



University of  
Chester

**Exploring International Student Satisfaction in  
Private Higher Education Institutes in London**

By

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## **Declaration**

*“The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit”*

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## ABSTRACT

In March 2019 the government of the United Kingdom developed a new strategy to strengthen Britain's leading role in the global higher education market, by aiming to increase the number of international students studying in the country by more than 30 per cent – which in turn would help to boost the income of educational exports to £35 billion (UK Government, 2019). The purpose of this study is to explore an understanding of international student satisfaction in institutions of private higher education in London, adding to the paucity of literature centred on international student satisfaction in private higher education in the UK in general and particularly in London. The private higher education sector in the United Kingdom is expanding rapidly, especially in London. An indicator of this is the number of private higher education institutions with degree awarding powers, which increased from only one private university to ten within less than a decade. Student satisfaction is a complex phenomenon and arguably related to or even extended from the concept of customer satisfaction, a relatively well-known concept in marketing literature. In higher education, only a few studies, mostly based on quantitative methods, are available within the subject area of student satisfaction. Furthermore, this existing body of work is limited to the public higher education sector. This is equally true for international students studying in private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) in London. This signifies the need to investigate thoroughly the perception and experience of international students studying at PrHEIs in London. The outcome of such a study should contribute to improving the quality of educational provisions not only in PrHEIs but also in public higher education institutions (PuHEIs).

For this particular study, qualitative research was employed, by conducting twelve in-depth interviews with international students to capture their experiences whilst measuring their levels of satisfaction, leading to the production of rich data. From this data, three themes emerged along with several subthemes; (1) Flexibility in policies - tuition fee policy, admission policy, multiple intakes and speedy admission processes, (2) Student friendly management- fast communication, a simple structure, quick decision making and easy access to senior management and (3) Feel being customers - customised service while the other significant existing themes such as course and institution selection, pre-arrival and arrival experience, learning & teaching, resources and overall satisfaction were matched to the expectations of the international students and findings in the literature. Recommendations were made particularly around emerging themes and subthemes in order to improve satisfaction by giving more value to student opinions and being more responsive to their needs and demands. This study further concludes that this can only be achieved if higher education (HE) considers students as customers. A need for further research was identified, to study more closely the relationship between new themes and subthemes and student satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Students Satisfaction, International Students, Private higher education institutes

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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	For
APs	Alternator Providers
APA	American Psychological Association
BAME	Black, Asian, Mixed and other Ethnic
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BIS	The department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CMSF	Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation
ECSI	European Customer Satisfaction Index
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EEA	European Economic Area
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HM	Her Majesty
ICEF	International Consultants for Education and Fairs
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
IPA	Importance Performance Analysis
ISB	International Student Barometer
ISI	Independent Schools Inspectorate
IT	Information Technology
K 12	Kindergarten to 12 grade
KPMG	Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler
LTRS	League Tables and Ranking Systems
LSC	London School of Commerce
LTRS	League Tables and Ranking Systems
MAC	Migration Advisory Committee
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Abbreviation	For
NAO	National Audit Office
NEON	National Education Opportunities Network
NCHL	New College of Humanity London
NSS	National Student Survey
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PrHE	Private Higher Education
PrHEIs	Private Higher Education Institutes
PROPHE	The Program for Research on Private Higher Education
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
PuHEIs	Public Higher Education Institutes/Institutes
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RDI	Resource Development International
REO	Review for Educational Oversight
SSRM	Student Satisfaction Retention Model
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TESOF	Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UG	Under Graduate
UK	United Kingdom
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
UKVI	United Kingdom Visa and Immigration
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
WLAN	Wireless Local Area Network
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity
WOM	Word of Mouth
XXXX	Anonymous person or entity

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction

This chapter discusses a number of issues related to the importance of understanding student satisfaction at private higher education institutions (PrHEIs). A comparative overview of the global competition and growth rate of higher education (HE) is presented with a focus on its economic impact on the UK economy. This then leads to a discussion on UK government policy in relation to maintaining the market position of UK HE in this competitive environment and the role of private higher education institutions in the UK. The specific context of London is examined. The need for additional research on the growth of the private higher education institutions is shown by a lack of data on international student satisfaction at these institutions, which leads to the explanation of the research problem for this study. The chapter ends with the structure of the thesis and summary of the chapter. The main content of this chapter is presented in visual form in Figure 01

**Figure 01: Main contents of the chapter (1) Introduction**

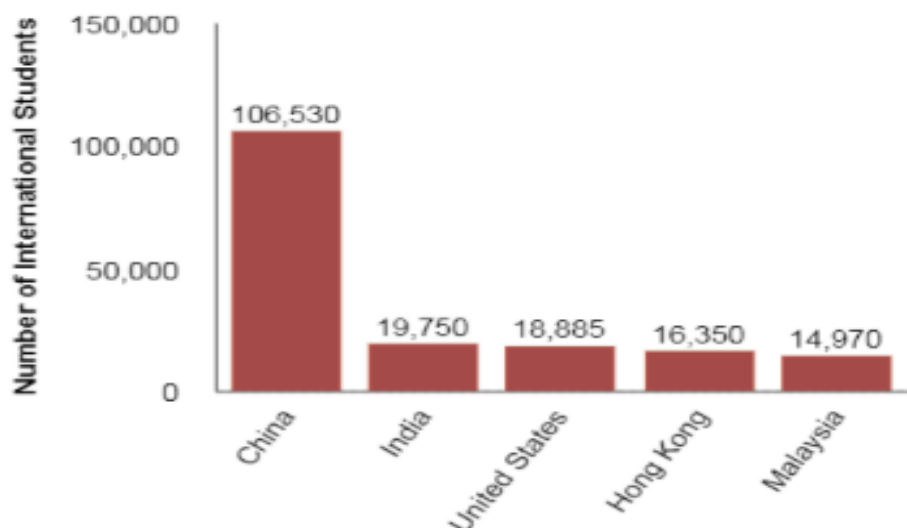


## Review of Professional Context

### Global Competition

The percentage of students traveling abroad for higher education has increased dramatically over the past century (OECD, 2017) and many authors have shed light on the experiences of international students (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2019). Every year many studies examine the academic and social experiences of international students, covering a diverse plethora of fields within the context of higher education (Redwood and Redwood, 2019). Most of the studies are quantitative in nature but a limited number have also been conducted by utilising qualitative research. These studies found that the international student experience is not homogeneous in higher education (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016). One way of explaining these differences in experience is that international students come from different countries in order to study with those often of a different race, culture and class (Redwood and Redwood, 2019). The figure (02) depicts that China, India, United States, Hong Kong and Malaysia are the top five countries of international student origin in the United Kingdom. This large 38% community of international students in the UK is heterogeneous and therefore their needs and expectations are different.

**Figure 02: Top five (5) countries of origin of international students in the UK 2017/18**



Source: Adopted and modified from [studying-in-uk.org](http://studying-in-uk.org)

China continues to be the UK's top international student country of origin. As of 2017/18, there were 106,530 Chinese students studying at HEIs in the UK, followed by 19,750 students from India and 18,885 students from the United States.

The competition in international education markets is becoming fierce. International students are attracted and recruited for economic reasons although it is not universal. A number of governments from different countries have set strategy not only to recruit international students but also to boost the HE balance sheet (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). For example, Australia, Canada, Germany and France have already formulated strategies for internationalising their higher education sectors and sending strong positive messages to the world that international students are welcome and needed. Australia launched a strategy in 2015 to increase the international student numbers up to 720,000 by 2025, in addition to improving the quality of education, enhancing student experience, improving complex visa application procedure and developing and strengthening international partnerships. Canada's international education strategy was formulated in 2013 and clearly recognised the importance of international students by setting a target to attract 450,000 international students and researchers by 2022. Germany and France have similar strategies and the targets as shown in table (01) below.

**Table 01: National Strategy for International Students**

<b>Country</b>	<b>National Strategy</b>	<b>Recruitment Targets</b>
<b>Australia</b>	National Strategy for international education 2025	Aims to reach 720,000 onshore enrolments by 2025
<b>Canada</b>	International education strategy	Aims to attract 450,000 international students and researchers by 2022
<b>Germany</b>	International cooperation action plan and strategy of the federal government for the internationalisation of education, science and research.	Aims to host 350,000 inbound internationally mobile students by 2020.
<b>France</b>	Aim to increase the number of international students	Aims to increase numbers of international students by 20% by 2025.

**Source: adopted and modified from: MAC report, (September 2018)**

Recent statistics have shown that the proportion of UK domiciled white students has declined over the past five years, while the proportion of students with black, Asian, mixed and other ethnic (BAME) backgrounds has increased (HESA, 2019). In March 2019, the UK Education Secretary and the International Trade Secretary announced a new ambitious strategy to strengthen Britain's leading role in the global higher education market, setting out aims to increase the number of international students studying in the country by more than 30 per cent – helping to boost income from educational exports to £35 billion by 2030 (UK Government, 2019). Therefore, the economic importance of international students cannot be denied (Murphy, Scott-Clayton and Wyness, 2017). They are considered a good source of generating revenue, as “cash cows” and as economic assets (Cantwell, 2015; Stein and de Andreotti, 2016). As a result they significantly contribute to economic growth and global competitiveness (Aghion et al, 2008; Valero and Van Reenen, 2016). Latest research by the UK's Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Kaplan International (2018) discovered that in purely financial terms, the advantages to the UK economy from international students are ten times higher than the cost. It is very evident from the above brief discussion that international students make an important contribution to the UK higher education industry by broadening the views and improving the experience of home students and academic employees (Wang, 2012; Foster, 2014). The UK is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest market after the US and the most preferred choice for higher education by international students (OECD 2017), how long this position can be held for is a thought-provoking question (Marginson, 2018). The answer depends on the quality of education and international student satisfaction, not only meeting their expectations but also exceeding them.

The sector attracts a large number of international students and every year more than 100,000 international students come to study in London (Study London, 2019). Not only do international students prefer to study in London but also British universities prefer to offer courses through their campuses in London. According to Study London (2019), there are nearly fifty universities in London with more than 10,000 courses on offer. The UK is the most well known destination for international students because of the quality and reputation of higher education provision (QAA, 2012). It is for this reason that the central focus of this thesis is to investigate international student satisfaction at private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) in London. By reflecting experiences of international students in the UK, this research will benefit both the private and public higher education sectors. However, the

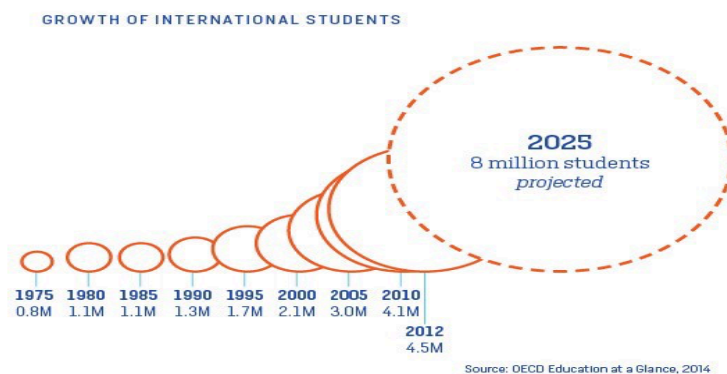
prospect of enhancing the international student experience is the overall basic motivation for this study. This study seeks to explore whether international student satisfaction, in relation to the perception and expectations of students is met, within the reported experience of their study at PrHEIs in London. Six themes will be covered; “Course and institute selection”, “Pre arrival and arrival information (induction)”, “Teaching and learning”, “Resources”, “Management” and finally “Overall satisfaction”. The preference to opt for qualitative research reflects the need to add to the paucity of literature based around international student satisfaction at PrHEIs in London.

In order to understand the needs and expectations of international students, it is necessary to first develop a thorough understanding of international students themselves. International students can be referred to by the use of other terms such as foreign or overseas students (Robinson-Pant, 2010). OECD (2019) define international students as those who have left their native country with the sole purpose of studying and also specifically define international students for higher education as those who received their prior education in another country (usually in their country of origin) and are not residents of their current country of study.

Based on the definitions, an international student within the UK context is a person who is not a UK resident and comes from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) to the UK for study only. International students from outside the EEA require a Tier 4 visa (student visa) and student must be sponsored by Tier 4 licensed institution and meet the requirements of the student visa (MAC Report, September, 2018).

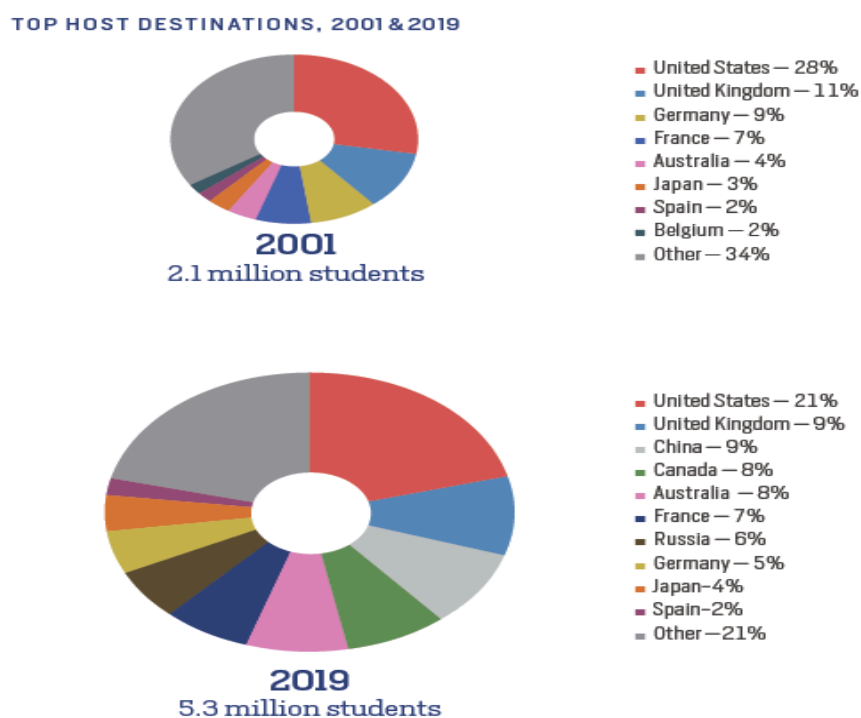
According to ICEF Monitor (2015), nearly 5 million students are studying outside of their countries of origin, this number has more than doubled since 2000 when 2.1 million people were classed as international students. In 2013 almost 4.5 million international students were studying, at higher education level, outside of their country of citizenship (UNESCO 2016). According to forecasts, the number of international students will reach 7 million by 2020 (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). The OECD forecasts that the number of international students will rise to 8 million by 2025. This indicates a very inspiring projected growth rate of 60 per cent in the overall global mobility of students over the subsequent decade. This is illustrated in the figure (03).

**Figure 03: The Growth of International Student Mobility Projection 2025**



The higher education sector is increasing, changing and becoming global. During the last decade, new countries such as China and Russia emerged in the top ten destinations for international students and Germany and France lost their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> position. The Australian higher education rapidly increased its market share from 4% in 2001 to 08% in 2019. The US higher education sector also lost 07% of the market share from 28% in 2001 to 21% in 2017; this is illustrated in figure (04)

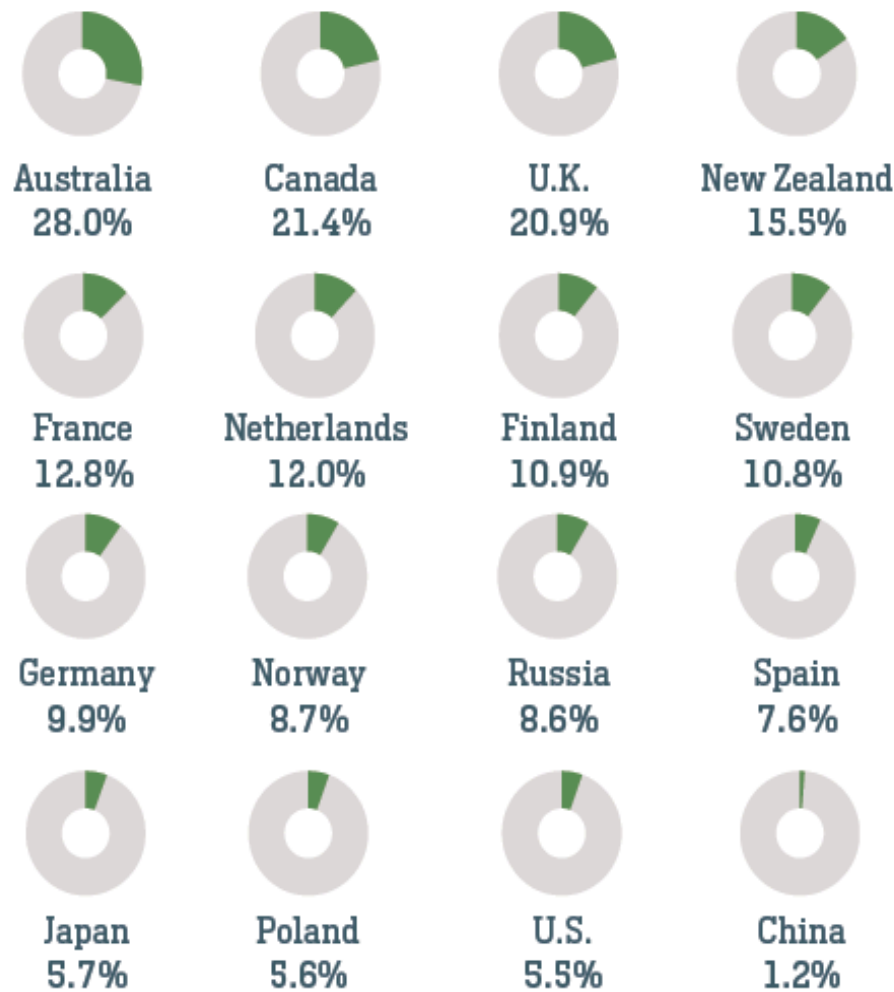
**Figure 04: Global market share of international students for leading destinations**



In this tough competitive environment, the UK could not retain its market share of international students fell from 11% to 9%. The total number of international students were 506,480 in 2018 and down to 496,570 that is the decrease of 2% .The loss of market share can be seen in the figure (04), but the loss of 2% is not big as compared to the United States loss of 7% as it fell from 28% to 21%.

Figure 05: International Students as Percentage of Total Higher Education

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL HIGHER EDUCATION



**Australia, Canada, the U.K., and New Zealand**  
host the largest shares of international students in comparison  
to their total higher education populations.

Source: Project Atlas, 2019

The figure (05) shows that the UK holds the third position after Australia and Canada in terms of international students comparison to its total higher education population.

The United Kingdom currently provides world-class education with a positive global reputation, and has a strong presence in the international market (HM Government, 2019). The number of international students in the UK reached 430,833 in 2017 (OECD 2017) and 458,520 in 2018, and it is also worth noting that there is no cap on the number of international students allowed to study within the country (MAC report, Sep 2018). The table (02) provides more information.

**Table 02: The top destinations for international students, 2016 and 2017**

Country of study	Number of International Students 2016	Number of International Students 2017	% of Change
1.United States	1,043,839	1,078,822	+ 3.4%
2.United Kingdom	496,690	501,045	+ 0.9%
3.China	397,635	442,773	+11.4%
4.Australia	292,352	327,606	+12.1%
5.France	309,624	323,933	+ 4.6%
6.Canada	263,855	312,100	+18.3%
7.Russia	282,921	296,178	+ 4.7%
8.Germany	235,858	251,542	+ 6.6%
9.Japan	152,062	94,962	+12.5%
10.Spain	76,062	94,962	+24.9%

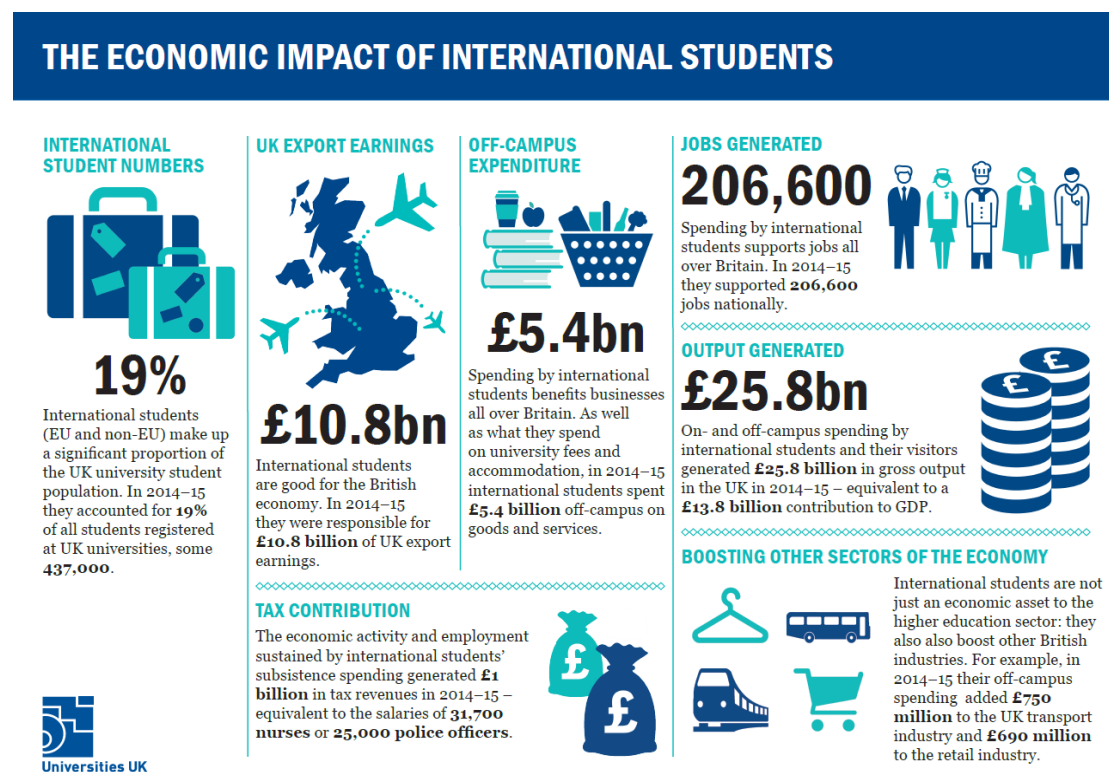
**Source: Project Atlas, 2016 & 2017**

### **Economic Impact**

International students provide invaluable economic, societal and cultural benefits (Foster, 2014) and can be a driver of campus internationalisation (Forbes-Mewett, 2016). According to ICEF Monitor (2019), international students generate an economic impact of US\$300 billion globally and the largest share is that of the US - US\$57.3 billion, followed by the UK, which had a share of US\$25.5 billion in 2016. According to Universities UK (2017), international students and their visitors

generated £25.8 billion for the UK economy in the 2014-15 academic year. This is illustrated in figure (06).

