

Critical Factors of Student Satisfaction in Private Universities of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Stiff competition among private universities has forced them to change their services and marketing strategies according to the current market situation and keeping an eye on the factors that are effecting student satisfaction. In this study researcher is going to examine the factors effecting Student Satisfaction in private universities of Pakistan. This is a quantitative study in which researcher has collected data from 341 students of private universities of Lahore through a self-administered questionnaire about Student Satisfaction and factors effecting student satisfaction. Researcher has found that factors like Quality of academic staff, university location, university facilities, university image, technology and assessment & feedback are very important for student satisfaction in private universities of Pakistan. The most important factor according to this research is University Image for student satisfaction, while Assessment & Feedback is the 2nd most influencing factor, Quality of Academic staff is the 3rd most important factor. Technology is 4th most important factor. University Facilities are on 5th place to influence student satisfaction and university location has the lowest impact on student satisfaction. Understanding of these Factors would help private universities to plan their future academic strategies and polices in a better way.

Keywords: Student satisfaction, University image, University location, University facilities

Background

During recent years there have been a great expansion in education sector round the globe. The phenomena of globalization and digital age have given birth to varied demand in terms of new

disciplines. Similarly the cost of education is also on the rise due to the introduction of new technologies in teaching methodologies and teaching instruments (Napitupulu et al., 2018). The entry of so many educational institutes has intensified the competition level in education industry. On other hand, students are more informative than ever before due to advent of information technology (Islam, Gul, & Rahman, 2017). So this cut-throat competitive environment calls for special consideration from educational policy makers to attract the new students and retain the existing ones. They need to know the factors that student consider while making a choice about a university.

During the last two decades in Pakistan, there is a profound transformation in the university sector especially private. Too many new universities started working during last fifteen years. Establishment of higher education commission of Pakistan (HEC) in 2002 is a milestone in this regard. During 2000-2019 many new universities are established. In 2000 Pakistan only had 45 universities and institutions (degree providers) but the number rise to 208 in 2019 (HEC) which exaggerate the competition level especially among private universities of Pakistan.

In line with above discussion, the private universities in Pakistan have more competition in the higher education market, which threaten the survival and growth of some of the current universities so this study will be helpful for the universities and their management to identify the factors that are influencing the satisfaction and retention of students in the context of Pakistan.

Many studies have been done on the satisfaction of the student worldwide like, Awais et al., (2019), Riva, Tunna & Rubel, (2019), Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, (2019), Hornby, (2018), Weerasinghe & Fernando, (2017) but very little is known in the context of Pakistan. Secondly, according to the best knowledge of the researcher, very few studies considered all these factors that are included in the present study simultaneously to assess the satisfaction of the student. Finally, the phenomenon of satisfaction of the student is very complex and it cannot be assumed that the factors influencing student satisfaction in one country will remain same in other countries as well.

There have been different studies in existing literature to find out the critical factor affecting student satisfaction. For example in his study Hornby, (2018), mentioned that the most important

factor affecting the satisfaction of students in Australian universities was teaching quality. Meanwhile, Farahmandian, Islam, Gul, & Rahman, (2017) indicated that teaching quality and student satisfaction don't have any relationship in Malaysian context. In South Korea, university image has the most important influence on student satisfaction (Chung, Jung and Lee 2017). Same findings were share by Hemsley-Brown et al., (2010) in the context of German universities. But in a study Ali et al., (2016) mentioned that the access to facilities is the most influential predictor of student satisfaction.

In Spain teaching staff, teaching methods and course administration have a significant effect on student satisfaction levels (Weerasinghe and Dedunu, 2017). Weerasinghe & Fernando, (2018) confirmed that university facilities are the most influential factor of student satisfaction.

So based on the above discussion it is clear that the factors influencing Student Satisfaction are different in different countries so it means that there is no universality of factors of Student Satisfaction and there is a dire need to investigate the major factors of Student Satisfaction in the context of Pakistan which may be helpful for policy makers of private universities.

Literature and Hypotheses

Student Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is most studied topic in the subject of marketing because identification of the customers is very important for every business and get their satisfaction for getting more business so as students are universities customers so they are working for getting more satisfied student which in the end provide more profit, according to Rudge (2014), students are customers and other universities are the competitors, so it's important to get more students to get competitive advantage over others. Satisfaction of the students is a serious issue in an organization's progress, in the context of universities, students are customers and their satisfaction is an important feature for *universities* (Ali et al., 2016). According to old literatures, students are customers of the private university. Students are choosing universities very carefully (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Universities are going to accept the concept of students is customers, and universities are now treating students as customers (Dužević, Delić, & Knežević 2017).

