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## **Determinants of student loyalty from service quality through their satisfaction in Bphram education – A proposed model**

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**Abstract.** Educational service is recognized as an emerging term in academic sectors. In global perspective, higher education is affirmed as a business and students, or parents and other related bodies are customers of universities. For their sustainable development, they insist on development and enhancement of their service quality by improving student satisfaction. Significantly, research of factors affecting student loyalty from service quality with the intermediating role of customer satisfaction of Bpharm education institutions Vietnam is really limited. Hence, this study is to propose a theoretical model on that matter for private universities located in Ho Chi Minh city in special and in Vietnam in general. To achieve that objective, the study uses mainly qualitative approach with the techniques of the systematic review, the meta-analysis, and the expert consultation with the data from different sources including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), EBSCO, Cengage and Springer, etc. From which, 145 publications have been found eligible for this study. Also, the study contributes to the knowledge of educational quality management and requires empirical studies to confirm whether the proposed framework exists or is adjusted for practical implementation.

**Keywords.** Bphram Education, Education Quality, Student Loyalty, Student Satisfaction.

### **1. Introduction**

Education is a crucial institution in the changing shift to a knowledge economy and, in our present century, tertiary education (or higher education) is one of key asset for the socioeconomical and technological development by its contribution to the economic development for a nation (Coleman 2005). higher education is affirmed as a business and their students are increasingly concerned as customers of universities. (Mohd-Yusof, Helmi, &

Phang, 2012). Recently in higher education, the education quality has become a concern at all the levels or management and stakeholders. Many organizations have been established with the purpose of enhancement of service quality provided by higher education institutions. Also, more and more both of the public and private higher education institutions have been newly established (Isani & Virk, 2005). Therefore, there is the competition existence in the education sector. More of that, the competition is from the globalization, races for university rankings and league tables which pushes to fight for their competitive advantages (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen & Johnson, 2009). In addition, especially for the private institutions, requirements of retainment of student interests and enhancement of references for the potential students are for their improvement of their service quality for their survivability. In literature, service quality has much been studied in business administration sector for years with focus on customer satisfaction (Gronroos, 1984). Service quality understanding and evaluation will provide the related administrators with instructions or guidelines for their operation performance in alignment with student expectations

In higher education, besides the others, students are recognized as one of the customers of universities. As such, student satisfaction is one of the key determinants for universities to retainment of current students and attraction of the incoming students (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006) and for achievement of the competitive demarcation between institutions regarding their superiority in the development of unique experiences (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011). While competition outcomes of the universities are as research and innovation, universities are also expected to deliver high service quality. Therefore, the service quality assessment of the higher education is crucial, much contribute and useful for administrators and employee to continue enhancing the education quality (Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012). Thus, student satisfaction studies are increasing (Manzoor, 2013).

However, the theory confirms that student satisfaction has been an antecedent factor to student loyalty, and both of them are positively correlated, significantly, development of student satisfaction and loyalty is first prioritized objective to private institutions for various reasons (Henning - Thurau et al., 2001). In terms of the correlation of satisfaction and loyalty, studies prove satisfaction is the most substantial factor that directly impacts the student loyalty (Helgesen Øyvind & Nettet Erik, 2007). In addition, Elliott and Shin (2002) state student satisfaction impacts not only on the service improvement and but also on the other relatednesses as institution's ranking, prestige, brand name, and operations service quality and customer satisfaction are affirmed as a positive influence in the study of Aga and Safakli, (2007). Besides, according to Baker and Crompton (2000), service quality is the factor that directly and influences customer satisfaction.

In Vietnam, for a long time, education is for a not-for-profit service. However, in adaption to globalization and integration, the term "educational service" is recognized as an emerging term in academic sectors. Thus, students or parents and other related bodies are customers of universities. For their sustainable development, they insist on development and enhancement of their service quality by improving student satisfaction. In addition, the pharmaceutical industry contributes much and plays a crucial role not only in the healthcare system but also in the economic development of a nation. However, the pharmaceutical workforce is facing a big shortage. Simultaneously, the distribution of pharmaceutical workforce is unbalanced among regionals and most of them are specialized in the trading and distribution sectors. The current Bpharm ratio in comparison with the Vietnamese citizen is at 1.76/10000. According to Kien (2009), to meet the development requirements of the pharmaceutical industry, the Vietnam workforce demand is required to develop in both quantity and quality. As such, to develop qualified human resources, the improvement of quality and

