Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main objectives of this study is to measure international student satisfaction with the service quality offered by higher education in India. A total of 291 responses from international students studying in higher education institutes from all over India were included in the empirical study. Using Factor Analysis, we extracted nine factors which measure satisfaction of international students with the quality of services provided by higher education institutes in India. The factors were analysed to draw meaningful insights. Stepwise regression and backward elimination approaches were used to identify factors which are good predictors of overall satisfaction. Hypothesis testing was done to identify differences in satisfaction level based on demographics. Student satisfaction was also checked for correlation with loyalty. The conclusions drawn from the study are presented below.

1.1. SATISFACTION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Based on factor-analysis, satisfaction of international students in India can be measured based on nine independent factors as follows:

1. **Faculty** - quality and competencies of faculty which are reflected by whether faculty is caring, courteous, knowledgeable, gives students valuable feedback, easily accessible, communicates in English, presentable, academically qualified and effective in teaching.

2. **Administrative Support** - non-academic support which includes how courteous, helping, accessible the administrative staff is, whether the International Students Office of the institute renders prompt service, how
well the institutes understand, and caters to international students’ needs, whether regular counselling, guidance, information, and orientation are provided to students on joining and during their stay, if food requirements are taken care of and if the institutes delivered what was promised.

3. **Campus Facilities & Upkeep** - determined by aspects like upkeep of the campus, neatness of classrooms and bathrooms, how well campus and classrooms are technologically equipped with labs, computers, teaching infrastructure like tables, chairs, blackboards, etc.

4. **Understanding** – based on student’s perception of how understanding the institute is in terms of providing pre-enrolment information, relevance and usefulness of the course, and on ensuring fair and unbiased treatment.

5. **Cost** - based on the advantage of economy and value for money of hostel/accommodation, food, etc. while studying in India.

6. **Course Conduct** – academic aspects related to timely conduct of classes, syllabus, exams, schedules, results, etc.

7. **Resource Adequacy** - dependent on adequacy of resources like auditoriums, conference halls, canteens, number of faculty, sports and recreation facilities, quality of library facilities and maintenance of records.

8. **Utilities Support** - related to facilities like medical, food standards, food hygiene and transportation on campus.

9. **Safety & Security** – based on how safe and secure students feel in their institute and in India.
Step-wise and backward-elimination Regression Analysis lead us to conclude that overall satisfaction of international students studying in India is most significantly determined by four factors. The score of these four factors alone can predict nearly 50% of the overall satisfaction score of students:

1. Faculty
2. Cost
3. Understanding
4. Safety and security

Two additional factors “course conduct” and “resource adequacy” are also important factors that can help predict student satisfaction.

1.2. MAJOR OBSERVATIONS

Most international students in India are fairly satisfied with their overall higher education experience in India. However, there are differences as follows:

1. **Academic aspects** – In general, international students are satisfied with academic aspects like faculty & conduct of classes in India.

2. **Non-Academic aspects** – International students are less satisfied with non-academic aspects of studying in India and therefore, institutes need to focus more on the quality of non-academic aspects of the higher education experience.

3. **Highest Satisfaction** - International students are the most satisfied with the low cost of studying and staying in India. “Value for money” destination tag can be used to target cost-sensitive students but it not sufficient to make India a preferred higher education hub. Students are also satisfied with academic aspects like faculty, course conduct as well as campus facilities.
4. **Moderate Satisfaction** – International students rate adequacy of resources, safety, security and institute’s ability to understand international students’ needs as being only moderate.

5. **Lowest Satisfaction** – The factor which has the lowest satisfaction score is “Utilities support” which shows the quality of support utilities like medical, transport, hygiene and standard of food are a major disappointment. Therefore, these aspects warrant special attention from institutions. International students also feel administrative support in higher education institutes is low which reflects the lack of empathy and responsiveness of non-academic and administrative staff.

6. **Gender** – There doesn’t seem much difference in the satisfaction level between genders but female students are relatively less satisfied with respect to safety and security as compared to males and hence additional security measures must be provided for female students.