According to the concept “student is customer”, universities become manufacturers and deliverers of services. Similarly, supporters of a student are customer model claim that this concept forced universities to enhance their services and fulfill the students’ needs. Watjatrakul (2014) argued, if universities (service providers) recognize the outlines that motivate students (service receivers) have positive behavior towards receive their education, so universities have to work on fulfilling students’ needs. Likewise, according to Elliott & Healy (2001) “Student Satisfaction is a short-term attitude”. Sapri, Kaka, & Finch (2009) stated that the role of satisfaction of the student is very important in defining the accuracy and reality of the services provided by universities. Education is like a service industry where the satisfaction of the customer with the service is important. Kumar (2012) defines that “Customer satisfaction in the service is the difference between the customer's expectations and the actual performance of the service. Barnett (2011) also supported that quality for services provided by the university is only identifies by the satisfaction of the students. In broader picture, students are the customers of private universities; students are the reason of the existence of the universities, so the satisfaction and retention of the student should be the goal of universities (Khalil-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018). Satisfaction of the student is an attitude of short-term which give the assessment of a student’s educational experience (Elliott & Healy, 2001). A satisfied student is generating positive word-of-mouth of the university (Kwun et al., 2013). The services, facilities and educational experiences which student gets during his/her study duration are impacting on the level of Student Satisfaction (Weerasinghe & Dedunu, 2017 and Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018). Level of Student Satisfaction relates to the level of services and facilities provided by universities (Mukhtar et al., 2015). Martirosyan (2015) stated that the satisfaction level of students varies from university to university. Sapri, Kaka, & Finch (2009) also define that different cultures and procedures difference is affecting satisfaction level towards education at universities. According to Wilkins & Huisman (2013) link between student-university relationship and satisfaction of the student is very strong, as satisfied student were found to involve in various actions that benefits that university, as they are choosing to study at same university for further education, promoting university in friends and family or serving the university after competition of education, simply by connecting themselves with the university throughout the life.

Factors of Student Satisfaction

Quality of Academic Staff

The quality of academic staff has a very strong effect on the satisfaction of university students (Pham & Nguyen, 2020). The quality of academic staff, their qualifications, and their teaching skills also have a positive impact on students' satisfaction (Hussein & Abdul, 2012). In the last decade, universities are using new teaching methods to attract students and to fulfill university needs in a highly competitive world of education and getting the satisfaction of the student (Martínez-Caro, & Campuzano-Bolarín, (2011). The academic staff of the universities includes professional and administrative people with duties that are defined with universities (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). The quality of teaching is too much important for the overall quality and image of the university and for the satisfaction of the student with long term effects (Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes, 2006). The performance of academic staff is very important inside and outside the class for student's loyalty, motivation and satisfaction towards university (Abdullah, 2006). According to, (Yusoff, McLeay, & Woodruffe-Burton, 2015) academic staff quality has a very significant and positive impact on students' satisfaction. Based on the above the hypothesis is:

H1: Quality of academic staff has a positive impact on the student satisfaction.

University Location

The University location is characterized on the bases of convenient accommodation, transport system, proficient learning, work opportunity enjoyment and wellbeing offices around the university. According to Hansen & Solvoll (2015); a good location of the university has a significant and very strong positive effect on the satisfaction of students of the university. Similarly, the security situation of the area of the university has a very strong influence on female students (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018). Inch, & Sun, (2013) stated that the effect of students' satisfaction is generally positive with the area of the university if the area has entertainment facilities and is surrounded with a good community and community resources. Based on the above the hypothesis is:

H2: University location has a positive impact on Student Satisfaction.

