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**FUTURE PROSPECT TOWARDS A CUSTOMER-DRIVEN APPROACH IN
EGYPTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Expectations of quality in its widest sense are very high in the developing world, as well as the developed world. Therefore, the Higher Education Ministry in Egypt, is in favour of reforming the education system to increase competition and equip graduates with the tools needed to face the increasing demands of the employment market and has indicated its concern to assure the community that the quality of higher education is of an appropriate standard and that it will be maintained and enhanced. Juran defines Quality as "fitness for use". His concept incorporates the point of view of the customer. Education is no exception in this respect. Therefore, Customer satisfaction is possibly one of the crucial challenges facing both private and public Egyptian educational organisations; this will require an intensive focus on customers, and successful identification of internal and external customers. One of the implications of this paper is that those educational institutions that understand consumer-oriented principles may have a better chance of satisfying the wants and needs of their students more effectively.

Abstrakt

Kvalita se v rozvojovém i rozvinutém světě očekává ve všech oblastech a v co nejširším rozsahu. Proto Ministerstvo vysokého školství v Egyptě podporuje reformu vzdělávacího systému, aby zvýšilo konkurenceschopnost a připravilo absolventy na vzrůstající požadavky trhu práce, zároveň také projevilo svůj zájem a ujistilo společnost, že kvalita vysokého školství se opírá o vhodný standard a že zůstane zachována a bude trvale vylepšována. Juran definuje kvalitu jako "vhodnost k používání". Jeho koncepcie zahrnuje názory zákazníků. Vzdělávání není v tomto ohledu výjimkou. Proto spokojenost zákazníků je možná jedním z nejdůležitějších očekávání, před které jsou postaveny instituce soukromého i veřejného školství Egypta, které si vyžádá intenzivní pozornost zaměřenou na zákazníky a úspěšnou identifikaci vnitřních i vnějších zákazníků. Jedním ze závěrů tohoto příspěvku je, že právě ty vzdělávací instituce, které chápou principy orientované na spotřebitele mohou mít daleko lepší šanci poskytovat svým studentům právě to, co vyžadují a přitom mnohem efektivněji.

1 INTRODUCTION

In all societies, education is subject to comprehensive and flexible planning that delineates objectives, examines alternatives, designs programs, issues legislation, outlines procedures, and lays the foundations for measuring impact, in order to ensure that it is indeed a right to all human beings

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without discrimination. Planning is essential for education to provide the appropriate manpower, capable of integration into a productive social life and interaction, at the same time, with the fast-paced world in all fields and equally qualified to compete in the era of globalization, while asserting its indigenous identity.

Champy and Nohira emphasised that Globalisation is forcing organisations to organise themselves in a radical different ways, to compete effectively with organisations from all parts of the globe to deliver the same product or service, anytime, anywhere at increasingly competitive prices. (1988)

Educational organisations worldwide are faced with increased competition due to globalization and have attempted to gain competitive advantage by positioning themselves as “excellent”. Excellence is likely to be a hallmark of the successful organisation of the 21st century where there will be many excellent organizations; these will be the maturing exponent of Total Quality in all its varied forms. In ten years excellence will be taken for granted. Whereas, it will be the expected level of performance, and the entry ticket without which an organisation will not be a competitor. In a competitive market for the provision of goods and services there will be many different suppliers, each of whom may choose to offer a product/service with a particular combination of price and quality attributes. Consumers will choose the combination of price and quality that best meets their individual preferences. In fact, although the client populations, the nature of services rendered, the basic processes involved in service delivery and expected outcomes may differ significantly, all service and educational enterprises share: (1) the common goal of providing some type of service designed to meet some type of human need; and (2) the awareness that, depending upon a number of internal variables and customer expectations, the degree of success in meeting that basic goal can vary.

Designing a winning strategy for a highly competitive educational environment requires more than just having a technical advantage. We must first seek out both spoken and unspoken objectives, translate these into actions, designing products that assure customer satisfaction and value and focus various business functions toward achieving a common goal, as well as enabling organizations to exceed normal expectations and provide a level of unanticipated excitement that generates a knockout response from both customers and competitors. Many education institutions are responding to a more competitive market environment by trying to reinvent themselves like corporations; as they are entering a global economy characterised by competitiveness which is critical in many ways: (1) The need to compete in an international market; (2) Products/services are competing within the local market with international competitors; (3) Competing for foreign investments of the sort that creates jobs.