diversification of educational and training activities are accepted as the sole approach. As aforementioned circumstances, the amended policy of pharmaceutical industry development is focusing on the expansion of pharmaceutical education and educational quality. However, in recent years, new establishment of tertiary institutions is on the rise, and it creates the big competition among universities. Thus, educational institutions endeavor to build up their competitiveness by enhancing the quality of education programs. In the view of the operation management, education quality enhancement is a considerably significant duty for educational institutions and their administrators to achieve the accumulated competitive advantage. However, research of factors affecting student loyalty from service quality with the intermediating role of customer satisfaction of Bpharm education institutions Vietnam is rare, especially for the newly established private university, hence, this study is to propose a theoretical model on that matter for private universities located in Ho Chi Minh city in special and in Vietnam in general and the study contributes to the knowledge of educational quality management and requires empirical studies to confirm whether the proposed framework exists or is adjusted for practical implementation.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Definition of Service quality*

In a service business, quality is a measure to understand if the customer's expectations are met. The service characteristics comprises of intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability and service sector plays a crucial role in the process of development of the knowledge economy service providers are pushed to strive towards quality. The term "service quality" includes service and quality which are both connected to the consumers. In addition, service quality is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the success of any organization (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Measurement of service quality call for great attentions of the scholars and has been studied widely in the past few decades. To date, in the theoretical perspective, as a universal definition of quality is not existing, universal model of quality measurement is in shortage. Grönroos (1984) affirms service quality includes three key dimensions as functional, technical and image, as such, service quality depends on two variables like the expected and perceived service and the functional service quality is evaluated by customers' attitudes. Parasuraman et al. (1985) point out service quality is known as the business or organization's ability in meeting or exceeding customer expectations in ten determinants as Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence, Access, Courtesy, Communication, Credibility, Security, and Understanding (Kitchroen, 2004). In the educational view, Harvey and Knight (1996) confirm that education quality is a reflection of the exception, consistency, purpose fit, financial value, and transformation.

Regarding the service quality importance, quality is the key to satisfaction of students/ customers and retainment of their loyalty with the aim of their continuance of the future product/ service purchase. As such, it contributes to the long-term revenue and profitability and can result the success or failure of an organization. As for the service quality, it is a key by its assistance on the determination of customer satisfaction and impacts the organization brand. In the tertiary education, shown in the studies of Kitchroen (2004) bad service quality will ultimately impact funding and viability in the higher education discipline by reducing the popularity of the institution and thus applicants' quantity and standards. To overcome difficulties in evaluating quality due to term explanation difficulty, Parasuraman et al. (1988) propose SERVQUAL model as the gap model because the difference between customer expectations and perceptions (Service Quality (Q) = Expectations (E) – Perceptions(P)). As a consequence, the long-term goal of the service organizations is to satisfy their consumer, strengthen their relations and achieve consumer loyalty.

## *2.2. Concept of student satisfaction*

For decades, the interconnection between the quality of higher education, and student satisfaction and loyalty has been accepted as the confrontations in either academic or professional perspectives (Gruber, Voss & Zikuda, 2010; Temizer & Turkyilmaz, 2012). Their debates depict there are significant correlations between education quality and student satisfaction and between the student satisfaction and loyalty as well. In the theory literature, the studies of these concepts/ notions are done within the framework of customer satisfaction of service quality (Giese & Cote, 2000). In addition, the notion of higher education quality is depicted by multi-aspects and the current concept of tertiary education quality is associated with service marketing globally (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006; Hieu, Xuyen & Hung, 2020; Diep & Hieu, 2021). Higher education relates to the market orientation that transforms into a highly competitive market (Temizer & Turkyilmaz, 2012). Prominently, higher education institutions are adapting service-orientation and customer-driven phenomenon (Shanahan & Gerber, 2004; Hieu, Xuyen & Hung, 2020). For others, academic staff, employers, and public sector are viewed as customers for universities or tertiary institutions (Hieu, Xuyen & Hung, 2020). In fact, the notion of student as a customer is not new. However, regarding of the supplier-customer relationship, it is not as clear in higher education as in other sectors (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006) by its diversification of opinions on the nature of customer in this field. As such, in this perspective, students are accepted as crucial stakeholders for higher education (Chandra et al., 2019), and universities strive to enhance student satisfaction (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006). Globally, universities strive to gain competitiveness by fulfilling student satisfaction since the market competition is significantly evolving (Østergaard & Kristensen, 2005). Student satisfaction plays a crucial role in educational quality reinforcement, raising research concerns in higher education (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Accordingly, satisfaction is interpreted following a dual basis: the precedent expectation of customers prior purchase and the perceived product performance in post purchase (Tandilashvili, 2019). In line with the concept, Hasan et al. (2008) assert that satisfaction is attributed to individual experience with the purchased products or services. More of that, Shanahan and Gerber (2004) confirm that customer satisfaction is the conjunction of delivered value and customers' needs fulfillment. From the educational perspective, student satisfaction is interconnected with an amalgamation of emotional and cognitive responses in a specific time and context (Giese & Cote, 2000). To what extent, the satisfaction is accepted to vary regarding the contextual change (Dado, Taborecka-Petrovicova, Cuzovic & Rajic, 2012). Furthermore, Gruber et al. (2010) strive to determine the concept of student satisfaction and its relatedness, which is explicated by fulfilling needs, desires, and students' goals. Hence, student satisfaction is determined by the positive relationship between the perceived performance and expectations, and the higher perception of performance enhances students' expectations, leading to student satisfaction (Napitupulu et al., 2018). Also, students' emotional perception determines the quality of education through the self-assessment of university offers (Sultan & Yin Wong, 2013). Importantly, student satisfaction refers to the self-evaluation of the outcomes and experiences in the educational process (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Also, Other stakeholders (i.e., academic staff, employers, and related public sectors) are the influential factors for the student satisfaction improvement (Shanahan & Gerber, 2004). The perceived quality in education influences student's retention rate with the university (Dado, Taborecka-Petrovicova, Cuzovic & Rajic, 2012). When students satisfy with the quality resulting in increased loyalty (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006; Chandra et al., 2019), eventually, student satisfaction is explicated following either the educational process or the ending outcomes, and this indicates that the concept of student satisfaction relies on viewpoints (Napitupulu et al., 2018).

