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### EXAMINING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ABOUT QUALITY OF ACADEMIC & ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES IN PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Due to imminent rise in the competition of educational sector, universities are striving for their brand positioning by inclining the number of students in order to maximize the profitability ratio. As an intangible service sector, Universities can get the sustainable competitive advantage in the market by providing the excellent service quality instead of playing on the number of students. So, this study aims to examine the students' perception about the provision of quality academic and non-academic services and their sustainable outcomes for the university. In this regards, academic and non-academic services are used as independent variables, students' satisfaction as a mediating variable and students' loyalty and motivation are dependent variables as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Data was gathered through self-administered close-ended questionnaire from a sample of 300 students of higher education sector of Lahore, Pakistan (100 students from public sector universities and 200 from Private sector universities). For analysis purpose, AMOS 22 and SPSS 24 were used to confirm the validity concerns and determine the proposed relationship among selected variables. The output revealed that academic and non-academic services have significant positive impact on students' satisfaction and it can lead towards students' motivation and loyalty towards the university. This study provides a 'snapshot' to the university management about the provision of current service quality and gives

suggestions to improve the service quality within minimum resources to get the sustainable competitive advantage in the market.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1970, World has witnessed a dramatically transformation of economic system from manufacturing economies to service economies(Grönroos & Ojasalo, 2004; Youtie & Shapira, 2008). Among various service sectors, higher education sector proved as an economic engine (H. S. Abdullah & Kalianan, 2009; Sultan & Yin Wong, 2010). In conjunction to this significant importance, educational environment is extremely dynamic and challenging that creates the stiff intensifying competition in both public and private sector provisions(Abdullah Hokoma, Khan, & Hussain, 2008; Quintal, Wong, Sultan, & Yin Wong, 2012). The emergence of globalization and internationalization of educational trends drives the educational institutes to focus on the sustainable competitive advantage instead of short term influence, visibility and market share(Cervero, 2000; Hune & Park, 2010).

In today's competitive academic environment, students have many options to avail nationally and internationally and so the students' attraction, satisfaction, retention and loyalty are major apprehensions for an educational institute(Brotherton, Rockey, & Etzel, 2005; Cervero, 2000).To address this challenge, extensive review of literature revealed that sustainable competitive advantage can only be possible through quality services; means how well the higher education institute fulfill the customers' need and expectations(Helms & Nixon, 2010; Sursock, Smidt, & Davies, 2010).

There is still a controversy around the marketing metaphor "customer" of educational institutes; we have a dire need to identify the true primary customers on which educational institutes need to focus for their attraction, satisfaction, retention, motivation and loyalty(Jeevarathnam Parthasarathy Govender, Veerasamy, & Noel, 2012). Michaela and Antony (2007) categorized the term "customers of universities" that includes parents, students, staff, community, funding agencies and employers. However, the students are considered as a primary customer, because students' satisfaction can lead towards the satisfaction of all stakeholders(Jeevarathnam Parthasarathy Govender et al., 2012; Jeevarathnam P Govender, Veerasamy, & Noel, 2014).

According to Hanaysha, Abdullah and Warokka (2011), to address the apprehension as mentioned above, universities need to build and maintain strong relationship with their primary customers through quality services. Despite the realization of its importance, researchers and scholars found it difficult to properly define and measure the concept "service quality" due to its unique SERQUAL model(Muhammad Butt & Cyril de Run, 2010; Nadiri, Kandampully, & Hussain, 2009).The meaning of quality varies from person to person and situation and situation associated with judgments, experiences and feelings(M. Kumar, Tat Kee, & Charles, 2010). Yadav (2012) argued that service quality is a complete

spectrum of multidimensional constructs that can be approached by different indicator. He summarized the multidimensional construct into two major distinct categories; academic services and administrative services(Krishnamurthy, SivaKumar, & Sellamuthu, 2010; Peprah & Atarah, 2014).

Earlier researchers are more focused on academic services (related to dimensions of instructor, course delivery arrangements, learning resources, and assessments) to conform the needs and expectations of the stakeholders (Konstantinides et al., 2014; Tenopir, Sandusky, Allard, & Birch, 2014). To date, many studies have been carried out to address the notion of academic and administrative services in isolation by using different and terms in different eras(Arena, Arnaboldi, & Azzone, 2010; Casu & Thanassoulis, 2006; Franklin, 2009). Unfortunately, no one can suggest the academicians a single key solution to get sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, the impetus behind this study is to narrate the academic and administrative services under the umbrella of “service quality” and its ultimate prolific outcomes in the form of students’ satisfaction. This study will further elaborate the significant role of students’ satisfaction with institutional quality services to be motivated and loyal. Accordingly, the study will be guided by the following objectives:

