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Title

CONCEPTUALIZING STUDENT"S PERCEPTION ON ACADEMIC AND PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS USING GAP ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The intake quality of students for BE/ B. Tech program in one of the leading self finance college in Chennai is of a high order. The facilitating infrastructure is well in place. However, the institution has not been able to demonstrate exceptional student achievements by way of university ranks and awards of external recognition. The present paper attempts to understand the existing scenario with regard to student goals, attitudes, and academics. Through a questionnaire and interview procedure, an analysis is done to gauge the perception of students about academic pursuits and facilitation efforts in the institution. The perceived gaps in academic service delivery are identified, through the 'Service Gap' model and ER model. This has been done through an extensive study of reading behavior of the high potential students of the institution. It was possible to understand their perceptions about purpose, self-management, faculty contribution, and institutional measures for facilitating development. Detailed recommendations are set forth, for appropriate interventions to address the specific gaps identified through the gaps analysis. The analysis further provides useful information and opens up new avenues for future research.

Key words: Perception, ER Model, Gap Analysis, Service Gap Model,

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

Psychologists and educators have long considered the role of achievement goals in student learning (Ames and Archer, 1988; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Rawsthorne and Elliot, 1999; Valle et al., 2003). Achievement goals are commonly defined as the purpose of an individual's achievement pursuits (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Maehr, 1989). When pursuing mastery goals, the student wants to develop competence by acquiring new skills and knowledge. They value and are willing to undertake activities that allow them to improve their knowledge, and they perceive effort as a positive, effective way to achieve their goals. Mistakes are considered a normal step in the learning process (Bouffard and Couture). In contrast, students pursuing performance goals are more concerned with demonstrating their abilities relative to other students. Here, efforts are perceived negatively. Students with a performance goal see

intelligence as fixed, avoid challenging tasks in an effort to avoid negative evaluations, are less likely to be intrinsically motivated, and consider errors as indicative of a lack of ability (Gonzalez et al). Besides mastery and performance orientation, some authors also distinguish a work-avoidance orientation (Meece et al., 1988; Meece and Holt, 1993). Students with a work-avoidance orientation try to avoid failure even without hard work, so achievement is represented as completing a task with as little effort as possible.

A variety of studies has shown that different goal orientations determine students' cognitive and behavioral reactions as well as their educational performance (e.g., Ames, 1992; Ames and Archer, 1988; Valle et al., 2003). Generally it is assumed that students are more satisfied and achieve better performance if they pursue a mastery orientation or a more intrinsic motivation (e.g., Fortune et al., 2005). Students with a mastery orientation seem to be more willing to pursue challenging tasks, have positive feelings towards the learning situation, and exhibit an adaptive attributional pattern (Ames and Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1988). Mastery goal orientation is often linked to long-term and high-quality involvement in learning. Performance goals, in contrast, are hypothesized to be associated with negative outcomes, such as surface processing of study material or reduced task enjoyment. Many works therefore suggest that students should be encouraged to adopt mastery goals and minimize their adoption of performance goals (e.g., Ames, 1992).

More recent studies disagree with the mastery goal perspective. They indicate that in specific situations performance goals can also promote the development of competences (e.g., Harackiewicz and Sansone 1991) and call for a re conceptualization of goal theory, which acknowledges the positive effects of performance goals. It has also been pointed out that the different goal orientations do not necessarily need to be treated as opposites. For example, Meece and Holt (1993) found that students could be high in mastery motivation and also high in performance orientation, while others could be low in both dimensions. Since at least the 1990s, there has been a sustained research focus on how multiple goals interact and jointly influence student learning and achievement (e.g., Wentzel 1991, 1993; Wolters et al., 1996). From this viewpoint, achievement goals are seen as complementary and it is acknowledged that students can pursue a mastery, performance, or work-avoidance orientation simultaneously (e.g., Valle et al., 2003).

Assessing students' achievement goals can provide valuable insights into differing ways they engage in, evaluate, and perform in academic learning. Analyzing how orientation relates to academic engagement and performance has significant theoretical and practical implications for administrative, curricular, and instructional decision-making and practices (Elliot and Dweck, 1988; Meece and Holt, 1993). If educators and administrators want to improve the academic experience of college students, understanding the potential factors that enhance motivational strivings should therefore be of primary concern.