**Figure 06: The Economic impact of International students**



**Source: Universities UK (2017)**

Attracting prospective international students remains important for economic reasons as well as for the diversity of experience (Soo and Elliott, 2010). International students are also beneficial to higher education institutions as they pay higher tuition fees in comparison to home students, creating an important source of revenue for higher education institutions during cutbacks in the budget (Riaño, Mol & Raghuram (2018). For instance, in the 2014-15 academic year it was estimated that 14 per cent of total university revenue in the UK was generated by the tuition fees paid by international students (Universities UK 2017). Despite this, following a constriction of student visa and work rules in the UK, British universities experienced a decline in the number of enrolments of international students in both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 academic years (OECD 2015). According to Universities UK (2017), this resulted in a hit of more than £8 billion to the UK economy and was regarded as being due to the effects of changes in student visa and immigration rules in 2012. The UK government immediately recognised the importance of international students and their significant

contribution to the UK economy, following strong criticism from the business community and the Independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). MAC report (2018) recommendations to exclude international students from net migration statistics (100,000) and further recommends to ease in student visa rules and provision of work experience after graduation.

There was a decline in the number of international students from India coming to the UK of 26 per cent, however the UK government decided to focus on attracting more Chinese students by simplifying the student visa application process for Chinese students in June 2018. According to new rules, Chinese international students are exempt from having to provide evidence of their qualifications, English language proficiency or their finances when forming student visa applications. Another benefit for Chinese students is that applications can be made from outside of China. The new rules came into effect on 6th July 2018 (British Embassy Beijing, 15th June 2018).

The following table (03) shows that the number of Chinese students has constantly increased since 2013, with a very encouraging growth rate of 14 per cent since 2013-14.

**Table 03: Top five non-EU sending countries**

Country	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017/18
1.China (PRC)	87,895	89,540	91,215	95,090	106,530
2.Malaysia	16,635	17,060	17,405	16,370	14,970
3.United States of America	16,484	16,865	17,115	7,580	18,885
4.India	19,750	18,320	16,745	16,550	19,750
5.Hong Kong	14,725	16,215	16,745	16,680	16,350

**Source: HESA (top ten Non EU domicile countries for HE enrolment 2013 to 18 - modified to five countries)**

According to ICEF Monitor (2019), the number of non-EU students studying at British universities has been increasing and there was an increase of 11 per cent between 2017 and 2018.

The following table (04) shows that, for international students, England is the first choice destination for study, followed by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Table 04: International student numbers by UK nation 2016-17**

Country	Total EU students (excluding UK)	Total non-EU students	Total international students
England	104,875	258,710	363,585
Scotland	21,245	31,045	52,290
Wales	6,235	14,970	21,206
Northern Ireland	2,480	2,810	5,290
UK	134,835	307,540	442,375

**Source: HESA Table 011 HE student enrolments by domicile and region of HE provider 2016/17**

### **Private Higher Education**

Levy (1986) defines private higher education institutes are those, which are defined by national authorities. The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) defines private institutes as:

*“any provider of higher education courses which is not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or does not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or from the Secretary of State for Education); and is not a Further Education College”. (Applying student number controls to alternative providers with designated courses, (2012, p. 3)*

The UK private higher education institutes also referred to as fully autonomous alternative providers which operate for profit, do not receive any grant from the Government and are ‘responsible for their own funding’ (Altbach, 1999, p. 2).

Within the realm of higher education (HE), private higher education is increasingly becoming significant and currently holds a third of global enrolment (Levy, 2018). Private higher education (PrHE) has been growing remarkably in the past several decades (Brown 2010). Currently one in three students globally in private sector (Levy, 2015,) therefore more than 30% of global population of higher education students is private (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009 and Levy 2018). This growth has been observed in many parts of the world including Europe, USA, South

America (Brazil), the Asian countries such as Japan, Indonesia, India, China and Philippines, and African countries such as South Africa, Kenya and New Zealand & Australia (Gupta, 2008). The US private higher education is a well-established industry with a long proud history with a globally interest (Zumeta, 2011) including top world ranking universities such as Harvard University, Stanford University, Yale University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The private higher education sector is more dominant than public higher education sector in the Asia and caters for more than 70 per cent of students in India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, and South Korea, and the second biggest segment in Asia belong to China with more than 30 per cent and last but not least in the Asia are Thailand and Vietnam with 15 per cent (Gupta, 2008). The growth of private higher education sector in Australia and New Zealand is also significantly remarkable, in Australia as it was only 0.3% of market share in 2000 and increased to more than 5 per cent in 2007 and based on the growth trend it will reach to 30 per cent by 2020 (Shah and Brown, 2009) and in case of New Zealand, the private higher education sector did not exist before 1989, legal authorisation was granted in 1989 since then this sector made steady growth and reached to 9.3 per cent of the market share (Xiaoying and Abbott, 2008). Private higher education is also expanding in the Middle East. According to Al-Atiqi and Alharbi (2009), one of the most fast developing sectors is the private higher sector and is expected to exceed public higher education by 2025. Within Europe, PrHE has a share of 15.6% of the total HE (PROPHE 2011b) and in Western Europe, the market share is fifteen per cent (15%) and surprisingly growing in France with market share of nineteen per cent (19%) in 2013 (Levy and Casta, 2016) and expected to continue to grow faster in future.

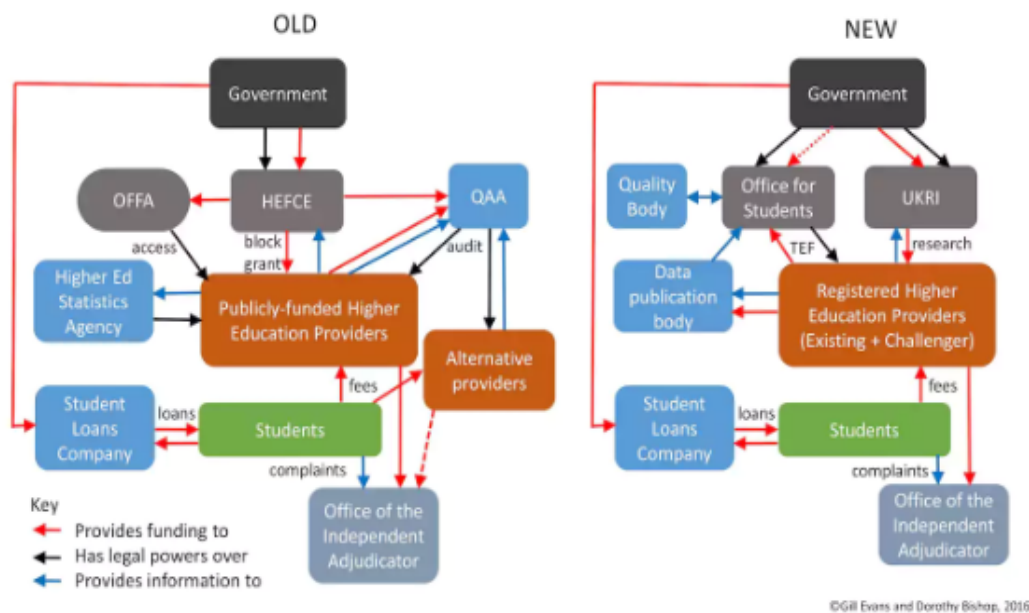
The expansion of the private higher education sector in the UK is part of a global trend (Middlehurst and Fielden 2014). An indicator of this growth is the number of private higher education institutions with degree-awarding powers, which increased from only one private university (University of Buckingham) to more than ten within less than a decade. A study by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2016) identified 732 PrHEIs in 2014 which served somewhere between 245,000 and 295,000 students. Compared to this, a report in 2012 found 674 PrHEIs, serving only 160000 students, clearly indicating significant growth in the private education sector. The report also indicates that an unusually high proportion of international students (27 per cent) were enrolled at alternative providers (APs), compared with (13 per cent) of international students who are enrolled within the

publicly funded HE sector. Almost two-thirds of alternative providers (64 per cent) expected to see increasing numbers of students (domestic, European and international) over the next five years.

As mentioned elsewhere, the UK government is pursuing growth and competition in the HE sector, and as a result, the PrHE in the UK is proliferating. Government made significant changes to the HE sector by introducing academic competition, improving quality of teaching, improving student experience, and referring to students as being “at the heart of the system”.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 brought significant changes within the HE sector. The reforms included significant changes to the HE structure and expectations to develop a stronger HE, rich with competition (PrHE). Deregulation will aid PrHE and therefore it is feasible to suggest that more private universities will emerge in the future. The act also empowers students due to the emphasis on the quality of teaching and satisfying student needs.

**Figure 07: Old and New structure of UKHE**



HERA (the Higher Education and Research Act 2017) established the Office for students (please see the figure 7). With the fast growth of new types of providers in HE, including alternative (private) providers and further education (FE) colleges, regulation had become fragmented with responsibilities lying among several bodies.

The government desired a simplified framework that would bring many of the functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Office for Fair Access (OFFA), the Department for Education and the Privy Council together into a single organisation. OfS is a nascent regulator of the English HE marketplace – planned to promote the growth of a competitive HE market that informs student choice, and protects the interest of its stakeholders (students, government, and society at large). The Office for Students is so named as to prominently and visibly place students at the heart of the system and ensure that it functions for students.

After a brief introduction to the new HE structure and OfS, the focus will now shift back to UK PrHE - a sector that remains relatively small in comparison with the rest of the world. According to Hunt (2019), there has been a growth in the sector over the last few years. In 2017 the total number of private higher education institutions was 813, compared with 732 in 2014 and 674 in 2011 (Shury et al. 2016; Hughes et al. 2013). Therefore the government has begun to support the growth of the private higher education sector and the main aim of the policy (HERA 2017) is to increase choice and competition in the HE market (Crosskick 2010). A positive outcome from this policy is that, as mentioned elsewhere, at present there are more than ten reputable PrHEI's in the country (listed below), whereas a decade ago only a sole private university (University of Buckingham) was in existence in the country.

1. Arden University
2. Ashridge Business School
3. BPP University
4. Ifs University,
5. New College for the Humanities,
6. Regent's University,
7. London Institute of Banking & Finance,
8. The Richmond University,
9. The University of Law,
10. University of Buckingham
11. University College of Estate Management,
12. University College of Osteopathy

In July 2010, the Conservative government created the first private university by conferring university college status to the BPP University. The Resource Development International (RDI), also known as Arden University, was awarded the title of being a university on 5th August 2015 (Times Higher Education 2015). Kaplan

and Pearson, the two large international companies, have already joined the private sector in the UK.

As a result of UK government's initiatives for development of private higher education, The College of Law was the first PrHEI sold to a private equity firm in April 2012. In November 2012, the college was granted the title of "University of Law" and it has since expanded to fourteen campuses - thirteen in the UK and one international campus in Hong Kong.

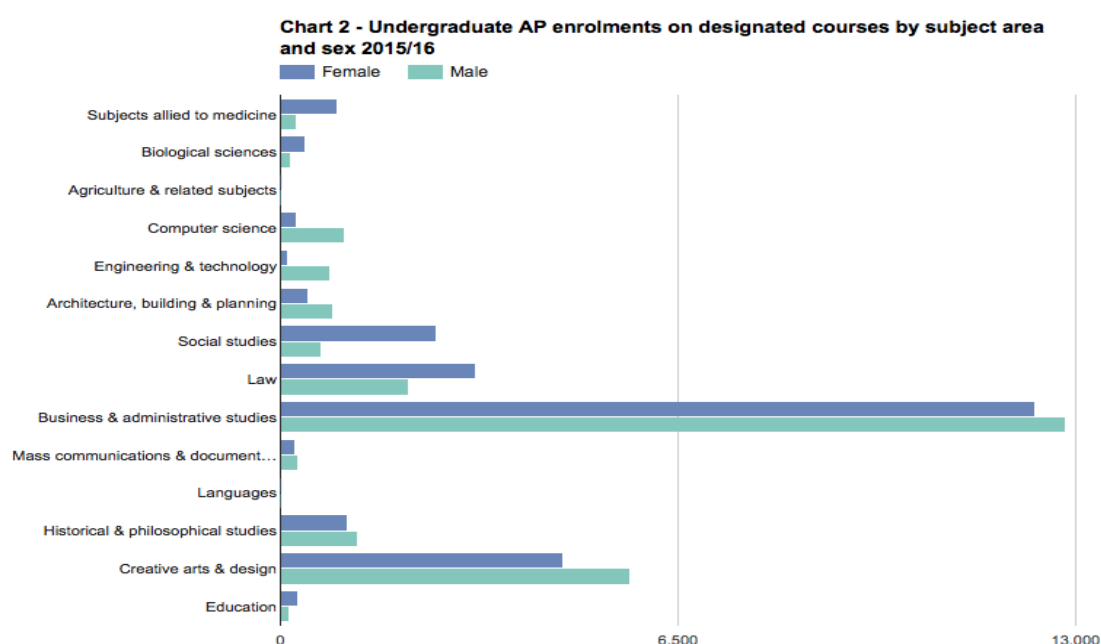
Another independent higher education provider - the London School of Commerce (LSC) has been growing fast not only in the UK (with campuses in London and Birmingham) but also in Europe and Asia. Well-respected campuses include those located in Malta, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Bangladesh.

Private providers provide higher education for both elites and non-elites (Levy, 2003). Within this document, the London School of Commerce (LSC) is used to provide an example of a non-elite institution, whereas the New College of Humanity London (NCHL) is used as an example of an elite institution, as NCHL was founded in September 2012 with what was at the time a double tuition fee of £18,000 per year, costing a student £54,000 in order to obtain a degree.

In comparison to public institutions, private institutions expand rapidly (Robertson, 2018) in this context - with examples including the University of Law, BPP, Ardent University and the London School of Commerce. A few years ago only limited courses were offered, such as business and computing courses, but PrHEIs are now offering a wide range of educational courses including engineering, medicine, Law, creative arts and business (see Figure 08 below). Having said that, PrHE is competing with public HE sector, therefore enhancing student experience should be a strategic priority for HE (Shah and Richardson 2016).

In addition to this private sector growth, the UK government cut funding to public universities by 12 per cent in 2012 and linked this with the increased charge of tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year. The funding cuts and increases in tuition fees show the government's intention to invite those in the private sector to come forward and invest (BBC News, 2011).

**Figure 08: Courses by subject at AP**



**Source: HESA (2017)**

In 2011 the government also published a White Paper called “Students at the Heart of the System” and provided broader participation to the private sector in provisions of higher education.

As part of this initiative, the government also increased the maximum tuition fee loan available, from £3,375 to £6,000 per year, for full-time students studying at alternative providers. In 2012, the government changed the criteria for the granting of university status to allow smaller institutions to qualify. In 2013/14, many private colleges recruited full-time students using tuition fee loans and grants from the government and the number of publicly funded students at APs increased in number to 52,745. A few colleges did not meet the required standard after recruiting large numbers of students, and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) identified serious issues and detailed their concern that the staff-student ratio reached 1:83 in some private colleges.

The government hopes that this private investment will “drive competition and innovation”, through a more market-based approach to higher education, allowing students to choose between a range of providers (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2013). It is envisaged that profit-seeking providers might take an

increased market share in the future as they are demand-sensitive or demand absorbing (Levy 2009, 2011) and this accounts for the largest proportion of providers.

The last two decades have seen unprecedented growth in private provision (Levy, 2015) within numerous national contexts, to the extent where moving from a passive, laissez-faire approach to an active, central planning/market competition approach may prove to be unavoidable. As Levy and Zumeta (2011) argue: "as private provision emerges and grows and touches more of the population and the interests of employers, as well as those of public higher education, governments are compelled to act" (346).

The quality of private higher education has always been a concern in the UK. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and National Audit Office (NAO) questioned why the private sector was allowed to expand without strict regulatory oversight and highlighted low standards especially in terms of poor attendance and issues with student satisfaction. The former UKBA endeavoured to fix this by replacing the old accreditation bodies with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) for further education. These new agencies were instructed by the former UK Border Agency to design a comprehensive system called the "Review for Educational Oversight" (REO) for independent higher and further education.

### **Significance of Student Satisfaction**

The purpose of education is to develop knowledge and skills for long-term success, but student satisfaction with the educational experience is another desirable outcome. Positive attitudes of students towards their curriculum can improve their learning performance (Chang and Smith, 2008) and are often used as one indicator of perceived curriculum quality (Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Douglas et al., 2015). Satisfied students are, in pragmatic terms, more likely to feel obligated to their university and maintain contact and support post-graduation (Gibson, 2010). Also alumni students can return for further studies, can recruit prospective students or regularly donate funds to the institution. For example Harvard business school receive large amount of donation and one of the alumni, Mr Ratan Tata from India gave \$50 million in 2010 (Khanna, Jacob & Chopra, 2019). Satisfied alumni develop long-term relationship with HEIs and help to build and maintain the reputation of the

HEIs due to their emotional attachment to the brand (Loureiro, Ruediger, & Demetris, 2012). For these reasons student satisfaction is a valuable result and decreasing student satisfaction would face bleak enrolments (Wright, 2000).

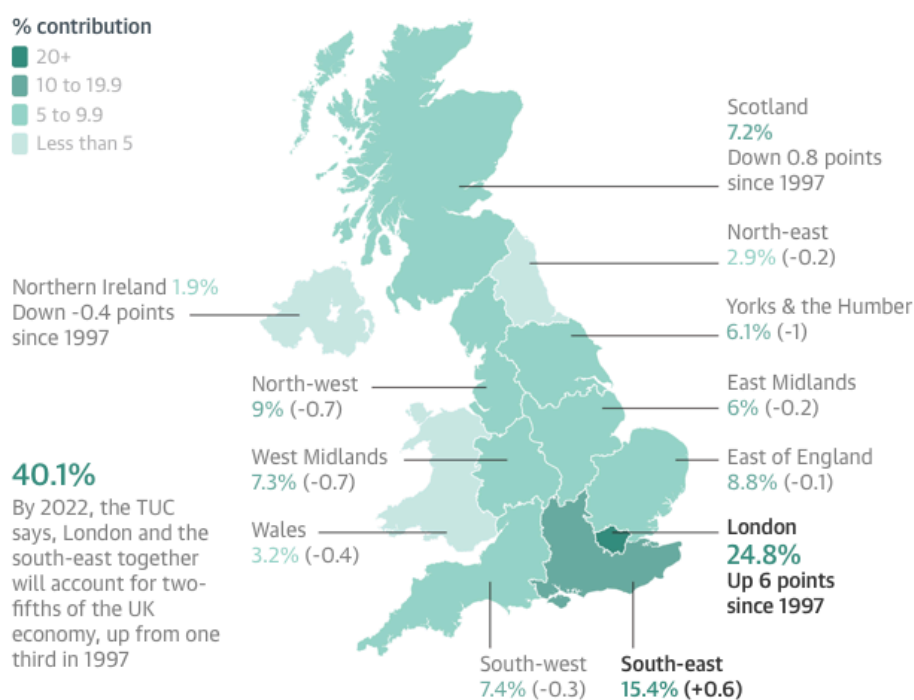
## Research Context

The recent rapid expansion of this sector in the UK has motivated the researcher to explore international student satisfaction in London. This region was chosen because London acts as the central hub for economic activity within the UK. The figure (09) represents the economic activities in the different parts of the UK.