Higher education institutions have not been exempt from the demands of excellence and quality, As a case in point, many local universities in Egypt, in addition to dealing with ongoing challenges to find and retain qualified teaching staff, to update curricula and classroom technology and to physically maintain buildings, are now finding themselves faced with the dual tasks of raising student academic performance , and the increasing development of labour market responsive curriculum reforms intended to appeal to all employers and students as “customers” and “client”, while protecting their already strained state and local funding. Satisfaction equates to an institution staying on top of the needs, wants, and expectation of its stakeholders: students, alumni, teachers, school board members, and taxpayers. Satisfaction can be measured by assessing both the strengths and weaknesses of an institution, compare current and past measurements of success in all areas, also analyzes where dissatisfaction exists and identifies how to take corrective action.

In today’s intensely competitive economy, Egypt’s business community depends more than ever on a capable, well-educated work force. Individuals preparing to enter that work force and workers already in it need higher, more relevant technical knowledge and intellectual skills than ever before. Yet just when Egypt needs its higher education systems to meet these competitive requirements, those systems are, with isolated exceptions, insufficiently responsive. Egypt’s publicly funded colleges and universities are perceived to be more out of touch with their markets than

community and private colleges. The result is a damaging accumulation of missed opportunities. Increasing numbers of degreed students are taking low-level entry jobs. Many employers are avoiding new graduates to hire people with experience. Companies that can't get what they need in continuing education are developing in-house programs or hiring private, proprietary trainers. Through distance learning, some companies and employees are bypassing Egypt's universities to get what they need at colleges and universities out of Egypt.

Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations, whereas learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning; and therefore settles firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

2 THE IMPORTANCE OF A CUSTOMER BASE

Deming's mandate, "Find out what customers want", has endorsed the field of customer satisfaction measurement. One of the breakthrough insights in assessing customers' satisfaction was the understanding that quality service/product is not an objective thing to be measured by conformance to engineering or design specifications; Rather, that quality is a primary determinant of satisfaction, which is frustrating to many engineers and technicians who consider this view point a very subjective concept, depending substantially on individually-derived cues and other soft data. Therefore, an organisation doesn't blindly respond to customer needs and opportunities, and never assume that it knows exactly what the customer is looking for, or how the customer defines quality. The customer's entire decision, purchase, use, and repurchase cycle ought to be investigated for every bit of insight it can give the professional concerning customers' concerns and requirements.

A business strategy which defines customers and markets to be served, competitors, and competitive strengths provides a framework from which to evaluate potential opportunities. The result of this evaluation of opportunities is expressed in a product/service plan which defines the target market and customers, the next step is to plan how to capture these customer's needs for each development project. This includes determining how to identify target customers, which customers to contact in order to capture their needs, what mechanisms to use to collect their needs, and a schedule and estimate of resources to capture the voice of the customer. Then the organisation makes up the decision to measure the satisfaction of its customers; the unfortunate reality is that most organisations face considerable up-front work to simply identify who should be included in their measurement program! This identification process will take time, require resources and require the assistance of several internal departments.

The determination to measure routinely customer satisfaction creates a new urgency for learning customer satisfaction; creates a new urgency to establish customer database along side the project of creating the satisfaction survey. Vavra argued that customer satisfaction measurement is much different from traditional marketing research, whereas customer satisfaction research represents a very specific survey situation. According to [10] that perhaps the most critical difference is that customers don't necessarily want to be anonymous considering the following: (1) customers have a relationship with the organisation and repeated Customer satisfaction measurement ensures retaining this relationship and enforce it; (2) Customers answer to the survey question may be considered a request for assistance, and therefore expect to hear back from the survey group or find the solution to their problem.

