ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY STANDARDS OF SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN JORDAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The objectives of this study are to explore the relationship between three key variables, namely Quality Standards, Satisfaction and Loyalty in Higher Education in Jordan.

Design/methodology/approach – About 202 students of Middle East University, Jordan involved as the sample. The questionnaires were analysed quantitatively by a variety of statistical techniques, including factor analysis and multiple regressions.

Findings – The finding from this study indicated that safety and security, and harmony had a positive impact on student's loyalty. Student's satisfaction mediates the relationship between quality standards and loyalty.

Research limitations/implications – Constraints of time and lack of prior studies on Higher-Education sites of Jordan, confined quantitative approach of studying the variables in question, which could be comprehensively explored in future researchers by utilizing both quantitative as well as a qualitative approach of research.

KEY WORDS: Higher Education, quality standards, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Introduction and Definition

In today's ever-changing business environments, quality holds the key to the most important sources of competitive advantage in both education enterprise and destination. Several leading organizations that deal with quality have spent millions in upgrading and in following a systematic process to manage quality in order to gain and maintain this competitive position (Eraqi, 2006). Every manager knows the importance of quality and fierce competition is underway in every sector regarding quality, as customer expectations increase to greater heights. It is necessary to adopt quality in the business strategies if the firm wants to achieve a sustainable future in the business, and as a result higher quality of performance of these service providers as well as the marked customer satisfaction is associated with increased loyalty and repeat future visitations, tolerance of price increases and ability of the firm or company to establish a well-known reputation. In the marketing field, satisfaction and quality often have been differentiated by the standard of comparison used in the disconfirmation of expectation (Baker & Crompton, 2000). In addition, to the above positive results, quality of education helps in understanding the modern needs of education and also to develop the economy (Maylor, 2000; Tse, 1996). For instance, transferring power and responsibility to employees, within specified limits, will lead to better provision of the best possible service at their own discretion (Kinlaw, 1995; Wynne, 1993). Saman (2000) observed that Jordan needs to take the utmost importance of quality in order to optimize the use, which could become a major contributor to the economy of the country. Therefore, the Higher Education of Jordan holds promising possibilities of doing so. Thus, the present study examines customer satisfaction and destination loyalty in order to have a view on how to build quality standards that improve this particular industry in Jordan. The lack of student's satisfaction and loyalty are due to the limitation of services in the Higher Education sites Although there are many researches on satisfaction and loyalty in different sectors, the study which addressed student's satisfaction as a mediator between the Education quality with student's loyalty, is still lacking. Furthermore, with the increasing business competition, the students need more quality standards provided by the education sites, for example those that being provided by the universities. In addition, Higher Education requires a more in-depth understanding owing to the different treatments from other factors of education such as eco-education. Therefore, this sector may need investigation of the impact of dimensions of education quality standards namely, safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency,

authenticity and harmony, which were used in this research, and have been established by WTO (2003), but have not been studied together with students satisfaction and loyalty in Higher Education. Eraqi (2006) summarizes the definitions of and implications for quality as shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1

Quality definitions and implications

Source	Definitions	Implications
The Oxford Dictionary (Ingram et al., 1997)	The degree or level of excellence; characteristic; something that is special about in a person or thing	Quality has two parts: (1) its inherent characteristics (2) a standard of excellence
The British Standards Institute (1987)	Quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs	The implication of this definition is that quality has to resolve the user's actual or perceived needs
Juran (1980)	Quality is the fitness for propose or use	Quality is judged by its ability to meet needs
Ernst and Young (Ingram et al., 1997)	Quality is the conformance to specifications and the relative absence of defects	Quality is judged positively and negatively compared to the expectation
Feigenbaum (1983)	Quality is the total composite product and service characteristics of marketing; engineering; manufacture; and maintenance through which the product and service in use will meet the expectation by customer	Quality is derived through a range of processes which transform the end product or service
Oakland (1989)	Quality is simply meeting the requirements	Quality has to be equal to the demands place upon it
Dodwell and Simmons (1994)	Quality is concerned with delighting the customer	The final test of quality is a subjective one
Day and Peters (1994)	Quality is rather like pornography in this respect. It may not be easy defined, but it is known when it is Seen	
Eraqi (2002	Quality as a concept is considered as a philosophy overwhelmed the organisation management. It is a continuous improvement	Quality has three components: (1) internal customer satisfaction (2) external customer satisfaction (3) the efficiency of processes

Source: Eraqi (2006)