Technology

We are living in a world of technology. Technology has an endless effect on the teaching and learning of university students (Bonk, Kim & Zeng, 2005). Various technological tools have changed the educational process, like communication, interaction and data transfer technologies not only improve the skills of the students but also improve the procedure of lecture delivery (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). During the last decade, universities have changed their conventional learning process into e-learning. E-learning has a very huge role in the dramatically growth of universities (Allen & Seaman 2003), In the world of technology students have high expectations from universities in different aspects one of the most important aspects is, use of the technological tool for learning process these tools are enhancing students' learning abilities. So, technology is playing the role of catalyst in improving teaching and learning procedure which improved student performance and also the university performance. This study states that there is a very strong and positive relationship between the use of technology in universities and students' loyalty and satisfaction (Kong & Yan 2014). Based on the above the hypothesis is:

H3: Technology has a positive impact on Student Satisfaction.

Assessment & Feedback

Students of different cultural and different nationalities have different styles of assessment and learning and as the distance increase between the students' nations and countries; the difference in assessment styles and learning becomes huge. Hofstede (1984), work on lower levels of student satisfaction. Satisfaction level of the university students and the marks which students are awarded in feedback/ valuation surveys have impact of too many factors, like student's academic accomplishment (O'Donovan, 2017). Empirical studies strongly support the relevance of changes in universities towards improving the quality of teaching and learning (Harman & Bich, 2010). Within the reforms, feedback is assuming a noticeable role. According to Wanner, & Plamer (2018) feedback is essential to the business of teaching. Rhodes (2016) guided us that feedback is one of the most significant parts of the assessment procedure. Feedback provides benefits to all stages of education, across all content areas. Based on the above the hypothesis is:

H4: Assessments & Feedback has a positive impact on Student Satisfaction.

University Image

The brand name, university reputation and ranking are called the image of the university. Tsedzah & Obuobisa-Darko (2015) stated that; the university image has a very strong impact on student satisfaction and loyalty. University image is a picture of ideas, feeling and old experiences of the university in the minds of students and their parents, (Foroudi et al., 2019). University image is influenced by different factors like the building of the university, academic programs, qualification and experience of the academic staff, university location and surroundings (Weerasinghe & Dedunu, 2017). University image is one of the most important factors affecting student satisfaction (Duarte et al., 2010). University image is summarized in this study as a supposed picture of a university that is built in the minds of students from their old experiences. Panda et al., (2019) and Duarte et al., (2010), stated that the image of the university has direct influence on the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the students'. Based on the above the hypothesis is:

H5: University image has a positive impact on Student Satisfaction.

University Facilities

Good quality of university facilities like the library, Wi-Fi, common study area, computer labs etc. are very important for satisfaction of the students (Zhai et al., 2017). Universities worldwide are providing high class facilities to their students; these facilities are helps students to complete their projects, courses and research in the university (Awang et al., 2010). Facilities are designed and built for providing smooth working and learning supports to the students in the university (Karna & Julin, 2015). In this study researcher discuss the quality of the university facilities like conditions of a classroom, availability of books in the library, computer labs and there conditions, s hostel facilities and conditions of the rooms and cleanliness of cafeterias. Yusoff, McLeay, & Woodruffe-Burton, (2015), state the strong relationship among university facilities and student satisfaction. Karna & Julin (2015) and Hansen & Solvoll (2015) also discussed this relationship based on the above the hypothesis is:

H6: University facilities have positive impact on Student Satisfaction.

Methods

The students studying in private universities of Lahore city are intended population for present study. The study has used convenience sampling technique. The data were collected from students of different private universities of Lahore. Researcher distributed 425 questionnaires among students of different universities of Lahore. A total of 341 fully filled questionnaires were returned that were used for data analysis purpose. Hence the response rate remained almost 80% percent that is reasonable.

Instruments.

In this study, Questionnaire consists of seven constructs. The items for Quality of Academic staff, University Location, University Facilities, University Image, Technology and Assessment & feedback are independent and Student satisfaction is dependent variable. A five point Linkert Scale has used, from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The variables of Quality of Academic staff, University Location, University Facilities, University Image were adapted from (Khalil-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2019). The variables of Technology, Assessment & Feedback were adapted from (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, M.S. 2013). The variable of Student Satisfaction consists of three items; these items were adapted from (Hasan & Ilias, 2008).

Analysis of Results

There were total 341 respondents in questionnaire among them 210 were male (61.6% of total participants) and 131 were females (38.4% % of total participants).