**Figure 09: Projected share of the UK's GDP in 2022**

### Projected share of the UK's GDP in 2022

TUC analysis of how much the regions and nations of the UK will contribute to GDP, if existing trends continue

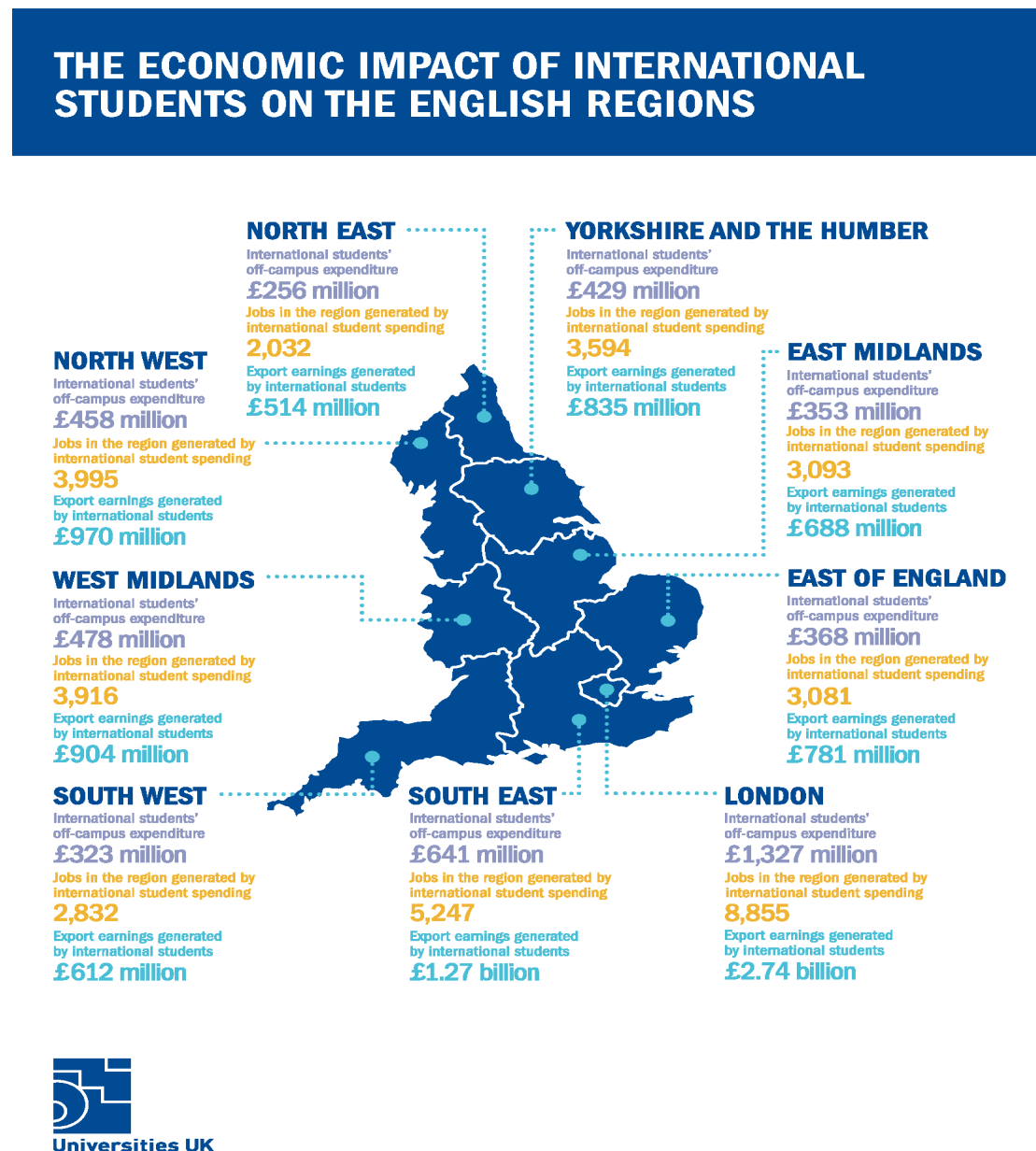


Guardian graphic | Source: ONS, TUC

According to the Trade Union Congress (TUC 2017), the UK economy is disproportionately concentrated in two regions - London and the Southeast. These prosperous regions are projected to account for 40 per cent of national output by the end of 2022. London's rapid growth is obvious in the last two decades during which

period the city climbed from 18.7 per cent of GDP to 22.7 per cent of GDP and this figure is expected to reach 24.8 per cent by end of 2022.

**Figure 10: Economic Impact of International Students**



International students pay full tuition fees and bear associated costs of study. The UK's national policy of high-cost tuition fees for international students not only produces an immediate income, necessary for the financial health of HEIs, but also provides economic benefits for the country and the economy (Lomer, Papatsiba and Naidoo, 2018). The figure (10) shows the summary of the economic contribution of

international students in the country. This contribution from international students to the economy has been documented (Hamzah and Abdullah, 2017). For example, the University of Luton (now University of Bedfordshire) earned 17.7 per cent of its total income from fees paid by international students, whilst the universities of Hertfordshire, Middlesex and Westminster all earned more than 20% of their total income from international students in the academic year 2003-04 (MacLeod, 2006). For many UK universities, international students are a means of financing their operations (Ziguras, 2011). Without international student tuition fee revenue, many UK universities would have a shortfall in financing, and it would be difficult to grow and invest in the future. In this context, some experts argue that without tuition fee income derived from international students, some UK universities might not survive (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

**Figure11: Students in higher education2018/19**



**Source: London Higher (2020)**

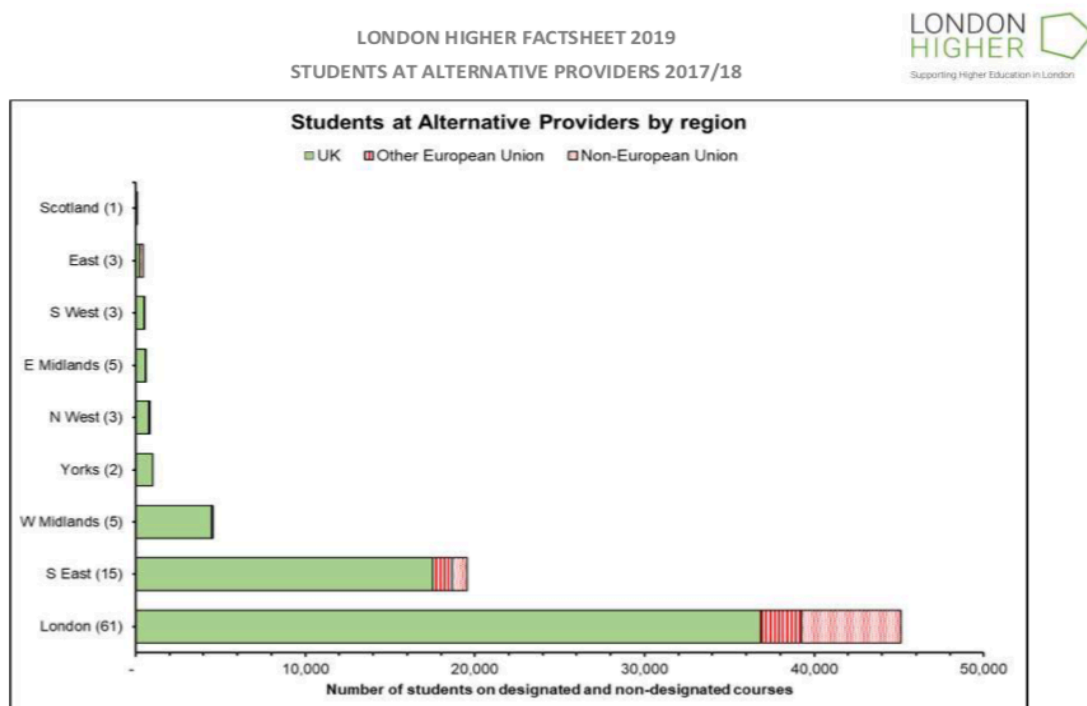
1. In 2018/19, over 2.3 million students were enrolled in 169 providers of higher education (HE) in the UK.
2. Approximately 386,000, or 16% of the total UK, studied at 39 HE providers in London

3. There were 254,000 undergraduates (66 %) and 132,000 postgraduates (34 %) in London by level of study.
4. Overseas students (Other EU and Non EU) were 122,500 in London, 32% of all HE students in the capital.
5. Of London's overseas students, 31% came from other EU countries and 69% came from non-EU countries (London Higher Factsheet, 2020)

The London area also represents the area in which international students in the UK make the greatest economic contribution. In 2014-15, international students in London contributed £2.74 billion, in the South East Region contributed £1.27 billion and in the South West contributed £612 million to the UK economy (Universities UK 2017). International students are contributing over £20 billion to the UK economy and due to its growth; this figure is expected to reach £23 billion by 2020 and £35 billion by 2030 (HM Government, 2019).

The capital is also the first choice of study not only for international students but for British students as well (MAC, 2018). The figure (12) represents London as the most preferred choice of students.

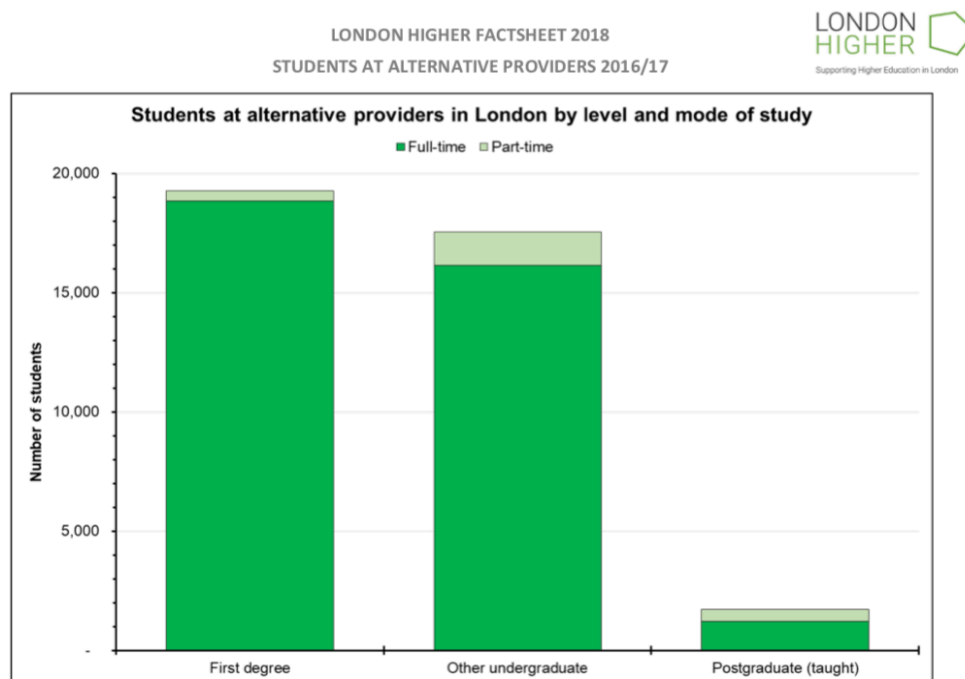
**Figure12: Students at Alternative Providers 2017/18**



Source: London higher (2019)

The total number of international students in the UK in 2017-18 was 458,520 and this accounted for about 14 per cent of the global share in international, mobile higher education students (UKCISA, 2018).

**Figure 13: London factsheet 2018 for students at AP 2016-17**



**Source: London factsheet 2018**

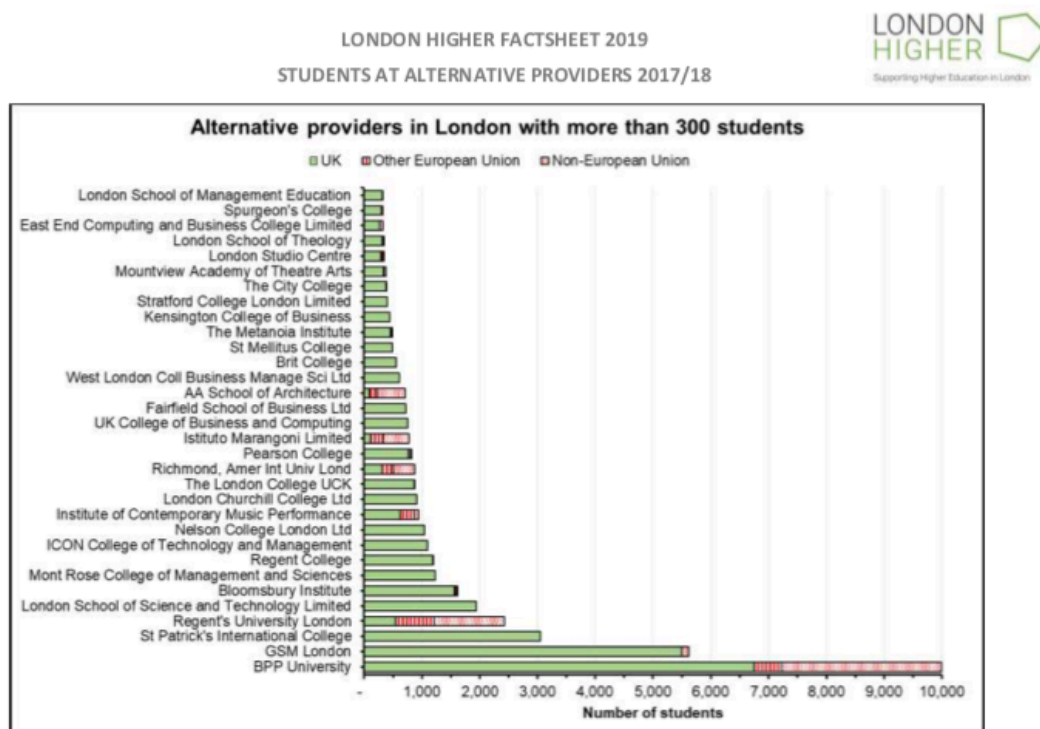
From the global share of the HE market, London hosted 102,965 international students, placing it as the top study destination, thereby beating New York and Sydney. Most of the private higher education institutions are in London due to commercial reasons, and the majority of students study first degree. Please see figure (13) for more information.

According to the QS Best Student Cities Rankings for 2019, London ranked at top students' choice for study. The ranking revealed the following top ten destinations.

1. London
2. Tokyo
3. Melbourne
4. Munich
5. Berlin
6. Montreal
7. Paris
8. Zurich
9. Sydney
10. Seoul

According to the UKCISA report, 148 of the 191 HE providers based in London were non-government funded, private institutions (London Higher, 2018).

**Figure 14: London APs with more than 300 students Factsheet 2019**



Source: London Higher (2020)

The private sector is growing particularly in London. A couple of years ago, many PrHEIs were enrolling less than 1,000 students, however now several PrHEIs have succeeded in enrolling more than 5,000 students.

## Researcher's Background

My interest in international student satisfaction actually developed when I started to work as a Principal at Bedfordian Business School - a private higher education institute in Luton, Bedfordshire in 2010. In fact, prior to this position, I had been working in the sector since 2000 and noticed that the student satisfaction assessment platform was only available for the public sector. The National Student Survey (NSS) did not include any private higher education institutions at that time. Informally, a few students stated that they were more satisfied in private higher education institutions than at public higher education institutions, as they had experience of studying at both forms of institutions, whether that is public or private.

This led to a curiosity, a will to formally investigate international student satisfaction, culminating in professional doctorate level research and this thesis.

### **Research Problem**

As previously noted, the PrHE sector is growing - particularly in London, therefore it is important for the continued growth of this sector to understand what factors contribute to the satisfaction of international students in London.

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

This research study was based on the following research questions:

1. What is student satisfaction and how does it relate to customer satisfaction?
2. What is international student satisfaction in the context of PrHE?
3. What are the major aspects that influence student satisfaction in private higher education?
4. What is the extent of student satisfaction in private higher education institutions in London?

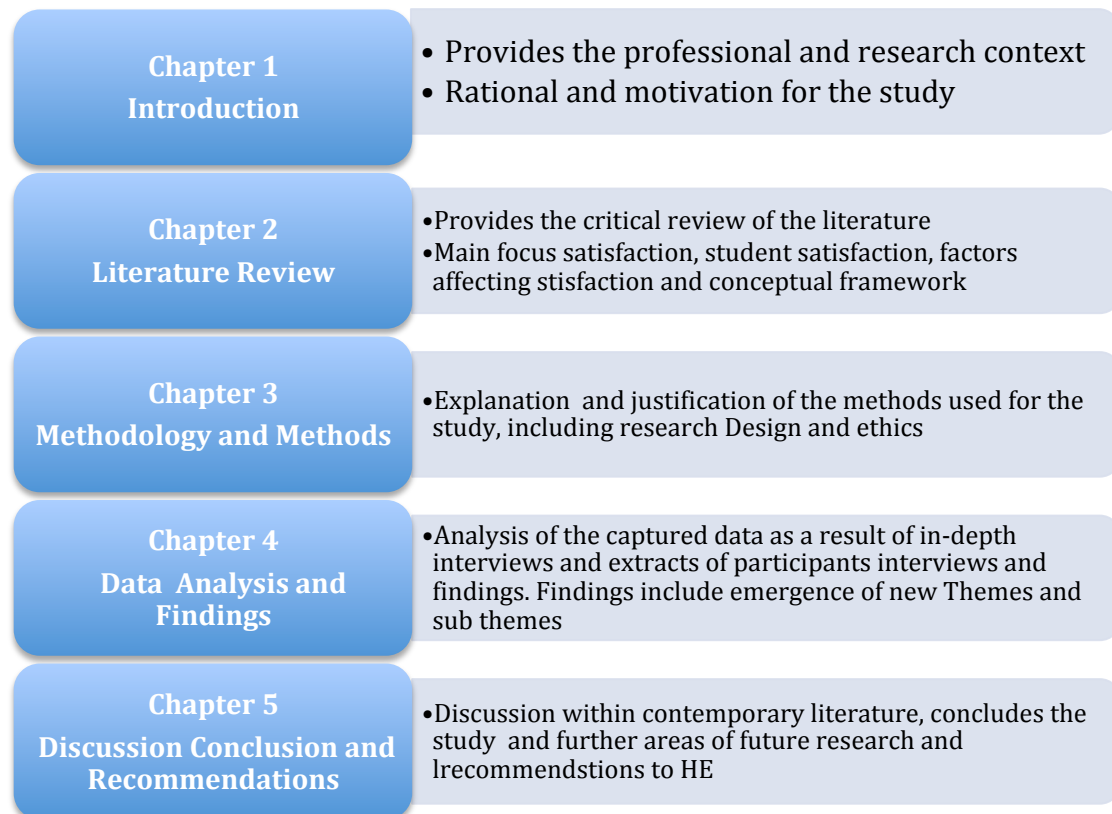
To answer the research questions, the following research objectives were specified:

1. To gain a better understanding of the roots of student satisfaction
2. To gain an understanding of international student satisfaction in the context of PrHE.
3. To explore the aspects that influence international student satisfaction
4. To examine the experiences of satisfaction of students in private higher education institutions in London.

## Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has been structured into five chapters

**Figure 15: Structure of the Thesis**



## Summary

The UK's private higher education sector is growing rapidly while competing at an academic level with the public higher education sector.

The UK government's policies of promoting the sector and creating healthy competition, removing barriers to entry and growth, conferring awarding powers, cutting funding to public universities in 2012, raising the cap on tuition fees to £9,000 per annum which students repay via subsidised loans, and allowing private providers to claim government-subsidised financial aid are all contributing factors to the growth of the PrHE sector in the UK. There is still a need to properly understand the overall impact of these changes.