7. **Undergraduate vs. Postgraduate Students** – UG students are clearly less satisfied compared to PG students. One reason for the difference could be the fact that undergraduate students are younger than postgraduate students. Normally, younger students are more aggressive, impulsive and less tolerant. It seems postgraduates are easier to satisfy as compared to undergraduate students and this point should be kept in mind by institutes while targeting and servicing international students. Younger students often look for more recreation, sports, cultural and fun-filled activities on campus. Institutes which cater to UG level students must make extra efforts to see that they get their share of excitement.

8. **Age** - Students less than 25 years of age are less satisfied with their experience in India. This substantiates our finding above on undergraduate students. Age is often associated with virtues like maturity, understanding, tolerance and patience. It seems older students are easier to satisfy compared to younger students who are less than 25 years old and this point should be kept in mind by
institutes while targeting and servicing international students. Appropriate recreational and social activities have to be devised keeping age of the students in consideration.

9. **Science & Technology vs. Non-Science students** – There does not seem to be a strong difference in the satisfaction level of international students between Science/Technology and Non-Science streams although Non-science students seems more satisfied on some factors.

10. **Govt. vs. Private Institutes** – There was no strong difference in the satisfaction level between Govt. and Private institutes but students in Govt. institutes gave a lower score for “Admin support” & “Resource adequacy” vs. students from private institutes.

11. **Student satisfaction and Loyalty** – There is statistical evidence that satisfied students are willing to recommend studying in India to others while dissatisfied students are not. Unhappy customers spread bad word. Research confirms that customers tend to tell twice as many people about a bad experience with customer service than a good one. Word-of-mouth advertising and interaction of prospective students with satisfied students should be used to promote the institute and attract more international students.

12. **Key pain points** – The common concerns of most international students which institutes need to pay more attention to are:
   - Non-academic and administrative staff support
   - Food standards & hygiene
   - Medical facilities
   - Transportation support
   - Understanding & catering to specific needs of international students
   - Ensuring safety and security on campus
   - Upkeep & maintenance of campus
   - Regular counselling & guidance sessions
- Cleanliness & upkeep of facilities
- Support and guidance of International Students Office
- Catering to provide an overall satisfactory higher education experience in India.

13. **International Students Office** - There is a perception that Indian institutes do not understand and hence do not cater to the specific needs of international students. Very little effort is made by institutes to address international students needs and requirements.

5.2.1 **Unique findings**

The following few unique findings emerged from the analysis which are contrary to common belief:

14. **Origin of student** – Surprisingly, students of Indian origin comprising Non-resident Indians (NRI’s), Overseas Citizens of India (OCI’s) and Person of Indian origin (PIO’s) were found to less satisfied as compared to students of foreign origin i.e. those who have no ancestral or other links with India. One would have assumed that cultural affinity and Indian roots would have made students more adaptable and acceptable to the Indian way of life but surprisingly that is not the case. Normally, foreign students coming to India seek cultural diversity, and are more informed and prepared before coming to the country. Further, since foreign origin student’s choice to come to India is not driven by compulsions of family affinity to Indian roots, therefore, it they may be having more realistic expectations, which tend to make their actual experience more satisfactory.

15. **Duration of stay** - Another distinct finding is that international students who have completed more than one year of stay in India are very clearly less satisfied than those who have been staying for less than one year. Normally, one would expect the opposite. In fact, study of international students in U.K. found
that stress was at its peak in the initial stage of the academic sojourn and was caused by the struggle to cope with the challenges of foreign language, use and an unfamiliar academic and sociocultural environment, homesickness and loneliness. An association was made between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress (Brown & Holloway, 2008). This clearly does not seem to be the case in India. Overall happiness of international students in India becomes lower as the duration of stay increases. Students who have been staying in India for a longer duration being less satisfied are not likely to recommend India to others. One possible reason could be that the rigour and difficulty of living in India seems to sink in after the initial euphoria of exploring a diverse culture is over. This leads one to conclude that shorter duration courses are likely to have more satisfied students as compared to long duration courses in India.

16. **Nationality** – Students from advanced countries like Americas/Europe/Australia have rated their overall satisfaction experience higher than Asians and African/Middle-East nationals. Students from Asian and Africa/Middle-East have similar satisfaction level. Students from advanced countries like Americas/Europe/Australia although less satisfied with “Facilities & upkeep” were more satisfied in comparison to their Asian and African/Middle East counterparts on other aspects. One possible reason could be that they do not come with high expectations and therefore their perception is more in line with what they had expected.