Table 1: Gender of Participant

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 210 | 61.6 |
| Female | 131 | 38.4 |
| Total | 341 | 100.0 |

The participants are divided in to 5-age groups that are Below 20, 20-25, 26-35, 36-45, and above-45, total 63 respondents has age Below 20 (18.5% of total participants), 125 respondents has age between 20-25 (36.6% of total participants), 87 respondents were of age between 26-35

(25.5% of total participants), 61-repondents were of age between 36-45 (17.9% of total participants), and there were 05 respondents above the age of 45 years(1.5% of total participants).

Table 2: Age Group of Participant

| Age Group | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| Below 20 | 63 | 18.5 |
| 20-25 | 125 | 36.6 |
| 26-35 | 87 | 25.5 |
| 36-45 | 61 | 17.9 |
| Above 45 | 5 | 1.5 |
| Total | 341 | 100.0 |

The participants are divided into 4-groups according to their education these groups are 4 Years bachelors, Masters, MPhil and others. There were 164 respondents are enrolled in 4 years bachelor programme (48.1% of total participants), 47 are masters (13.8% of total participants), 116 respondents were enrolled M.Phil (34.0% of total participants) and finally 14 were enrolled in other fields (4.1% of total participants).

Table 3: Education of Participants

| Level of Education | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 4 YEARS BACHELOR | 164 | 48.1 |
| MASTERS | 47 | 13.8 |
| MPHILL | 116 | 34.0 |
| OTHERS | 14 | 4.1 |
| Total | 341 | 100.0 |

Table 4 expresses the results of reliabilities and AVE. As it is obvious from the table that all results of both reliabilities such as alpha values and composite reliability are producing good

enough results which means that the items of each variable are consistent with other. Similarly the values of AVEs are also beyond the threshold level of 0.5 except on value of variable ULC (0.47) but as this value is very close to 0.5 so the authors still feel that it is also in acceptable range. Except ULC value, all other values are well above of the cut-off value of 0.5.

Table 4: Cronbach's α , Composite Reliability and AVE

| Constructs | Cronbach's α | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------|
| QS | 0.810 | 0.822 | 0.54 |
| ULC | 0.884 | 0.893 | 0.47 |
| TCH | 0.795 | 0.813 | 0.76 |
| ANFF | 0.909 | 0.918 | 0.56 |
| UMG | 0.915 | 0.930 | 0.51 |
| UFF | 0.912 | 0.923 | 0.53 |
| STS | 0.815 | 0.826 | 0.51 |

Table 5 displays the statistical findings of correlation, descriptive analysis and discriminant validity in terms of square root of AVE (presented in bold values for each variable). As it can be seen from above table that all variables are positively and significantly associated with each other as indicated by the results of correlational analysis which is good indicative in the context of hypotheses testing. The highest value of correlation is observed between variable UMG and STS that is 0.64** and lowest value is between QS and UFF that is 0.41**. However all values are showing modest level of correlation which means there is no issue of Multi- Collinearity.

Table5: Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and discriminant validity

| | Means | S.D | QS | ULC | TCH | ANFF | UMG | UFF | STS |
|------|-------|------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----|-----|
| QS | 3.62 | .811 | (0.74) | | | | | | |
| ULC | 3.44 | .924 | .49** | (0.68) | | | | | |
| TCH | 3.90 | .910 | .45** | .48** | (0.87) | | | | |
| ANFF | 3.23 | .876 | .57** | .53** | .56** | (0.76) | | | |
| UMG | 3.59 | .838 | .58** | .49** | .61** | .53** | (0.71) | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| UFF | 3.28 | .871 | .41** | .52** | .50** | .54** | .57** | (0.73) |
| STS | 3.63 | .846 | .46** | .44** | .48** | .51** | .64** | (0.72) |

Model Assessment

We tested the modeling model by evaluating the relevant models to show how well the data fit into the concept. First, we implemented the measurement model in AMOS (Figure 1), Fortunately all the results were in acceptable range so we did not delete any item or drew co-variations among some observed variables. The measurement model results are present in table() All fit indices were above the cut-off value which mean the measurement model is well established as shown by statistical results.