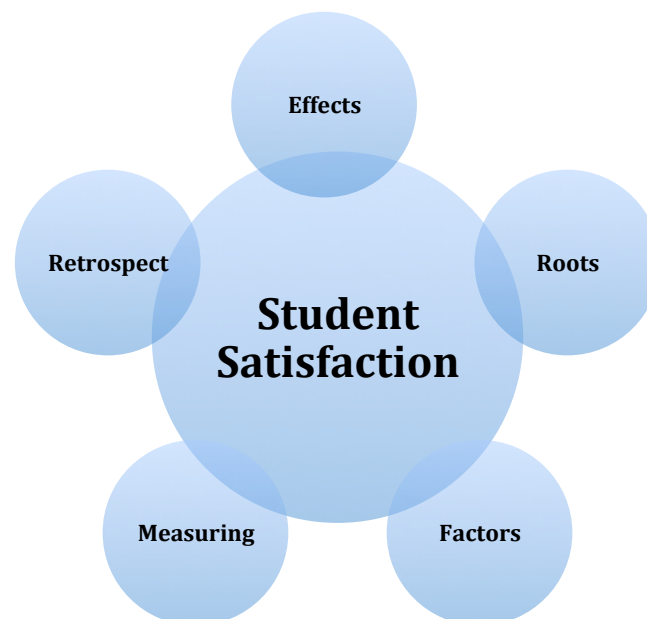
There has been relatively little research and few publications on international student satisfaction in the private higher education sector. This sector is growing in the UK and therefore there is a significant need for this study. The outcomes of the study aim to improve the strategies and activities used to enhance student satisfaction. The insufficiency of research in private higher education sector and how this insufficiency fits into the broader UK higher education sector, with a major focus on international student satisfaction, is the main motivation for this research. The contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, this study contributes to the marketing literature by providing an examination of student satisfaction, whilst considering the student as a prime customer. Secondly, it provides an improved understanding of international students' experiential satisfaction in relation to their time studying at PrHEIs.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the controversial debate centred around whether students are customers or not, and then explores the contemporary understanding of satisfaction, customer satisfaction and student satisfaction, and the determinants and implications for the parties involved in the transaction, i.e. the individual as well as the product or service provider, especially the private higher education institutions. This chapter explores the building blocks of the effects of student satisfaction, roots of student satisfaction, satisfaction and how it relates to marketing and customer satisfaction, factors affecting satisfaction and measuring satisfaction and finally, sets out the conceptual framework of the research at student satisfaction and its parameters and what is at stake for the involved parties. The figure below displays the main topics covered in the review of literature:

**Figure 16: Main contents of the chapter (2) Literature Review**



## **Effects of Student Satisfaction**

The main objective of this thesis is to explore the influences on the expectations and experiences of international students within private higher education institutions, in order to do this it is important to develop the understanding of the effects of student satisfaction. Student satisfaction is a significant element of student life and learning and acts as an assessment of whether an organisation offers an experience those learners consider worthwhile (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Student satisfaction and dissatisfaction affect both the student and the higher education institution in a positive and negative way (Alves and Raposo 2007). The level to which learners are satisfied now does not only impact on their present study achievement, but can also have long-term consequences in and out of their professional and specialist areas of practice. Additionally, student satisfaction has been linked to other productivities of students and even long term implications for their lives, which also adds to the complexity of the subject. Many studies point out that satisfied students are committed and will lead more productive lives while still at an undergraduate level (Cotton, Dollard & de Jonge, 2002). Similarly, other studies have confirmed that more satisfied students at an undergraduate level are more successful in graduate level study, compared to their less satisfied peers (Ostergaard & Kristensen, 2005). Furthermore, many European studies also indicate similar outcomes - that satisfied students perform better during their time in education and after this period, in their professional lives (Vaasra & De Vries, 2007).

As such, student satisfaction matters before and after graduation, affecting current and future quality of life. As noted earlier, satisfied students are more productive and successful, and in turn this has a national impact. Student satisfaction or a lack of consequently has implications for each key stakeholder - the student and the higher education institution. There are three levels that student satisfaction can benefit, be they on an individual, institutional or social level.

From an institutional perspective, satisfied students are more probable to continue in their studies, become loyal students, most likely to engage with alumni, maintain relations with their alma mater and succeed academically, and during and after their study they provide positive word of mouth for current and future students (Alves and Raposo 2007). Therefore, it is important for HEIs to regularly assess student satisfaction and determine areas of improvement, and make decisions to improve the identified areas in order to create a significant impact on student experience and the

image of HEIs. Satisfied students create and transmit positive publicity, and positive word of mouth interactions from satisfied students would logically dictate survival and growth (Prentice, Brady, McLaughlin, 2018). In addition to that, this reduces the cost of attracting prospective students and enhances the university's overall reputation; therefore there is a greater need to meet the demands of students (Tomlinson, 2017). Well-known and successful HEIs realize that retaining enrolled students is very vital rather than attracting prospecting students. One of the main reasons for this is due to the fact that a competitive advantage can be achieved through student satisfaction (Elliott and Shin, 2002) and this satisfaction could be used effectively in the marketing tools of the university. For example, according to a recent study conducted by Dennis, Papagiannidis and Alamanos (2016), it was established that student satisfaction has a significant impact on the perceived identity of a HEI, and therefore has a direct effect on the success of student recruitment (Schlesinger et.al, 2017).

Understanding the underlying dimensions of and contributing factors to student satisfaction has many potential advantages and implications for students, institutions, and society. Graduate students earn more than non-graduate students as a whole and their lives are deemed to be more successful. The institutes have a higher retention rate and require low marketing efforts to enrol students (Deloitte, 2017).

On the contrary, dissatisfaction can potentially have ominous consequences for students and universities; dissatisfied students become unsuccessful (Walther, 2000) in terms of higher rates of quitting their study or transferring (Astin, 2001, 2003; Ham, 2003), and negative experiences are transmitted to others through word of mouth, making it more difficult to attract future applicants (Walther, 2000; Ham, 2003). As a consequence, student satisfaction brings many benefits to both the student and the institution. It is linked to student and institutional success, as well as a wider range of societal benefits that subsequently spur on economic growth.

Researchers have distinguished that nations with a competitive advantage in higher education such as the USA, the UK and Australia, who adopt the tuition-based model, do believe in student satisfaction as a key element of the higher education system (DeShields, Kara and Kaynak 2005; Allen and Johnson, 2008). Within the UK context, student satisfaction is gaining the attention of policy makers. The recent White Paper "Success as a Knowledge Economy" (BIS, 2016), based on student

satisfaction metrics, sets out a strategy for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and links to university funding through tuition fee rates.

The previous White Paper, "Students at the Heart of the System" (BIS, 2011) also gave considerable significance to students. However, a more recent survey by Havergal (2016) of 15,221 undergraduate students at higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK shows that the TEF initiative has been taking place against a background of growing dissatisfaction since 2012, with 35 per cent of English-domiciled students thinking that their time at university did not represent value for money, but represented either poor or very poor value for money (Neves and Hillman, 2017).

Increasing competition worldwide and dynamic higher education environments extend student satisfaction as an aspect of reputation to other countries (Gruber et al., 2010). Wilkins (2013) indicates that student satisfaction has become a significant element of HE in developed countries seeking to compete as a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, it is now crucial for HEIs to enhance their knowledge of those elements of student experience that affect satisfaction and this can be achieved by consulting students and developing a deeper understanding of their needs (Lomas 2007).

## **Roots of International Student Satisfaction**

In order to better understand the roots of international student satisfaction, this research uses the concept of student satisfaction, a theoretical construct, originally derived from the marketing literature and previously adapted in higher education studies. The experiential satisfaction debated in this study is extended from the concept of service satisfaction, and explores service satisfaction and affects in a specific situation (Kao, Huang, & Yang, 2007). According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), "customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company" (p.118), while Carbone and Haeckel (2005) define experience as a takeaway impression that customers have when they encounter products and services from business organisations. In a similar fashion, Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello (2015) state that any exchange of service leads to a customer experience, irrespective of its nature and type. Customer experience is an interaction between an organisation and a customer and developing a strong understanding of this relationship has become important, therefore all big

organisations such as Amazon, Google and KPMG now employ chief customer experience officers, vice presidents or customer experience managers (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). This broad view takes into account the holistic nature of customer experience, integrating the cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, social and spiritual reactions to all interactions with a company (Bolton et al. 2014; Lemke, Clark and Wilson, 2011).

Although experiential satisfaction extends the concept of service satisfaction, experiential satisfaction focuses on consumers' overall evaluation of experiences after consumption (Kao et al., 2007).

### Customer Satisfaction

There is an abundance of literature related to customer satisfaction. Classic literature on satisfaction will be utilised, and although there have been some modifications and improvements in the construct, the literature is still valid to a certain extent. The contemporary definition of satisfaction as stated by Ivashkova and Lopatinskaya (2013) is the state of perception inside the customers after experiencing a service or using a product that fulfils their expectation.

Oliver (1981) suggested that customer satisfaction is the evaluation of customer surprise level, resulting from product acquisition and consumption experiences.

*"The summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about consumption experiences" (p.27).*

Customer satisfaction is believed to be the result of a customer process of comparing his / her expectations and perceptions of performance, confirming or disconfirming those expectations then predicts satisfaction. This theory is the most widely accepted theory, and many researchers and marketers have applied it (Wirtz and Mattila, 2000; Yi, 1990). Many researchers have tried to develop a consensual definition of the construct (Giese and Cote, 2000).

Rather than emphasizing the evaluation process itself, some researchers recommended that customer satisfaction be viewed as a response to an evaluation process (Giese and Cote, 2000). For example, "the consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations (or some norm of

performance) and the actual performance of the product (or service) as perceived after its consumption" (Tse and Wilton, 1988, p. 204).

"[Product satisfaction] is an attitude – like post consumption evaluative judgment" (Mano and Oliver, 1993, p. 454). Kotler (2000) also suggested a similar definition of customer satisfaction as a mental state, finding the difference between what customers recognise as product performances and their own personal expectations, which is the function of cognitive performances and expectations. Customers are subjects who purchase goods and services to satisfy their needs. Kotler also explained customer satisfaction in a broad sense with relation to needs and money - that customers would like to exchange money in order to satisfy their needs.

Brown and Scot (2009) consider satisfaction is the post consumption experience

*"Economists sometimes make a distinction between 'search goods' and 'experience goods', the difference being that the customer can only judge the quality of experience goods after purchase, as they are consumed. But higher education is actually a 'post-experience good', the effects of which may not be discoverable until well afterwards" (P.5-6)*

Many authors also consider satisfaction to be based significantly on the experience of consumption, as they say satisfaction tends to be a transient and experience-specific effect that varies by situation within a short time frame (Zhou, Fang, Vogel, Jin and Zhang, 2012).

Furthermore, customer satisfaction is the evaluation of service by the customer as to whether that service has met the needs and expectations of the customer (Zeithaml et al., 2006). It can therefore, consider customer satisfaction as an evaluative response and expressed some time during the purchase-consumption process (Lee et al., 2015).

To sum up the discussion, it is generally viewed as feeling or affect, resulting from one's immediate or prior experience with a product or service. (Yuen, Cheng and Chan, 2019). The overall satisfaction level of the customer will be determined depending on whether the expectations of the customers have been met (that is confirmed, exceeded (positively disconfirmed or not met (negatively disconfirmed). The concept of experiential satisfaction is proposed and defined as "the result of

customers' evaluation of the contents presented by service providers" (Kao et al., 2008, p. 167). Higher education falls into the domain of services marketing, where service performances are considered to be situation-specific (Schoefer and Ennew, 2005).

### **International Student Satisfaction**

When it comes to identifying what contributes to student satisfaction, there are variations in views held, based on how student satisfaction is interpreted. The term student satisfaction may seem simplistic but in reality, does not find consensus in literary circles. According to Hom (2002), researchers face a challenge in developing a consensus and agreeing on a standard definition of the student satisfaction term and there is therefore a need to pick and change a customer satisfaction theory so that it can explain the meaning of student satisfaction. The complexity of the term derives from a wide range of factors including demographic and technological variables (Couper, 2013).

The academic literature lacks a standard definition for student satisfaction and student's perception of the educational experience is very complex (Hoang, Ngo and Pham, 2018). Therefore researchers have designed student satisfaction conceptualization from the borrowed theories of job satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and economic theories of investment. So much of the contemporary literature on student satisfaction is borrowed from other disciplines. Trying to comprehend student satisfaction within the framework of general marketing practice is justified, although there are some reservations. It has been noted elsewhere that research supports a 'market-driven' and 'customer-driven' approach to universities in order to develop a successful student relationship.

In the context of higher education, international student satisfaction is the principal focus of this work. International students bring enormous benefits, not only to the economy in general but also as providers of a source of income to HEIs (Cantwell, 2015). Therefore, it is important for HEIs to pay attention to international student satisfaction policies (Asare-Nuamah, 2017) and endeavour to provide value to students through the quality delivered by academic staff and provisions, as the students are of great importance to HEIs (Cong, 2017). However, as Choudaha (2016) points out a majority of HEIs still struggle to allocate adequate resources and the expertise required to satisfy the expectations of their high-paying international

students, eventually leading to lower levels of satisfaction and a negative impact on the prospects of enrolling international students in the future. As noted elsewhere, students are basically customers of HEIs and the HE institutions are really part of a service industry.

**Figure 17: Roots of student satisfaction**



**Source: Author**

Please see the appendix (08) for more information on satisfaction, customer satisfaction and student satisfaction

Thus student satisfaction occurs in HE when perceived performance meets or exceeds the expectations of the students (Mark, 2013). As students assess quality of service, they normally cannot help but compare perceived outcomes with expected outcomes (Wright and O'Neill, 2002).

A small number of attempts to define student satisfaction are found in the literature. Due to the overwhelming complexity of the matter, it is hard to choose a 'perfect' definition, which could take every possible ingredient into account. There is a mixed usage of various factors, which could influence student satisfaction. No definition seems to be a universal all-encompassing definition.

Elliott and Shin's (2002) definition has been the most-widely used in contemporary literature:

*[...] the favourability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education. Student satisfaction is being shaped continually by repeated experiences in campus life.(p.198)*

According to the above definition satisfaction represents the overall perception and experience of the service. Thus, this holistic perception is often explained by the multidimensionality of service attributes (Duque 2014; Mansori, Vaz, and Ismail 2014).

Student satisfaction can be defined as a short-term attitude resulting from a student's evaluation of an educational experience (Elliot & Healy, 2001). Moreover, Mazzarol, 2017, claims that student satisfaction is an attitude that only lasts for a short period of time.

Many studies related to student satisfaction have mainly focused on service quality attributes (Parahoo, Harvey and Tamin, 2013; Elsharnouby, 2016). As Parahoo et al. (2013) stated, the concept of student experience related

*“not only to interactions with faculty, courses, and overall learning experiences, but also to other aspects that fall within the domain of student life such as administrative service, staff, physical characteristics of academic facilities, social environment, and advising support” p 137- 138).*

Sweeney and Ingram (2001) define satisfaction as,

*“the perception of enjoyment and accomplishment in the learning environment”* (p.57).

However, it is also important to acknowledge the on-going debate about the relative importance of each experience type leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Student satisfaction is a vital factor in attracting students and retaining high achievement. In higher education, the various researchers have conflicting opinions when considering who is in fact the primary customer. HEIs are traditionally recognized as the owner of multiple customers and/or stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Reavill, 1997; Kanji and Tambi, 1999; Hwarng and Teo, 2001). Kanji and Tambi (1999) classified students as primary customers and government, industry (employers) and parents as secondary customers.

The UK government acknowledges the significance of focusing on students and their expectations when it comes to formulating an educational policy. The Department of Business and Innovation Skills (BIS 2011) defines students as being at 'the heart of the system.' Machado et.al. (2011), also suggested that meeting student needs and expectations should be a top priority, and maintaining them is a challenge worldwide.

In a nutshell, the main purpose of private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) should be to develop the satisfaction of students as financial performance depends on number of students and tuition fee paid (Khaldi and Khatib, 2014). Therefore it is significant for public higher educational institutes in general and PrHEIs in particular to recognise how students perceive their education and what are the most vital factors relating to their satisfaction (Enache, 2011).

It is vital to understand student satisfaction in order to gain and maintain a competitive advantage. As observed elsewhere, student satisfaction appears to be a complex construct. Regardless of that, students are the primary customers for PrHEIs and this fact makes marketing literature and practices a strong candidate for application in higher education in order to explore student satisfaction and its determinants.

### **Students as Customers**

A thought-provoking question is whether students should be considered as customers, and whether their needs should be met. Within the marketing literature, it is argued that the needs of customers should be met and the current emphasis seems to be on customer satisfaction. However the relevant literature on the subject of students being customers or not, is divided. There is an increasing reference to, and controversial debate in the literature surrounding, whether students should be regarded as educational customers (Clayson & Haley, 1990; Gruber et al., 2012; Sperka and Enright, 2019), and this debate needs to end (Guilbault, 2018).

There has been a debatable question regarding whether students should be considered as consumers or producers/products (Saunders, 2015). A study by Obermiller, Fleenor and Raven (2005) found that institutions usually prefer the product orientation, yet students favour the customer orientation. Business language has been imported into the education sector (Ball & Youdell, 2007) to construct and label students as 'customers' (e.g. Laing & Laing, 2016; Mark, 2013). Over the last

four decades, many researchers have discussed the conceptualisation of students as customers. Many authors support the conceptualisation of students as customers such as Bunce, Baird and Jones (2017), Clayson and Haley (2015), Hubbel (2015), Laing and Laing (2016), Sander et al., (2000) and Tight (2013).

In theory, the metaphor of 'students as customers' could position students in a central, and even possibly powerful role in the educational 'transaction' (Biesta, 2005), especially if one adopts the business philosophy that 'the customer is always right' or that the 'customer is king'. The organisations with this marketing approach emphasise profit maximisation by customer satisfaction (Ton, 2014), and consequently customers are considered as being superior to employees (Wang, 2016). This conceptualisation repositions students in the education process (Powell, 2015). As a result, whether students consider themselves as customers or not, remains mostly unknown (Finney & Finney, 2010). There is a growing tendency to represent students as customers and certainly provides a positive contribution to academic pedagogy (Furedi, 2011) as they know what to study and how it should be taught (1994 Group, 2007) in doing consider themselves as customers. Pitman (2000) and Lomas (2007) both explored administrative and academic staff's perception of students as customers, but did not engage with students to determine whether they view themselves as customers.

Lastly, Modell (2005) and Watjatrakul Annamdevula (2014) have been investigating students as customers in an international context, Modell (2005) found difficulties in implementing consumerism approach in public higher education organisations in Sweden. Watjatrakul (2014) concluded that globalisation and market pressure forced higher education sector to constantly review the changing needs of students and improve performance in order to meet students' needs. Franz (1998) also deliberated the consequences of the customer and product orientation and concluded that neither are appropriate. He feared that the students-as-customers paradigm would produce following serious problems: (i) classes become popularity contests; (ii) learning becomes entertainment; (iii) students desire drive programmes; (iv) grade inflation runs rampant; (v) professors become submissive to their students and worried about delighting students rather than teaching.

Grayson (2003a, 2003b) criticises a customer orientation that allows the students to determine how courses should be taught or delivered as being 'tantamount to letting the inmates run the asylum'. Franz (1998) also expressed his serious concerns about

the view that students are producers/products. He contended that in the product orientation, students become passive and overly accepting.

Finally, Franz established that students should be treated as co-workers, as partners in the educational enterprise, with professors taking on the role of a coach. For education, as with any service, the involvement of the customer is crucial. Franz detailed that a greater standard of learning occurs when students actively participate as co-workers in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills.

Groccia (1997) contends that “a real learner is a producer, not a consumer, of the knowledge he or she gains” (Groccia, 1997, p. 32), or in other words, learning is a direct result of the student’s efforts instead of a service purchased by student. The student’s role and relationship with a university is complex. Although students are consumers as well as producers/products of education (Conway and Yorke 1991), the limited empirical evidence suggests that, unsurprisingly, students favour a customer orientation. An artificial bridge between the two orientations will be a viewpoint of students as products focused on faculty and institutional priorities and focused on abstract social needs, while the students as customer’s viewpoint focused on student satisfaction (Saunders, 2015).

Considering the lack of consensus on students as customers and a trustworthy empirical research on the topic, this study derives its strength only from the conceptual argument that students are indeed customers. The concept of customer satisfaction has existed for a long time in the business industry, as can be seen from the definitions and discussions in the literature from the 1970s. However, applying this concept to the service of education and student satisfaction is a more recent development. In the contemporary literature, there is a considerable inclination to consider higher education as a service industry and focus on its delivery as a service.

This view details that HEIs comprise of intangible characteristics, thereby qualifying as a pure service provider (Broachado, 2009; Petruzzellis et al., 2006). Since the higher education sector has been recognised as a service provider over the past few decades, the sector has widely accepted the important notion of student satisfaction and is engaging in satisfying the diverse wants and needs of students (Baldwin and James, 2000; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Gremler and McCollough, 2002; Saunders, 2015; Han and Yoon, 2015; Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016,

Teeroovengadum, et al., 2019). Furthermore, it has been accepted that students should be viewed as customers (Clayson and Haley, 2015; Laing and Laing, 2016). Subsequently, many HEIs have placed more emphasis on concepts such as service quality, students as customers and satisfaction (Gremier and McCollough, 2002; De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2013, Tsai et al. 2017). Saunders (2015) emphasizes that students should also be considered as customers during their time in K-12 schools, although it is worth noting that the schools are publicly funded and run by taxpayers' money. He further says that it is rare to refer to K-12 students as customers, but students are readily conceptualised as customers once they join a college or a university.

The education sector is considered as a business-like service industry and the attributes of service industry customer satisfaction are applicable to student satisfaction in the education sector (Abu-Hasan, 2008). Further literature often considers private higher education students as customers (William, 2002; Joseph, Yakhou and Stone, 2005; Azhar, Yasmin, Tarannum. 2017; Guilbault, 2018).

Given the high importance of customer satisfaction for businesses, student satisfaction is also very important for higher education institutions (Yusoff, Mcleay and Woodruffe-Burton, 2015). In current atmosphere where students pay tuition fees, many HEIs perceive education as paid service and market it accordingly (Letcher and Neves, 2010; Oldfield and Baron, 2000;). Recognizing that students have become "customers" and customer-oriented principles should apply in this case, has become a moral imperative (DeShields et al., 2005). Sines and Duckworth (1994) were more assertive, stating that,

*It's time for educational institutes to face two facts: [T]hey are in a competitive battle for students, and students are customers . . . students are increasingly seeking out those institutes offering them the treatment they believe they deserve as paying customers. (p. 2)*

It should therefore be the main responsibility of higher education institutions to meet the wants and needs of students, especially within the private sector where students are viewed as "customers" (Huang, 2009; Koris, 2015). With reference to the student-as-customer concept, higher education institutions have become providers of services and measure student satisfaction. They periodically conduct student satisfaction surveys to aid the managing of operations in an efficient manner and to

effectively deliver quality services that meet students' expectations (Clayson and Haley, 2005).

