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Nexus between Service Quality and Graduate Student Retention in Selected Universities in Kenya

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Abstract:

Higher education has been identified as a veritable vehicle for the growth of economies and fostering development internationally. Customer satisfaction with the quality of services provided largely depends on the ability of individual encounters to provide the client with the feeling of contentment from the association. Commitment by staff, their availability for one-on-one interaction and their capacity to innovate with regard to the instruction mediums of use may equally shore up the client satisfaction levels in a university. The study sought to carry out an analysis of the service quality of graduate student retention in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive design, and the stratified random sampling method was used for sampling purposes. The marketing department personnel at the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Strathmore University, United States International University, and Daystar University served as the respondents. Data was collected by using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found out that service quality levels were confirmed to have assured the institutions ability to generate optimal referrals. The study recommends that universities enhance their service quality levels by working towards ensuring commitment from staff members.

Keywords: Graduate student retention, service quality, Kenyan Universities, customer satisfaction

1. Introduction

Service quality is defined as the salient satisfaction accrued by a client attributed to meeting an intangible need from the consumption of a service, as premised by Nasr, Eshghi and Ganguli (2012). The encounter between the client and the organization thus brings forth the ability to determine the merits and demerits of the overall experience. The experience plays an integral role in determining the ability of the client to engage in mutual association with the service provider in future business endeavors based on the satisfaction accrued (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Customer satisfaction with the quality of services provided is thus dependent on the ability to have the individual encounter and provide the client with the feeling of contentment from the association (Kumar, Kee & Manshor, 2009).

Tinto (2009) argued that the ability to meet students' expectations and their perceptions about the technical quality of the academic programs offered equally plays an integral role in achieving satisfaction levels in universities. The perceived value of the academic programs offered with regard to their assurance to meet the expectations of the student's ability to be employed after completion equally raises the image of institutions (Ahmed *et al.*, 2010). This enhances client loyalty and enhances the ability of the institution to continuously retain the students. It may positively impact the overall growth trajectory of the institution. High service quality was commensurate with high client retention and satisfaction. According to Owino, Kibera, and Munywoki (2014), levels of client satisfaction have a large bearing on the ability to attract and retain clients. This positively impacted the overall performance of the organizations with regard to the ability to generate positive goodwill from the corporate image. Owino *et al.* (2014) opined that service quality standards and client satisfaction are positively related to overall firm performance.

Twum and Peprah (2020) opined that service quality in universities accrues from the ability of the student to appreciate the academic programs in place. The students have to strike a chord with the content delivery and identify with the ability of the teaching staff to comprehensively tutor them in class (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). This ingrains the feeling of satisfaction from partaking in the programs and assures them of the ability to continuously attend the academic programs passionately accruing from the benefits derived (Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia & Koole, 2020). The ability to have teaching staff who are up to the task in terms of meeting students' demands may give reassurance to the students about their competency and empathy, as postulated by Tinto (2009).

Commitment by staff, their availability for one-on-one interaction and their capacity to innovate with regard to the instruction mediums of use may equally shore up the client satisfaction levels in a university as premised by Twum and Peprah (2020). This is because students are always very keen on the capacity of the staff to be approachable and to provide them with the requisite assistance when they carry out their academic programs. Students are equally keen on confirming the intuitiveness of the lecturers with regard to the provision of alternatives concerning the knowledge dissemination processes at hand (Ahmed *et al.*, 2010).

Rapanta et al. (2020) were of the view that the presence of a wide variety of choices with regard to the programs available and the ability to guarantee students job placement and quality education were equally strong selling points for universities in the highly competitive higher education sector. The presence of excellent physical resources in terms of learning amenities was a strong selling proposition for the colleges (Barrett *et al.*, 2019). This assured them the capacity to retain students enrolled in academic programs and the ability to continuously grow their population and stand out as effective institutions.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The higher education sector has gradually experienced some exponential growth. This has been occasioned by the rapid population growth and the presence of a more assertive populace which needs to acquire knowledge as a medium of personal development and social transformation. The uptake of education programs has thus been more sustained, necessitating the need to open up new institutions and satellite colleges for higher education. This has also set the pace for competition between existing institutions in the quest to attract, enroll, and retain new students. The need to carry out aggressive marketing cannot thus be underscored. The evolution of the marketing scene demands greater innovation and fortitude in the wake of getting more students.