Table 6. Results of Absolute Fit Indices and Incremental Fit Indices.

| Type | Measures | Cut-off Value | Obtained Value | Type | Measures | Cut-off Value | Obtained Value |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------|---------------|----------------|
| Absolute Fit Indices | CMIN/DF | <3 | 2.340 | Incremental Fit Indices | CFI | >0.9 | 0.910 |
| | RMSEA | <0.08 | 0.049 | | NFI | >0.9 | 0.923 |
| | GFI | >0.9 | 0.909 | | TLI | >0.9 | 0.915 |

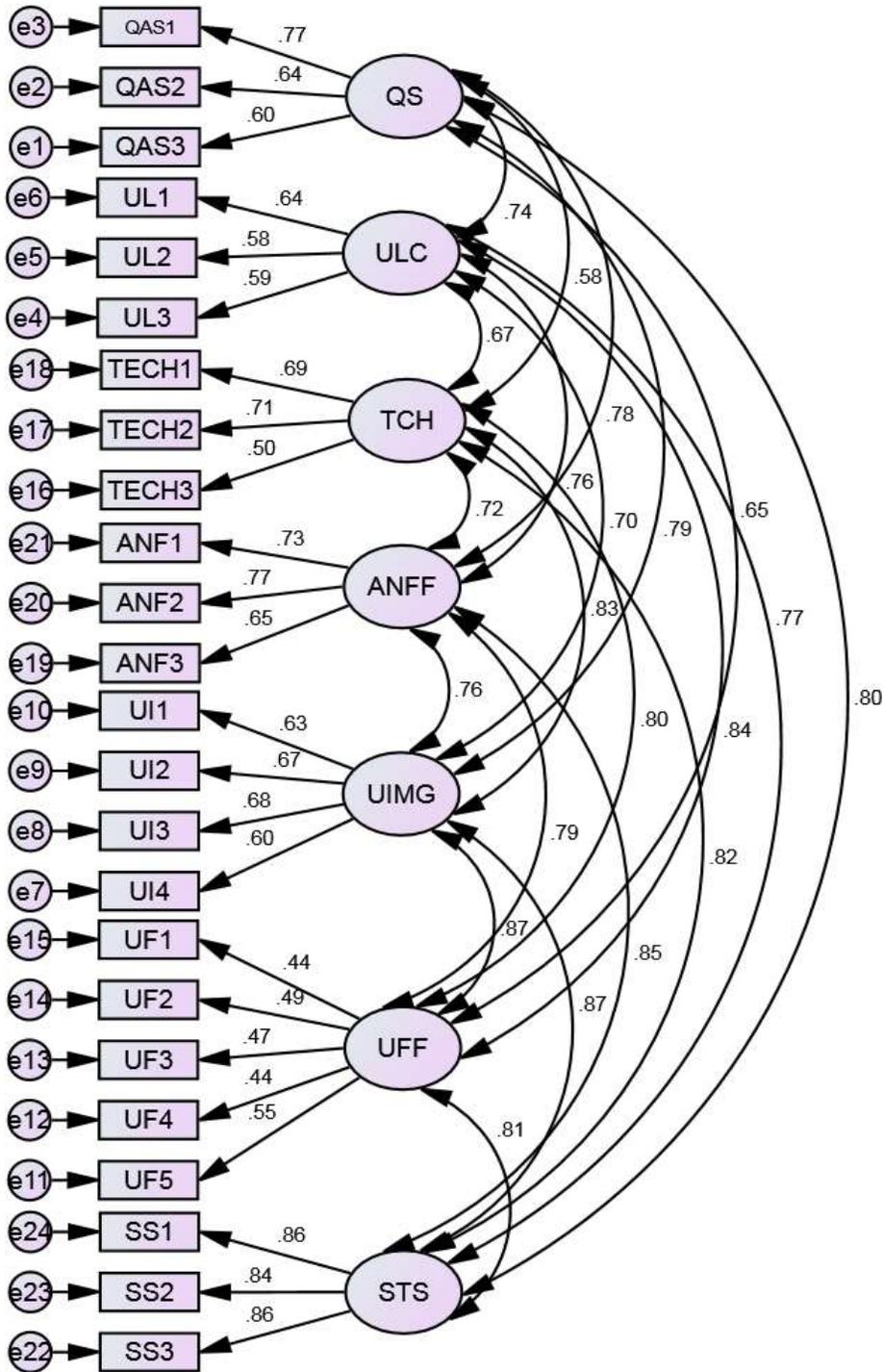


Figure 1: Measurement Model

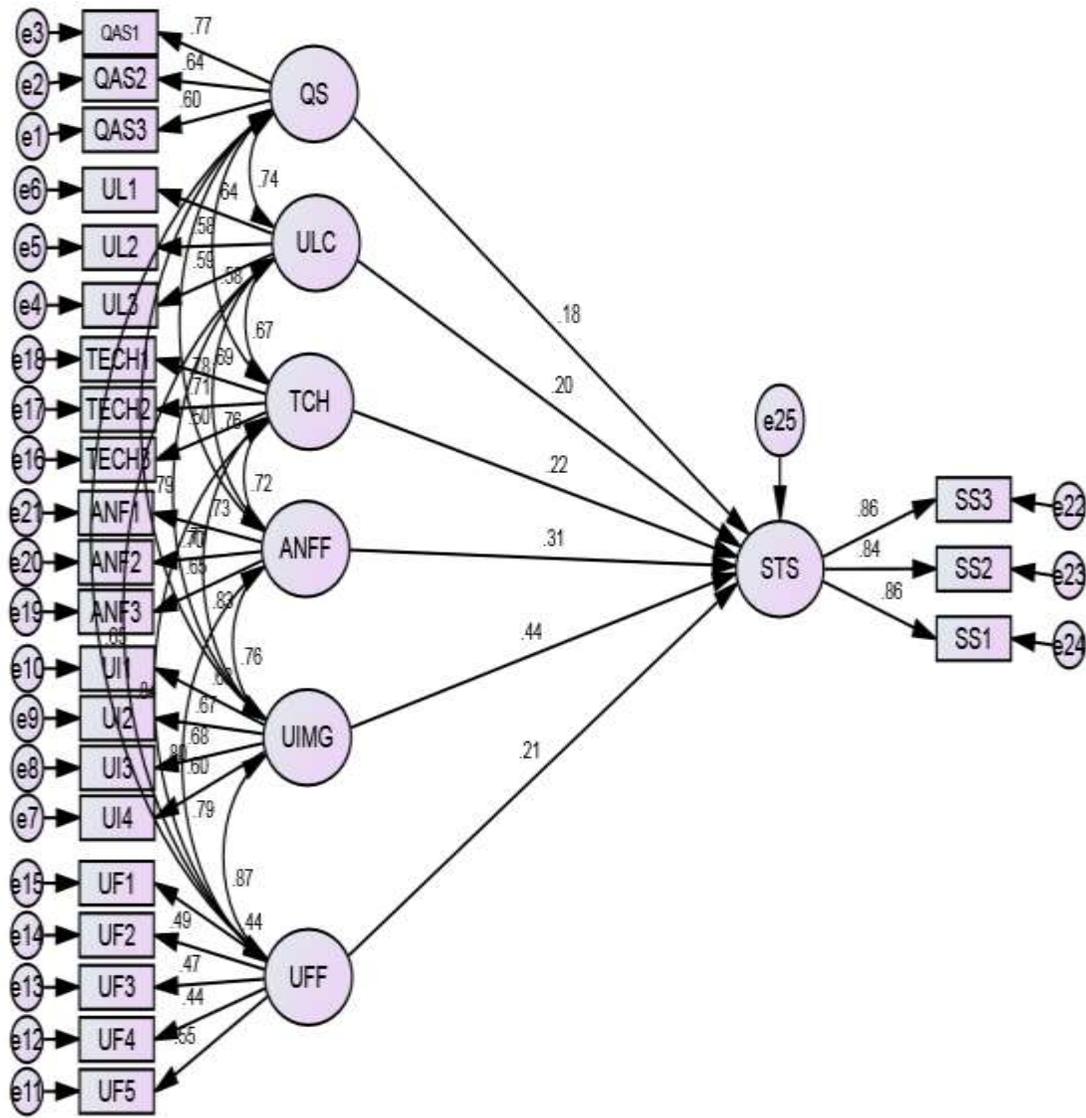


Figure2: Structural Model

For hypotheses testing, we executed structural equation modeling (SEM) which is an advanced level technique for hypothesis analysis and testing. According to the results of SEM, all six hypotheses are proved to be true as verified by the empirical results. So all of our six independent variables are positive predictors of student satisfaction in private universities of Pakistan. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the most powerful predictor among six is university image of a private university which contributes the most to create a high level of satisfaction among students.

