259
Interaction	.0466	.0836	-.5574	.5795

Table 8: Coefficients Table for Year of Education Moderation
Interactions: Year of Education X Customer Orientation Culture

YOE	Effect	se	t	p
-1.2101	.3302	.1807	1.8277	.0010
.0000	.2738	.2738	3.2890	.0011

Table 9: Conditional Effect of Year of Education on Student Satisfaction at Values of Customer Orientation Culture

The analysis revealed that Year of education has a significant conditional effect on student satisfaction β = .404, t (56) = 2.93, p= 0.0049. That is the partial effect of Year of education when customer orientation culture= 0. Meaning for every per unit increase in Year of education, student satisfaction increases by one unit when customer orientation culture = 0. In other words, it is not the direct effect of Year of education on student satisfaction, it is the partial effect (Hayes, 2014).

On other hand, customer orientation culture also contributed partially to student satisfaction β = .273, t (56) = 2.29, p= 0.0010. That is an increase in customer orientation culture partially affects student satisfaction when Year of education = 0.

When the interaction term was added to the model, it proved insignificant to the student satisfaction model b= -.046, t (56) =-.56, p=0.011. That is, Year of education significantly moderated the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The overall model was also significant F (3, 56) = 9.1414, p <.001, R^2= 0.38.

- *Is Program of study a significant moderator between student satisfaction and Customer orientation culture?*

R	R-sq MSE	F	df1	F	df2	p
.5572	.3105	1.0546	7.0034	3.0000	56.0000	.0004

Table 10: Model Summary for Program of Study Moderation with Customer Orientation Culture

	β	se	t	p
constant	3.1426	.1344	23.3845	.0000
POS	.5606	.1283	4.3685	.0001
C.OC	-.2038	.3083	-.6610	.5113
interaction	.0920	.3070	.2996	.7656

Table 11: Coefficients Table for Program of Study Moderation

POS	Effect	se	t	p
-1.2101	-.3151	.5366	-.5872	.5594
.0000	.2038	.3083	-.6610	.5113

Table 12: Conditional Effect of Program of Study on Student Satisfaction at Values of Customer Orientation Culture

Against Customer orientation culture, the analysis revealed that Program of study has a significant conditional effect on student satisfaction β = .560, t (56) = 4.37, p= .000. That is the partial effect of Program of study when Customer orientation culture = 0. Meaning for every per unit increase in Program of study, student satisfaction increases by one unit when Customer orientation culture = 0. In other words, it is not the direct effect of Program of study on student satisfaction, it is the partial effect (Hayes, 2014).

On other hand, Customer orientation culture also contributed partially to student satisfaction β = -.204, t (56) = 4.37, p= .0001. That is an increase in customer orientation culture partially affects student satisfaction when Program of study = 0.

When the interaction term (Customer orientation culture × Program of study) was added to the model, it proved insignificant to the student satisfaction model β= .119, t (56) = 1.81, p=.33. That is, Program of study failed to moderate the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The overall model Nonetheless is significant F (3,56) = .96, p <.001, R^2= .59.

- Is Student Perception a significant moderator between student satisfaction and Customer orientation culture?

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5620	.3159	1.0463	7.7097	3.0000	56.0000	.0002

Table 13: Model Summary for Student Perception Moderation with Customer Orientation Culture

	β	se	t	p
constant	3.2053	.1353	23.6918	.0000
Student Perc.	.5753	.1246	4.6192	.0000
C.O.C	.3466	.3270	1.0601	.2937
Interaction	.3684	.3294	1.1184	.2682

Table 14: Coefficients Table for Student Perception Moderation
Interactions: Student Perception X Customer Orientation Culture

SP	Effect	se	t	p
-1.2101	-.0992	.5694	-.1742	.0024
.0000	.3466	.3270	1.0601	.0021

Table 15: Conditional Effect of Customer Orientation Culture on Student Satisfaction at Values of Student Perception

Against customer orientation culture, the analysis revealed that Student Perception has a significant conditional effect on student satisfaction β = .575, t (56) = 4.62, p= .000. That is the partial effect of Student Perception when customer orientation culture = 0. Meaning for every per unit increase in Student Perception, student satisfaction increases by one unit when customer orientation culture = 0. In other words, it is not the direct effect of Student Perception on student satisfaction, it is the partial effect (Hayes, 2014).

On other hand, customer orientation culture also contributed partially to student satisfaction β = .35, t (56) = 1.06, p= .0024. That is an increase in customer orientation culture partially affects student satisfaction when Student Perception = 0.