METHODOLOGY:

The present research was done to understand the existing scenario with regard to student goals, attitudes, and academics. The college is already highly ranked in several academic quality metrics. This paper also aims at enhancing the value and image of the Institution. The challenge for the institution is to emerge as a top rate academic institution, to create an intense activism amongst students on campus for learning, doing, achieving, and leading.

A descriptive research design based study is conducted using a sample size of 100 students drawn from the scholarship holders of BE II year, III year, final year MBA and MCA programs. Through a questionnaire open discussion and interview procedure, an analysis is done to gauge the perception of students about academic pursuits and facilitation efforts in the campus.

The students were briefed on the purpose of the study and administered a questionnaire comprising fifty questions. The topics related to academics, purpose, self- managing, faculty, and preparation for leadership.

The following three conceptual models form the basis for the study:

1. Entity-Relationship Model for an academic institution
2. Gaps Model of Service Quality by *Valery Zethaml and Joe Bitner*
3. Relationships between factors relevant to developing transferable skills, by Shiela Cameron

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The research concentrated on student's perception in different academic, psychological and personality dimensions. The perception of the students with respect to various dimensions was captured through the questionnaire and open discussion. Based on the responses and opinions, an action plan is recommended.

Dimension 1. Personality Development

i) Confidence Building

Student's Perception

The first aspect of personality development is confidence building. The students opinioned that appreciation by faculty and peers, for any achievement by them will definitely build confidence.

Recommended Action

- To acknowledge and publicize student achievements.
- Sponsor top 10% students for special training in technology/ management

ii) Communication Skills

Student's Perception

Need for fair and periodic evaluation of students' communication skills is necessary to indicate the current level of competence

Recommended Action

- Periodic communication skills assessment to be conducted; viza viz online tests and quizzes
- Every student must be required to clock 20 hrs of communication skills training, every semester, for both oral and written expression
- Strengthen the communication lab with audio video facilities for 100 capacity
- Recruit top quality communication team
- Co opt external experts
- Placement aptitude tests, at least 20 hrs in a semester

iii) Exposure

Student's Perception

Students should be encouraged to participate in external workshops, quizzes, debates & seminars. Guest lecturers by eminent personalities in the relevant field should be organized on a regular basis. The methodology of learning along with experimentation is not followed in the college

Students generally do not take up in-house or industrial projects that can supplement the learning in the course

Recommended Action

- Active and regular participation in events / competitions organized by top institutions/ companies like IIT, IEE, Isis, Microsoft Ltd, Google, IIM, NIT.
- Inter institution as well as dept. quizzes & debates both technical & general should be organized in each semester
- About one third of each course in each programme should include lectures by resource persons from industry and top
- Project work may be introduced in most of the courses.
- Exposure to standard industry oriented tools for some of the specialized courses

Dimension2. Scholarly Attributes

Study revealed that a good scholar possessed certain special attributes. He had clarity of purpose. His grasp on the subject was very strong. He kept himself aware about environment. He was motivated to engage in self- study and could reflect on his own performance and do critical thinking. He had the capability to apply the knowledge he gained and finally he was aware of his social responsibility

Students' Perception

It was found the most of the students are not actually aware about these special attributes of a good scholar. Their perception was that this information should be communicated to all the

students. In addition, efforts should be taken to ensure that scholars are directed towards a specific goal be it higher education, good placement, or becoming an entrepreneur.

Recommended Action

- The most successful leaders from all over the world to interact with students about goals and purpose of outstanding academic achievements.
- Benchmark against other top ranking institutions
- The best answer sheets of students to be discussed in the class, in detail. What makes an answer sheet impressive?
- Successful alumni must share the ideas on importance of good academics.
- Online tests to indicate the student's level of preparation and readiness for exams.
- Faculty to review important technical/ general category books in the class.
- The top students should participate in workshops on problem solving, critical thinking and lateral thinking.
- Each student to do a minimum of 20 hours of social work- sanitation, education, healthcare and rural economy

Dimension3. Mentoring (Quality, Periodicity)

Students' Perception

Students should be allowed to choose their own mentor Mentors should have regular interaction with students. Mentoring should not be restricted to academic counseling only. Mentors should guide on social issues too.