### *2.3. Measuring service quality and student satisfaction in higher education*

As above depiction, student satisfaction is perceived as a relatively significant determinant for the quality of higher education (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Indeed, studies endeavor to evaluate the factors affecting student satisfaction since the satisfied students influence higher education's service quality. Significantly, various frameworks and/ evaluation benchmarks are established to improve student satisfaction and educational quality.

In 1990, Parasuraman et al. built up a model named SERVQUAL to measure service quality. on the view of customers' assessment of service quality. In the original model, there are ten factors and later, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) reduce it to five factors. namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, and tangibles. Currently, this model become one of the most popular models to assess customer expectations and service quality (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011; Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012).

The SERVQUAL model is affirmed by internal gaps as: Gap named positioning gap - between customer expectations and management perceptions of those expectations; Gap 2 named specification gap regarding management perceptions of customer expectations and the organizational service quality specifications; Gap 3 as delivery difference between service quality specifications and actual service delivery by employee, and Gap 4 as communication gap for the actual service delivery and external communications about the service (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011). SERVQUAL has been widely used by the scholars in various disciplines as the tyre retailing and dental services (Carman, 1990), hospitals (Babukus & Mangold, 1992), hotels (Saleh & Ryan, 1992), car servicing (Bouman et al, 1992), hospitality (Johns, 1993), entertainment services (Taylor et al., 1993), banking (Wong & Perry, 1991; Kwon & Lee, 1994), etc. The present study employs PZB's 22-item scale and five - dimension structure of service quality for examining the research problem.

In academic research, many studies have applied the model of SERVQUAL to assess the service quality in universities (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011; Mohd-Yusof, Helmi, & Phang, 2012; Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012) in which students are considered as service customers in education (Foroughi Abari et al., 2011). However, through the empirical tests, this model is not universal due to the unique characteristics of the context. Also, it is confirmed that the development of a model to evaluate service quality at the university or tertiary institutions is a complicated issue. In the study of Legčević (2009), The examination of the student expectations and service quality perceptions has been done at Croatian Osijek University. In addition, Zeshan, Afridi, and Khan (2010) have tested service quality among eight Pakistani business schools. Also, Abu Hasan, Abd Rahman, and Abd Razak (2008)'s study confirm those five dimensions and service quality impacts with students' satisfaction. Moreover, Khodayari and Khodayari (2011) confirm the the importance of the reliability, tangible, responsiveness, assurance and empathy for students' service quality. Besides, Mohd-Yusof, Helmi, & Phang, (2012) study and conclude the tangibles dimension is the most influence and the empathy and assurance are the least. In another study of Al-Alak and Alnaser (2012), the findings show that the assurance and reliability factors are two most important dimensions of service quality. More, Oliviera and Fereira (2009) apply SERVQUAL to identify the expectation and perception gap among students and to adapt it for the higher education sector in Brazil. Tan and Kek (2004) use this model to evaluate student satisfaction and conclude that some cultural factors need to consider and add more in the SERVQUAL's questionnaire. And Zafiroopoulos and Vrana (2008) evaluate service quality and show staff results differentiates significantly from scores of students. Dado, Taborecka-Petrovicova, Cuzovic & Rajic (2012) conclude there was a significant expectation and perception difference.