- To evaluate the notion “service quality” in the context of Higher education sector of Lahore, Pakistan
- To identify and explore the “services” as a multidimensional construct in the form of academic and administrative services comprehensively
- To compare the service provision (both academic and administrative) in public and private Higher educational institutes of Lahore, Pakistan
- To determine the impact of services on students’ satisfaction, motivation and loyalty
- To determine the role of mediating role of students’ satisfaction with provision of academic and administrative services to make them motivated and loyal with the institution.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Higher education services*

According to De Shields *et al.* (2005), Higher educational institution needs to understand and apply market oriented tactics and strategies to get sustainable competitive edge in the market. In pure marketing term, customer is considered as “King” whose actions and reactions determine the fate of an organization(Bauer et al., 2004; Homburg, Müller, & Klarmann, 2011). Since 1970, the dynamic and emerging economic trends highlighted the role of educational institutes as an economic engine for any nation (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007;Hanushek, Woessmann, Jamison, & Jamison, 2008; Homburg et al., 2011). This trend fosters the competition among the educational institutes especially higher education to attract, maintain and retain the customers(Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015).

In this regards, it is very crucial and important for higher educational institutes to understand the students' perceptions, expectations and needs regarding quality services to make attract and retain them (Ryals, 2005; Zameer, Tara, Kausar, & Mohsin, 2015).

### *Service quality*

Over the last three decades, service quality is the most prominent, researched and debated topic for marketer, researcher and scholars (Kotler, Keller, Manceau, & Hémonnet-Goujot, 2015). Its importance is obvious due to its significant relationship with organizational cost, customers' attraction, satisfaction, retention, loyalty, profitability and finally sustainable competitive advantage (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Researchers claimed that service quality is a abstract and elusive construct that is difficult to define and measure, it's identity can be varied from person to person and situation to situation (Baron-Cohen, 2009). The intensity and level of service quality can be measure by the barometer of customers' expectations (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). As per the analysis of Sultan and Wong (2010), service quality in higher educational institutions is relatively a new term as compared to other manufacturing and service sectors. Higher education service quality is an integrated system oriented approach that requires quality in both academic and administrative aspects (D. R. Brown et al., 2008; Car et al., 2008; Muthamia, 2016).

### *Academic services*

Academic services refers to the characteristics, processes and activities that are intended to fulfill the students' needs and expectations related to study (Manzoor, 2013; Muthamia, 2016; Voss & Gruber, 2006). The spectrum of academic services includes a wide list of activities that are embodied into quality of teachers, curriculum, learning resources, instructional practices, laboratory, library, assessment methods, and knowledge acquisition quality (Al-Ghamdi & Bakry, 2008; Antony, Jiju Antony, Kumar, & Rae Cho, 2007; Zadeh, Sahranb, & Mukhtar, 2013). Quality of academic services provided by an educational institute can be evaluated by terms and conditions that are embedded into university systems to leave mark in the educational network (Coley, Williams, DaPos, Chen, & Smith, 2002; Eaton, 2012; Majeed, Williams, Northstone, & Ben-Shlomo, 2008; Montserrat, Casas, & Malo, 2013).

### *Administrative services*

The concept "administrative services" are considered as supportive services to smoothly operationalize the systems and activities of the stakeholders (Gbadamosi & De Jager, 2009). The quality of administrative services depends upon knowledge, skills and service attitude of the administrative staff (Gbadamosi & De Jager, 2009; Gyamfi, Agyeman, & Otoo, 2012; Kara, Tanui, & Kalai).

Administrative services includes a bundle of services other academic functioning of the university as quality of registration process, cafeteria, transportation, recreational activities, social welfare system and accommodation (Colton et al., 2014; Mhlanga, Matope, Mugwagwa, Phuthi, & Moyo, 2013; Odhiambo, 2014). Due to intangibility and heterogeneity of services, it is quite difficult and challenging to differentiate the services from your competitors (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011; Nadiri et al., 2009). However, the ways to overcome the evident, educational institutes should firstly identify the needs and expectations of the students to provide the services according to them (Palmer, Bottle, Davie, Vincent, & Aylin, 2012). In order to get sustainable competitive advantage, services provision is not enough, it is equally important to explore the students' perceptions about services to rectify it (Ladhari, 2009; Llosa, Orsingher, Carrillat, Jaramillo, & Mulki, 2007; Palmer et al., 2012).

### *Students' satisfaction*

The concept of "customer satisfaction" was initially introduced and researched by Cardozo, R. in 1965. This concept got recognition in both fields of academic research and applied research as a source to get competitive edge in the desired market (Faganel, 2010; Hemsley-Brown et al., 2010). It is a sense of happiness and joy to get the required services (Hong, 2002; Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kannas, 1998). In case of Educational institutes, students are the primary customer whose perceptions, judgments, actions and behaviors' write down the fate of an organization (Woltering, Herrler, Spitzer, & Spreckelsen, 2009). So students' satisfaction is the comparative judgment between his/her expectations and received value (Mason & Weller, 2000). The confirmations and disconfirmation of students' expectations leads to students' satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Hong, Lai, & Holton, 2003; Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2011). It is a post-purchase evaluation state that can be affected by the multiple internal and external factors (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Maag, 2006). Educational institute need to match the pre-purchase expectations of students and post purchase evaluation through the proper market research, resulting in future retention, loyalty, repurchase, positive word of mouth and motivation to put extra efforts (Nauta, 2007; Sakthivel, Rajendran, & Raju, 2005).