The Standards of Quality

The international Organization [WTO] (2003) as cited in Eraqi (2006) and Krishn and Seema (2008) has designed six (6) standards for student's product or service that have to be considered when an enterprise/destination management develops the education product design and marketing. Thus, the present researchers have adopted these standards for this study for this

research in the universities. The six standards are listed as the followings:

a) Safety and Security

This measure means the education product or service should avoid circumstances where it would lead to danger to life, health and other vital interests and integrity of the consumer, even in the light of 'adventure education'. Security standards pertaining to safety and security are established by law, and should be looked at as quality standards, as peace, safety, as well as security, are basically the requirements for growth, attractiveness, and competitiveness of the destination. Without these mentioned factors, students' destinations cannot exist successfully in the universities (Cavlek, 2002). In addition to this, according to Sonmez and Graefe (1998), safety and securities are often considered crucial in students' choice of destination.

b) Hygiene

Hygiene is an important factor that requires the accommodation facilities to be safe and clean and is not only recommended in high-class establishments but to all. Further more, food safety and hygienic standards that are established by the law of the country must be fulfilled in all food outlets, such as a cafeteria. The absence of which will result in some sort of dissatisfaction. According to James and Associates (1996), the presence of hygiene will lead to 'satisfying' rather than 'satisfaction'. Moreover, as stated by Van Wijk and Murre (1993), better hygiene through hand washing, food protection and domestic hygiene, reduces the possibility of catching different diseases and are related to better sanitation, hygiene practices, and to cleaner water.

c) Accessibility

Accessibility is one of the effective indicators that can be used to reorganize target areas. Researchers have explored the topic from different sectors like transportation, education, geography and economy (Andersson & Karlsson 2007, O'Kelly 2007). It is one of the major issues when it comes to student's attractions and transportation planning. The measurement of accessibility gives an inkling to operators or agencies on how to recognize improvement when it comes to student destinations. The term accessibility with regards to transportation planning is considered as access to goods, services and destinations. In a similar vein, Litman (2003) defined

accessibility as an easy way of getting to the opportunities offered (i.e. goods, services, activities and facilities) in a given destination.

d) Transparency

This is a key factor in providing legitimacy of expectations and student's protection as it relates to providing and communicating true information that revolves around the characteristics of the subjects, and its fees which include what is and is not covered by the price regarding supply. Hence, Copper (2006) has defined transparency as "being open and honest with the public."

e) Authenticity

Authenticity is the most difficult and subjective quality determinant to attain in a commercial world because of its aspect of multidimensionality, including marketing and competition dimensions. Authenticity is based on culture, and is basically to make a product distinct from other similar products to meet student's expectations. Therefore, authenticity disappears when the product loses its natural and cultural background. For instance, a theme park representing other far away lands and cultures is a good example of authentic education product. An authentic product can develop and adapt to the needs and expectations of students, and is the most important and preservable value of the building heritage. This appreciation of the cultural diversity and the enrichment of the world heritage is a novel viewpoint (Niskasaari, 2008).

g) Harmony

Harmony that exists within the human as well as the natural environment relates to sustainability, which is a medium- and long-term concept. Maintaining the sustainability of education requires managing environmental and socio-economic impacts, establishing environmental indicators and maintaining the quality of the education sector. The term harmony is defined as fitting harmoniously into the environment. Adam Smith, as cited in Petermöller and Britzelmaier (2008) said that a natural harmony will exist owing to the market mechanism which acts as the invisible hand.

The Relationships between Quality and Satisfaction and Loyalty

Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is considered as a "cognitive or affective reaction" that emerges due to a single or extended set of service encounters (Rust & Oliver, 1994). It is also considered as a post consumption experience which compares perceived quality with expected quality, whereas Education Quality Standards refer to a global evaluation of a firm's service delivery system (Anderson & Fornell, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Iacobucci et al. (1995) stated that the main difference between Education Quality Standards and customer satisfaction, is that quality signifies the managerial delivery of the service while satisfaction relates the customers' experiences with the said service, and furthermore, quality improvement should be based on customer needs. In addition according to Iacobucci et al., (1995), Anderson and Fornell (1994), Dick and Basu (1994) and Rust and Oliver (1994), "quality is one dimensional on which satisfaction is based" , while Sivadas, Jamie and Baker-Prewitt (2000) claimed that quality is an antecedent to satisfaction. Additionally, Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994) and Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann (1994) also agreed that improved Education Quality Standards will lead to a satisfied customer. On the other hand, there is a marked clash on an interaction-quality-satisfaction repurchase model with all the links well-established. According to Cronin and Tailor (1992), and Oliver (1980), all the links between quality, satisfaction and repurchase have been thoroughly studied. Although there have been consensus that interaction is associated with satisfaction in service counters (Woodside et al., 1992; Cermak et al., 1991; Kelley et al., 1990; Hill & Neely, 1988; Mills & Morris, 1986), empirical demonstrations however, are lacking (Czepiel, 1990).