1.3. **CONCLUSION**

International students are most satisfied with respect to the cost and economy of studying in India. In addition to being satisfied with the low cost of studying and living in India, students seem to be fairly satisfied with the academic aspects like faculty and conduct of courses, and moderately satisfied with respect to adequacy of resources. While, this “value for money” destination tag can be used effectively to target cost-sensitive students, it is not sufficient to compete with other Asian
destinations in order to make India a preferred higher education hub and meet the aspirations of initiatives like “Educate in India”. A lot more needs to be done both at the institutional levels and at the Govt. policy-level.

The non-academic service aspects which international students are not satisfied with are equally important in the higher education experience. Indian institutes are particularly deficient in providing quality service in non-academic aspects like administrative support, food standard and hygiene, understanding international student needs and catering to their specific needs, ensuring safety and security and quality upkeep and maintenance of the campus and its facilities. Indian institutions do not continuously engage with and help resolve international students problems nor are regular counselling and guidance provided during their stay. Likewise, very low student satisfaction with levels of cleanliness, food hygiene and services of International Students Office highlight areas where institutes need to improve the most.

1.4. INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

At the institutional level, the following measures can help to overcome the drawbacks highlighted in the previous section:

5.4.1 Learning from Students

An on-going exercise necessary for any higher education institution is the continuous capability to track the changing needs of students, identify problems they experience and prioritise them for remedial action. The first step towards service quality is to start measuring student’s satisfaction regularly, establish a minimum baseline for satisfaction and learn from the students themselves to champion and enable customer driven quality-improvements.

5.4.2 Use of Social Media

Universities need to continuously engage on a regular basis with international students both prior to and during their stay. Students need to be informed at two
stages: pre-enrolment and post-enrolment. Social media like Facebook, Twitter and You Tube can play an important role in connecting and dissemination of information for both the stages. Social media sites also help establish a bridge between existing students and new admits. Dedicated websites, blogs, videos on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are commonly used for the purpose.

a) Website

Prior to enrolment, the Institute’s websites need to inform students who are applying on aspects covering:

- Accommodation
- Support services
- Health services
- Opening a bank account,
- Financial advice
- Academic transition
- Immigration and visas
- Travel to the institute
- Indian culture and life in the city

b) Videos

Another way to disseminate information and quench the curiosity of new students and their parents is by uploading videos of current students. The videos should comprise the following sections:

- Pre-arrival and traveling
- Arrival
- First few days
- Settling in
- Social life
Academic matters
- Cultural sensitivity
- Sightseeing opportunities

c) Facebook

In addition to a dedicated website, a Facebook group for both new and old international students should be made available. This will encourage students to develop culturally diverse networks outside of their country groups both prior to and after their arrival. Otherwise, students tend to remain confined to their home country networks.

1.5. POLICY-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

A positive development in the higher education landscape is that more countries have come into the field of international education. Asian countries like China and Singapore are encroaching upon the competitive edge of the U.S. and the U.K. Global competitiveness requires India to focus more on quality than quantity to make it attractive for international students. Taking cue from other Asian countries, particularly Singapore and China, institutions and Govt. policy-makers will have to design, implement, review, and adjust themselves to cater to providing a satisfactory experience to international students studying in higher education institutes in India by:

1. Incentivizing inbound student, faculty and institution mobility.
2. Public private partnerships to ensure major quantity and quality upgrade.
3. Liberalization and privatization of the higher education sector.
4. Focus on developing students to be global citizens with global leadership qualities.
5. Promotion of cross-cultural awareness, diversity and engagement among students.
6. Permitting foreign universities to compete at par with Indian institutions in India.
7. Encouraging and funding innovation and research in order to attract quality students and faculty.
8. Focus on meeting the country’s and global manpower requirements through an international curriculum.
9. Establishment of dedicated Knowledge parks / innovation centres / centres of excellence in education, similar to Special Economic Zones (SEZ’s) for trade.
10. Exposing students, faculty and institutions to global standards of teaching and learning.
11. Encouraging more interaction with global faculty.
12. Encouraging and funding training of Indian faculty abroad.
13. Encouraging reciprocal agreements for student or faculty exchanges.
14. Merit-based scholarships for international students to attract quality students.
15. Transparency in accreditation of higher educational institutes though a centralized portal.
16. Websites for better dissemination of information on institutions, programmes, teaching quality and learning outcomes in an internationally comparable fashion.
17. Centralized, reliable and accessible information on scholarship sources and on living conditions of living in India.
18. Ease and speed of visa applications for international students.
19. Establishment of an agency representing the domestic higher education sector in international fairs and providing a central access point to most information related to student mobility.
20. Incentivizing global accreditation and recognition of higher education institutions by global bodies.
22. Encouragement to participation of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, and other bodies, in relevant international networks.
23. Co-ordination and alignment of higher education policy with other policies like immigration, trade, development, labour market policy, skill development, etc.
1.6. NEED OF THE HOUR