Recommended Action

i) The top 10% students may be given the option to choose mentor.

ii) External panel of Mentors from industry should be identified to guide top students.

iii) Mentoring workshop by experts to be arranged for faculty.

iv) Mentors to be available at all times, if necessary on e-mail or telephone. Meetings to be organized on request from either parties

Dimension 4. Academic Excellence (achieving university ranks)

Students' Perception

The students were of the view that it is not an objective worth pursuing. According to them scoring good marks does not necessarily imply depth in knowledge or possession of better skills. They were also not very happy with the consistency of the university examination and evaluation system. Many students only studied during their study holidays. This last ditch effort did not always translated into good marks There was also the problem of not sustaining their enthusiasm till the end of the semester."

Recommended Action

i) Inspiring achievers to interact with top students- will help in clarity on the need for academic excellence.

ii) Through publicity and awards, attract the top 300 students in CET of Anna Unit/ AIEEE.

iii) One- third of the classes in each course to be handled by expert faculty from industry/ top institutions- IIT/ IIM/ Isis.

iv) Communicate to students about the background and achievements of the faculty, and the research work being done by them.

v) Communicate the idea of faculty as feeders of knowledge.

vi) Support the faculty for equipping themselves to command the respect of students- through experiential exposure.

vii) Top 10% of the students in each class to be trained thoroughly:

- ✓ *Solve 5 yrs university question papers/ extra bank*
- ✓ *Examination handling guidelines*
- ✓ *For the very brave: Rigorous' tough' problem solving exercise to maximize scoring in quantitative subjects; introduce hard core algorithmic methods to handle university exams*

- ✓ *Revision of theory for both short and long answer questions*

Dimension 5. Academic Rigor

Students' Perception

"Course lacks academic rigor"

"Time is not constructively utilized"

Recommended Action

i) Motivational training to the top 10% for achieving academic excellence.

ii) Offer the top 10% students opportunity to attend best of class workshops. They should share their experience with the rest of the class.

iii) The workload to be increased- assignments for theory, and tests for problem solving. Tutorials for all quantitative courses- 06 hrs/ week.

iv) Top 10% students to solve extra question banks using the library and computing facilities.

v) Rigorous continuous evaluation based on class participation, notes taking, projects, presentation, term papers, case studies and problem exercises.

vi) Evaluate self- study and textbook reading effort by students.

Dimension 6. Placement

Students' Perception

The students were of the view that mostly software companies come for placement therefore there were not much placement opportunities in the core area"

Recommended Action

i) Intensive effort to get non-IT companies, from all over India, to campus, e.g., ABB, BSES, Compton Greaves, L & T, REL, BHEL.

ii) Intensive effort to get IT product development companies, from all over India, e.g., Microsoft, Google, Oracle, Adobe, Motorola, IBM

Dimension 7. Motivation

Students' Perception

Scholarships are based on past performance in qualifying examinations. But it is not always true that only the scholarship holders are bright. There are others too who could be potential winners.

Recommended Action

i) To introduce a spirit of competition, offer Rest. 500 award on the basis of internal marks in each subject and Rest. 5000 for overall internal marks, in each semester, for the top 10% of the class.

ii) Publicity for the top ranking students- internals and university.

iii) Offer Incentives/ Scholarships based on:

- ✓ internal assessment for courses and overall
- ✓ project (Individual & Group)
- ✓ demonstration of leadership skills
- ✓ organizing skills
- ✓ external participation
- ✓ best attendance