The service quality pursuits in universities and other institutions of higher learning have gradually evolved with time. This is attributed to the rapidly changing landscape with regard to technology, upgrade of programmes and the need to conform to emerging best practices. This has made many universities change their tact with the aim of ensuring that they get a greater number of students in the highly competitive business scene (Williams, 2013). This, notwithstanding the need to ensure that the pitches made by the universities are in consonance with the reality on the ground with regard to the delivery of programs, cannot be over-emphasized. In many cases, most of the universities do not meet the stakeholder expectations and the marketing pursuits carried out end up in vain (Williams, 2013).

The ideal practices currently place an emphasis on the need for universities to employ patience in the efforts carried out in marketing the institutions to realize service quality. Consistency is essential in meeting service quality in the marketing process by adhering to standards (Yingfei *et al.*, 2022). The essence of having the best practices as the driving factor behind the aspirations of the institutions is to ensure leverage and realization of the expected fruits from the marketing activities. This is due to the fact that, with the advent of delivering on the promises made to potential clients, universities are bound to experience sustained growth attributed to repeat buying and client retention (Harvey *et al.*, 2015).

Magutu, Mbeche, Nyaoga and Onger (2010) were of the view that the prevailing trends in the higher education sector demanded explicit changes in the service quality approaches employed. This was the only way out to ensure that the public universities achieved the envisaged ideals in terms of quality management practices (Magutu *et al.*, 2010). The study focused on quality management practices as a factor affecting the creation of goodwill and retention of students in public universities. This occasioned a gap in the other marketing activities devoid of the program of events as a goodwill generation requisite. The policy framework dictating the economic growth and development trends equally came out as a factor affecting the ability of public universities to attract and retain clients (Jowi *et al.*, 2013). The study observed that social development was a factor which affected the growth of the student population, accruing from the ability to have government subsidies for education programs and the capacity to pay for the academic programs. The ongoing discourse presented a vivid knowledge gap in the experiential marketing strategy as a forum that can be employed by universities to ensure graduate student retention.

Despite the numerous approaches used by universities to market their academic programs, the sector has been fluid, with most of them experiencing frequent fluctuations in student numbers. The fluctuations may be attributed to the trends in the marketing activities carried out by the universities (Osewe *et al.*, 2014). These are a pointer to the marketing activities directly impacting the institution's ability to attract and retain students. The marketing trends point to a profound growth of the online presence as a tool for marketing but a slow uptake of the experiential approach (Forlani & Pencarelli, 2019). The study thus sought to examine the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategy on graduate student retention in Kenya.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Review of the Study

This study reviews the theoretical underpinning of the study and empirical study relating to the area of study.

2.1. Theoretical Literature

The study was guided by student integration theory developed by Kuh *et al.* (2006). The theory banks on interactionism from a sociological perspective. This is based on the fact that the ability of the university to encourage the student to transition from the former social spheres to the school setting is integral to their retention. Assimilation into the prevailing social groups in the schools in terms of academia and responsibilities is a critical factor in the sustained retention of students in college and their ability to complete the programs (Chrysikos *et al.*, 2017).

Seidman (2005) espoused that the student integration theory is premised on the congruence between the academic and social integration complementarity. The capacity of the students to adjust to the rules, norms and dominant patterns on the campus makes them well-adapted socially within the institutions. The social adjustment provides the students with a psychological safety net. This provides the students with gratification from the knowledge that they have the ability to conform to set standards and obligations pertaining to their continued stay in the institutions (Beethoven *et al.*, 2002).