If India and Indian universities are to compete internationally, then they have to start engaging internationally. India will need to have a higher proportion of international students and faculty. Due to our unique demographics, the current priorities of Indian higher education are domestic. The answer to both the domestic compulsions and global competitiveness requires India to focus both on quality and quantity. Currently, even if an international student wants to go to an IIT, they may probably not meet the entry criteria - and if they can, then they would probably prefer going to MIT or Oxford instead.

India should first make universities focus on developing students to be global citizens with global leadership qualities. Since Indian universities have a clear strength in technology and natural sciences, we should reap the global benefits of our strengths in engineering, technology and medicine but will have to encourage a more diverse international mix on campus. This will benefit both the international students and also the domestic students who will learn important cultural, social skills and understanding from their international peers.

Very similar to the change in economic policy in 1991, we need to liberalize, privatize and globalize higher education in India. Indian universities need freedom and autonomy to establish and compete globally. The ease of doing R&D in India is just as important as the ease of doing business. Therefore, permitting foreign universities and reforming higher education policy to allow home-grown excellence to bloom is essential for globalizing higher education. The presence of foreign universities in India and the presence of Indian universities globally, could help bring the spotlight to India and make India a preferred higher education hub in Asia. The ‘Educate in India’ initiative can then complement other Govt. initiatives like ‘Make in India’, “Skill India”, “Digital India” and “Start-up India”. However, it remains to be seen if and how India will be able to provide the capacity and quality required for its expanding
young population while also attracting inbound international students in an international educational exchange environment that is currently very competitive.

1.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are always some limitations in the extent to which it is possible to generalize the results of a study based on a sample. Further, as there is no directory or database of international students in India, direct contact with international student could not be established. The only recourse was to contact international students through their International Students Office and various Govt. organizations in the case of scholarships. A request was made to allow their students to participate in the survey by forwarding them the survey questionnaire. Only those institutions could be approached which had made their contacts available on public domain. Further, the choice to allow their students to participate in the survey was at the exclusive free will and choice of the institution/organization. Some private institutions were even reluctant to have their students participate in the survey and no response was received from them. However, reputed institutions like IIT’s, NIT’s, IIM’s, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and South Asian University, were very forthcoming, supporting and extended their full help by requesting their students to respond. Organizations like the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) were kind enough to request all their Fulbright and foreign student scholars in India to participate in the survey. Keeping in view the non-random, non-stratified selection of the sample and the use of judgemental and snowball sampling techniques, the results of this study may or may not be a truly representative sample of the population. Also, this is a cross-sectional study and does not capture the effect of time lags and transformations, if any. However, notwithstanding this weakness, both the approach and the findings in terms of the key variables and dimensions provide pointers to understanding the views of international students and the way in which these students view their higher education experience in India.
1.8. SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are clearly many further avenues for research in this area. A wider range of participating institutions with different priorities and located across the width and breadth of the country, a wider range of courses, a larger sample size, could all provide better insights of international students. While they are a significant cohort among the students included in the survey, and this study can provide pointers, their number may not be sufficient to draw final conclusions about their particular characteristics, if any.

For the purpose of advancing the current research, the study can be used for establishing relationship with national and global accreditations, ranking by national and international university ranking organizations, employee perception, popularity and reputation of the institute, admission and retention of international students. Using a larger, random and stratified sample, the model can be used to investigate differences due to demographics of international students, Government and private institutions, location of the institute, etc.
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