In another study, Cronin and Taylor (1992) looked into the causal relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. The results of their study that was undergone through correlation analysis are; (1) Quality Standard was an antecedent of consumer satisfaction, (2) Quality Standards had less effect on purchase intentions than did consumer satisfaction, and (3) consumer satisfaction had a significant effect on purchase intentions. Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe (2000) also suggested that customer satisfaction strongly mediated the effect of Quality Standards on behavioural intentions. Literature regarding Quality Standards showed that the perceptions of high education quality standards and high service satisfaction resulted in a very high level of purchase intentions (Taylor, 1997; Zeithaml et al.,

1996; Taylor & Baker, 1994; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Conversely, Cöner and Güngör (2002) claimed that customer loyalty was affected by product quality, service quality, and retailer's image, and suggested that "quality [of product and service] … is directly related to customer satisfaction, and … lead[s] to the loyalty of the customer" (Cöner & Güngör, 2002, p. 195). In addition, Education Quality Standards is one of the antecedents of satisfaction as shown based on empirical findings (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). The lack of researches on the topic has been pointed out by Bloemer, Ruyter and Wetzels (1999) who stated that the relationship between perception on Quality Standards and customer loyalty is not well-studied. According to Zeithaml et al. (1996) in a study of behavioural intention in service sectors, (CATEGORIZATION), the results of the study revealed that Quality Standards had a positive relation to loyalty and willingness to pay more, while Quality Standards is negatively related to switching behaviour and the external response to a problem. This was echoed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) in their study when they found Quality Standards do not have a significant positive effect on the intention to puruchase again. On the other hand, Boulding et al. (1993) discovered a positive relationship between Quality Standards and repurchase intention and willingness to recommend, while Zeithaml et al. (1990) revealed a positive relationship between Quality Standards and two loyalty dimensions. Hence, these results show that Quality Standards is an important influencer of satisfaction, and it is supported by researchers (Rust & Oliver, 1994).

Similarly, in a study by Baker and Crompton (2000), satisfaction is revealed to be enhanced by the higher perceptions of quality performance, which corresponded to the quality satisfaction. Behavioural intentions relationship flow guided to manipulate the perceptions of high quality which in turn positively affected intended behavior. The study also supported by researchers such as Parasuraman et al. (1994), and Fornell and Manfred (1996) who claimed that customer satisfaction with a transaction is a function that evaluates assessment of service quality, product quality, and price; that is, quality normally leads to satisfaction. Along similar lines, Oliver (1997) opined that consumer's psychology mediates the impact of performance observations on satisfaction judgments, and that service features determine quality, which then satisfies consumer needs. While Otto and Ritchie (1995) pronounced that marketing literature on the perception of the quality of service owes itself to the causal antecedents that associate satisfaction with

experience. Choi et al. (2004) revealed that perceived Quality Standards had a significant, positive, direct influence on satisfaction, value assessment, and behavioural intentions.

From the arguments above, the author of the current study has chosen the variables that are to be considered in this study and they are; education quality standards with six dimensions - safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity, and harmony. A look at the previous literature revealed a gap in the relationship between education quality with loyalty and student's satisfaction. Most of the previous related research attempted to delve into the Education Quality Standards with satisfaction, for example, the strengths and weaknesses of product relative to the service quality, evaluate the students views related to education quality standard, and student's satisfaction. However, most of the higher-education studies were conducted in the western part of the world, and none of them examined Jordanian higher-education industry.
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Methodology

Population and Sample

Respondents involved in this study consisted of Jordanian and Arab students who joined Middle East University in Jordan. Choosing the right sample size is indisputably important because a reliable and valid sample can enable a researcher to generalize the finding from the sample of population under investigation (n from different faculties in MEU) Since the focus of this study is in specific MEU in Jordan, a non-probability purposive judgment sampling is considered to be the most appropriate method. The reason of using the judgment sampling was that this method practically involved the selection of the students who can provide reliable and valid responses (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2000).

Data Collection Procedures

Out of 350 questionnaires, 220 were returned by the end of June, 2015, despite many excuses and obstacles found by the author during data collection purpose. For example, most respondents were busy with lectures or assignments, and they did not have time to answer the questionnaire. In addition to the primary data, relevant secondary data was also gathered from various sources

namely, the Ministry of higher Education and Statistic General Circle (SGC), and daily newspapers.