Pascarella et al. (2008) were of the view that the student integration theory equally comes along with the economic perspective. This entails the cost in terms of the amount of money expended in retaining the student in school. The money may be used for tuition fees, boarding fees, and other incidental costs. This may play a critical role in influencing the students to continuously stay in school associated with the anticipated future earnings and the capacity to obtain tangible results from the academic programs (Van Stolk et al., 2007). It identifies well with the human capital model, which leads students to make decisions influenced by the anticipated economic benefits from the programs they undertake in school.

The theory identifies well with the study owing to the fact that the universities have to package themselves in a manner which will make them attractive to the students. This is by making a strong pitch to them that they stand a chance of obtaining good opportunities in life upon graduation. Universities should provide explicit examples of persons who have excelled in other facets of life after going through academic programs in the institutions. The alumnae associations are strongly regarded as avenues of interaction between prospective students and universities. They may act as a fulcrum to influence positive decision-making regarding taking up an academic program.

2.2. Empirical Review

Magutu Mbeche, Ogeri and Ombati (2010) showed that the service quality levels in the public universities in the Republic of Kenya led to a drawback in their capacity to meet client expectations. Magutu et al. (2010) noted that situations of greater satisfaction in institutions of higher learning were a pointer to the vacuum occasioned by poor service quality. Owino, Kibera, and Munywoki (2014) opined that client satisfaction had a large bearing on the ability to attract and retain clients. In addition, Owino et al. (2014) observed that service quality standards and client satisfaction are strongly correlated, thus improving retention levels.

Hodum (2007) postulated that the measurement of service quality interest is attributed to the relationship between the level of clients' satisfaction and the cost expended to guarantee the realization of the requisite satisfaction levels. According to Mithas et al. (2005), it is imperative that an organization has to invest in the realization of client satisfaction from the services offered to clients. Grigoroudis and Siskos (2009) remarked that a measure of salient approval of the services provided and the goodwill generated naturally translates to repeat buying, and the capacity to assure increased volumes is thus guaranteed by offering quality services. Twum and Peprah (2020) opined that service quality in universities accrues from the ability of the student to appreciate the academic programs in place. Tinto (2009) observed that teachers who can meet students' demands are critical in reassuring the students concerning their competency level.

Ongo (2019) noted that the commitment of teaching staff is key to achieving client satisfaction, which is one of the indicators of service quality. According to Ahmed et al. (2010), students are always interested in alternative means of getting quality services. Tinto (2009) argued that the ability to meet students' expectations and their perceptions about the technical quality of the academic programs offered equally plays an integral role in achieving satisfaction levels in universities. Ahmed et al. (2010) argued that client loyalty is essential in retaining customers in an organization since trust in the brand has significantly developed. Rapanta *et al.* (2020) pointed out that the presence of a wide variety of choices guarantees quality services that can satisfy client needs and expectations. In addition, it will increase the chances of customer retention in the organization.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

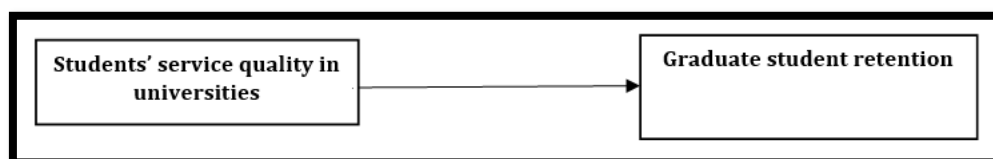


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant relationship between service quality and graduate student retention. Service quality is a critical component of the encounter between the client and the organization, thus allowing one to deduce the merits and demerits of the overall experience. The experience plays an integral role in determining the client's ability to engage in mutual association with the service provider in future business endeavors, going by the satisfaction accrued, thus fostering the retention of graduates.

3. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to carry out a comparative analysis of how service quality in public and private universities affects graduate student retention. Orodho (2009) postulated that a descriptive survey design is a method of collecting information by administering questionnaires to selected samples or conducting interviews. The research design was considered appropriate for the studies because the researcher sought to collect, analyze, and report information as it existed in the field without any undue manipulation of the variables.