FIG 1 ENTITY–RELATIONSHIP MODEL FOR AN ACADEMIC INSTITUTION - GEETA SANTOSH

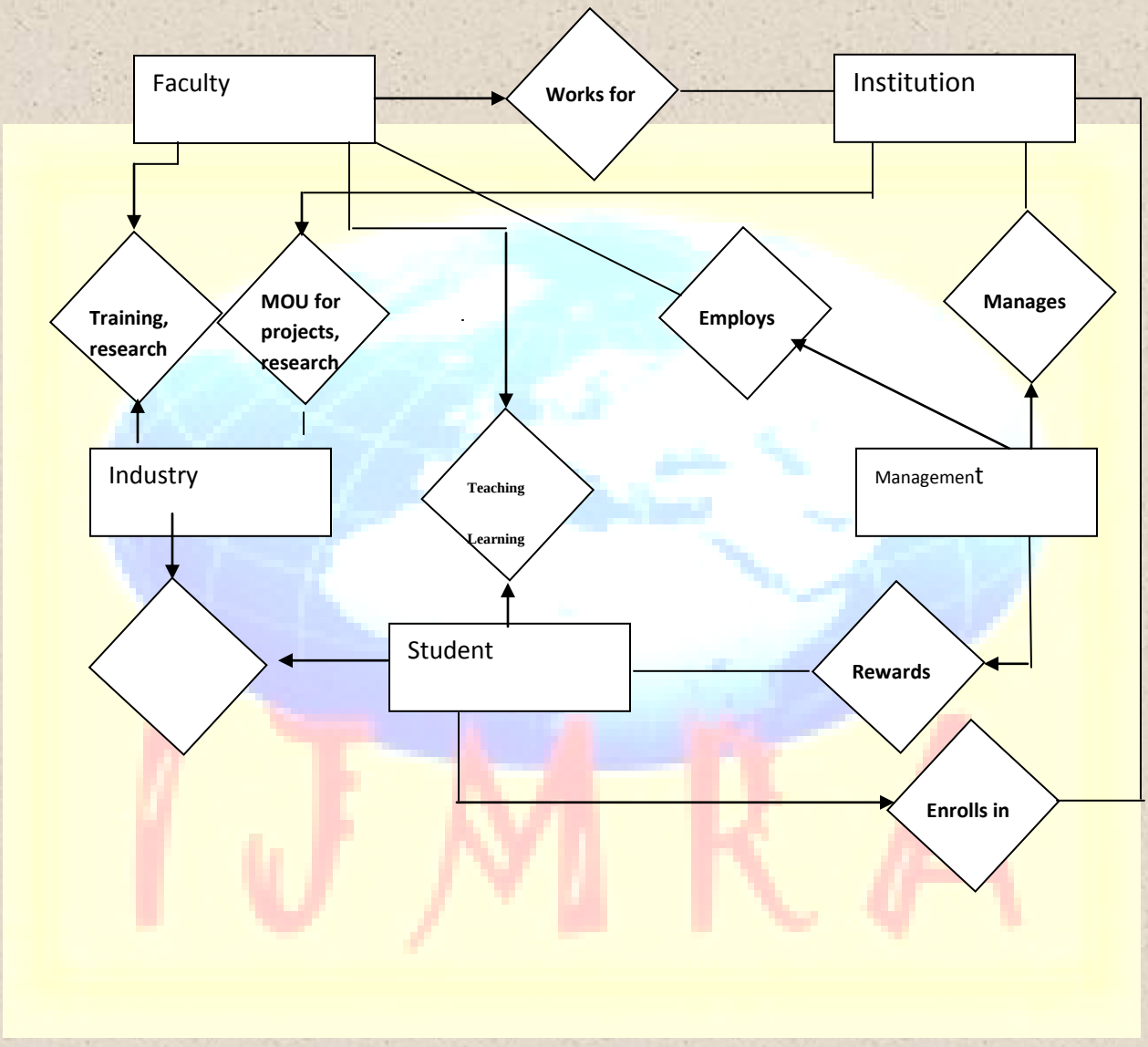


FIG 2 GAPS MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY ***(Valery Zethaml and Joe Bitner)***