When the interaction term (customer orientation culture × Student Perception) was added to the model, it proved insignificant to the student satisfaction model β= .368, t (56) = 1.1, p=.0021. That is, Student Perception significantly moderated the relationship between customer orientation culture and student satisfaction. The overall model was also significant F (3, 56) = .96, p <.0002, R^2= .32.

4.1. A Customer Satisfaction Model for Higher Educational Institutions in Ghana

The analysis procedure for the student questionnaire was divided into three stages: the data preparation, the descriptive analysis followed by the inductive analysis. The representative results in this part confer always to the propositions and the empirical model. The Cronbach´s alpha reliability coefficients on the five dimensions measuring student satisfaction ranged from 0,6532 to 0,8105.

Dimension	Cronbach´s alpha	Number of factors
Service performance	0,8105	5
University performance	0,6532	3
Relationships	0,7661	3
University standing	0,6576	6
Promotion	0,7641	3

Table 16

The following results could be gained in the quantitative analysis: The factor analysis pointed to a stronger importance of relationship dimensions e.g. service perception instead of service performance leading to a renaming of the model dimensions and factions. Though not reported here in detail, the results of a series of correlations and indices indicated support for the initial student satisfaction model. Due to the results of the
Kolmogorov-Smirnov a u-test was made. The results for this test are presented in the following table, meaning that results with p < 0, 05 are significantly different.

	Kolmogorov - Smirnov	p	Mann-Whitney-U	p	Difference in comparison to the study form?
Overall student satisfaction					
Teaching	4,034	0,000	22332,500	0,076	no
Factors of the university experience	2,815	0,000	17306,500	0,000	yes
Service performance					
Professors					
Accessibility during office hours	4,804	0,000	21855,500	0,014	yes
Accessibility outside class	4,905	0,000	23764,000	0,299	no
Satisfaction with the individual treatment	5,072	0,000	22857,000	0,065	No
Teachings kills	2,253	0,000	21572,500	0,007	Yes
Assignments	1,825	0,003	23319,000	0,,186	No
Increase of knowledge	2,317	0,000	23843,000	0,272	No
Assistance	2,586	0,000	20740,500	0,002	Yes
Study content	2,531	0,000	22318,500	0,032	Yes
Course management					
Clarity of tasks	5,609	0,000	24565,500	0,544	No
Organization of the university course	8,350	0,000	21918,000	0,003	Yes
Accessible syllabus	4,953	0,000	20607,500	0,000	Yes
University performance					
Infrastructure					
Basic offer	2,291	0,000	11180,500	0,000	Yes
Staff					

	Kolmogorov - Smirnov	p	Mann-Whitney-U	p	Difference in comparison to the study form?
Social climate	5,577	0,000	23588,500	0,340	No
Responsiveness	4,024	0,000	20815,000	0,004	Yes
Relationships					
Bonding	1,834	0,002	19767,500	0,001	Yes
Empathy	3,297	0,000	22777,000	0,302	No
Reciprocity	1,628	0,010	6102,000	0,000	Yes
University standing					
Prestige	3,247	0,000	23333,500	0,158	No
Image	3,232	0,000	22195,500	0,021	Yes
Positioning					
Promotion tools	2,728	0,000	23803,500	0,298	No
Standing	3,350	0,000	21739,000	0,008	Yes
Resources services	3,896	0,000	23680,500	0,453	No
Education	4,492	0,000	24028,500	0,412	No
Reputation	1,650	0,009	21959,500	0,064	No
Promotion					
Trust	2,608	0,000	23023,000	0,141	No
Commitment	1,967	0,001	24987,500	0,854	No
Future intentions	1,782	0,003	12711,500	0,247	No

Table 17

As can be seen from the results in the above table, there are significant differences between the study modes in University of Applied Sciences in Austria when looking at various factors in the university environment. The component Factors for university experience of the overall student satisfaction construct is significantly different measured from the students who are in a part-time course in comparison with students who are in full-time courses. Similarly, part-time students' views are different concerning the professors´ accessibility during office hours, professors´ teaching skills, professors´ assistance, study content, organization of the university course and the accessibility of materials. In the student satisfaction dimension, university performance the factor additional offer and responsiveness are different due to the study forms. A similar result can be found in the satisfaction dimension relationships where only the factor empathy is equal in the full- time and part-time courses whereas the factors empathy and reciprocity are not. The satisfaction dimension promotion results in differences for the factors image and standing for part-time student in comparison to full-time students. Due to the different needs of students in full-time or part-time courses the results of the u-test clearly show the factors where the students in part-time courses can be especially addressed with the same methods, activities or strategies and where not.