### *Students' loyalty*

Students' loyalty is the behavioral aspect of a student to maintain the relationship with the institute in long run (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). It can be demonstrated in the multiple ways; institutional preference over others, repetitive purchase intention in the future, spreading positive word of mouth, recommending others to join, patronize the preferred institution in the future and paying the premium price over time (Grönroos, 1989; Osayawe Ehigie & Taylor, 2009). All previous studies claimed that students' loyalty can be created through satisfying his/her needs and expectations timely (Alves & Raposo, 2009; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Osayawe Ehigie & Taylor, 2009). Students' loyalty is the strategic issue for an educational

institute that entails the profitability of an organization in long run (Mohamad & Awang, 2009; Narteh, 2013). It might not be created benefit in short run but it one of the most important source and key to get the sustainable competitive advantage for which every institute is striving (F. Abdullah, 2006; El-Manstrly, Paton, Veloutsou, & Moutinho, 2011; Khokhar et al., 2011).

### ***Service quality and students' satisfaction***

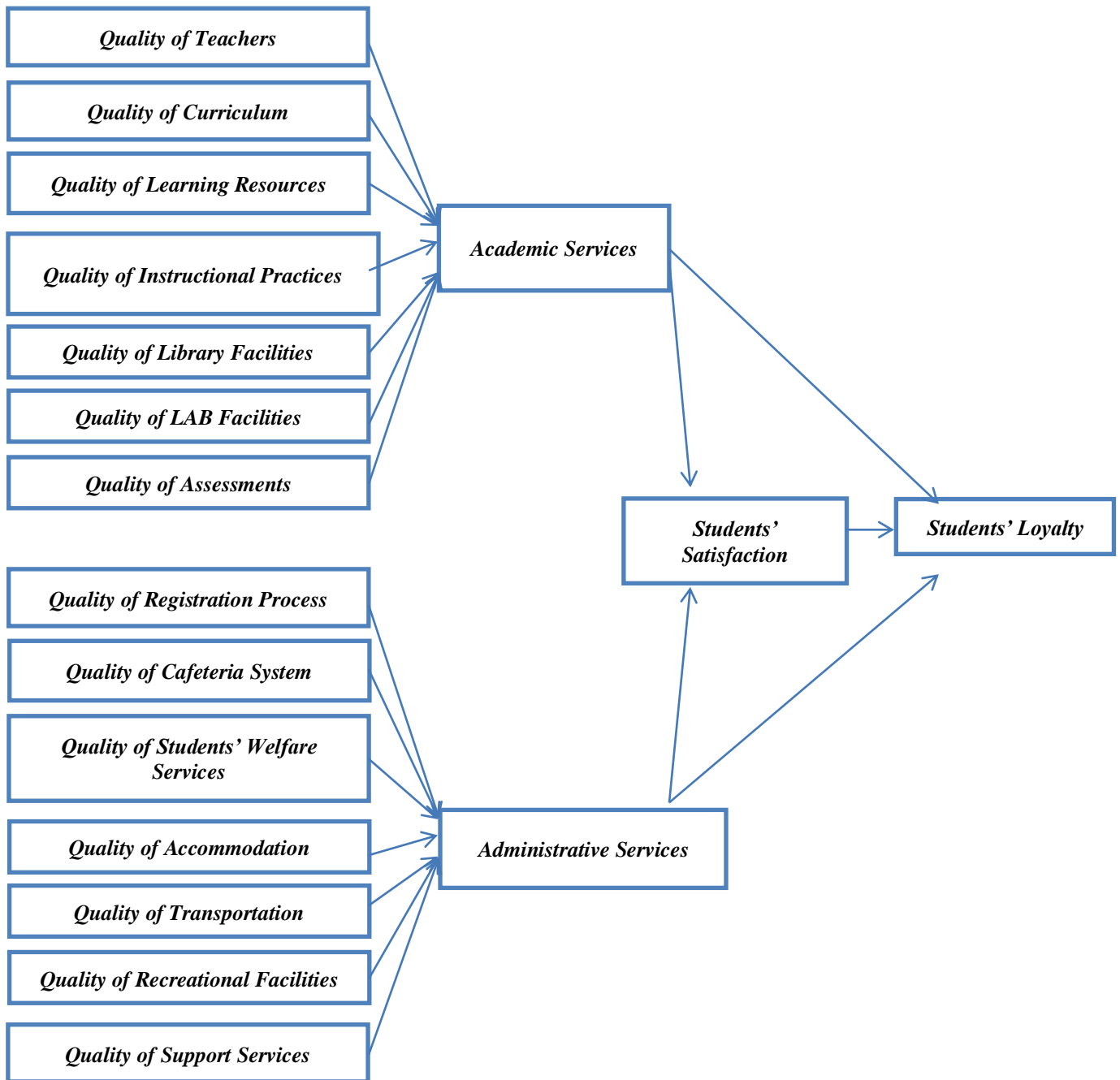
Fuß, Voss and Gläser-Zikuda (2010) claimed that student is solely representative for the success and failure of the institution. Students' satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure that can be created and affected by the quality of services provided at the university (Hasan, Ilias, Rahman, & Razak, 2009; Malik, Danish, & Usman, 2010). Service quality is an intangible characteristic that can't be stored and standardized, it can be varied according to the experiences of an individual (Colton et al., 2014; Hanaysha, Abdullah, & Warokka, 2011). To date, a lot of studies has proved that service quality in the form of academic or non-academic both is the most important and significant predictor of the students' satisfaction (Hasan et al., 2009; Malik et al., 2010; Sigala, Christou, Petruzzellis, D'Uggento, & Romanazzi, 2006; Snipes, Oswald, LaTour, & Armenakis, 2005). It is combined consensus of previous researchers that when students' needs and expectations are fulfilled within required span of time, he/she must be satisfied with the organization's systems, policies, procedures and working patterns (Chiu, Chiu, & Chang, 2007; Sigala et al., 2006). Research proved that one happy customer can create and refer ten more customers, while one unhappy and dissatisfied customer can spoil one hundred customers (Chiu et al., 2007; Ma, Sun, & Kekre, 2015; Xiang, Schwartz, & Uysal, 2015). So, educational institute should satisfy student as primary customer to get the sustainable competitive edge (Saeidi, Sofian, Saeidi, Saeidi, & Saaeidi, 2015; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). Spreng and Mckoy, (2016) proved that provision of quality services is the critical pre-requisite for creating the long term relationship with the educational institute that create the sense of happiness and joy. Previous studies are in agreement that service quality has positive significant effect on students' satisfaction (Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2012; V. Kumar, Jones, Venkatesan, & Leone, 2011; Manzoor, 2013; Razaak & Martini, 2013).