Table7: Results of hypotheses testing

| Hypotheses | Structural Path | β value | P-Value | Significant/In Significant |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|---------|----------------------------|
| H1 | STS<----QS | 0.18 | *** | Significant |
| H2 | STS<----ULC | 0.20 | *** | Significant |
| H3 | STS<----TCH | 0.22 | *** | Significant |
| H4 | STS<----ANFF | 0.31 | *** | Significant |
| H5 | STS<----UMG | 0.44 | *** | Significant |
| H6 | STS<----UFF | 0.21 | *** | Significant |

Discussion & Conclusion

Universities are playing very important role in the development of any nation and private universities are not only providing education to the students but also providing business and profit to the investors. The goal of private universities is to get more and more students that they can get more business and ultimately profit. Student satisfaction is very important factor for universities now days and for increasing satisfaction of the students universities are working on many things like providing facilities and trying to fulfill the demands of the students and their parents, there are many factors which are effecting satisfaction of the students in this study researcher has tried to discussed few important factors like “quality of academic staff”,

“university location”, “university facilities”, “university image”, “technologies” and “assessment and feedback”. According to the data we have collected from different private universities “university image” is the most impacting factors which have huge impact on satisfaction of university students. Image of the university is factor which is not only important for current students but also too much important for getting new admissions. University image forced students and their parents to choose university. The 2nd most impacting factor is assessment and feedback according to present research. With the changes in the field of education the importance of assessment and feedback increase very rapidly assessment helps teachers directly and students indirectly to improve the skills and to know the strength and weakness of students. Quality of Academic staff is the 3rd most important factor poor quality academic staff is the strongest reason of students’ dropouts once a student joins an university the role of academic staff starts now the behavior of the students too much depends on the abilities and qualities of the staff. After Quality of Academic staff comes technology we are living in the world of technology, technologies used in university impact students not only on their studies but also improve their satisfaction towards university. University facilities are also important for students, a university which is providing more facilities to students gets more satisfied students and university location is come in the last. Location of the university is important for getting more students but if a university have good image, high quality teaching staff and are providing latest technologies to their students but the location is not that much good they are still be able to get students satisfaction.

Implications

This study has few implications for the private universities. Every university is working on different type of strategies for getting maximum enrollment. This study suggests these private universities about few important factors that will help universities to get maximum enrollment. As this study found that “University Image” is the most important factor among all factors, while “Assessment and feedback” is 2nd important factor, “Quality of academic staff” is at 3rd position, “technology” is at 4th position, “University facilities” is at 5th position, “University Location” is at 6th position, or the least important factor among all other factors.

“University Image” is 1st and most important factor which attract the students while they are searching a university. Positive image is the 1st factor which attracts upcoming students and their parents towards any university. Old students are making image of any university either positive or negative, so universities have to work hard for making their positive image after that they don't need any advertisement for new enrolments. Assessment and feedback is getting more and more attraction of students now day's universities with strong Assessment and feedback system are being able to see true picture of their strength and weakness. Assessment and feedback also reacts a strong bond between students and teachers. No university can survive without high quality academic staff, there the most important for making a positive image of the university. In the world of technology universities can't survive without updates technologies in their campuses. Technological gadgets are helping both teachers and students during lectures and research oriented programs. University students need latest facilities from universities during their educational period. Technological, technical, educational, all type of facilities have their impact on students and on their satisfaction. In the last university location is also important for universities it's become difficult to all the necessary facilities inside university so if the university have to good location more than 50% facilities are already there, security situation of the area has very strong impact of female students. So universities can improve their strategies and planning with the help of this research.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are many factors that are playing role for satisfying university students, present study is not covering all factors. New researchers can work on impact of these factors on student satisfaction, like fee structure on the university, university resources, student expectation, study programmes, scholarship and financial aids etc. Present study is only taken data from private universities of Lahore new researchers can work on wider frame by taking data from universities of different cities and can work on comparative study among cities and they will be able to check which factor is important for which city, like present study is showing that “University Image” is the most impacting factor for student satisfaction.

One more study can be done to determine the impact of subsidiary factors, like personal factors, family background, academic achievements of students etc. New researchers can conduct a

qualitative study to understand more about reasons why students are influenced by certain factors. Continued research should be conducted because of the changing in the factors with the time. As governing bodies, economic conditions and institutions change policies, the factors which influence student satisfaction will change. This study is only covering students of Lahore city because of limited resources and time, future researchers can work on the students of different city for getting more comprehensive results.

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