## **Factors Affecting Student Satisfaction**

Student satisfaction is affected by a number of factors, but a) direct experience and b) experience perceptions (expectations) are important (DeShields, 2005). It is vital to comprehend the factors contributing to student satisfaction, in order to fully understand the complexity of the learning experience. Student satisfaction seems to be an even more complex construct, primarily due to a multitude of factors that influence it (Hoang, Ngo and Pham, 2018). Understanding and evaluating student satisfaction is becoming increasingly complex due to the dynamic characteristics of demographic factors (Couper, 2013). Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006) classified two groups of factors influencing student satisfaction in HE, 1) personal factors and 2) institutional factors. Personal factors include gender, age, employment, preferred learning style and the student's GPA. Institutional factors include the quality of teaching, promptness of the teachers' feedback, clarity of expectations and teaching style. Student satisfaction is influenced by the characteristics of students (Thomas et al., 2004) and satisfaction also has a social dimension, which has been explored for some time (Fournier and Mick, 1999). Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) describe this term as an overall response and that this response is not limited to the learning experience of a student, instead it includes students' evaluation of the service provided by the HEIs. Understanding the meaning of student satisfaction is therefore a complex exercise (Hoang et al., 2018).

Student satisfaction is also related to future employment, for example, a study conducted by Clemes and colleagues (2008) found a significant relationship between student satisfaction and the reputation of the particular HEI, and also various factors were responsible for the quality of teaching and student satisfaction. They also found a significant relationship between student satisfaction and intended future outcomes for students (further studies and employment). The author has compiled a list of dimensions referenced by various authors over a period of time, as found in the literature. This list is available in Appendix 01 "Dimensions of Student Satisfaction" and provides a quick glance over the variables that authors have been attributing to student satisfaction. Attributes frequently linked to student satisfaction include resources and the quality of resources for learning, the student's social life at the

institution, future prospects and students' subjective present and future perceptions linked to the course and the institution.

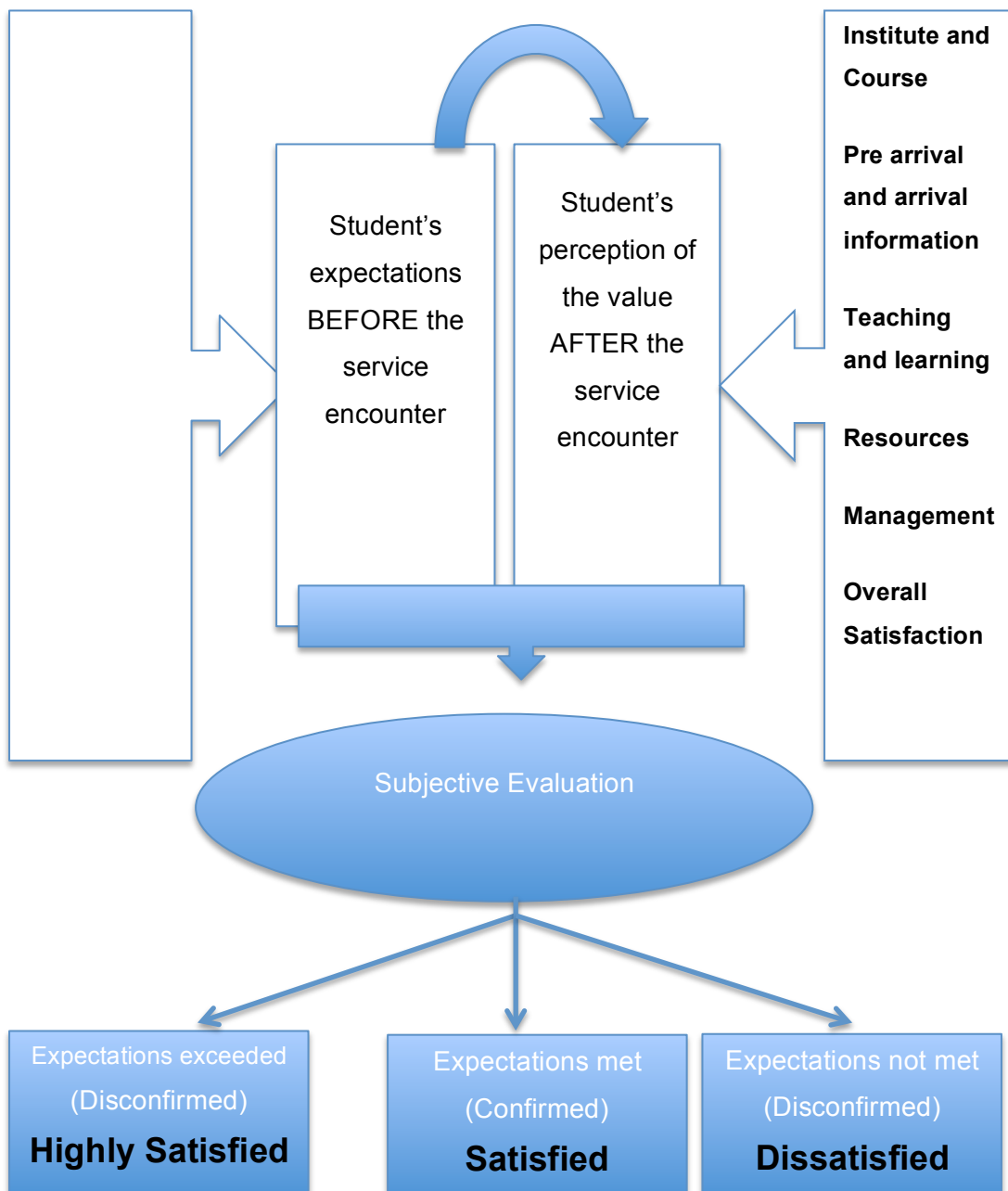
## **Conceptual Framework**

Harvey (2001) recognizes that major satisfaction surveys cover five areas: 1) institutions, 2) faculties, 3) departments, 4) courses and 5) teacher-appraisal by students. The researcher also considered Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) factors for reviewing the higher education sector in the UK. Therefore, adopting the inclusion and exclusion strategy for Harvey's five areas and QAA factors developed the conceptual framework for this study.

Taking into account previous research (Lee et al., 2000; Harvey, 1997, 2001; Elliott and Shin, 2002), almost all universities in the world conduct student satisfaction surveys covering their services. These services include: 1) learning and teaching, 2) learning support facilities, 3) support facilities, 4) the external aspects of being a student and 5) the learning environment.

In this study, satisfaction is conceptualised with key themes of factors which appear to affect student satisfaction: 1) Institution and course selection, 2) Pre-arrival and arrival information (induction), 3) Teaching and learning 4) Resources 5) Management and 6) Overall satisfaction. Figure (18) shows the conceptual framework: the relationship between student satisfaction and the factors mentioned above. This study intends to contribute to existing contemporary literature by determining the extent to which these five key themes influence international student satisfaction.

Figure 18: Conceptual Framework of this study



Source: Author

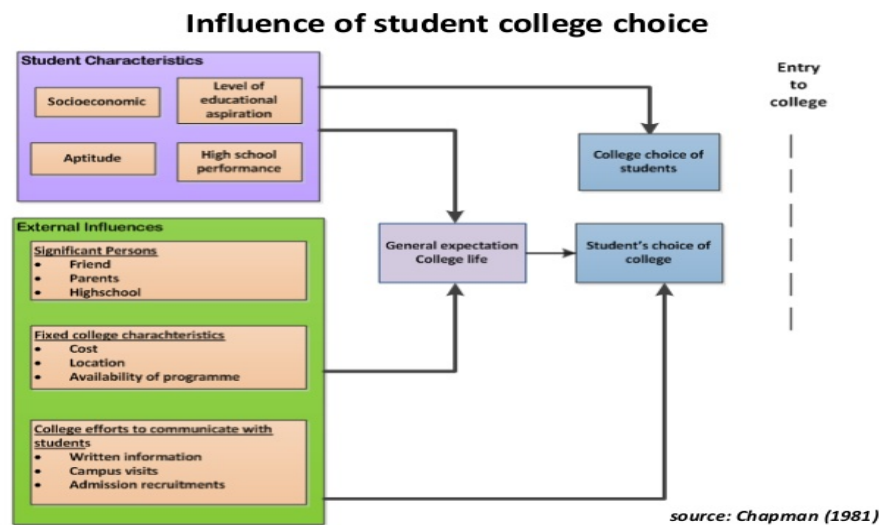
## Course and Institute Selection

Many researchers have attempted to explain the student decision-making process models that started to emerge in the early 1980s. For example; Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Hanson and Littens (1982), Kotler and Fox (1985) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) have become well renowned and generally accepted in field of HE enrolment behaviour (Perna, 2000; Hamrick and Stage, 2004; Teranishi et al., 2004; DesJardins et al., 2006; Smith and Fleming, 2006; Clarke, 2007). But there is little literature on international students analysing the decision-making factors (Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006). As a result, researchers depend on generic models of student decision-making processes. The Chapman model is the most important and widely used in order to understand the factors influencing students' decision in choosing their college. Please see the figure (19).

The model consists of two components: student characteristics (push factors), and external influences (pull factors) - the former component includes socio-economic status, aptitude, educational aspirations, and high school performance while the latter component includes the influence of significant persons such as friends, parents and teachers, fixed characteristics of the college such as location, cost (tuition fee), availability of programmes and communication efforts. The high cost of studying abroad makes decision-making complex as students are looking for value for money (Douglas and Douglas, 2014). The choice of a country or an institute is influenced by many push and pull factors (Banjong & Olson, 2016, Eder, Smith, and Pitts 2010, James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017 and Mazzarol and Soutar 2002).

Most of the studies came to a consensus that international students are usually from non-English-speaking countries and travelling to English-speaking countries in order to study. This choice is influenced by many push and pull factors (Eder, Smith and Pitts, 2010; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

**Figure 19: Chapman Model**



These models are linked to several general consumer behaviour and decision-making process models such as those of Engle, Blackwell and Miniard (1995, 2001), Perreault and McCarthy (2005), Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), and Kotler and Keller (2009). Kotler and Keller's model of decision-making process is based on five stages:

(1) Need recognition, (2) Information search, (3) Evaluation of alternatives, (4) Purchase and (5) Post-purchase behaviour. Students go through all stages of this process, with stage three, the evaluation of alternatives, proving especially important before the actual decision is made.

## Location

Many studies have revealed that one of the most important factors that influence the decision of students in the selection of HEIs is location, for example one of the most integral factors is distance from home or in other words easy access (Moogan and Baron, 2003; Price et al., 2003; Hoyt and Brown, 2003; Briggs, 2006; Domino et al., 2006). Access refers to the extent to which the services provided by a university are conveniently available to students in terms of location/place or time (Arambewela et al., 2005; Telford & Masson, 2005). Most HEIs are located in cities and are easily accessible by public transport and such locations can have a strong influence on students' overall satisfaction (Hanssen and Solvoll, 2015). The city location provides transport connections, socialising opportunities, and a sense of community;

consequently, students become more satisfied within such environments (Andrea and Benjamin, 2013).

Access therefore includes attributes such as the location and operating hours of a university library (Arambewela et al., 2005; Petruzzellis et al., 2006) and ease of access to university buildings and facilities (Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2004).

Petruzzellis and Romanazzi's (2006) study involving 1147 students also positively correlated student satisfaction with the location of the institution. The location of the higher education institution is linked to students' choice through several points; those are the country, the city, infrastructure, safety, and destination image (Gray et al., 2003; Ali-Choudhury, Bennett and Savani, 2008; Alhelalat et al., 2009; Spake, Joseph and Weldy, 2010). The significance of location, from the point of view of students, stems from the need for 'easy commuter access' (Thomas and Jones, 2017), non-educational activities such as sport and leisure, safety and stability of the destination, and accommodation availability (Ali-Choudhury et al., 2008, Spake et al., 2010).

Crisp (2010) provides a wider perspective of the role of the academic institution's location in the choice of students, based on the destination reputation in terms of community stability and wealth, accessibility and transportation connections, living costs, and communication infrastructure.

## Course

Course choice is particularly important as subject area choice, is often a surrogate for career aspirations (Maxwell, 2000; Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Chalmers, 2002). The most popular choices are related to Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) as these are considered crucial for the bright future career (Gill, Roderiro, and Zanini, 2018). The core benefit, which students ultimately achieve, is their higher education qualification and they spend money, time and energy to complete the course and aim to obtain good grades. Student satisfaction, according to Kuo et al. (2013), implies learners' perceptions of the value of a course and their learning program experiences. Students often take courses, which have bright job prospects and hence these courses deserve to be studied and attract a large number of students. It is generally believed that after the completion of the study, most students go for a relevant job to their study; therefore, while selecting a particular

course, often students consider it as being career investment (Maringe, 2006). Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) rightly consider students as buyers of benefits in terms of employment and lifestyle. Therefore, course selection process also considers the importance of career after the completion of the course (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Eder et al., 2010; Maringe, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

### **Tuition Fee**

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) categorised six factors influencing a student's selection of a HEI in a foreign country: 1) knowledge and awareness of the host country, 2) personal recommendations, 3) cost issues, 4) environment, 5) geographic proximity and 6) social links. Maringe (2006) emphasizes costs that include living expenses and the availability of part-time job opportunities for prospective students. The opportunity of working part-time is sometimes one of the ways for certain international students to make their HE study abroad possible (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), to keep their expenses within their means. A latest study conducted by Fagence and Hansom (2018) highlighted the major concern of students on tuition fee cost and accommodation cost as these both costs make going to university expensive. Students said that although the tuition fee and cost of living expenses will be covered by their student loan, they will be in debt for a long period of time.

### **Pre-Arrival and Arrival Information (Induction)**

Bianchi (2013) has defined two kinds of facilities: core (linked to teaching and learning) and peripheral (linked to host country living environment, such as safety, cultural and social activities, housing, transportation, and visa/entry requirements). Moving to a foreign country and the initial adjustment is a challenge and proves a stressful process, therefore all UK universities provide useful and essential pre-arrival and arrival information to international students such as details regarding transport links and options, nearest temporary accommodation availability, and practical advice on opening a bank account and registering with a surgery. According to Archer et al. (2010), the arrival experience is a critical point in the relationship between international students and universities. All UK HE institutions are required to provide support to international students; therefore QAA produced guidance for UK Higher Education providers in 2015 with one of the most important areas being arrival, orientation and induction. Kelo et al. (2010) identify three stages

in this process. The first comprises the pre-arrival services, the second covers those services provided on arrival, and the last is related to services during their period abroad.

**Table 05: Stages of Different Types of Services for International Students (Kelo et al., 2010)**

Stage	Most important service	Least important service
Pre-arrival	Finding somewhere to live	Information about area
On arrival	Finding somewhere to live	Formal welcome
During period of study	Support for academic problems	Language support

**Source: Kelo et al., 2010)**

According to Kelo et al. (2010), the most important problem is finding accommodation and the adjustment into a new academic environment - students usually take four to six weeks to become familiar with their new academic environment and begin to develop a sense of belonging and commitment to their study (HEA, 2014).

## **Learning and Teaching/ Resources (Learning Facilities)**

Learning and teaching refers to teaching methods, learning materials and lecturers' interaction with students (Telford & Masson, 2005). The important contribution teaching and learning make to student satisfaction has been confirmed by several studies (Abdullah, 2006; Arambewela et al., 2005; Ahmed, Gamage, Suwanabroma, Ueyama, Hada and Sekikawa, 2008; Gruber et al., 2010; Navarro et al., 2005).

For example, a study conducted by Hill, Lomas, and MacGregor (2003) discovered that student satisfaction was highly influenced by the quality of lecturers, particularly with regards to issues such as lecture delivery in the class, answering students' questions during lecturing and relationship with students. Traditional lecturing methods are replacing with interactive lecturing methods and lecturer's interactive methods of explaining are significant to student professional development (Yakovleva & Yakovlev, 2014). Since teaching methods are significant, therefore, HEIs are continuously changing and improving teaching methods with modern technology to make more effective in order to meet the diverse needs of students (Henard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008). According to Voss, Gruber, and Szmigin

(2007), competent lecturers with the ability to adopt the most suitable teaching method according to the needs of students, make lessons interesting and students become attentive observant.

A study was conducted in German universities using a student loyalty model based on quality of relationship between HE and the student (Hennig et al. 2001) who found that the quality of teaching and students' emotional commitment to their institutions were crucial for students' loyalty. Navarro et al. (2005) surveyed Spanish university students to gain information regarding their satisfaction with educational efforts made by the universities. The results of the study expressed that the teaching staff, the teaching methods and course administration were key elements in achieving student satisfaction and their subsequent loyalty.

Most student experience studies focus on teaching and learning elements that add to the growth of academia, which measures to what extent learners feel they have grown intellectually and are able to attain academic objectives. Surveys cover two wide sub-categories: teaching and learning, and learning facilities. The first sub-category – teaching and learning – can be further sorted into three groups: features of the teacher/reader, techniques of teaching/learning, and feedback and evaluation.

Learning facilities have a positive correlation with student satisfaction (Weerasinghe and Fernando, 2018), therefore the importance of learning facilities cannot be denied. Several studies indicate that the level of student satisfaction depends on educational experience and learning facilities that students encounter during the learning process (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Weerasinghe and Dedunu, 2017; Weerasinghe and Fernando, 2017). A recent study by Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) concluded that learning facilities such as lecture rooms, libraries, computer labs, social areas, hostel facilities, and student cafeterias serve as major determinants of student satisfaction levels at state universities in Sri Lanka.

In recent years, the world has seen a fantastic and rapidly increasing advancement in technology. The use of mobile technologies including smartphones has become prolific in various service sectors including banking, health, education, tourism, farming and disaster management (Karimi, 2016).

As a result of this advancement and growing popularity, mobile technologies such as smartphones are popular among students, and they are used often for learning

purposes. A recent study by Al Fawareh and Jusoh (2017) confirmed that smartphones are actively used by academic staff, and that computers have been replaced by smartphones as the most actively used form of technology for browsing and emailing. The quality of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and of Wi-Fi access networks or services has a direct impact on student satisfaction. For example, a recent study by Gururaj, Kumar and Lokesha (2016) confirmed student dissatisfaction in relation to low-quality Wi-Fi network services.

The elements of teaching and learning and learning facilities can be seen in the table (06) below:

**Table 06: Teaching and Learning and Learning Facilities**

Teaching and Learning			Learning Facilities
Lecturer	Teaching Methods	Feedback & Assessment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecturing Skills</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Enthusiasm</li> <li>• Teaching qualification</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Academic qualification</li> <li>• Research Record</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class size</li> <li>• Lecture content</li> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Teaching style</li> <li>• Independent learning</li> <li>• Group learning</li> <li>• Class interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From Staff</li> <li>• Timing</li> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Method</li> <li>• Clarity</li> <li>• Expectations</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library &amp; Timing</li> <li>• Time Tables</li> <li>• E-Resources</li> <li>• Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</li> <li>• Computer Lab</li> <li>• Wi-Fi Networks</li> <li>• Audio Visual Teaching Aids resources</li> </ul>

**Source: Author**

Highly satisfied students may produce increased benefits for the higher education institution, such as being a source of competitive advantage with possible outcomes including positive word of mouth (WOM) communication, student retention and loyalty (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Consequently, it is crucial that higher education institutions put measures in place to increase their student satisfaction rating.

One way to enhance customer satisfaction is through evaluation. Petruzzellis et al. (2006) commented that *“evaluation is finalized towards upgrading the quality of*

service”(p.350). Petruzzellis et al. (2006) also commented that, in order to improve quality, student surveys have been conducted in Italian universities.

Douglas et al. (2006) conducted research on the identification of student satisfaction at the Faculty of Business and Law at the University of Liverpool, UK. The study used the concept of the service-product bundle to design the survey questionnaire. This bundle consisted of three elements:

- (1) The physical or facilitating goods;
- (2) The sensual service provided – the explicit service; and
- (3) The psychological service – the implicit service.

The survey results indicated that the most important aspects were related to teaching and learning while the least important were related to physical facilities.

## **Management**

There is a paucity of literature on international student satisfaction and management within HE. Recently, Professor Propper from the Imperial College Business School has published the findings of her study - that good management practices improve the performance of the department, university and student (McCormack, Propper and Smith, 2014). In general, it is acknowledged that management of any organisation should involve problem solving and not a problem-creating approach (Aken, and Berends, 2018). There is an underlying premise based on two universal concepts of management - good and bad management (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2012). Satisfaction does not only include liking and disliking of product and services but also related to interaction with employees (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009). In the higher education, students could not develop relations with management because of the hesitation of considering them as customers (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007).

## **Overall Satisfaction**

Globalisation, tough competition and pressure from key stakeholders, all demand excellence in educational services, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that customers, such as students, are satisfied (World Bank Report 2010).