### ***Students' satisfaction and students' loyalty***

Banwet and Datta (2003) claimed that students' loyalty is one of the most important challenges of the educational institute. Students' loyalty is the ultimate output of students' satisfaction with the university systems and facilities (Ahmed & Masud, 2014; R. M. Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Gallarza & Saura, 2006). Students' loyalty is the multi-dimensional construct that involves future repurchase behavior, patronizing, creating positive word of mouth and referring other to the parent organization as an alumni (F. Abdullah, 2006; Baron-Cohen, 2009). These all loyalty aspects can only be created when institution fulfilled the students' expectations and needs regarding study, learning resources, instructor and other support services (Beerli Palacio, Díaz Meneses, & Pérez Pérez, 2002).

Students' satisfaction can be expressed through compliments and loyalty with the educational institute, while dissatisfaction with service failure can be demonstrated by switching from parent organization to the competitors (Butt & ur Rehman, 2010; Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008). Customers' satisfaction leads towards customers' loyalty that has strong long term financial impact on institution in the form of profitability (Sigala et al., 2006). It is claimed that students' satisfaction is short term evaluation/measurement of institutional success, while loyalty is long term behavioral measurement of institutional performance (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Sigala et al., 2006). From the extensive review of literature about service quality in the form of academic and administrative services, students' satisfaction and students' loyalty (Letcher & Neves, 2010; Martensen, Grønholdt, Eskildsen, & Kristensen, 2000; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004; Rojas-Mendez, Vasquez-Parraga, Kara, & Cerda-Urrutia, 2009). The following theoretical/conceptual framework is proposed;

*Theoretical Framework*



**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

*Sample and procedure*



As per the recommendations of (Rubin & Babbie, 2016), Survey design is the most appropriate technique to collect numerical data and rigorous quantitative analytical tools and techniques to identify and examined the proposed relationship between selected variables mentioned as above in literature section. This study aims to evaluate the service provision named as academic and administrative services of both public and private sector universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Furthermore, this study is intended to investigate the relationship between dimensions of service quality (named as academic services and administrative services) and students' loyalty with the mediating effect of students' satisfaction. Thus, positivism paradigm is the most suitable and appropriate to conduct empirical research by using survey design as favored by (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Systematic sampling technique was used to decide the sample size of 2 public and 4 private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. (Guha & Mishra, 2016). Students of the specific universities were treated as the unit of analysis.