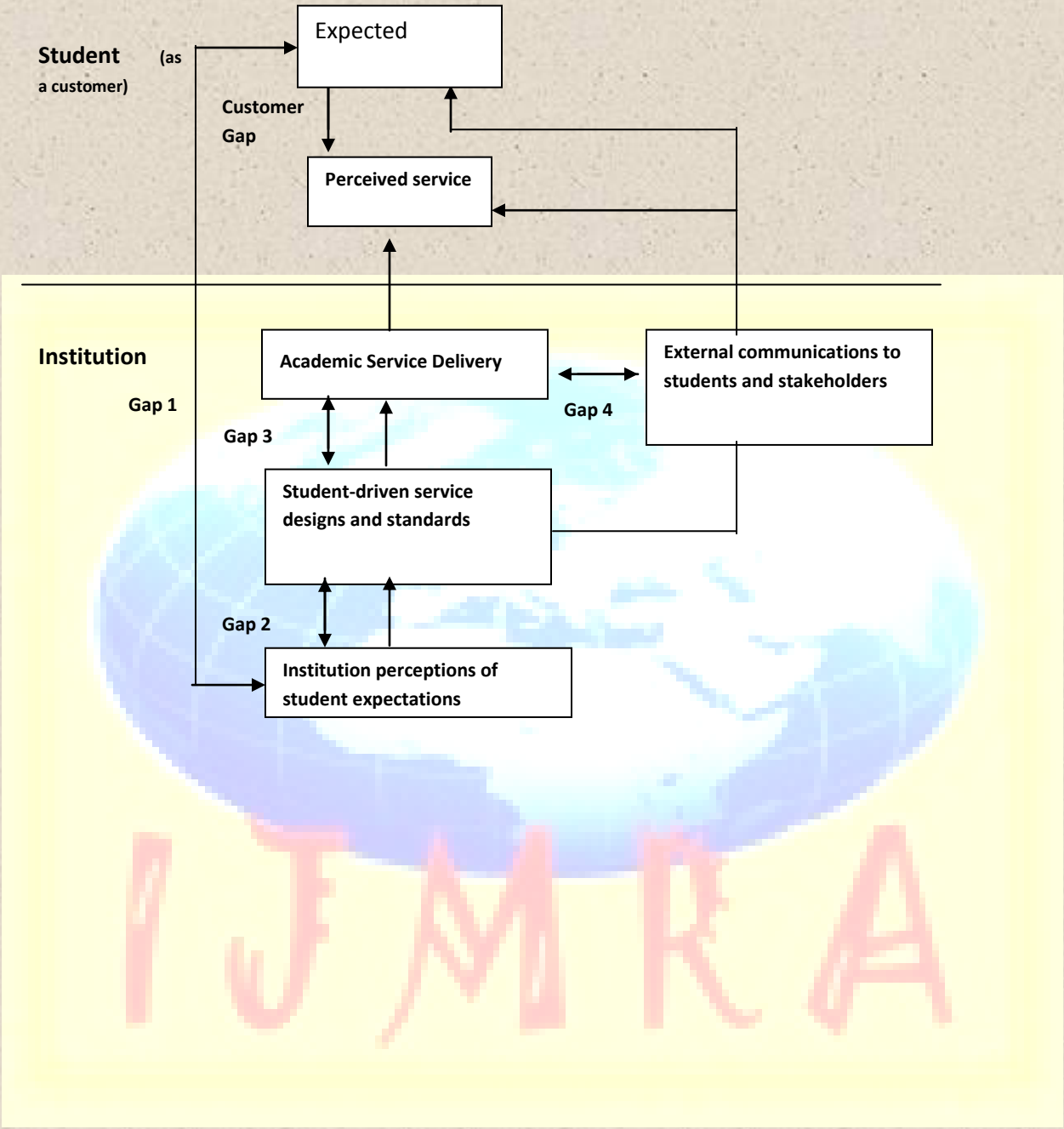
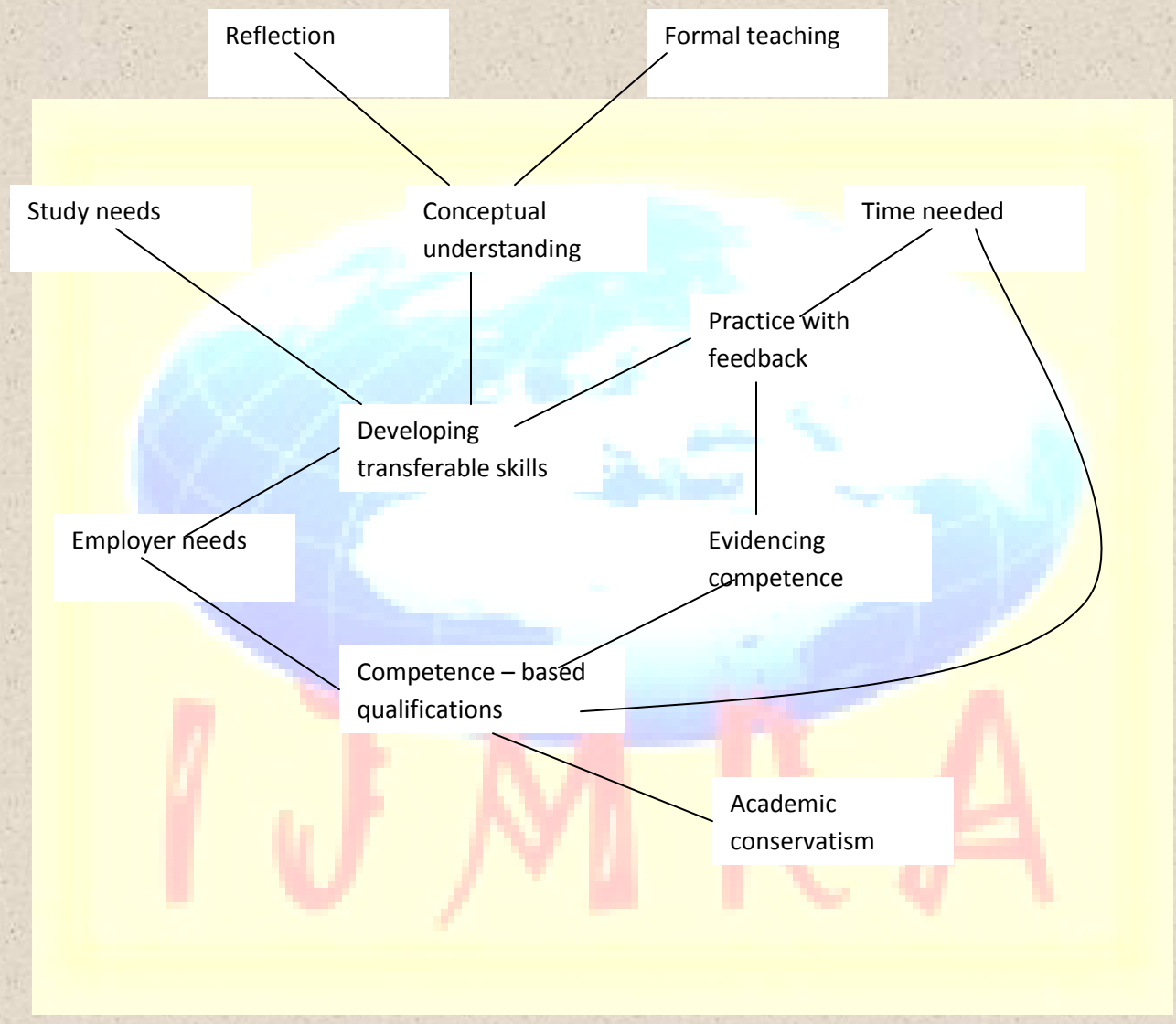