Since the levy of tuition fees was raised in UK HE, students have started demanding value for money and to some extent they consider themselves customers. Customer

satisfaction is an overall attitude towards a service provider (Hansemark and Albinsson, 2004). Dib and Alnazer (2013) compare students' satisfaction results to contentment with the educational services experience, culminating in feelings of joy and pleasure of being associated with a university. In marketing theory, it is generally accepted that delighted or highly satisfied customers are likely to recommend a product or service to friends. In service industries a view is generally held that there is a very strong link between an organisation's success and the proportion of customers who are 'promoters' of the service (Reichheld 2003). Usually promoters are those customers who are highly satisfied with the actual service experience or get financial incentives from the business to give a word of mouth recommendation for the product or service.

Overall satisfaction refers to the totality of a person's experiences with an organisation (Jones & Suh, 2000). It is more easily understandable in terms of numbers, or outcomes. The overall satisfaction approach to satisfaction is the end result (Jones & Suh, 2000; Olsen & Johnson, 2003; Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). For example, a student was not happy with the admission process, as it was time-consuming and slow, but during the course all of the service encounters were highly satisfying, therefore, the student's overall evaluation of their experience was that of satisfaction (Elliot & Healy, 2001).

## **Measuring Student Satisfaction**

The basic understanding of the measurement of student satisfaction is the collection of data (information) about the service students received and experienced. The higher education industry is increasingly recognized as a service industry (Sapri, Kaka and Finch 2009). Measuring student satisfaction must involve understanding the construct of quality. Abu Hasan, Ilias, Razak and Rahaman (2008) explain that in service literature it is the perceived quality or the consumer's judgement of overall experience. The service quality, including in the case of students' satisfaction, is a result of how the customer perceives the service as meeting or exceeding expectations.

Perception of the quality of educational experience during study seems to be the main indicator when measuring student satisfaction. As noted elsewhere, private higher education institutions are essentially a part of the service industry. With that perspective, the quality of service should constitute an integral part, if not all, of the

satisfaction derived from the service. When it comes to students' individual perceptions about the quality of education provided by an institution, surprising results are uncovered. The Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey (2014) found that the University of Sheffield scored highest within the parameter of 'Overall Score' for student experience, with the University of Oxford placing fourth and the University of Cambridge sixth. This indicates that the perception of educational experience does not necessarily depend on a university's image or even its perceived standing or reputation alone.

The relationship between service quality and student satisfaction was examined by a study involving 200 university students at two private higher education institutes in Malaysia. In their study, Abu Hasan et al. found a stronger than moderate positive relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. This was also the case in a similar study in India. Malik, Danish, and Usman (2010) conducted a survey of 240 students in private as well as public higher education institutes in the Punjab, India. They showed that service quality significantly influenced the student satisfaction in multiple facets. In Abu Hasan et al.'s study, empathy had the strongest relationship to satisfaction, followed by assurance, tangibility, responsiveness, and reliability. These authors concluded that there is a clear relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. They also noted the high ranking of empathy and assurance and suggested therefore that not only is student satisfaction improved by increasing service quality, but that private higher education institutions should place emphasis on increasing empathy and assurance. In the Punjab study, the quality of teaching and the learning environment ranked highest in factors affecting student satisfaction. Tangibility also played a part in student satisfaction. Whether there is a difference in the relationship of service quality and student satisfaction between public and private higher education institutes is a suggestion for further study.

For example, there is the question of how to measure changing expectations of net generation students as the world is changing rapidly in terms of technology and the application of it (Moore and Burgess 2017). Students' expectations have been radically changing regarding what a quality learning experience should be (Pedro, 2010) and how satisfaction can be measured in an effective fashion (Moore and Burgess 2017).

Appendix (03) "Student Satisfaction Measurement Models" contains a list of frequently used models with descriptions and criticisms for each model. Measuring

student satisfaction has a long history is not a nascent concept. A majority of Higher Education institutions have been taking an interest in measuring student satisfaction by using different satisfaction tools.

The importance of 'customer satisfaction' was therefore a concern even before tuition fees were introduced in countries such as the United Kingdom (Douglas et al., 2006). Student satisfaction surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) were developed to obtain feedback from students in their final year of undergraduate study, in order to enhance the experience of future students. The survey plays a significant role in institutional self-evaluation, which aids the assessment and improvement of services since students have been recognised as primary customers and are the direct recipients of the educational services provided, therefore self-reporting survey results are gained (Yorke, 2015).

**Table 07: Student Satisfaction Surveys**

Types of Survey	Subject	Respondents/Timing
National Student Survey –NSS (HEFCE)	Academic experience	Final year undergraduates
Student Academic Experience Survey HEPI-HEA	Academic experience	Full-time undergraduate students (all years)
Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey	Academic, social, career- related services	Full-time undergraduate students (all years)
Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (HESA)	Career outcomes	Graduates (all levels), three years after completing their course
TEF (TESOF)	Teaching Excellence (Teaching quality, Learning environment and outcome-employment	UK HEIs (undergraduate level) Annually awarded as Gold, Silver, Bronze and Provisional

**Source: Author**

Since the status of students as customers has arisen, there have been many student satisfaction tools that have been introduced, such as the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005 in the United Kingdom which included six dimensions: (1) Teaching;

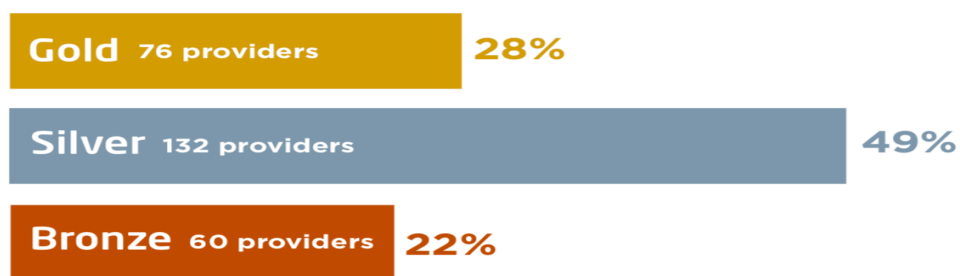
(2) Assessment & Feedback; (3) Academic Support; (4) Organisation & Management; (5) Learning Resources; and (6) Personal Development (Langan and Harris, 2019). The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) in Australia, was designed to capture student perceptions of course quality at a national level and reported improvements in 2010 and 2016, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that started in 1998 in the US, requires students to reflect on educational activities and engagements (Kahu 2013). Under this context, student participation can be regarded as the time and effort that students commit to partaking in purposeful educational activities (Radloff and Coates, 2010). Such surveys and in turn their results have a long history and have been published as public information, for example rankings of the academic quality of the US' HEIs have been on the scene for approximately 100 years (McDonagh et al, 1998). This information has been very useful for prospective students as it is one of the most important factors for students when choosing which HEI to attend (Hou & Jacob, 2017).

Results from surveys such as league tables and ranking systems (LTRS) are published by the government, HEIs, accreditation bodies and popular media. These results are used for competitive purposes in order to attract prospective students, academic and administrative staff and funding. Therefore some HEIs take the ranking system seriously in order to feel proud and to more easily attract students with their higher-ranking position (Mogaji, 2019). For example, the *U.S. News and World Report's* special issue on 'America's Best Colleges' has been published annually since 1990, the *Times Higher Education Supplement* since 1992, and others include the *Financial Times* and *The Sunday Times* (UK/Ireland), *Der Spiegel* (Germany), *Macleans* (Canada) and *Reforma* (Mexico). The position of a HEI in any league table or ranking has an impact on its public image, and this image has a strong impact on the retention of current students and the attraction of new students (James et al., 1999). In a world of increasingly globalised higher education and intensifying competition, it is of paramount importance to sustain a good public image in order to stay competitive. Therefore, HEIs are increasingly directing efforts towards improving their ranking (Jereb and Jerebic and URH, 2018) and image.

The Teaching Excellence Framework or TEF (Business Innovation and Skills, 2016) is a rating award, which focuses on improving the quality of teaching at the undergraduate level. The TEF was renamed in 2017 as the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TESOF) but the acronym TEF is still in use (Deem

and Baird, 2019). The framework is based on excellence in the quality of teaching, and HEIs are awarded a Gold (outstanding quality), Silver (high-quality teaching), Bronze (meets the teaching quality standards) and Provisional (participation but no results released yet) rating. The primary purpose of the assessment is to assist prospective students in choosing a place of study in the UK. The TEF awards cover four main areas (1) Student Satisfaction; (2) Continuation rate-progression; (3) Employment rate and (4) Academic Support.

**Figure 20:TEF Results 2019**



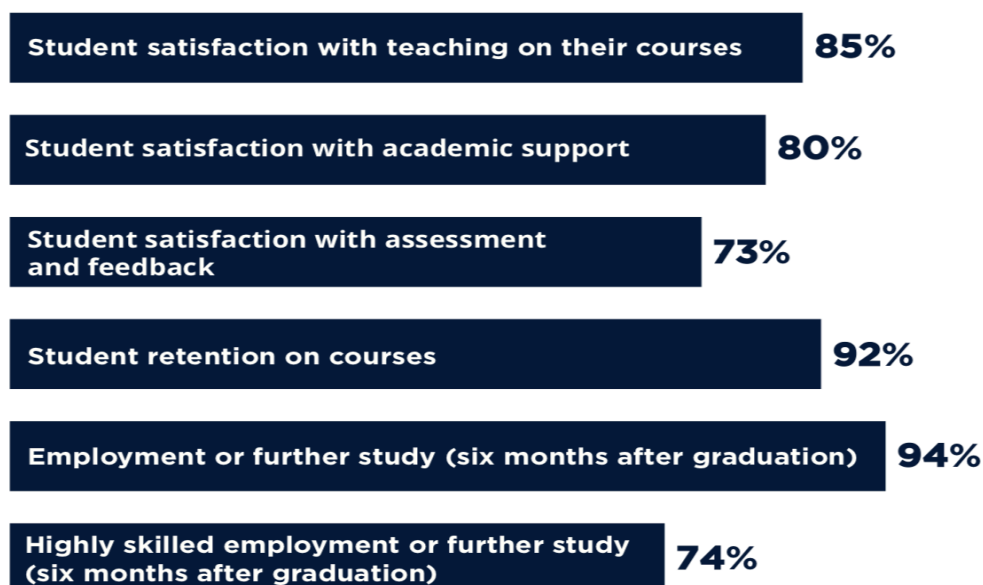
Source:

OfS (2020)

There are also 14 providers with provisional awards.

The results of TEF 2019 were based on the six metrics and present the average results in percentage.

**Figure 21: TEF Metrics used for 2019**



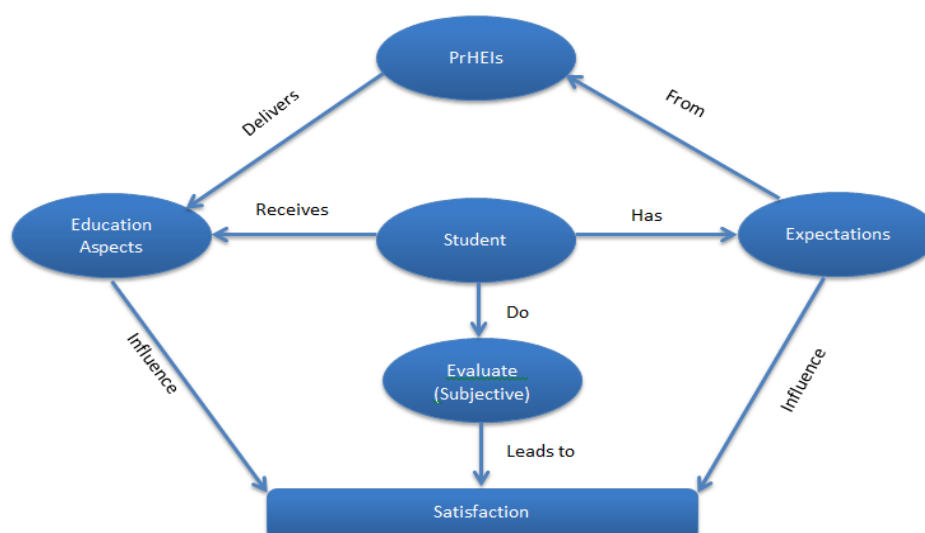
Source: OfS (2020)

The private higher education sector is rapidly emerging and competing with the public higher education sector at academic levels in the UK (Crosskick 2010, Grove 2014). The private providers range from a few large-scale providers to many small-scale providers. One of the large providers is the BPP University College which has degree-awarding powers. The BPP has seven campuses in the UK and is owned by the Apollo Group (which also owns the University of Phoenix). The University of Phoenix has seen a significant growth in student numbers, from around 25,000 enrolled students in 1995 to 455,600 in 2010 (Hunt, 2019). Wilkins (2013) emphasized that the most influential dimensions driving student satisfaction in the private higher education sector need to be identified and analysed, as it is the main factors in gaining a competitive edge.

Therefore, in the competitive environment, higher education institutions need to have satisfied students in order to maintain a good image. HEIs use a specific framework to assess their students' satisfaction with the services and courses of study in order to better meet students needs and satisfy their aspiration (Qureshi, Shaukat, & Hijazi, 2011). Realizing the importance of student satisfaction and its relation to an image, HEIs frequently conduct satisfaction surveys with a twofold purpose, firstly to find out the overall level of satisfaction with the provision and quality of service and secondly, to improve the internal system based on the findings.

The process of measuring student satisfaction can be seen in below framework.

**Figure 22: Process of measuring satisfaction (Role of PrHEIs and Student)**



**Source: Author**

These surveys are primarily centred around assessing the perceptions of students in relation to independent variables contributing to student satisfaction. In the UK, the most popular survey is 'The Student Academic Experience Survey', which provides insight into how students appraise their time at UK institutions to date whilst also influencing policy and debate at a national level (Neves & Hillman, 2017). The most common and frequently used feedback survey is about course and course delivery, with the main aim to improve teaching and learning methods and measure the effectiveness thereof. Improvement decisions, such as extra training for academic staff or promotions, are made based on these surveys (Mai, 2005; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013).

## **Retrospect on Student Satisfaction Research**

As compared to the public higher education sector, the private higher education sector has not benefited from any significant research for a very long time. The first research on the US private higher education sector (Geiger, 1986) and in Australia (Jones & Anwyl, 1987) were published in the 1980s and followed by the establishment of a body of research on private higher education in Central and Eastern Europe in 1990 (Dima, 1998; Kwiek, 2003; Nagy-Darvas & Darvas, 1999; Nicolescu, 2002; Reisz, 1992; Sadlak, 1994; Sapatoru, 2001; Slantcheva, 2001; Suspitsin, 2004). The focus of most of the research studies has been on the difference between public and private institutes. An example is the Bibliography of Private Higher Education (Maldonado-Maldonado et al, 2004), which identified over 150 papers on economic and financial issues, and mostly focused on the funding of higher education (covering topics such as public vs. private funding or tuition fees), but not student satisfaction.

Although there has been a significant production of research literature on higher education and student satisfaction, only a small proportion of that has been produced on international student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Examples of this include:

- Finn & Darmody (2017), "what predicts international higher education student satisfaction with their studies in Ireland?"
- Asare-Nuamah (2017), "International Students' Satisfaction: Assessing the Determinants of Satisfaction",
- Gakhal, Wilson, Broughan and Sparks (2017), "Evaluating student satisfaction at a top-performing UK university".

- Zhou, et.al (2016), “Does higher education service quality effect student satisfaction, image and loyalty”?,
- Elsharnouby (2016), “Participation behaviour among international students: The role of satisfaction with service augmentation and brand choice attainment”,
- Ngamkamollert and Ruangkanjanases (2015), “factors influencing foreign students’ satisfaction towards international program in Thai Universities”,
- Padleea and Reimers (2015), “Factors Influencing Foreign Students’ Satisfaction toward International Program in Thai Universities”,
- Chong (2015), “Internationalisation of Higher Education: Proposed Framework on International Students’ Satisfaction”,
- Garrett (2014), “Explaining International Student Satisfaction”,
- Korobova (2012), “a comparative study of student engagement and satisfaction and academic success among International and American students”,
- Stoltenberg (2011), “Investigating the Concept of Student’ Satisfaction”,
- Arambewela and Hall (2009), “an empirical model of international student satisfaction”.

However, surprisingly a few studies have addressed international student satisfaction at PrHEIs. For example, McLachlan and Justice (2009) conducted small-scale research on the experience of international students in specific private higher education institutions in the USA, and Abu Hassan (2008) wrote “Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: a case study of private higher education institutes in Malaysia”, with another piece of literature written by Mansori, Vaz and Ismail (2014).

Appendix 02 “Recent research works in the area of student satisfaction” shows a list of recent research works in this area. All of these works have been carried out using the “Quan” method and the topics predominantly revolve around student satisfaction, its perception, and the varying elements of it. There are no studies located that examine international student satisfaction in the private higher education UK in general, and in London in particular. This study seeks to fill this research gap.

## HE Marketing and Student Satisfaction

Organisations have been emphasizing to identify customer needs, which is naturally the first step in any properly planned marketing (Taghipourian and Baksh, 2017). Kotler and Armstrong (1998) detail a marketing philosophy that the “customer is king”, hence the top priorities for organisations are to deliver superior customer service in order to satisfy their needs (Oliver, 1993; Kotler, 2001; Wali and Wright, 2016). HEIs increasingly recognise the importance of satisfying students to attract more students from the competitive global market, therefore marketing material includes student satisfaction surveys (Williams and Mindano, 2015). It is generally considered that HEIs use satisfaction surveys as one of their most important marketing tools. Therefore HEIs focus on improving student satisfaction and becoming increasingly responsive to their needs, which in turn undeniably influences the reputation of institutions (Shah, 2012).

Research has shown that market orientation can facilitate competition by creating and maintaining superior value (Gounaris, Tanyeri, Avlonitis and Giannopoulos, 2012). In the case of competition and particularly considering customer needs and wants in that case, everyone (students, parents, employers) looks for study from a first class university (Altbach, 2015).

Attracting students is the top priority for all HEIs, regardless of their location in the world (Abbas, 2019). HEIs are adopting new ways (innovating) to attract more international students such as developing the attractiveness of programmes on offer (Widiputera et al., 2017). HEIs advertise their courses to attract students by adopting branding attributes, as students as customers prefer a renowned brand as their HEI (Kayombo and Carter, 2016). Use of professional marketing techniques in HEIs is well established in UK and USA (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010). For example, HEIs advertise and promote their brands to students and other groups (Chapleo and Reader, 2014; Khanna, Jacob, and Yadav, 2014; Lowrie, 2007; Williams and Omar, 2014). Therefore almost all HEIs advertise their courses by using appropriate media whether such as print, electronic and social media. Gray et al. (2003) argue that the attractiveness of a university brand for students is derived from the features of reputation, academic quality, campus life and guidance services.

As previously noted, there is a relationship between satisfied students and the image of the HEI. This relationship aids marketing activities whether that be directly or

indirectly, and therefore it can be contended that student satisfaction is significant to HE.

## Summary

This chapter begins with an attempt to understand the origin and concept of satisfaction, and how it fits within the concept of student satisfaction in higher education. Organisations in all industries make progress by satisfying customer needs. The satisfaction of customers directly contributes to the success, growth and survival of an organisation. There are multiple views when it comes to fitting students into a market-oriented approach. There are arguments to consider students as customers, as producers, as consumers or even simply as learners. As students incur costs for their education, there is an argument that what is being delivered against this cost has to be evaluated. This is true for both public and private sector institutions of higher education. The relationship between satisfaction in the education sector and that of customer satisfaction in any general commercial transaction is very similar. Just like in commerce where satisfied customers help to build value for organisations, satisfied students yield multiple benefits for the institution. Increased student satisfaction leads to a reduction in dropout rates, improves brand image, aids in increasing intake and more importantly, leads to a happy and satisfied student in the end. However, there are peculiar differences between student satisfaction and customer satisfaction in general which are worth noting.

Compared to customer satisfaction, the student satisfaction literature tends to agree that student satisfaction it is an extended process and can be distinct when measured at different times with big gaps in between (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a complex cognitive or affective reaction that develops as a response to service encounters (Rust and Oliver, 1994).

Giese and Cote (2000) further explain the complexity of the construct. According to them it comprises of three basic components; (1) the type of response (cognitive or affective), (2) the centre of interest or the subject upon which the response is focused and (3) the moment in time in which the evaluation is made.

Student satisfaction is arguably even more complex than customer satisfaction (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008).

There is a constantly evolving socio-economic landscape and a potential 'purchase-consume' gap i.e. from prior to study, during study and after study. According to

Giese and Cote (2000), though satisfaction is a post-purchase phenomenon, subtle differences exist as satisfaction may vary prior to choice, during and after consumption. For example, if a student achieves qualification until this qualification is used effectively in life, satisfaction can vary considerably depending on when it was assessed.