Tab. 1 The difference between marketing research and customer satisfaction measurement [10]

The issue	Marketing research	Customer satisfaction measurement
<i>Who To Survey?</i>	A sample-a statistically representative sampling	A census-all customer should be given the opportunity to participate.
<i>Participant Identities</i>	Kept confidential participants' answers are never read individually, only when combined with other participants answers in averages, distributions ,... etc	May require feedback-individual's ratings should be examined, searching for individuals with specific problems requiring solutions.
<i>Acknowledgement for Participation</i>	Not essential - establishing good will with sample is irrelevant, it is unlikely they will ever be sampled again	Essential - their participation in future surveys is desired, it is also desirable to establish good will so they will continue to buy our products and services.
<i>Repeated Measurements</i>	No participants will become "sensitized" to the issues making their responses less valid	Essential, we will need to track the growth or decline in individuals satisfactions
<i>When To Survey?</i>	A single "wave" may be sufficient	Continuous surveying is best, it is less likely to reflect one specific contact event and more likely to reflect the cumulative experience with the organisation.
<i>The Purpose</i>	To collect information	To collect information to solve specific customers' problems, and to communicate to all customers their opinions are desired.

3 THE STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS

While, implementing the quality management systems deployed in industry into education, we will find that the basic principles are unchanged; but, new elements are introduced and some long cherished ideas about how to manage the teaching/learning process will have to change; it is interesting to reflect some of the students' expectations.

Tab. 2 Students' expectations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and professionalism in the provision of services; • More flexible provision; • Changing curriculum design to enhance employability; • Improvement in teaching quality; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to suitably qualified teachers and appropriate learning support; • Value of study to career prospects; • Improved student support; • Greater Transparency.
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A previous research conducted on the potentials of higher education in Egypt, presented the average of the tuition fees in some private educational organisations, the selected universities are determined based on the following factors:(1) The availability of Fees lists;(2) Market analysis. (Attia, 2005)

Tab. 3 University fees

○ The German University average is	37.800 L.E
○ The 6 October University average is	11.730 L.E
○ The Misr University average is	13.470 L.E
○ AASTMT average is	16.000 L.E

The introduction of tuition fees has lead to students acting more like customers, where students expected value for money. Today students are seen increasingly as customers of a service. The supplier-driven, model which most higher education institutions have followed in the past has been replaced by a customer oriented model, whereas, a focus on the student as a customer of a service; Students (and parents) expectations are now high.

Some of the broad factors that have caused student expectations to change; include, for example the rise of the student as a customer, many students now work part time while in higher education and as a result want a flexible learning environment. An important drive of change has been the influence of external agencies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education and through contracts with the main higher education funding bodies established to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education. With its emphasis on the quality of

the student experience, its rolling programme of subject reviews there has been a heavy emphasis on identifying and enhancing the student experience and whether institutions are meeting student expectations. It is not surprising, with the students has now a greater role in assessing the quality of their educational experience, that higher education institutions are devoting much more time improving the student experience, and “Bridging the Gap” between what students expect and experience.

Consequently, we might consider quality of education service and the customer satisfaction key indicators for the business excellence shift from internal of the organisation to external directed towards market. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985; Carman, 1990; Mattsson, 1994; Bolton and Drew, 1991) described service quality as “the ability of an organisation to meet or exceed customer expectations”. (Kitchroen, 2004), as a result, Universities need to take a more strategic approach to the management of student expectations. This management might take the form of spelling out more clearly to students what they will experience and in addition be prepared to change student expectations. This is especially important in light of evidence. (James, 2002) However, successful service industries have been shown to research what customers expect of the service and then work to provide the service that meets those of customer expectations; as pointed out by Sander et al. (2000) In order to increase student satisfaction, we need to recognize gaps exist between the experience and expectations of students to determine the overall level of satisfaction, reveal specific areas where improvements can be made to raise the level of student satisfaction and therefore the success of the service offered.

3.1 Collecting evaluation data

The customers’ perceptions of the University (obtained, for example, from parents/career and students surveys, focus groups or meetings, compliments and complaints). Educational institutes should seek to develop a range of approaches to obtain the point of views of all parties involved in the educational organisation, as well as educational process development, about various issues such as, the organisation image, the teaching and learning process, university support, loyalty and retention which will reflect consequently the costumer’ standpoint of the university reliability, reputation, and quality.