FIG 3 RELATIONSHIPS DIAGRAM SHOWING FACTORS RELEVANT TO DEVELOPING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS (Sheila Cameron, Developing Transferable Skills)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

The Entity Relationship Model (Fig1) was developed to capture the various stakeholders of the institution and the relationship between them. The study revealed many significant findings about the quality of faculty in the institution, course delivery by the faculty, academic performance of the students, attendance status of the students, study pattern of the students, and student motivation to score ranks in the university examinations The perceived gaps in academic service delivery were identified, in the context of the 'Service Gap' model by Valery Zethaml and Joe Bitner (Fig 2). This has been done through an extensive study of reading behavior of the high potential students of institution. It was possible to understand their perceptions about purpose, self-managing, faculty contribution, and institutional measures for facilitating development. A study of the relationships (Fig3).for assessing the factors relevant to developing transferable skills was also done.

Authors recommend that students within top 300 ranks in AIEEE/ CET(All India Basis) should be admitted and should be awarded special and suitable scholarships in order to ensure good quality. It was also necessary to follow this quality admission process with very strong academic rigor during the course. Specific efforts were required to be made in order to mitigate student cynicism about formal academics and thereby implementing an attitude change. In this regards, it is also imperative to set a benchmark along the lines of other top ranking institutions in the country. The average quality level of the class should be enhanced by means of giving special attention and support for top 10% of the class and mentoring and facilitating the top performers. There was also a need to step- up student exposure in order to enable them to obtain new experiences that will develop their leadership skills. For those few who achieve university ranks, the best in career path and educational opportunity should be offered. In order to improve the faculty quality special orientation should be provided for the best academic service delivery. There was also an urgent need to intensify the placement efforts. In future a similar study with faculty, alumni, parents, and other stakeholders could be done.

Detailed recommendations are set forth, for appropriate interventions to address the specific gaps identified through the gaps analysis.

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