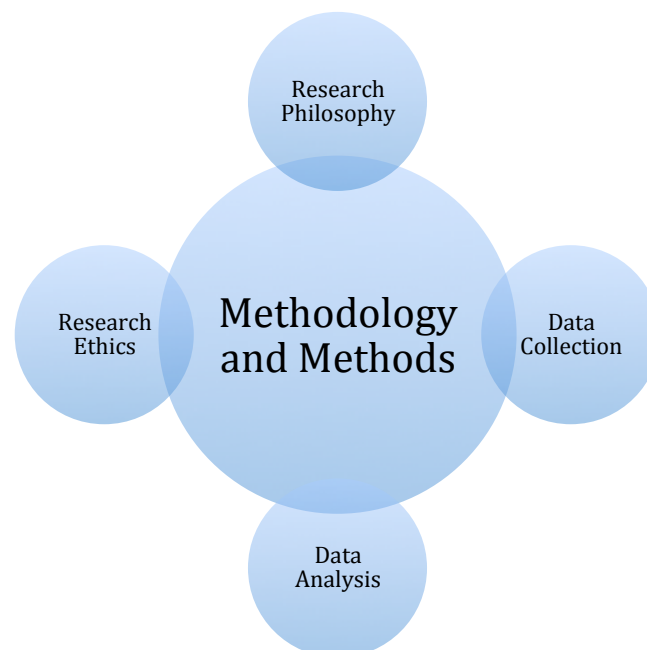
Education is a very significant element of the social and economic status of a person as socio-economic status is formed not just by income but also by educational achievement. Therefore, arguably, education has long-lasting and robust social, economic, and psychological implications for the person. Students are investing significant money and time in higher education and their expectations are complex both in scope and importance. This is even more true for higher education institutions where fees are substantially higher. Research in various countries has shown a definitive positive relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. Service quality, being the most significant factor, must be examined by private higher education institutions in order to not only increase student retention but also to facilitate more enrolments of students. The research has also shown that student satisfaction is influenced by both economic as well as social factors. Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2006) also advocate that all universities should undertake student satisfaction assessment as part of their competitive strategy.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the most appropriate methods used in this study to explore international student satisfaction in private higher education institutions in London. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research philosophy and classification, major paradigms and a rationale for the selection of the interpretivist paradigm used in this study. Subsequently, a rationale will be provided for the adopted research design and associated methods such as the primary data collection method, sampling technique used and also size. This is then followed by a discussion of data analysis methods and finally, details will be provided regarding research ethics. Previous chapters provided an assessment of existing literature on international student satisfaction and its associated aspects, while this chapter provides the base for examining the experiences of international students and their satisfaction in private higher education institutions in London.

**Figure 23: Main contents of the chapter (3) Methodology and Methods**



## Research Philosophy

Researchers are faced with a number of difficulties in selecting suitable research techniques and methods (Blaikie, 2000). Researchers can adopt a variety of fundamentally different research strategies to test hypotheses in quantitative research, and usually answer research questions using qualitative research. The research philosophy is associated with the development of knowledge and nature of the knowledge. According to Saunders et al. (2007), the philosophical perspective of a researcher affects all phases of the study process, from the conceptualisation of the issue to the choice regarding how to analyse the data. In this context, Blaikie states that the selection of appropriate research methods is a challenge for a researcher. Research philosophy is classified as epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Saunders, 2007). Ontological and epistemological considerations shape the process of selecting methods for any study (Maxwell, 2018) therefore it is important for the researcher to develop an epistemological and ontological stance to knowing which knowledge is legitimate, adequate, and possible to capture through the research process (Ormston, 2013).

Epistemology was defined, as possible ways to gain knowledge of social reality, whatever it may be understood to be. In brief, the question is that 'how it can be known what is assumed to exist' (Blaikie, 2000, p8). Similarly, Cooksey and McDonald (2011) describe Epistemology as what counts as knowledge within the world. It concerns the very foundations of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be captured, understood and how it can be disseminated to other human beings. Epistemology concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge and is more concerned with identifying the origin of knowledge in a field of study (Dawson, 2002). Research is being conducted to solve a specific problem and the researcher consciously or unconsciously creates a number of assumptions at each stage of their research (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). Ontology, on the other hand, focuses on the 'philosophy of reality' (Krauss, 2005) based on the assumption that something makes sense, and that there is a meaningful and real essence of the social phenomenon under investigation (Scotland, 2012). It is concerned with "what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 2003, p.10). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.83) state that the ontological

assumptions are those that respond to the question 'what is there that can be known?' or 'what is the nature of reality?'

Ontological assumption as related to the nature of reality is crucial to the researcher's understanding and meaning of the data collected. Epistemology can therefore be explained, as an understanding of how we know what we understand while ontology is the way we define things and the interrelationships that exist between them.

Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgements about value (Saunders, 2007). Axiological aspects of the research philosophy are related to values known in the research, and the researcher is supposed to make values known to others by presenting and sharing reports that were actually gathered from the study (Carnaghan, 2013).

A concise conclusion it as follows:

- Epistemological assumption is related to **knowledge**
- Ontological assumption is related to **reality**
- Axiological assumption is related to **importance** or **value**

Epistemological assumption - the study of participants' (international students') experiences, could only be better understood by conducting in-depth interviews, in order to learn about the satisfaction experience of this group in private higher education institutions in London.

What will be known through participants, as they are the ones who actually experienced the private higher education delivery process? As previously mentioned, ontology refers to reality. Multiple realities exist in the context of higher education, and scholars have different assumptions regarding students; one group of scholars considers students as customers, while the other group does not. Consequently, there are two assumptions that exist, and student satisfaction mainly depends on the ontological assumptions. The researcher alone cannot easily define 'reality'. It is more significant for the researcher to apprehend the perceptions, meanings and experiences of the participants (international students) in this study.

Research has been dominated by two major paradigms in the social sciences scene - positivism and interpretivism (Creswell, 2012). Positivism is rooted in natural sciences, and positivists believe ontologically that externally objective reality exists, is epistemologically discoverable and measurable, and supported by evidence (Hammersley, 2013). Therefore it is generally known as a 'scientific method', involving data being collected in a way that is not subjective (Creswell, 2012), apart

from the subjective states of individuals (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015). In this study, research is mainly focused on student experiences and satisfaction, and both of these terms cannot be measured quantifiably, therefore the positivist paradigm is not appropriate for this study (Bryman, 2004).

Moving to the second paradigm, interpretivism is primarily aimed at understanding the context and then making an interpretation shaped by experience. Interpretivists ontologically believe that reality is multiple (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivists seek to understand social phenomena as multiple realities that exist and cannot be the same, as its usage in physical sciences because human beings interpret their world and then act based on such interpretations and it is not the world that acts (Hammersley, 2013). Guba (1990) relates ontology to reality and suggests that ontology depends on other systems for meanings; this consequently makes it difficult for researchers to interpret ontology in terms of fixed realities. Interpretivists epistemologically acquire knowledge that is socially constructed rather than objectively discovered (Carson et al., 2001). Interpretivist ontology provides the comprehension of social reality (Hudson and Ozanne 1988), whilst on the other hand, according to positivist ontology, the world is external and there is only one objective reality available to any research regardless of the research focus and its objectives or mechanisms. Therefore researchers choose to conduct research in a controlled manner, with a clear definition of hypotheses and an utilisation of appropriate methodology. Objectivism requires one to work with concrete objectives. Carson et al. (2001) suggest that positivist researchers maintain a clear distance between themselves and participants, in order to decouple emotions from reason. Interpretivists are of the opinion that reality is multiple and also relative (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Lincoln and Guba (1985) elaborate that the meanings of these multiple realities are dependent on other systems, whilst positivists only observe external reality. For example given a situation where 70 per cent of international students are satisfied and 30 per cent are not satisfied, interpretivists will try to comprehend why 70 per cent of students are satisfied while the remaining 30 per cent are not. In the same situation, positivists will limit the scope to determining what percentage is satisfied. Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) suggest that these two approaches can be complementary to each other. They are designed to serve different aims, objectives and research outcomes, thus it is hard to imagine non-human instruments capable of interacting with research participants in a manner that reveals their multiple realities. Consequently, 'the knower and the known are inseparable' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.37).

The research should be conducted in a 'natural setting', means the things as they are for example the participants (international students) actually studied at PrHEIs in London, and interviews were based on their experiences, therefore, "realities are wholes and cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.39). A researcher should be the primary data-gathering instrument and obtain active interaction with participants in order to fully grasp, respond to, explain and comprehend the contextualised meaning and multiple points of views (Lewis, 2003), in order to develop collaborative reconstruction from the multiple realities that exist (Guba and Lincoln, 1989b).

This study leans toward the interpretivist method (qualitative approach) as it seeks to understand the aspects of satisfaction through in-depth interviews of individuals (international students), and to fill the gap left following many quantitative studies that have been undertaken. For example, many quantitative studies have identified factors and causes of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction (please see the table Appendix 02: Recent research works on student satisfaction area).

Researchers contend that the interpretivist paradigm predominantly uses qualitative methods (Silverman, 2000; Thomas, 2003; Nind and Todd, 2007; Nind and Todd, 2011) and naturally suits the use of qualitative methods in exploring individuals' subjective experiences (Saunders, 2003; Maykut and Morehouse, 2002; Woods & Trexler, 2001). This research is exploratory and uses inductive approach with the main objectives to fully understand the student satisfaction construct and to generate new data.

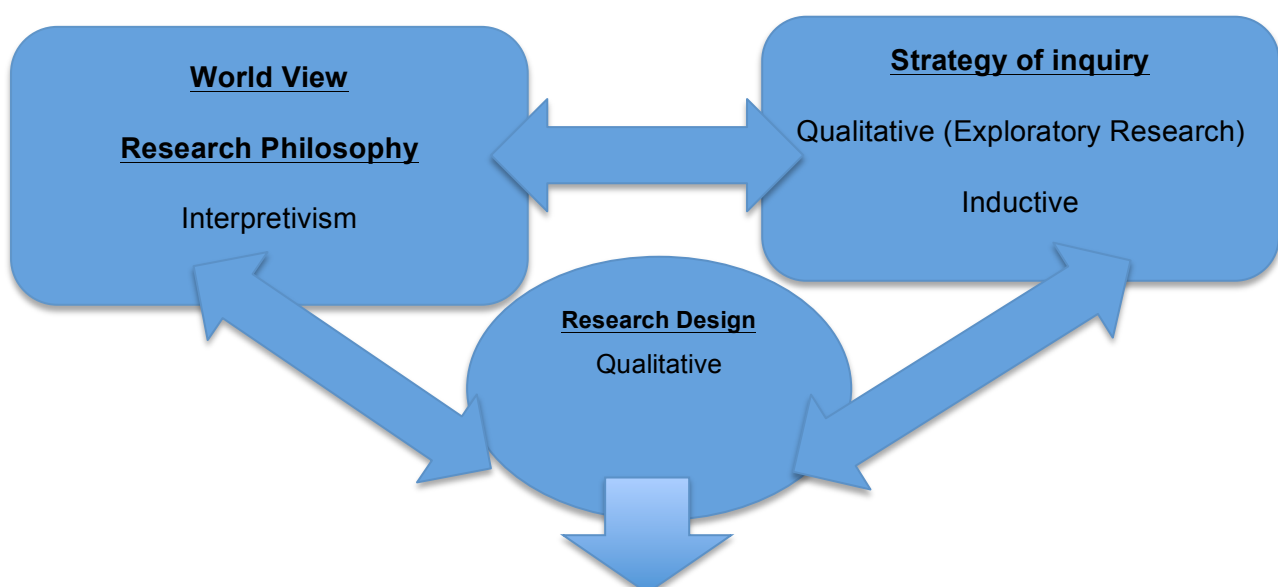
Advocates of interpretivism do not accept the existence of universal research standards, but rather contend that the research guidelines are "products of a particular group or culture" (Smith, 1993, p.5). Interpretive researchers are not searching rigidly for answers to their studies. Rather, they approach reality from subjects, particularly from individuals. Qualitative research has had its fair share of criticism and had been termed as 'not strictly scientific' (Ruyter and Scholl 1998) however this argument has been negated by suggesting that, if done properly, this type of research can yield to richer insights into a phenomenon.

In this study the individuals are international students, who own their experiences of studying at PrHEIs and belong to a specific group that is within the international student community. The researcher identified interpretivism as the best option for this

study because the researcher wanted to find out what makes international students at PrHEIs in London happy or satisfied, what are their expectations and their experience of learning in private higher education. Researcher's task was to understand social reality and behaviour of international students as they experience it and then explore aspects of their satisfaction, which shape their actions and behaviours (Cohen et al 2007) and extracting the meanings from the participants' replies /stories and researcher's interpretation (Silverman, 2012).

The research design is based on three important components 1) intersection of philosophy, 2) strategies of inquiry, and 3) specific methods (Creswell, 2012). This is displayed in the below figure (24)

**Figure 24: Research Methodology**



International Student Satisfaction		
Research Questions		Objectives
Literature Review		
Student Satisfaction		Private Higher Education
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Product</b>
Qualitative Data Collection	In-depth 12 interviews with participants	Recorded interviews
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis and Coding	Text data (Transcript and coding) Themes and Codes, Categories Discussion, Conclusion
Findings	Interpretation	Emerging data (New Themes) Discussion, Conclusion

**Source: Author**

The term worldview or paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p.17). A worldview is a general orientation about the nature of the research that a researcher holds firmly (belief) to shape a research design based on a research method (Creswell, 2010). The researcher worldview has demanded to adopt qualitative research. The philosophical stance, objectives and research questions of this study demanded that detailed interviews with students studying in private institutions of higher education be conducted in order to collect primary data. Justification of qualitative data in this study is presented on the grounds that this data is collected about the personal and subjective experiences, narratives, passions and emotions of the participants. This approach exploits Maxwell’s following goals of qualitative research:

- 1) It’s capacity to study the meaning of participants and the events, actions and situations these participants (international students in our case) are involved with. Using a qualitative research method with open-ended questions allowed the researcher to capture responses from different participants based on their subjective experiences. Their responses reflected how participants acted when confronted by different situations. The researcher was trying to seek the real experience (reality) of international students by asking relevant questions and shaping the meanings of participants' responses. This focus on actual meaning is in line with what is known as the social science "interpretive" approach (Silverman, 2000, Schwartz-Shea, Yanow, 2012, Fujii, 2018, Fusch, Fusch, and, Ness, 2018).
- 2) The specific context within which participants were acting and the influence of this context on them. The researcher appreciated that the experiences of various participants were subjective and were influenced by the context within which those experiences were registered. For example, tuition fee and cost affordability, college or university status perception, teaching and learning, the perception about the resources, perception about the value of a degree, perception about employability etc. were elements of a specific context within which students shared their experiences with the researcher. As elsewhere mentioned, qualitative research relies on a small sample size and researchers maintain in their analysis the individuality of each participant or of their findings, rather than gathering information from big samples and aggregating information across participants or situations (Maxwell, 2008)

- 3) Unanticipated phenomena and the influences spontaneously emerging from an open-ended interview are characteristics missing from well-structured interviews. The types of unstructured in-depth interviews that use open-ended questions in qualitative research allow researchers to respond with counter-questions tailored to suit on-going or previous responses. This means that respondents do not have upfront knowledge of counter-questions, hence the possibility of engineering responses is reduced and responses are more spontaneous.
- 4) The process-giving rise to actions and events. Although qualitative research is concerned with outcomes, a significant strength of qualitative research is found in its capacity to assess the processes that lead to these outcomes, processes that are often poorly identified by experimental and survey (quantitative) research (Maxwell, 2004a)
- 5) The classical view that qualitative research is unable to identify and describe causal relationships is based on a restrictive and philosophically obsolete concept of causality (Maxwell, 2004b). New innovative methods are being explored and combine both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2010). A qualitative approach involves thinking about causality in terms of procedures and mechanisms, rather than merely showing regularity in variable interactions (Maxwell, 2004a). It is not a simple task to derive causal explanations from a qualitative study, but qualitative research in this regard is no more distinct from quantitative research. (Maxwell, 2008, p.221-222).

As in survey data processing, qualitative data can be encoded, collated and analysed to reveal student satisfaction factors and patterns. Qualitative data however may be more powerful compared to quantitative data and goes beyond survey data in clarifying the specificities of a given phenomenon. For example expressions like “insufficient resources”, “improvement required in teaching” etc. can be further expanded upon to enhance understanding of subjective experience. Furthermore, this type of narrative data provides context and detail and reveals the chronology and details of events, which contribute to a student’s subjective experiences. The process of thematic analysis identifies themes and patterns within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate this method as the first one to learn because, in their opinion, this method provides ‘core skills which could be useful in learning many other types of analysis’ (p.78). Specifically from the perspective of teaching and learning, there is another advantage, namely, that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun &

Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013). This, unlike many quantitative methodologies, means it is not bound to a specific epistemological or theoretical viewpoint. Not being bound to a viewpoint makes this method very flexible, which is a considerable advantage, given the diversity of work in learning and teaching.

Sometimes people are confused with the term interviewing, for example in job interviews, the interviewers have structured questions related to the job description that are set out in a standardised format, but in contrast to structured interviewing - quantitative and qualitative interviewing is flexible and dynamic. It has been referred to as non-directive, unstructured, non-standardised and open-ended interviewing. The phrase 'in-depth interview' is frequently used in qualitative methods, it means face-to-face encounters, which are now also possible with the help of technology such as Skype, with the purpose of thoroughly understanding respondents' lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words.

## **Data Collection**

Primary data was collected in accordance with an interpretivist posture and conducted through in-depth interviews of international students studying at PrHEIs, in order to explore their learning experience and satisfaction. The research sample was selected using the convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling is a particular form of the non-probability sampling technique that depends on data collected from members of the population who are conveniently accessible to engage in the research. The respondents were 12 international students who had the experience of studying at private higher education institutions in London. They were selected from 3 PrHEIs, the first was large and well established, the second was medium-sized and the third was smaller and more recently established compared to the other two. The respondents were originally from six Asian countries, (1) Bangladesh, (2) China, (3) India, (4) Pakistan, (5) Sri Lanka and (6) Vietnam. The respondents were identified as a number between one and twelve and each participant was assigned a pseudonym according to gender. For example, a male international student from Pakistan was assigned the pseudonym Syed and a female student from India was assigned the pseudonym Sapna, likewise for all of the participants in this study. It could be contended that using pseudonyms is helpful as it helped participants to feel natural environment. It thus enabled the researcher to accurately present the story of the participants and to retain a human dimension.

As the researcher has more than twenty years of experience in the higher education sector and most of that experience belongs within the private higher education sector, the researcher enlisted colleagues and contacts who are working in these institutions to aid in the recruitment of students for the study.

Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies generally use smaller sample sizes. This is because qualitative research does not aim to yield a statistically large representative sample or draw statistical inferences. Indeed a phenomenon needs only appear once in the sample, and based on this logic most qualitative studies have small sample sizes. The justification behind the smaller sample size is to gain an in-depth as well as a breadth of understanding of students' perceptions of their experiences at PrHEIs. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) provide the reasons for this. With an increase in sample size, the information extracted from the sample follows a pattern of diminishing return. This is due to the reason that one occurrence of a piece of data is all that is needed to make sure that the aspect represented by the data has been taken into account for the analysis framework. For qualitative research, frequency of datum is rarely relevant because one cannot understand more from the same point of data even if it is repeated multiple times, thus making repeated occurrences superfluous. Qualitative research is concerned with meanings in the data and not with generalisations based on frequencies of data (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). The researcher therefore intends to explain, describe and interpret, as pointed out by Maxwell (2013). Lastly, because qualitative research is labour-intensive, analysing large amounts of data proves impractical. Because of these reasons, sampling is a matter of developing a richness of information, rather than being a matter of representative opinions (Guetterman, 2015).

Qualitative researchers often need to anticipate sample sizes before data collection starts. The challenge is to minimise the burden on participants and also resources, and maximise the possibility that thorough and meaningful findings are extracted from surveys. Currently there is not enough guidance regarding minimum sample size justified for an inquiry of qualitative nature. Furthermore the sample size required to fully expose a theme and attain code saturation across different qualitative methodologies and approaches has also not been properly studied.

Researchers have recently begun conducting methodological studies to arrive at an empirical sample size for qualitative studies. For instance, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) defined data saturation "as the point in data collection and analysis

when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” (p.65). When looking at the relationship between collations of codes from interviews for a qualitative study, they found that 73 per cent of codes were identified in the first 6 interviews and 92 per cent within the first 12 interviews. Similarly, the findings of the research conducted by Young and Casey (2018) on “An Examination of the Sufficiency of Small Qualitative Samples” provides strong evidence that researchers can achieve robust results with small sample sizes, at least under certain given conditions. The findings further confirm that a robust identification of themes and convergence of codes may be achieved with as few interviews as five.

The sample size was determined with the consultation of the research supervisory team in an effort to have a minimum of twelve participants from PrHEIs in London. This sample size could be extended to fifteen but actually the study reached a point of saturation - a common criterion in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Saunders et al 2017).

However, several researchers debated that this may be problematic given the privilege of researchers to arbitrarily claim saturation in justifying the premature closure of their data-gathering activities (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). The researcher was very careful in this context and actually saturated results started to appear after 9th interview, the situation was discussed with the leading supervisor and it was agreed to restrict the predetermined sample size to twelve.

As mentioned earlier, sample size is often small in qualitative research however it is important that the sample size is not too small making providing sufficient data problematic. “It is rare that five or six one-hour interviews will provide sufficient data to lead to saturation” (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.140).