Collecting evaluation data are increasingly important, to collect immediate feedback because: (1) It helps identifying immediately what worked out and what didn’t;(2) It provides information for improving the current program and designing future programs;(3) It provides information helpful in accountability programs;(4) It shows participants and stakeholders that we are interested in improving and that we are value their input. Although, collecting data via questionnaire is a fast and easy way from a large number of people but as with any methods it has advantages and disadvantages. Using questionnaires to gain evaluation feedback is a common practice, there are a variety of ways to collect immediate feedback other than questions, consider what will most likely yield the results you seek. Some alternative include:(1) Observation of interactions, skill development or learning; A group discussion at the end of the session guided by specific evaluation questions; Personal interviews with potential stakeholders; (4) Photographs or a Videotape of the session, or particular aspect or events; Internet forms such as questionnaires, queries, etc.

3.2 Data evaluation

These measures are the internal ones used by the university in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve its performance and to predict perceptions of all its internal customers, as well as external customers. When planning a program of evaluation, many factors should be thought about simultaneously: why are you doing an evaluation; who will use the information ; How will they use it; What do you (and others) want to know; What specific questions will you ask; How should the form be designed and formatted ; Who will check the questionnaires; When will the form be used and distributed; How will the data be managed and analysed; How will you use your results for program

improvement and external reporting; Who is responsible for each task above; How much time will each take?

The aspects are identified by asking students to identify the most important aspects of course provision to them. A variety of methods are used to establish what the students themselves felt were the important aspects of course delivery. These included focus groups and a paper based questionnaire (Rangecroft et al, 1999) Care is taken to ensure that the end-points are as far as possible value-free. Among the number of different ways of assessing the quality of a course, by far the most common is the tried-and-tested system of asking students variations on the question “How was it for you?” A recent example of what might be called the standard approach is provided by Wall (2001), who sets out three versions of the approach: (1) the university-wide review based on a student survey, (2) the staff-student consultative committee, and (3) informal feedback from students to staff, to which she adds the notion of a student focus group. The information thus produced is usually recorded on paper (although in the case of Wall’s focus group approach it was recorded on tape) and then presented as a report to the course director.

Olson and Dover (1979) defined expectations as:” beliefs about a product or service’s attributes or preference at some time in the future” The Following are sum of students’ beliefs about the levels of attributes possessed or offered by the product or service. Oliver and Bearden (1983) have observed, however, that there are likely two components of expectation: the level of performance expected, and the certainty of receiving that level of performance.

Tab. 4 Sample of educational service aspects expected

Teaching & Learning Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor exhibited sound knowledge of the topic • The instructor showed enthusiasm for encouraging student learning • The instructor was well organized • The instructor encouraged student participation in learning activities • The instructor stimulated my interest in learning in this topic • The Student understanding of the topic was increased as a result of this person’s teaching ability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor gave clear explanations • The instructor showed respect for students’ views and opinions • The instructor had a realistic appreciation of the time and effort required to complete my work • My learning was enhanced by the instructor teaching style • Overall, the instructor is effective as a university teacher
Presentations Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident, Communicated effectively and Spoke clearly • Gave clear demonstrations • Made effective use of examples, teaching materials, audio-visual materials “films and/or videos, audio-tapes” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made effective use of innovative teaching techniques • Emphasised the important points • Taught in a way that made note-taking easy and facilitated my learning • Overall, Taught at an appropriate level for me
Communications Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor communicated effectively and was opened for alternative viewpoints • The instructor was accessible for students seeking advice and for consultation (e.g. questions, calls, emails etc.) • The instructor was patient with the students and showed concern for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor was willing to help students and gave sufficient help when asked, and with assignments • The instructor assisted me with orientation to the staff, facility and practice • The instructor established an effective and non-threatening teaching relationship which was collegial and respectful
Professionalism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered the ethical aspects of the topic • Attended the teaching sessions regularly/punctually • Was well prepared for each class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was accepting of constructive criticism • Was open to alternative viewpoints
Topic Competence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showed how theory was related to practical situations • Showed how the concepts presented in the topic were related to each other • Showed how the various segments of the topic were related to each other • Presented alternative theories or points of view, when appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was skilled in current professional practice • Was skilled in the use of the language • Exhibited sound knowledge of the language’s country/countries of origin • Exhibited sound knowledge of the culture of the language’s country/countries of origin