All people under consideration in any field of inquiry constitute a universe or targeted population (Kombo & Trump, 2006). The study considered all the public universities and the chartered private universities as the target population. According to the Commission for University Education, the public universities were 22 in number while the

private universities were 17 in number. The study used the members of staff of the marketing departments in each university as the target respondents.

The study selected the University of Nairobi, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Kenyatta University. The private universities that were selected are Daystar University, Strathmore University and United States University of Africa. These universities were chosen because they had the highest student population and were most proximate to the researcher. The motivating parameter for sampling was the size of the marketing departments in terms of staffing and proficiency as pertains to the exposure. The stratified random sampling was used to reach the individual members of the marketing departments in the different universities. The different institutions served as the stratum. Kombo and Trump (2006) posited that a representative sample of 10% and above is adequate to provide the requisite information in large populations. The researcher picked 50% of the staff members in the marketing departments in all six institutions. The researcher selected members of staff in the respective institutions randomly from a list to ensure that all members had an equal chance of participation in the study.

Validity can also be said to be the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data actually represent the phenomenon under investigation (Orodho, 2009). The researcher tested the face validity of the questionnaire. Face validity is in relation to the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the question. This was checked by employing the pre-testing method. In addition, reliability measures the extent to which an instrument will consistently yield similar results after being administered several times to the same respondents. The reliability coefficient was computed using the Cronbach Alpha method.

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviation and presented in the form of tables. Inferential analysis was also carried out using measures such as correlation and multiple regression analysis to establish the nature and magnitude of the relationships between the variables (Zou et al., 2003). Correlation analysis was carried out to determine the nature and strength of the relationship that exists among the study variables (Jeon, 2015). Regression analysis was conducted using linear regression models to establish the relationship between employees' involvement in decision-making and industrial harmony in the devolved public health sector in Kenya.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study and further discussion.

4.1. Graduate Student Retention

The responses on the ability of the universities to make concerted efforts and ensure that students who enrol on academic programs complete them were as captured in table 1.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very highly	17	30.4
Highly	31	55.4
undecided	5	8.9
Not at all	3	5.4
Total	56	100.0

Table 1: Concerted Activities to Ensure Students Complete Academic Programs

Study findings showed that 55.4% of the respondents confirmed that the universities had earmarked activities in place to ensure that the learners who enrolled for academic programs in the universities completed them. This was confirmation that the universities had put in place measures to ensure that they retained the graduate students who undertook the academic programs from enrollment to completion. The responses vindicated the universities with regard to the ability to follow up on the students enrolling in academic programs to reduce the risks of dropping out. It can be interpreted to mean that the universities not only focused on enrolling students in academic programs but equally strived to ensure that the students enrolled completed the programs.

The responses showed that 86% of the respondents confirmed that their institutions ensured all students derived satisfaction, and this showed that they completed academic programs without shifting to other colleges. The responses indicated that the universities placed a premium on the essence of the students completing the academic programs enrolled for, thus not interested in only the number of new students without program completion. However, situations of undecided respondents and others having a contrary opinion were significant at 14%. This was, however, an indication that some of the universities did not make follow up to ensure program completion by ongoing students. The responses can be interpreted to mean that the institutions understood the essence of program completion by the students in totality as a measure of enhancing their profiles and statures, thus ensuring that the learners effectively completed their academic programs.

The findings showed that 79% of the respondents believed that the strong brands that students liked to associate with motivated them to complete the academic programs without shifting to other colleges, which was a unique selling proposition to their universities. This was a factor that brought to the fore the essence of known and strong brands in particular lines of academia, thus elevating the positions of the universities in the mindsets of the target markets. It indicated that the universities had capitalized on their unique positions as marketing avenues. It can thus be interpreted to mean that unique and strong brands were a great medium of focus that enabled universities to tap into their markets.