A total of 300 questionnaires were randomly distributed among students of six universities of Lahore City and received back only 267 questionnaires, thus response rate of data collection was 89%. For the empirical results, , AMOS 22 was used to ensure construct and convergent validity, while SPSS 24 is quite helpful and beneficial to apply the descriptive statistics on demographic profile of the respondents and to check the direct and indirect effect of selected variables. Lastly, mediation plug-in was applied to check the mediating role of students' satisfaction among academic services, administrative services and students' loyalty recommended by Hayes, 2013 (Hayes, 2013).

From our total sample (267 cases), 211 (79%) are male students and 56 (21) are female students. For sector of study, out of the 267 respondents 189 (79%) are studying in private sector universities, 78 (21%) are from public sector universities. This shows that most of the respondents are from private sector universities. As far as qualification is concerned, 31 respondents (11.8%) are PHD Scholars, 102 (37.9%) are students of M.Phil, 61 (22.5%) are studying in Masters, 79 (29%) are doing graduation degree.

### ***Measurements***

Service quality consists of two major dimensions: academic services and administrative services. For academic services, we are considering quality of instructors, curriculum, learning resource, instructional practices, libraries, laboratory, and assessments. While, in case of administrative services, we used quality of registration process, cafeteria, transportation, recreational activities, social welfare system and accommodation. Five point likert scale was used to measure all constructs mentioned as above that adapted from adapted from; academic services (Jayasundara, Ngulube, & Minishi-Majanja, 2009), administrative services (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016; Saif, 2014), students' satisfaction (Dalati & Al Hamwi, 2016), and students' loyalty (Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2015; Patanduk, 2016).

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS/RESULTS

### *Confirmatory factor analysis (Measurement Model)*

CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) is used to check the convergent and construct validity of specified construct and to check the overall fitness of the proposed model. For CFA, AMOS 22 was used to check the required validity and fitness concerns. The output of Table 4.1.1 shows that all factor loadings, AVE and CCR of given construct are greater than .60, 0.50 and 0.70 as a required standard value. This means that all constructs possess construct reliability and convergent validity. Table 4.1.2 reveals the overall moderate fit indices of four factors CFA for the direct effect (GFI=.921, AGFI=.826, NFI=.910, TLI=.931, CFI=.956 & RMSEA=.025) and for indirect effect or mediation model (GFI=.913, AGFI=.856, NFI=.967, TLI=.921, CFI=.965 & RMSEA=.037). For the discriminate validity, topologies mentioned by Fornell and Hair et al. was used (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). Table 4.1.3 demonstrates the results of discriminate validity in which AVE of all constructs were greater than maximum MSV & ASV and most importantly, square root of AVE of each construct was also greater than its correlation. The results discussed as above shows the discriminate validity of each given construct

**Table 4.1.1** Results of confirmatory factor analysis and Convergent validity and construct reliability

Variables	Standard Loadings	AVE	CCR	Cronbach Alpha
Academic services	0.802	0.625	0.891	0.991
Administrative services	0.932	0.612	0.734	0.806
Students' satisfaction	0.891	0.598	0.896	0.937
Students' Loyalty	0.910	0.521	0.621	0.894

**Table 4.1.2**  
Model Fitness

	Direct Effect	Indirect Affect
<b>GFI</b>	.921	.913
<b>AGFI</b>	.826	.856
<b>NFI</b>	.910	.967
<b>TLI</b>	.931	.921
<b>CFI</b>	.925	.965
<b>RMSEA</b>	.025	.037

	<b>AVE</b>	<b>MSV</b>	<b>ASV</b>	Acad S_all	AcadS_a ll	StdS_ all	StdLoy_al l
AcadS_all	0.518	0.554	0.292	<b>0.743</b>			
AcadS_all	0.721	0.204	0.146	0.386	<b>0.859</b>		
StdS_all	0.531	0.391	0.372	0.564	0.562	<b>0.737</b>	
StdLoy_all	0.683	0.321	0.248	0.357	0.477	0.639	<b>0.828</b>

**Note:** Diagonal value: Square root of AVE and Non-diagonal value: correlation

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 4.2.1 exhibits the results of descriptive statistics in the form of minimum, maximum, mean and lastly standard deviation. In this research study having a survey of 53 items, in which the respondents' feedback vary between 1-5. The results show demonstrate the variation of different items like mean range from 3.12-3.74), standard deviation varies between 0.899-1.124). See the following results;

<b>Name of Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. D.</b>
Academic services	267	1	5	3.12	1.056
Administrative services	267	1	5	3.50	1.124
Students' satisfaction	267	1	5	3.24	.967
Students' Loyalty	267	1	5	3.74	.899

### *Regression analysis*

SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) is used to check direct and indirect effect of quality services (academic and administrative services) on students' satisfaction and students' loyalty. Table 4.3.1 and table 4.3.2 demonstrate the direct and indirect effect of different constructs of service quality on students' outcomes (as dependent variable). The regression coefficients among academic services, administrative services and students' satisfaction are (0.834, 0.264) while among academic services, administrative services and students' loyalty are 0.251, 0.765, 0.625. It has been found that these all constructs are significant at 0.05 level, it means results supported our hypothesis: 1, 2, 3, 4& 5.