Participation of Students	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged students to express ideas • Encouraged student discussion • Encouraged student creativity • Encouraged team-work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided opportunities for students to ask questions • Was skilled in facilitating group discussions • Was skilled in facilitating independent learning
Resources & Library Facilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching materials (e.g. handouts, study guides, reading list, transparencies, preliminary questions, etc) were valuable for my understanding of the topic • The teaching materials were of high quality • The teaching materials were used effectively by the teacher(s) • The resource materials were readily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resource materials were relevant to the topic • Library facilities (e.g. availability of books, topic librarian, etc) were adequate for the topic • Adequate guidance were received on how to use the library effectively • The books on reserve in the library were easily accessible
Computers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was sufficient computer training provided • There was sufficient access to the computers • The computer software was of a high standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The computer software's on-screen help facility was useful • The computer software's documentation was of a high standard
Innovative Teaching Techniques	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The novel style of teaching employed by the teacher(s) facilitated my understanding of the topic • The novel style of teaching employed by the teacher(s) stimulated my interest in the topic • The novel style of teaching employed by the teacher(s) should continue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students preferred this style of teaching rather than a lecture-based approach • The students benefited more from this style of teaching than they would have if it had been a lecture-based approach

Clearly, there is much work to be done to incorporate customer needs and expectations into educational research and development efforts. Higher education institutions are grappling with issues such as: demonstrating value, managing scarce resources, client relationship management, changing client and stakeholder needs and expectations, competition, market differentiation, partner and supplier relationships, and future viability. Why is a customer oriented strategy focus so critical to quality management? The answer is simply that the customer is the one who determines the level of quality delivered. Improvement efforts that do not identify customer satisfaction as their primary objective fail the basic litmus test of quality. If there is no perceived increase in value to the customer, there has been no quality improvement.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Customer satisfaction plays an effective role in the business success whilst, the Poor condition or absence of a customer database places an added burden on the individual or department committed to measuring satisfaction.

Egypt depends on higher education to transmit the shared values and knowledge that shape capable individuals and cohesive communities, it is recommended to that higher education institutions adopt:

- **A customer-driven mode of operation;** Higher education must have a persistent customer focus.
- **Quality assurance;** An undergraduate degree from an institution must assure that the student meets high, definable standards of knowledge and skills.
- **Improved system access and utilization;** Egypt should strive to make higher education accessible to all qualified Egyptians regardless of their financial condition or geographic location.
- **Practicum experience;** Internship programs are a key way to give students experience that businesses want in hiring new graduates. They also encourage businesses to become aware of the formal education curriculum. Internships and other experiences with businesses provide faculty members a way to stay abreast of applications in their disciplines.
- **Customised continuing education;** Egyptian institutions have an opportunity to meet a vital market need in supplying customized continuing education in business, management, and engineering.

- **Increased training of technicians;** there is a large and growing demand for well trained technicians in a wide variety of industrial sectors. Egyptians institutions have an obligation to meet this demand.
- **Stronger high technology undergraduate education;** Egypt needs more and better educated electrical engineering; information systems; and computer science graduates.
- **Advanced education in proximity to the high technology industry.** Egypt's high technology industry needs a top-ranked computer science

Pursuing Excellence in Higher Education shows how universities can maintain their position. First and foremost, this requires effective teaching. Effective teaching at the university level requires more than just being skilled at teaching. It requires extensive knowledge of the subject taught, and of the subjects being taught. Not only must we bring professional experiences and academic knowledge to the job when hired, but we must continually refresh, enhance, and advance our knowledge just as our students must do in order to function as effective citizens. This, indeed, is why communicating the value of a university education to the stakeholders is the most important challenge faced by universities today. To make sure outsiders know that we engage in basic and applied research along with performing high level consulting engagements with the university's greater community. To make sure outsiders know that we continually developing ourselves, both as professionals and as scholars.

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