However, the element of strong and unique brands did not apply to all the universities, as evidenced by 21% of the respondents, thus an indication that, in some cases, the brands did not tally with the market expectations.

The goodwill built over the years allowed continuous referrals and ensured students did drop out of the academic programs enrolled for as evidenced from 75% of the respondents. This indicated that the element of goodwill held a major sway on the ability to attract students to the university occasioned by the good names and images that the institutions had cultivated over the years. It can, thus, be interpreted to mean that in the event of goodwill occasioned by the heritage and history of the institution, the universities were bound to attract and retain graduate students. The goodwill on its own was, however, confirmed not enough to ensure that the students enrolled and completed their academic programs by 25% of the respondents. This indicated that in the event of goodwill and rich legacies, the students still expected value from the institutions regarding satisfaction with the ideals of the academic programs taken.

The position of enhancing goodwill as a premise of attracting graduate students was the same as that of Maringe and Gibbs (2008), who were of the view that in the higher education segment, experiential marketing seeks to create a relationship between the potential student and the institution. The need to implore the student to gain confidence in the programs being offered forms the core basis of the interaction (Bowen *et al.*, 2014). It motivates the potential students to yearn to understand the institution better in terms of the programs offered and their quality. This motivates potential students to seek prior interaction with the systems in place before making a decision to enrol in the programs (Chapleo, 2010). The interactions may entail actual physical visits to the institutions, meeting the members of the faculty, looking out for the successes of the individual alumnae association members and engaging the institutions through online media platforms like interactive websites (Forlani & Pencarelli, 2019).

All the respondents affirmed that the colleges had unique academic courses, and this limited the students from shifting to others because they did not have a choice of similar programs. The findings confirmed the position taken by Berger *et al.* (2014), who attested that the need to have universities seeking to carry out continuous needs assessment before rolling out new programs and expanding the existing ones cannot be over-emphasized. The element of cost also plays a critical role in determining the pricing of the university academic programs. Instances whereby failure to resonate with the market in terms of the cost of programs and the potential of the target market have always exposed some institutions to jeopardy (Lewison & Hawes, 2007). This is occasioned by the fact that, in some cases, the programs are overpriced and some competitors fill in the gaps by offering quality and cheaper alternatives in terms of pricing. This has seen some public universities stagnate without any tangible expansion, especially for the module two programs, while the private counterparts open new campuses nationally and regionally (Chapleo, 2010). The need to have the programs offered to identify with the demands of the market and engage in market surveys to seize the competition is the only way out for serious players in the highly competitive higher education sector (Wangenge-Ouma, 2008).

4.2. Service Quality

The presence of service charters indicated the organizational positions regarding the need to document and affirm the records detailing client expectations and findings presented in table 2.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	56	100
Total	56	100.0

Table 2: Presence of Service Charter in University

The responses showed that 91% of the respondents confirmed that the institution placed major emphasis on staff commitment to enhance graduate student retention. The responses were a pointer to the situation whereby the institutions had identified the staff as a critical cog in ensuring that the programs in place were actualized in an ideal manner. It can, thus, be interpreted to mean that the universities had identified the teaching and non-teaching staff to be of great essence in terms of ensuring that the clients were attended to. Situations whereby the respondents felt the levels of commitment by staff were below the expected standards were equally cited by 9% of the respondents. This indicated that in some of the universities, the staff members did not work with the passion and commitment expected of them.

This affirmed the position taken by Ongo (2019), who was of the view that commitment by staff, their availability for one-on-one interaction and their capacity to innovate with regard to the instruction mediums of use may equally shore up the client satisfaction levels in a university as premised by This is because students are always very keen on the capacity of the staff to be approachable and to provide them with the requisite assistance when they carry out their academic programs. Students equally are very keen on confirming the intuitiveness of the lecturers with regard to the provision of alternatives as pertains to the knowledge dissemination processes at hand (OECD, 2016).