Hypothesis tested	Independent variables	Dependent Variables(Student s' Satisfaction)		Dependent Variables(Student s' Loyalty)		Remarks
		$\beta$ coefficients	P-value	$\beta$ coefficients	P-value	
H1	Academic services	.834	<b>0.000</b>			Significant
H2	Administrative services	.264	<b>0.010</b>			Significant
H3	Academic services			.251	<b>0.010</b>	Significant
H4	Administrative services			.765	<b>0.002</b>	Significant
H5	Students' satisfaction			.625	<b>0.031</b>	Significant

**Note:** Significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Hypothesis tested	Independent variables	Dependent Variable(Students' Loyalty)		Remarks
		$\beta$ coefficients	P-value	
H6	AcadS → StdS → StdLoy	.256	<b>0.000</b>	Significant
H7	AdmSS → StdS → StdLoy	.284	<b>0.000</b>	Significant

**Mediation Analysis (Plug-in Hayes)**

Hayes (2013) model is used to check the mediating effect of students' satisfaction between constructs of service quality and students' loyalty. The constructs of service quality are academic services and administrative services while students' loyalty is an outcome variable.

For mediation, we have to conform three conditions; existence of mediation, effect of mediation and statistically significance level of mediation. Existence of mediation will be checked by 'p-value', mediation effect will be confirmed by the value of 'effect' and significance level will be ensured by the values of 'Boot LLCI

& ULCI'having similar signs. From the output in Table 4.4.1 shows that for H6, students' satisfaction acts as a statistical significant mediator between academic services and students' loyalty (p-value=0.000, effect=8.210 & Boot LCCI=0.1352, Boot ULCI=0.0021), for H7, students' satisfaction acts as a statistical significant mediator between administrative services and students' loyalty (p-value=0.000, effect=7.251 & Boot LCCI=0.0625, Boot ULCI=0.0054). Hence, it is proved that students' satisfaction is a statistical significant mediator between both constructs of service quality and students' loyalty.

**Note:** Significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed)

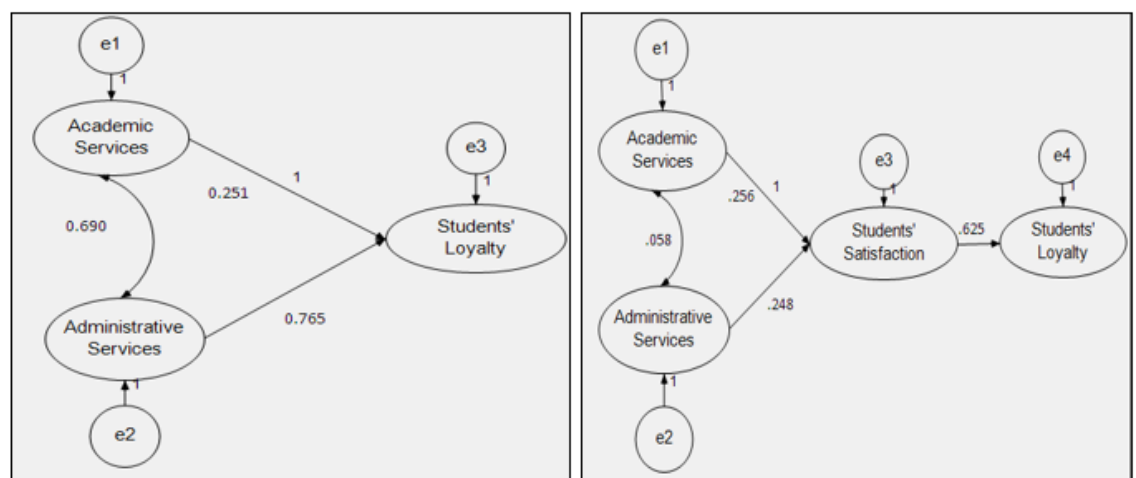
## DISCUSSION

Earlier in 19<sup>th</sup> century, economies focused on manufacturing sector for its expansion and scalability that is considered as a symbol of economic growth (Nadiri et al., 2009). Later on, the dynamic trends transform the focus from manufacturing to service sector (Mohamad & Awang, 2009; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). As the result of fundamental restructuring of the economies, higher education faced demand of knowledge-intensive economies to enable individual to grasp the opportunities that are prevailing in the market (Palmer et al., 2012). Higher education sector is now deemed to be an economic engine for the nation. It is the need of the time that higher education should produce competent, capable and skillful human resource that can suggest the creative and innovative solutions to the impossible problems (Peprah & Atarah, 2014). This ever-growing demand on higher education intensified the competition among higher educational institutes to make effort and war for their survival in the market. For this, educational institutes should conform the quality standards of academic and non-academic services provision to their stakeholders (Ryals, 2005; Saeidi et al., 2015). Educational institutes have a list of stakeholder like students, parents, family, society, funding agency, quality assurance authoritative bodies, councils and government bodies that need to be satisfied in order to get the sustainable competitive advantage in the market (Saif, 2014; Samdal et al., 1998). Among all these stakeholders, student is the primary stakeholder and customer who is treated as the king of the state, whose feelings, perceptions, actions and reactions can affect the fate of an educational institutes. In pure marketing term, customer is always right (Peprah & Atarah, 2014). From the extensive review of the literature, it has been notified that customer loyalty is the main source to get the sustainable competitive advantage that can be obtained by customer satisfaction (Palmer et al., 2012).