Furthermore, SERVPERF is the extension of SERVQUAL, which highly focuses on assessment of the service performance. By adapting the SERVQUAL, the SERVPERF model inherits the five dimensions from SERVQUAL, including (1) Reliability, (2) Responsiveness, (3) Assurance, (4) Empathy, and (5) Tangibles; however, the SERVPERF model is interpreted as a performance-only measurement (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Moreover, Cronin & Taylor (1994) assert that the SERVPERF model has more practical implications as the questionnaire is related to the actuality than the SERVQUAL. Indeed, the performance score indicates more validated convergence than the gap score (Bayraktaroglu & Atrek, 2010). In conformity, the SERVPERF is accepted as a better outcome when assessing educational service due to the better reliability of the measurement scale (Sohail & Hasan, 2021). Thus, the performance-only measurement is more applicable in higher education quality (Ngo & Nguyen, 2016).

In addition, Abdullah (2006 a/b) establishes the development of the HEdPERF model (Higher Education PERFORMANCE-only). Indeed, the HEdPERF is developed based on the concept of SERVPERF, in which 41 service performance components are developed (13 are adapted from SERVPERF) and are categorized in 6 dimensions (Adubllah, 2006a; Silva et al., 2017). Accordingly, the framework is interpreted six dimensions of higher education, including (1) Academic facet, (2) Non-academic facet, (3) Reputation, (4) Access, (5) Program issue, and (6) Understanding (Abdullah, 2006a). In studies, the HEdPERF and SERVPERF are compared and evaluated to confirm the appropriateness of assessment of higher education service quality (Silva et al., 2017). Also, studies confirm that HEdPERF is a more adaptable and performative measurement framework since the scale specifically considered multi-dimensional aspects of higher education services performance and relatedness (Abdullah, 2006 a/b). As such, The HEdPERF is designated to better performance in evaluating Higher Education which is accepted to sufficiently fulfill the drawbacks of SERVPERF (Abdullah, 2006a/b; Khattab, 2018). Eventually, HEdPERF is confirmed to be more effective for SERVQUAL in quality of higher education measurement since the consideration for the environment, and academic relatedness is included (Yazid & Moulai, 2021).

#### *2.4. Previous empirical studies on service quality, student satisfaction and loyalty in higher education*

According to Al-Rafai et al. (2016), 5 factors as (1) Satisfaction with academic quality, (2) Satisfaction with the help of faculty, (3) Satisfied with the LAB room and equipment, (4) Satisfied with the registration process, (5) Satisfied with the exchange and education programs have the significance impact between student satisfaction and service quality in the University. Also, in a study, Costas and Vasiliki (2015) show that satisfaction is influenced the most from the academic base (Beta = 0.676), Media (Beta = 0.569), Support Services (Beta = 0.378), Employees (Beta = 0.145) and Education Program (Beta = 0.008). More of that, Diamantis and Benos (2007) assert that student satisfaction with the educational program depends on many factors such as curriculum, major, teaching facilitators, curriculum, and social and intellectual experience. Besides, in Vietnam, many research have been done in terms of this issue, Ai (2016) confirms results of testing of four factors that directly affect students' perception including Facilities, Lecturers, Curriculum, and Education Environment. In addition, Lien (2016) confirms (1) Facilities), (2) Education program, (3) Ability to serve. In the study of Huong, Phuong and Loan (2016), 5 factors affecting student satisfaction with the universities' provided service, have been indicated as (1) Facilities, (2) Service capacity, (3) Responsibility, (4) Concern, and (5) Confidence. Moreover, in a study by Chau and Chau (2013), six factors of (1) Behavior, the attitude of staff, (2) Behavior and capacity of lecturers, (3) Facilities Quality, (4) Staff clothing and course information, (5) Library, (6) Learning area, information technology application affect student satisfaction. In addition, Tam and Giang (2013) show that there are 5