The findings showed that 75% of the respondents affirmed that efforts had been put in place to ensure customer satisfaction, and this led to the institution retaining graduate students. This indicated that the universities had employed ways and measures to assure them of the opportunity to tap into the markets, attaining a segment and retaining it. It can be interpreted to mean that there was evidence of activities which the universities had embarked on to enhance client satisfaction levels as a measure of retaining them in the institutions till the completion of their studies.

Service quality levels were confirmed to have assured the institutions' ability to generate optimal referrals by 70% of the respondents. This was evidence of the fact that in the event of meeting clients' demands and assuring them of sustained quality standards enhancement referrals were bound to be generated. It can, thus, be interpreted to mean that most of the universities met the thresholds of client expectations as pertains to service quality levels, and this predisposed them to the opportunity of generating the requisite referrals and retaining graduate students. Instances of indecision and

dissent by 30% of the respondents to the attribute of having high standards with regard to service quality enough to generate optimal referrals was an indication that some of the universities had failed in terms of meeting client expectations. The responses confirmed that there were cases of failure to retain graduate students, which was attributed to poor service quality levels, which affected the clients' perceptions towards the institutions.

This was in contrast to the position taken by Magutu et al. (2010), which showed that the service quality levels in the public universities in the Republic of Kenya led to a drawback in their capacity to meet client expectations. This occasioned the inability of public universities to retain students in a sustainable manner, thus impeding their growth levels. Situations of greater satisfaction from private universities were a pointer to the vacuum occasioned by the poor service quality, thus curtailing the growth levels of public universities owing to their inability to attract and retain students (Magutu et al., 2010).

The responses showed that 91% of the respondents confirmed that meeting clients' expectations had assured the institutions the ability to continuously retain graduate students. This was a pointer to the essence of fulfilling and assuring the clients that the intended ideals which made them enrol in the institutions in the very fast instance were bound to be realized. It can, thus, be interpreted to mean that the universities had put in place mechanisms to assure the clients of the value for the money paid. Cases whereby 9% of the respondents felt that the universities had failed to meet client expectations were evident. This was an indication of the situation whereby some institutions failed in their mandate of assuring clients that their needs would be effectively met in the course of undertaking academic programs.

The findings confirmed the works of Tinto (2009), who argued that the ability to meet students' expectations and their perceptions about the technical quality of the academic programs offered equally play an integral role in achieving satisfaction levels in universities. The perceived value of the academic programs offered with regard to their assurance to meet the expectations of the student's ability to be employed after completion equally raises the image of institutions (Ahmed *et al.*, 2010). This enhances client loyalty and enhances the ability of the institution to continuously retain the students. It may positively impact the overall growth trajectory of the institution.

Taking care to meet the communities' expectations in terms of goodwill generation was confirmed by 64% of the respondents to have been a factor that assured the universities the ability to attract and retain graduate students. The responses expressed the fact that the universities had taken cognizance of the situation and that they needed to satisfy the expectations of the communities that hosted them. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the institutions needed sustained goodwill and continuous rapport as a measure of assured growth of the student numbers from the communities around them. The failure to meet community expectations and failure to realize goodwill was, however, confirmed by 36% of the respondents. This indicated that some of the institutions did not have a very good rapport with the communities around them.

The findings identified with the position taken by Hodum (2007), who postulated that the measurement of service quality interest is attributed to the relationship between the level of clients' satisfaction and the cost expended to guarantee the realization of the requisite satisfaction levels. It is, thus, imperative that an organization has to invest in the realization of client satisfaction from the services offered to clients (Mithas et al., 2005). This is a measure of salient approval of the services provided, and the goodwill generated naturally translates to repeat buying, and the capacity to ensure increased volumes is thus guaranteed by offering quality services (Grigoroudis & Siskos, 2009).