In this regards, this study is intended to evaluate the academic and non-academic/administrative service provision of the education institutions to their students. The spectrum of academic services includes a wide list of activities that are embodied into quality of teachers, curriculum, learning resources, instructional practices, laboratory, library, assessment methods, and knowledge acquisition quality (Taei, 2008; Jiju et al., 2007; Nayef University, 2008; Accreditation Commission of Higher Education, 2012). While Administrative services includes a bundle of services other academic functioning of the

university as quality of registration process, cafeteria, transportation, recreational activities, social welfare system and accommodation (Owino, Oanda & Olel, 2011; ROK, 2014; Ngethe, 2013; Ndirangu & Udoto, 2011 ). Here we have used academic and administrative services as independent variables, students' satisfaction is mediating variable and students' loyalty is dependent variable. In totality, this study is conducted to identify and investigate the mediating model of students' satisfaction between service quality and students' loyalty. To collect data, 300 questionnaires were randomly distributed among students of six universities of Lahore City and received back only 267 questionnaires, thus response rate of data collection was 89%. For the empirical results, , AMOS 22 was used to ensure construct and convergent validity, while SPSS 24 is quite helpful and beneficial to apply the descriptive statistics on demographic profile of the respondents and to check the direct and indirect effect of selected variables. Lastly, mediation plug-in was applied to check the mediating role of students' satisfaction among academic services, administrative services and students' loyalty recommended by Hayes, 2013 (Hayes, 2013).

From the empirical analysis and results of direct effect, it has been observed that academic and administrative services has significant relationship with students' satisfaction by varying the strength level (demonstrated by regression coefficient 0.834, 0.264 that are significant at 0.01 level), and students' loyalty (demonstrated by regression coefficient 0.251, 0.765, 0.625 that are also significant at 0.01 level). These results supported our Hypotheses; H1, H2, H3, H4, &H5. For indirect effect, the results reported that for H6, students' satisfaction acts astatistical significant mediator between academic services and students' loyalty (p-value=0.000, effect=8.210 & Boot LCCI=0.1352, Boot ULCI=0.0021), for H7, students' satisfaction acts astatistical significant mediator between administrative services and students' loyalty (p-value=0.000, effect=7.251 & Boot LCCI=0.0625, Boot ULCI=0.0054). Hence, it is proved that students' satisfaction is a statistical significant mediator between both constructs of service quality and students' loyalty.



Note: Significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed)

## **CONCLUSION**

Across the globe, dynamic economic trends fostered the need to grow educational sector as an economic engine. Educational institutes are considered as knowledge economies that are responsible for the production and generation of competitive and capable individuals to grasp the opportunities prevailing in the market. Literature claimed that knowledge intensive nations can rule around the world. In this regard, it has been identified that we should evaluate the conditions of our educational sector especially higher education and suggest them a key to get sustainable competitive advantage in the world. To address this apprehension, this study aims to evaluate the service provisions and their impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of their primary stakeholder 'student'. The satisfaction and loyalty of student can create the financial and non-financial outcomes for the institution as well as economy. By using rigorous statistical tools and techniques, academic and administrative services proved as strong predictor of students' satisfaction and ultimately create students' loyalty. The results of mediation recommended by Hayes (2013), demonstrate that students' satisfaction acts as a strong mediator between constructs of service quality and students' loyalty. This study provides recommendations to the management of higher educational institutes to provide the quality academic and administrative services to make their students satisfied and loyal with the institution in order to get the sustainable competitive advantage.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has certain limitations due to lack of resources named as time, financial and human resources. This study is purely quantitative based that is conducted within Lahore city only. Very small sample size (300 students of 6 public and private universities) was inducted to examine the students' perception about quality of services (academic and administrative services) provided by universities of Pakistan. This study is cross-sectional in nature that can be expanded to other cities and universities and it can also be conducted from the students of schools and colleges to explore the level of service quality. This study can be more enriched by using other research methodologies and design as well as increasing the number of participants.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In particular, this study is being conducted to fulfill the two major objectives. Firstly, it enriched and extended the literature of academic and administrative services provided by the universities to enhance the students' satisfaction level that will ultimately create the loyalty of the student towards the organization. This loyalty can be academically and practically explained as the positive worth of mouth created by the students regarding university practices. Moreover, students will be considered as more loyal if they prefer to become the part of university in the future. Secondly, this study provides the recommendation framework for the policy makers and practitioners of universities as well as Higher Education