Operationalization of Variable

The quality standards of Education was operationalized based the original measurement modified from author Alqurneh (2011). By using a five-point scale that ranges from "Highly dissatisfied" (1) to "Highly satisfied" (5).

Factor Analysis on Quality Standards

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on quality standards, including six dimensions: safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony. From the analysis, three items were for safety and security, four items for hygiene, three items for accessibility, four items for transparency, five items for authenticity and three items for harmony. The results of factor analysis on quality standards are presented in Table 1.2. The table presents the factor loading of six dimensions of quality standards items after deleting the items that show low factor loading ($<$0.50), and the results indicate that the loadings of the remaining items were from 0.50 to 0.80. The factor analysis for 22 items of quality standards provided three dimensions with eight items (three dimensions with 14 items were deleted). The three dimensions remained were; safety and security with two items, accessibility with three items, and harmony with three items. The relative explanatory power (Eigen values) for each dimension is 3.759, 1.447 and 1.017 respectively. These dimensions cumulatively captured 77.794 percent of variance in the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MAS) for all items was 0.758 which is ranged within the acceptable level i.e between 0.51 and 0.90. In other words, if the MAS value is above 0.50, it indicates appropriateness (Hair et al., 2006). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, which indicates that there is sufficient number of significant inter-correlations for factor analysis, and the assumptions of factor analysis were met. The Cronbach's Alpha of items is reliable and that's presented in Table 1.2. The results of factor analysis are also demonstrated in the following Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Summary of Factor and Reliability Analysis on Quality Standards

Name	Items	Factor Loading	Eigen-value	% Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Harmony	Efficiency in MEU (if applicable)	0.870	1.017	12.717	0.845
	Treatment equipment's in MEU (if applicable)	0.904			
	Communication facilities (interpreters, phones, faxes, Internet, mail, etc.) in MEU (if applicable)	0.788			
Accessibility	Accessibility to MEU	0.851	1.447	18.091	0.796
	Guidance signs to the site	0.746			
	Public Transportation to and from MEU (if applicable)	0.813			
Safety and Security	Entrance fees (if applicable)	0.846	3.759	46.987	0.837
	Public parking around MEU area	0.921			

Note: Items with factor loading less than 0.50 or double loading were deleted.

Table 1.3 summarizes the dimensions before and after deleting items during factor analysis and the reason for deleting those items.

Table 1.3

Summary for the dimensions before and after items deleted for Quality Standards

Dimensions	No. of items Before	Items Deleted	No of items After	Reason for Deleted

Safety and Security	3	1	2	Double loaded
Hygiene	4	4	All dimension deleted	Double loaded
Accessibility	3	0	3	None
Transparency	4	4	All dimension deleted	Double loaded
Authenticity	5	5	All dimension deleted	Double loaded
Harmony	3	0	3	None

Examination of Quality Standards that has More Impact on Destination

a. Loyalty

In order to examine which component of quality standards that has more impact on destination loyalty, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: There is a significant and positive relationship between quality standards and destination loyalty

The largest beta coefficient is β =.273 which is Safety and Security. This means that this dimension makes the strongest unique contribution to explain the dependent variable. Safety and security has also significant value less than .05 (significant = .000). Therefore, this dimension makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (destination loyalty). Other dimensions are arranged according to stronger unique contribution as follows: Safety and security =.273 beta (significant = .000); accessibility =.002 beta (not significant = .966); and harmony = .159 beta (significant = .000). This presents the variation in the destination loyalty that was statistically explained or accounted for by a regression equation. Table 1.5 below shows that Safety and Security, and Harmony were found to be very significant and supportive of the hypothesis regression whereas Accessibility was not. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between Quality Standards as in Safety and Security, which stated as follows:

The Quality Standards = 2.324 +.226 Safety and Security -.002 Accessibility + .139 Harmony. The three (3) predictors' dimensions were observed to positively correlate to the dependent variable (destination loyalty) as indicated by the R-value of .361 in Table 1.4. In other word, these dimensions can explain the change in destination loyalty. A computed (R^2) R-square value of .130 suggested that the variables were responsible for more than 13 percent of the variance in the destination loyalty with a standard error of estimate of 0.95119. The multiple regression analysis results are shown in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4

Regression Result of Education Quality Standards with Destination Loyalty

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	2.324	.136	
Safety and Security	.226	.034	.273**
Accessibility	.002-	.039	.002-
Harmony	.139	.034	.159**
R	.361		
R^2	.130		
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.95119		

Dependent Variable: Destination Loyalty

The Examination of Quality Standards that has More Impact on Students Satisfaction

In order to examine which component of quality standards that has more impact on student's satisfaction, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1-1: There is a significant and positive relationship between quality standards and Student's satisfaction.