The ability of the members of staff to embrace and be positively receptive towards the service charter as a measure of ensuring enhanced service quality was confirmed by 73% of the respondents. This indicated that the institutions had positively rallied the membership towards the ideals of the service charters as a measure of instilling ownership and ensuring the service quality levels were enhanced. 27% of the staff members were, however, not very positively receptive towards the institution's service charters, thus derailing the institution's ideals. This negatively affected the service quality levels and the capacity to attract and retain graduate students.

The findings were in tandem with the position of Owino et al. (2014), who argued that high service quality was commensurate with high client retention and satisfaction. The empirical works showed that the levels of clients' satisfaction had a large bearing on the ability to attract and retain clients. This positively impacted the overall performance of the organizations with regard to the ability to generate positive goodwill from the corporate image. There was, thus, a correlation between the service quality standards and client satisfaction with the resultant positive effects on overall firm performance, as indicated by Owino et al. (2014).

73% of the respondents believed that putting in place service charters was confirmed to have affected the ability of the institutions to effectively reach out to the potential markets and retain graduate students. This built client confidence levels in terms of their ability to associate and relate with the institutions in the quest of taking up academic programs. It can be interpreted to mean that service charters had the ultimate effect of confidence building in the target markets in terms of reinforcing assurance of the documented thresholds of the minimum expectations as pertains to service quality. Situations whereby, regardless of the presence of service charters, the institutions had failed to reach out to potential markets still sufficed, as confirmed by 27% of the respondents. This indicated that the institutions failed to exploit and disseminate information to the wider populace about the essence of the service charters and their ideals.

Statement	Point	Percentage	Total
Our institution places major emphasis on commitment by staff, thus enhancing the levels of graduate student retention	Disagree	5	3
	Undecided	4	2
	Agree	32	18
	Strongly Agree	59	33
Total		100	56
Efforts geared towards ensuring customer satisfaction have been put in place and they have seen our institution retain graduate students	Disagree	18	10
	Undecided	7	4
	Agree	41	23
	Strongly Agree	34	19
Total		100	56
Service quality levels have ensured that our institution generates optimal referrals	Disagree	13	7
	Undecided	18	10
	Agree	29	16
	Strongly Agree	41	23
Total		100	56
Meeting client expectations has the graduate students continuously retained in our school	Disagree	5	3
	Undecided	4	2
	Agree	41	23
	Strongly Agree	50	28
Total		100	56
Taking care to meet the community expectations in terms of goodwill generation has ensured that the university attracts and retains graduate students	Disagree	20	11
	Undecided	16	9
	Agree	41	23
	Strongly Agree	23	13
Total		100	56
The members of staff have been positively receptive towards the charter in place to ensure enhanced service quality	Disagree	13	7
	Undecided	11	6
	Agree	50	28
	Strongly Agree	26	15
Total		100	56
The service charter has affected the ability of the institution to effectively reach out to the potential markets and retain graduate students	Disagree	18	10
	Undecided	5	3
	Agree	45	25
	Strongly Agree	32	18
Total		100	56

Table 3: Responses on Service Quality and Graduate Student Retention

The mean analysis showed that the attribute of service quality indicators with the highest mean difference was placing major emphasis on the institutions to ensure staff commitment. It can, thus, be deduced that the ability to have the staff totally committed as envisaged in the service charters was a prelude to the realization of optimal service quality levels. The capacity to have the clients get what they aspired for in terms of the academic programs enrolled for was thus an integral measure of service quality assurance.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Graduate student retention	4.0332	.81270	56
taking care to meet community expectations	3.68	1.046	56
members of staff positive receptive	3.91	.940	56
potential markets and retain graduate students	3.91	1.049	56
efforts geared toward customer satisfaction	3.91	1.066	56
service quality levels for optimal referrals	4.03	.911	56
meeting client expectation	4.36	.796	56
institution places major emphasis	4.45	.807	56

Table 4: Means Analysis for Service Quality and Graduate Student Retention

A Pearson moment correlation was run to determine if there was any significant influence of the attributes that the study used to determine the effects of service quality on graduate student retention. Graduate student retention was used as the dependent variable, while the indicators for the effects of service quality were deemed independent variables. The indicators were commitment by staff, customer satisfaction, referral generation, meeting client expectations, meeting

community expectations, the ability of staff to embrace the service charter and the ability of the service charter to raise the institutional profile in the potential markets. All the indicators of service quality levels had a positive correlation with the capacity to retain graduate students owing to the fact that they had a value of less than one. It can, thus, be deduced that the service quality levels of the institutions have enhanced their ability to ensure graduate student retention.