For this survey a multiple regression analysis was done. A major result of this study was that the dependent construct, student satisfaction, resulted in two components: teaching and Factors for university experience. The component teaching is defined as the pure product of the Universities. It contains also the future preparation of the students which has a strong connection with the experiences teaching product. The second component Factors for university experience include the promotion activities and the experimental factors.

The experimental factors are divided in formal and personal parts. The formal part is the infrastructure and resources of the instructions, and the personal part is the specific treatment of the students. The tested student satisfaction model has 89% of significant paths for the dimension teaching and 93% for the dimension factors for university experience. First, the variables were ranked according to their correlations, the non- significant variables were eliminated from the model, and variables were then re-named and clustered. In order to the results gained by the statistical analysis of the pre- conceptualized model, it has to be adapted in the naming of the dimensions. The initial model is displayed below:

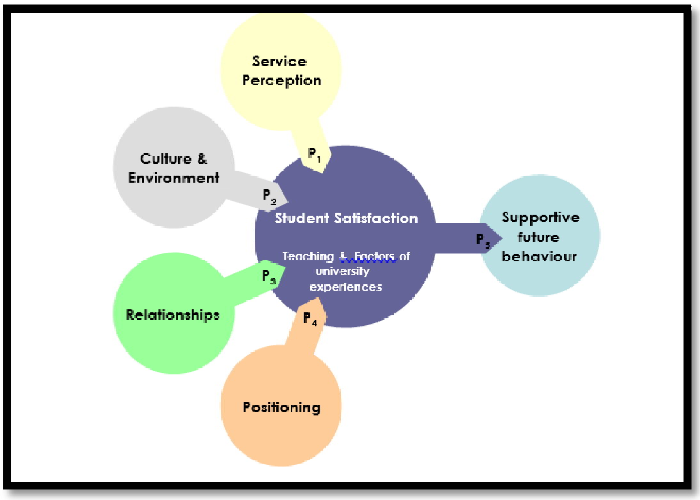

Figure 1

The study examined a marketing model with different dimensions and outcomes of student satisfaction for Higher Education providers. By presenting holistic management thinking the article aimed at developing a theoretical framework for student satisfaction at Universities in Austria. The authors have reviewed and consolidated prior research and current theoretical models from several fields of study. The framework was evaluated by actual students, alumni, Higher Education experts and university personnel. Researchers

(Gummesson, 2017; Arnett, German & Hunt, 2015) suggest that promoting long-term relationships with key customers is an important strategy. This is also in case for Higher Education providers, especially for Universities. These institutions have tremendous pressures and needs from various angles to keep and attract new students. Therefore, tertiary institutions need to rethink their orientation towards their customers and their competitors, national and international wide. By implementing or improving a relationship marketing strategy with their stakeholders more competitive advantages can be gained.

The key factor inside this strategy is the satisfaction construct. This research must be considered as an initial attempt to develop a more comprehensive view of the overall student satisfaction construct, the student satisfaction dimensions and factors at the university level.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Most students in the tertiary institution sees themselves as customers. For instance, Helms and Key (1994) surveyed students at Wright State University to assess how students perceive their role at the university. Students strongly identified themselves as the customers in higher education and were hesitant to even acknowledge others as possible legitimate customer groups. Nonetheless this viewpoint of the students is not accepted by many in the academics. In all these viewpoints one things seems to be certain as there is a disagreement between the integrity of academic and offering an education as well as offering quality customer service (Emery et al., 2001; Guilbault, 2010; Molesworth et al., 2009). Notwithstanding, researches are yet to prove this case (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015; Mark, 2013). Koris and Nokelainen (2015) verified a student customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ) that permits tertiary institutions 'to identify the categories of educational experience in which students expect higher educational institutions (HEI) to be student customer oriented' (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015, p. 115). The outcome of the study shows that 'students expect to be treated as customers in terms of student feedback, classroom studies, and to some extent also in terms of communication.' (Koris and Nokelainen, 2015, p. 128).It is recommended that University officials ought to have a more strategic approach towards the management of students within their institutions. Students should be perceived as academic customers who deserve quality service in areas such as tuition. However, students are not supposed to perceive themselves as customers who buy University degrees because these degrees are awarded and not purchased.

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