The largest beta coefficient is $\beta = .042$, which is Accessibility. This means that this dimension makes the strongest unique contribution to explain the dependent variable. Accessibility also has significant value of less than .05 (significant = .000). Therefore, this dimension makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the mediator variable (student's satisfaction). Other dimensions are arranged according to stronger unique contribution as follows: Safety and security =.193 beta (significant = .000); accessibility = .208 beta (significant = .000); and harmony .188 beta (significant = .000). This presents the variation in the student's satisfaction which can be statistically explained or accounted for by a regression equation. Table 1.5 shows that Safety and Security, Accessibility and Harmony were found to be significant and supportive of the hypothesis regression. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between Quality Standards as in Accessibility, which stated as follows: The Quality Standards = 1.691 + .183 Accessibility + .222 Safety and security + .189 harmony. The three (3) predictors' dimensions were observed to positively correlate to the student's satisfaction (the mediator variable) as indicated by the positive R-value of .458 in Table 1.5. In other words, these dimensions can explain the change in student's satisfaction. A computed R-square value of .210 suggested that the variables were responsible more than 21 percent of the variance in the student's satisfaction with a standard error of estimate of 1.03980. The multiple regression analysis results are shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5

Regression result of Education Quality Standards with Students Satisfaction

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	1.691	.149	
Safety and Security	.183	.037	.193**
Accessibility	.222	.042	.208**
Harmony	.189	.038	.188**
R	.458		
R^2	.210		

Std. Error of the Estimate	1.03980

Dependent Variable: student's satisfaction.

Examination Whether student's Satisfaction Mediate the Relationship between Quality Standards and Destination Loyalty

To examine whether Students Satisfaction was a mediator in the relationship between Quality Standards and Destination Loyalty, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1-3: Student's satisfaction mediates the relationship between quality standards and destination loyalty

Table 1.6

Summary of Beta Value on the Relationship of Student's Satisfaction between Quality Standards and Loyalty

Criterion Variable Destination Loyalty			
Variable			
	Without	With	Result
Safety and Security	.272**	.140**	P
Harmony	.159**	.043	F

Note: F = Full mediator

P = Partial mediator

**P<0.01

Table 1.6 indicates that Safety and Security were a partial mediator between Student's Satisfaction and Loyalty. It also shows that harmony fully mediated the relationship between Student's Satisfaction and Loyalty.

Discussion and Limitation

The global competitiveness in business environment has made quality as one of the most important sources of competitive advantage for the education business destination. Each business management is aware of the fierce competition in every sector, and customer has never been a greater asset. It is no longer sufficient just to maintain a business, and it is necessary to move forward if a business wants to achieve a sustainable future. The researchers looked at quality as an important variable to be successful in business and services, and thus influence customer satisfaction. The safety and security of a destination site plays a role in determining the level of attractiveness of the place. The finding of this study indicated that Safety and Security, Harmony had a positive impact on student's destination loyalty which means that Jordan's Safety and Security is favored or liked by the students, and therefore, increased their level of loyalty towards the destination they had chosen. The limitations of the study lie in the associations among the key variables separated into antecedents comprising of many levels within time constraints. This limitation was treated in a professional and a statistical way. Having this in mind, the researchers managed to carry out the study within the limited scope and completed the required processes successfully. Another limitation is the lack of studies regarding Jordan's Higher Education, and hence the researchers had to make do with the limited available studies and the quite extensive ones in other sectors, and particularly in the developed countries. Following the same line of limitation, there is also lack of studies regarding the comparison of research between regional countries based on the similar type of education. Studies like these may have assisted in identifying the rearrangement of the services and pricing policies as well as other variables which influence student's satisfaction. It is advised that future research may be helpful they are focused on other functionalities for the purpose of enhancing the Higher Education sites or other parts of the Education sector which could in turn contribute to the improvement of destination loyalty. It is also advised that future research may make use of staff knowledge and their time and effort, their qualifications and their experiences in the higher-education sites in every level of management, which could be considered as a good variable influencing student's satisfaction and student's loyalty. Moreover, future researchers should attempt to identify and add to the required variables in the antecedents of the student's satisfaction framework, for instance, pull and push motivation in Jordanian Universities. Doing so will greatly help the Jordanian Higher Education to improve and expand. Finally, future

research might attempt to integrate the triangulated approach of a research process by involving both qualitative and quantitative strategies to determine the antecedents of student's satisfaction.

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