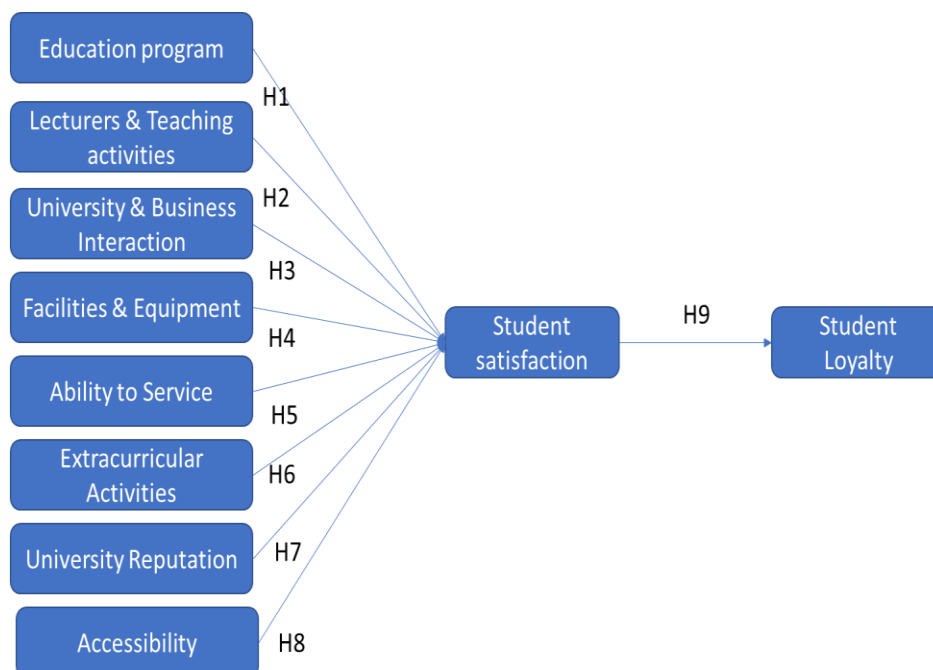
factors of educational service quality that positively impact on student satisfaction: (1) Teaching facilitators, (2) Education programs, (3) Facilities, (4) university care for the student, and (5) Administrative Supports. Also, Nghi, Chau and Giao (2012) affirm the factors of (1) Internship conditions, (2) Social knowledge, (3) interaction of lecturers, and (4) Improvement in foreign language skills are positively correlated with student satisfaction and educational quality

### 3. Research Methodology

This paper is done with a qualitative method with the techniques of the meta-analysis, systematic review, and expert consultation. Systematic literature review minimizes bias. (Tranfield, Denyer, Smart, 2003). In this study, the meta-analysis and systematic review methods have been employed to collect, review, and analysis data from different sources to produce the richness of information in the research papers, theses or dissertations, books, and other related publications in the focused research issue from prominent and reliable databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), EBSCO, Cengage and Springer, etc. From which, 145 publications have been found eligible for this study. Additionally, authors have conducted 7 interviews with 51 students and 18 lecturers of pharmaceutical disciplines on the related research issue. More of that, the authors have met and consulted with the 3 research experts to gain the consultation and to confirm and crosscheck with experts on the found factors and model in the Vietnam context, significantly for the private universities with the Bpharm education programs

### 4. Findings of the study

After deep analysis of studies, a research model of factors that impact student loyalty from the service quality with the intermediating role of student satisfaction for Bpharm education programs at private universities in Ho Chi Minh City is proposed



Source: Author (2021)

Hypothesis are established as follows:

H1: Education program is positively related to student satisfaction

H2: Lecturers and teaching activities is positively related to student satisfaction

H3: The university and business Interaction has a positive relationship with the satisfaction of educational quality

H4: Facilities and equipment is positively related to student satisfaction

H5: Ability to Service is positively related to student satisfaction

H6: Extracurricular activities are positively related to student satisfaction

H7: University reputation is positively related to student satisfaction

H8: Accessibility is positively related to student satisfaction

H9: Student satisfaction is positively related to student loyalty

## 5. Conclusions

Due to the increasing competition, private universities in Vietnam participate in a race to pursue quality improvement from a multi-perspective. Significantly, the education service enhancement for the Bpharm program at the private universities is a crucial issue because it impacts not only the current and future pharmaceutical workforce, the university ranking and reputation but the health care of the country citizens as well. By reviews previous studies and related theories on service quality, student satisfaction and loyalty in higher education, this paper proposes a conceptual framework and research propositions of determinants of student loyalty from service quality through their satisfaction in Bpharm education at the private universities located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. However, this proposed model is expected not only Therefore, the study contributes to the knowledge of educational quality management and for further research, the proposed conceptual framework is required empirical studies to confirm whether the proposed framework exists or is adjusted for practical implementation

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