Commission to design and implement the best policies in order to enhance students' level of satisfaction and loyalty.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Survey questionnaire*

I invite you to participate in my research project named as '**Examining student's perception about the quality of academic and administrative services: an empirical study in the context of Higher Education sector of Lahore, Pakistan**'. I have attached a short survey about my study. I hope, you will cooperate with me regarding survey completion. If you take voluntary part in the survey, it would only require 10–15 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. For each of the questions, please select the option that best reflects your answer.

All the information provided by you will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. The overall results of this study can be shared with you on your request.

Name		of		Participant(Optional):	
<b>1. Gender</b>		<b>2. Qualification</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Male		<input type="checkbox"/> PhD Scholar			
<input type="checkbox"/> Female		<input type="checkbox"/> M.Phil Scholar			
		<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree			
		<input type="checkbox"/> Graduation			
<b>3. Sector of Study</b>					
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Sector University					
<input type="checkbox"/> Private Sector University					

✓ Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale provided. Check ( ) the corresponding number beside each statement.

1 = Strongly disagree (SDA)

2 = Disagree (DA)

3 = Neutral (N)

4 = Agree (A)

5 = Strongly agree (SA)

Sr. No.	Statements	Scale				
		1 SDA	2 DA	3 N	4 A	5 SA
<b>1.</b>	<b>Service Quality</b>					
<b>a.</b>	<b>Academic Services</b>					
1.	Instructor makes a real effort to understand difficulties that students may be having with their work.					
2.	Instructor here normally gives helpful feedback on how we are going.					
3.	Instructor is extremely good at explaining things to us.					



4.	Instructor work hard to make subjects interesting.					
5.	Instructor of the courses motivates students to do their best.					
6.	University curriculum includes attractive content and ability to stimulate students' interest.					
7.	The library resources were appropriate for my learning and research work.					
8.	Where it was used, the information technology in teaching and learning was effective.					
9.	It was made clear what resources were available for learning and research.					
10.	Computer labs are adequate and accessible.					
11.	The campus facilities are well-maintained.					
12.	Relevant learning resources were accessible when I needed them.					
13.	The library services were readily accessible.					
14.	The course seemed focused in testing what I had understood.					
15.	Questions asked in the course exams were thought provoking.					
16.	To do well on the courses we really need good analytical ability.					
17.	It would be impossible to get through the courses just by working hard around exam time.					
18.	Feedback on student work is provided in the form of marks, grades and interactive sessions with the teachers.					
19.	The courses have helped me to develop my problem-solving skills.					
20.	The courses have helped develop my ability to work as a team member.					
21.	There was sufficient flexibility in my course to suit my needs.					
22.	The content of the courses within my major is valuable.					
23.	The courses have helped me develop the ability to plan my own work.					

24.	The course content was organized in a systematic way.					
<b>b. Administrative Services</b>						
1.	The university administration knows students' needs in detail.					
2.	The university administration is interested in meeting student needs.					
3.	The university administration responds to student complaints and grievances.					
4.	The university administration responds to student complaints and grievances.					
5.	The university collects information regularly from students to improve its services.					
6.	Necessary data collection and analysis are available for community needs identification.					
7.	There is adequate communication between the university and community groups.					
8.	The university performs its expected community service role.					
9.	Sufficient parking is available at the university.					
10.	The appearance and design of the university buildings fit their functions.					
11.	Lectures halls are appropriate for teaching.					
12.	The appearance and design of the university buildings fit their functions.					
13.	It is easy to access the university (availability of transportation).					
14.	The university has adequate sporting facilities for students.					
15.	The university has adequate and appropriate hostel facilities for students.					
16.	The university provides adequate support mechanism for needy Students.					
17.	The university promotes an independent students' union.					
18.	The university provides adequate career counseling and advising.					
<b>2. Students' Satisfaction</b>						
1.	The institution fulfils my expectations.					

2.	The institution is just how I would like them to be.					
3.	I am satisfied with the institution.					
4.	I would recommend the institution to others.					
5.	Thinking back on your experience within the institution, how you rate your overall satisfaction?					
<b>3. Students' Loyalty</b>						
1.	I will recommend my course to someone else.					
2.	I will recommend my university to someone else.					
3.	I'm very interested in keeping in touch with "my faculty."					
4.	If I was faced with the same choice again, I'd still choose the same course.					
5.	If I was faced with the same choice again, I will still choose the same university.					
6.	I'd become a member of any alumni organizations at my old university or faculty.					
7.	I satisfied with visitation restriction and rule.					

**Thank you for your participation.**