		Graduate Student Retention	Institution Places Major Emphasis	Efforts Geared Toward Customer Satisfaction	Service Quality Levels for Optimal Referrals	Meeting Client Expectation	Taking Care to Meet Community Expectations	Members of Staff Positive Receptive	Potential Markets And Retention of Graduate Students
Graduate student retention	Pearson Correlation	1.000							
	Sig. (2-tailed)								
	N	56							
institution places major emphasis	Pearson Correlation	.844**	1.000						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000							
	N	56	56						
efforts geared toward customer satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.959**	.786**	1.000					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000						
	N	56	56	56					
service quality levels for optimal referrals	Pearson Correlation	.982**	.890**	.968**	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000					
	N	56	56	56	56				
meeting client expectation	Pearson Correlation	.857**	.936**	.788**	.888**	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000				
	N	56	56	56	56	56			
taking care to meet community expectations	Pearson Correlation	.938**	.797**	.919**	.950**	.773*	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56		
members of staff positive receptive	Pearson Correlation	.973**	.797**	.935**	.959**	.797*	.913**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
potential markets and retain graduate students	Pearson Correlation	.963**	.778**	.984**	.965**	.779*	.917**	.951**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlations for Service Quality and Graduate Student Retention

The regression equation was based on assuming a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables. It was also based on the assumption of homoscedasticity as pertains to the variances along the line of best fit remaining similar.

4.3. Model Fit for the Service Quality Regression Equation

The hypothesized model took the form of equation two below.

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \beta_i X_1 + \varepsilon_0 \quad \text{equation (2)}$$

From the equation (2),

Y = Graduate student retention,

α_0 = constant showing graduate student retention in the absence of experiential learning,

β_i = Coefficient of the independent variables

X_1 = Service Quality,

ε_0 = error term associated with the regression model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.881 ^a	.777	.759	.173	.777	44.349	4	51	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), service quality, experiential learning, alumnae association

Table 6: Model Summary of Experiential Marketing Strategy

The R squared value was 0.777 which indicated that the model provided a good fit attributed to the fact that it had a slope of 77% indicating good gradient.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.316	.153		15.106	.000		
	Service quality	-.162	.053	-.371	-3.041	.004	.295	3.391

a. Dependent Variable: capacity to retain graduate students

Table 7: Coefficients of Service Quality

The regression equation was: - Graduate student retention=2.316-0.162*service quality influence on graduate student retention. The dependent variable was graduate student retention, and service quality levels had an insignificant influence at -0.162. This denoted service quality is not an essential predictor of graduate retention. The null hypothesis for service quality levels failed to be rejected.

5. Conclusion and Implication

The study established that the institutions had identified the staff as a critical cog in ensuring that the programs in place were actualized in an ideal manner. The institutions had positively rallied the membership towards the ideals of the service charters as a measure of instilling ownership and ensuring the service quality levels were enhanced. Enactment of the service charters had a positive and profound effect on the capacity of the institutions to attract goodwill from potential markets owing to the fact that the markets were certain about their expectations.

The study recommends that the universities should enhance their service quality levels by ensuring commitment by the members of staff to infuse efficiency in program delivery within the institutions of learning. It may enhance clients' satisfaction and generate referrals, thus growth, with minimal expenditure on institutional marketing activities. Preference should be given to measures geared towards attaining international certification on quality standards. Universities should ensure that the ideals of the service charters are met and implemented comprehensively to attract and retain more students.

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