An open-ended interview protocol was developed based on previous work related to international student satisfaction (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair and Ragavan, 2016; Kheradmand, 2015; Poturak, 2014; Wilkins 2011). A pilot interview was conducted prior to the commencement of the actual research. This process allowed the researcher to express thoughts and feelings relating to the questions. This opportunity allowed the researcher to resolve any difficulties with the wording of the questions and the structure of the interview, while also identifying any questions that might make a participant feel uncomfortable. The data collected in the pilot interview was not included in the analysis.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face between the months of May and June 2018. Prior to each interview, respondents were provided with a consent form and a brief introduction of the project, outlining the research topic along with research objectives, the respondent's criteria and respondent's rights. Respondents were asked to represent the experience they had at their institution and raise any important aspects or critical events that affected their experience. The interview length ranged from 20 minutes to 50 minutes; on average the interviews were of around 30 minutes in length.

The interview questions were based on the following six themes;

1. Course and Institute selection (General /Start Up Questions)
2. Pre arrival and arrival information (induction) experience
3. Learning and teaching
4. Resources
5. Management
6. Overall satisfaction (Closing questions)

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a vital and crucial step in qualitative research. The amount of literature on qualitative data analysis is enormous, but still experienced and novice researchers alike struggle with the "how" of qualitative analysis (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis was used because it is the process of identifying patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as "*it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis*" (p.78).

The researcher recorded the face-to-face in-depth interviews on six themes 1) Course and institute selection (general /start up questions) 2) Pre arrival and arrival (induction) experience 3) Teaching and learning 4) Resources 5) Management and lastly 6) Overall satisfaction (closing questions). There are many different methods that can be used to conduct thematic analysis (e.g. Alhojailan, 2012; Boyatzis, 1998; Javadi and Zarea, 2016). However, the research used Saldana's (2002) method of data analysis and also benefited from Braun & Clarke's (2006) data analysis method. The thematic analysis was based on five stages 1) Transcribing data 2) Coding data

3) Categorising data 4) Constructing themes 5) Interpreting themes. The final stage of developing theory was not used, as this study does not aim to develop theory.

The researcher first transcribed all of the recorded interviews, and then primary and secondary categories were developed by linking relevant points into important themes (Philaretou and Allen, 2006). Afterwards, the data was divided into categories. The researcher wrote descriptive paragraphs about the categories, and the relationships between categories were explored as well (Polit and Beck, 2004; Hipsky, 2006; Philaretou and Allen, 2006). Comparisons between categories & subcategories and participant responses were made to ensure that the 'voice' of each participant was included and that data saturation was achieved (Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Once all categories including subcategories were linked, the researcher went back to the original data to search for any missing data and to ensure that all the information had been analysed and reviewed. Once the final results had been analysed, the interview records and results were finalised for verification and counter-checking in order to ensure validity (for more information please see the chapter Data and Analysis).

### **Analysing the Data**

Qualitative research as an important paradigm of inquiry aims to collect qualitative data, which is non-numeric and captures opinions and concepts from participants, in order to generate meaningful information (knowledge) grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004). The complexity of qualitative research means that rigorous and methodical techniques are required in order to yield meaningful and useful results (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Qualitative data analysis can be defined as the process of making sense of the views and opinions held by research participants on circumstances, corresponding trends and patterns, themes, categories and regular similarities (Cohen et al 2007).

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews to obtain meaningful information from the participants about their educational experience at PrHEIs. Once the data was collected, then analysis was required. The researcher chose thematic analysis as their preferred method of analysis.

Thematic analysis is a commonly used method within qualitative research to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes, and acts as a fundamental method for describing and analysing data in detail. Braun & Clarke (2006) recommend that

thematic analysis is the first qualitative method that should be learned as "it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (p.78).

Such as conversational analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis and narrative analysis. Through its theoretical liberty, thematic analysis offers a flexible and helpful study tool that is capable of providing a wealthy and comprehensive yet complicated account of information. Actually, a well-defined demarcation of this method will be helpful in ensuring that those who use thematic analysis can make active choices about their particular form of analysis. However, it also often goes beyond this, and interprets different aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Another benefit, especially from the learning and teaching perspective, is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013). However, thematic analysis is poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged. This implies that it is not linked to a specific epistemological or theoretical view, unlike many qualitative methodologies. This makes it a very flexible method, a significant benefit given the diversity of work in learning and teaching. In this study, thematic analysis technique was used. This analysis was completed over five phases.

### Transcribing Data

The collected data was transcribed manually by listening to recorded interviews and typing up the conversations that took place. The sample size was limited to twelve (12) interviews). For this number of items it is worth noting that the author did not find a justification to use transcription software. Although such software is helpful when used with bulk data, it has limitations. To begin with, privacy and security can never be guaranteed. Furthermore, no software is 100 per cent error-free. The user has to compare the output to input manually. Even minor linguistic mistakes can completely alter the meaning and semantics of the information inputted. Doing this manually for a limited number of interviews meant the author was able to transcribe with maximum accuracy, without jeopardising data privacy and with the added advantage of gaining an enforced understanding of the data as collected in its original form.

### Coding Data

At this stage, the researcher started to organise data in a systematic and meaningful fashion. For example, all of the recorded interviews were assigned numeric titles as (1 to 12). Coding is important as it reduces large collected data into small chunks of

meaningful data and provides the basis for the researcher to relate to research questions (Elliott, 2018). The research was based on theoretical thematic aspects of student satisfaction and originally six satisfaction themes were determined. Therefore it was not necessary to code every piece of text or sentence. The researcher used simple and open coding; this means that no predetermined codes were used except for the six predetermined themes. The researcher had pre-ideas about themes and codes, for example a prevailing theme of tuition fees had been arising in all twelve interviews but the theme code remained the same, however with a different code for each participant. Interview notes were taken from the recording to put all of the relevant information together into a logical order, sorted by each theme and grouped together in a coded manner.

**Table 08: Sample Codes, Categories and Themes**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Easy, difficult, Access, Public transport, walking distance, Big City, Country, English Speaking Country, Limited Choices, Famous cities, Trend, Amenities, Walking distance, Journey, tiring, stress,	Location	Institute and Course
Big Decision, Content, Interest, demand, employability, value for money, Public, Private, Relevant, Subjects, Continuation, progression, Pre Master and Master, Bright Future, Easy, Fast Admission Process, Preference, Choice, Background, Ranking, Reputation, Matching, Student requirements	Institute  Course	
Private, Public, Institutes, Cheaper, Expensive, Strict policies, Flexible Policies, Price, Comparison, Decision, Fee structure, payments, modes, instalments, Payment plan, Exchange Rate, British Pound, Currency,	Cost (Tuition Fee)	

**Source: Author**

Whenever the researcher captured something new and interesting, new codes were generated for this emerging data.

After coding all twelve interviews, the researcher grouped them and produced a list, eliminating overlapping codes. For example, in the above table (08) of coding samples, the researcher noted recurring and salient codes, such as “easy access”,

“location”, “tuition fee” and “induction”. This list of codes provided relevant information in terms of carrying out data analysis. For participants’ sample quotes please see table (09).

**Table 09: Coding Samples**

Sample Participant Quotes	Codes
“I was considering a good institute whether public or private but my priority was location and really easy access to institute as it was a commitment of one year. I do not want to spend much time and money on travelling cost, especially in this country Time is money and really valuable	Public, Private, Good, Priority, Easy Access, Commitment, Time, Money, Travelling, Valuable
“....that (Induction) was a nice experience. It gave me chance to ask questions I had in mind. I felt very welcome and relaxed. I started looking forward to the commencement of course more positively”	Nice, Experience, Chance, Questions, Welcome, Relaxed, Commencement, Curse
“The university selection is a big challenge especially for an international student, when he has to leave his country. I was just considering a Good University. Good University means (Interviewer), location.....close to London with easy access to public transport”	Big, Challenge, International students, Leave, Country, Good University, Location, Close, London, Easy Access, Public Transport
“.....offering a subject of my interest, having international students and easy and fast admission process, they have four intakes in a year. I am doing a master course and feel that I did not waste much time in the admission process”	Easy, Fast Admission Process, Four Intakes, Waste, Time
“I was very happy when college allowed me to spread the tuition fee with flexible payment options. I made a payment plan according to my own affordability”	Tuition Fee, Plan, Happy, Affordable, Flexible payment options

**Source: Author**

### Categorising Data

Categorising is a significant element of qualitative data analysis by which the researcher attempts to group patterns observed in the data into meaningful units or categories. Once the transcription and coding of findings were completed, the data

was organised in such a way that the text (content) provided comprehension and the researcher gained an understanding of the content and became familiar with the data, especially in terms of narrowing down codes into overarching codes to generate categories on the basis of 'look-alike' characteristics (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### Constructing Themes

In this section, first of all the codes obtained in the primary section were categorised under themes created at the beginning and a few sub themes also emerged. In determining the similarities

**Figure 25: Codes to Theory Model**

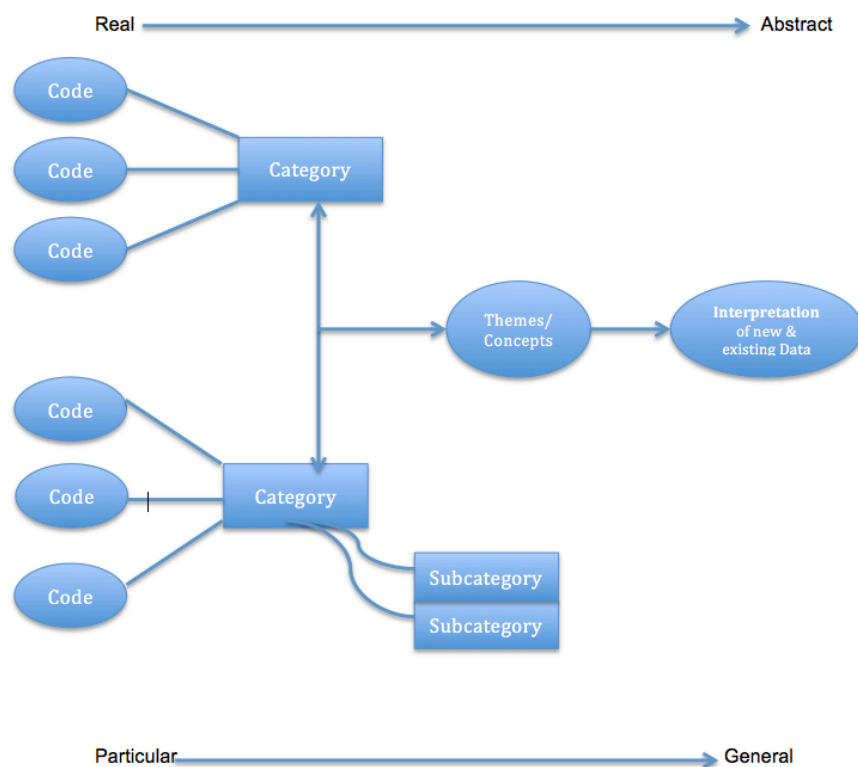


Figure: A streamlined codes to theory model for qualitative research  
(Adopted from Saldana 2002)

**Source: Adopted from Saldana, 2002**

## Interpreting Themes

In this stage, the researcher transformed analysis into interpretable themes; an on going process that requires a thorough understanding of the themes. The research needs to provide clear interpretation to make the comprehension easy for the reader.

This study applied an inductive approach to examine the data from the interviews. This approach involves discovering patterns, categories and themes in data. This is also known as a bottom-up approach. The researcher discovered some new data that can be found in the thematic map.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) postulate that the trustworthiness of a research study is important in evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility and confidence in the 'truth' of the findings, transferability is the degree to which findings are applicable in other contexts, dependability means findings are consistent and confirmability is the degree of neutrality. The analysis produced six existing themes and three new themes along with five sub themes that described the experience of students. Please see figure (26)

**Figure 26: Thematic Map**



**Source: Author**

The results on majority of themes indicated that most of the students' expectations were met and exceeded. The themes were then summarized and reinforced with direct quotes from participants providing confirmability. This then aided the researcher to evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In turn, this led to transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and meant that the findings have applicability in other contexts. In this research, new data was discovered - for example, themes brought up by the research participants included attitudes towards multiple intakes and easy access to senior management in the private higher education sector, the latter constituting a factor that can be applied to the public higher education sector as well.

## **Research Ethics**

Educational research is primarily social research and, in this research context, international students are the targets of this social research. The researcher should respect the privacy, autonomy and dignity of individual participants and follow the guidelines and values of research (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018). Appreciating this fact, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) offers a similar minimum set of criteria, which is to be met when carrying out any social research in order to meet the research ethics criteria (ESRC 2015). Because of the nature of this study, it is impossible to overemphasise the significance and importance of research ethics. All of the participants were treated with respect. A formal authorisation was acquired from the university prior to gathering primary data for the project. A formal interview request was sent to each participant for interview appointments using one of the following communication types: letter, mobile or email. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were of significant and paramount importance for the researcher; therefore the anonymity and privacy of the participants were protected and secured. No personal data was collected nor were any data sources linked to the identity of any of the research participants, as elsewhere-mentioned pseudonyms were used instead of real names for example, Yazqan was assigned Syed and so on. The data collected was safely handled and stored, the personal computer used was password protected and only the researcher had access. An important aspect in relation to research ethics was the ethical approval form, please see the appendix no 04,05 and 06. According to the ethical approval form, the researcher first sought the consent of each participant and explained what the research was regarding. No information was fabricated, falsified

or misrepresented anywhere and originality was preserved throughout. The researcher also attempted to prevent bias in the collection and interpretation of data; therefore all activities were systematically scheduled, recorded and carried out with the aim of avoiding mistakes and negligence. Non-discrimination was assured by attempting to offer equal participation to all without prejudice based on sex, race, ethnicity or other variables.

The researcher aimed to maintain competency level of D'Prof throughout the life cycle of this thesis. The APA technique of referencing has been adopted to recognize all of the definitions, ideas, terms, numbers, models and facts used in the studies. This has assured full respect for intellectual property. The table (10) illustrates the research questions and methods used in this study.

**Table 10: Research Questions and Methods Employed**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Thesis Reference</b>
1. What is student satisfaction and how does it relate to customer satisfaction?	1. To gain a better understanding of roots student satisfaction	Secondary data analysis of satisfaction available and synthesis of data on student satisfaction with reference to higher education	Chapter Two Literature Review
2. What is international student satisfaction in the context of PrHE?	2. To gain an understanding of the international student satisfaction in the context of PrHE.	Qualitative Data In-depth Interview to capture data and analysis	Chapters 3 and 4
3. What are the major aspects that influence student satisfaction in private higher education	3. To explore the aspects that influence International student satisfaction	Thematic Analysis	Chapters 3 and 4
4. What is the extent of student satisfaction in private higher education institutes in London?	4. To examine the satisfaction experiences of the students in private higher education institutes in London	Thematic Analysis Discussion	Chapters 4 and 5

**Source: Author**

## **Summary**

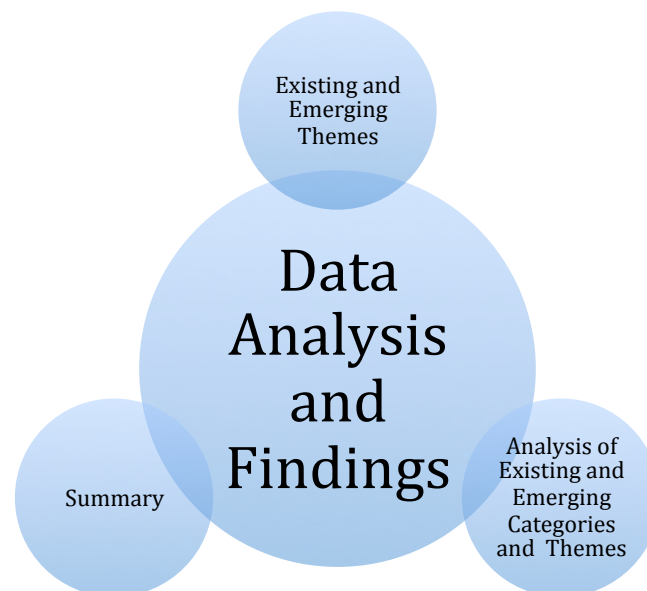
The methodology and methods chapter has presented the most appropriate methods and tools applied in this study. Consequently the research design was formulated based on interpretivism philosophy. The chapter discussed the research philosophy and classification and provided the justification for the interpretivism paradigm. Subsequently, a rationale was provided for the adopted research design and associated methods used for the primary data collection. This is then followed by a discussion of data analysis methods and finally, details were provided regarding research ethics.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

### Introduction

This chapter presents the captured data as a result of in-depth interviews conducted and the analysis of the data. The data presentation and analysis process aims to present the data in an interpretable form in order to identify trends and patterns of international student satisfaction. Last but not least, this chapter also presents the findings derived from the data analysis in the table and attempts to achieve research aims and objectives.

**Figure 27: Main contents of the chapter (4) Data Analysis and Findings**



A few new themes and subthemes emerged and were also included in the table (11).

**Table 11: Existing and Emerging Themes**

S. No	Existing Themes and Categories	Emerging Themes	Emerging Subthemes
1	<b>Course and Institute selection</b>  <b>Category</b> Location Availability of course (Content)	<b>Flexibility in Policies</b>	<b>Tuition Fee Policy Multiple Intakes Fast Admission Process</b>
2	<b>Pre arrival and arrival information (induction)</b>		
3	<b>Learning and Teaching</b> <b>Category</b> Teacher (Lecturer) and Teaching Styles, Class Size Assessment and Grading, Feedback		
4	<b>Resources</b> <b>Category</b> Classroom Resources, Library, Computer Lab		
5	<b>Management</b>	<b>Student Friendly Management (Efficient and Effective Management)</b>	<b>Easy Access to Management, Fast Communication Simple Structure Quick Decisions</b>
6	<b>Overall satisfaction</b> <b>Category</b> Value for money Recommending to Others	<b>Feel being customers</b>	<b>Customised Service</b>

**Source: Author**

The United Kingdom will continue to attract a large number of international students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018). The population of international students are heterogeneous; therefore, HEIs require more significant nuances in service delivery with a more comprehensive approach to meet their needs (Jones, 2017).

Consequently, satisfied international students will not only help to increase more students for the country but also enhance the image of the UKHE. The UKHEIs are responsible for ensuring that an efficient system is in place for the support and

development of students. This support should be relevant, valuable, timely, and cover all fields of student experience both internally (inside the classroom/campus) and externally (outside classroom/campus) (Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2015; Spencer-Oatey, Dauber & Williams, 2014).

## **Analysis of Existing and Emerging Categories and Themes**

### **Theme 1: Course and Institute Selection**

The selection of course and institute for study abroad is a strategic decision for international students, and they have a choice about where to study but a competition to recruit them is increasing in the global environment (MAC Report, 2018). Numerous studies show the generic student decision-making factors influence the choice of a course and destination country (Petruzzellis and Romanazzi 2010; Eder et al. 2010; Wilkins and Huisman 2011; Hemsley- Brown, 2012; Zheng, 2014; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015; Ahmad et al, 2016; Alfattal, 2017 among others).

Nevertheless, the majority of international students prefer five English Speaking Countries (1) the United States, (2) the United Kingdom, (3) Australia (4) Canada, and (5) New Zealand (IDP International student buyer behaviour Report, 2017). Consequently, most international student destination mobility study tends to focus on moving international students from non-English speaking countries to English speaking countries, influenced by the various push and pull factors (Ahmad & Hussain 2017) for example the most common pull factors are English speaking destination country, institute and course. According to Hobsons survey (2017), international students made a choice first about the subject (course) followed by country and institute.

The push factors may include lack of ability to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century educational needs of specialist programmes and quality of education offered by local educational institutions and hard to find an excellent job in the home countries, while a foreign qualification brings bright career prospects (Ahmad 2015 and Lee 2014).

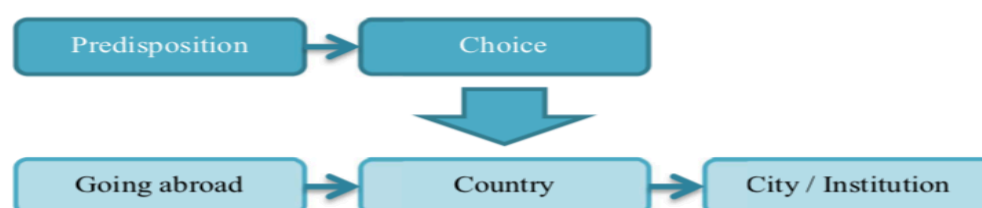
### **Category: Location**

The geographic location of the facility or workplace is probably the first and significant criteria when engaging in any long-term activity, including learning and education. The contemporary literature on location and international student

satisfaction provides as one of the significant factors in decision making about study abroad. For example, according to Jiani (2017), selecting a location and institute of study is not a one-stage decision-making process instead involves multiple stages, but most of the student prefers the first city and then institute. The process of decision making of international students is a three-stage process, at stage one decision is made, not to study at home but to study abroad, stage two includes the selection of the country or city and final stage selection of the institute.

This is presented in the graphical form in **figure (28)**.

**Figure 28: International student decision making process**



**Source: Jiani 2017**

According to literature, every year London attracts a large number of international students and according to Study London (2019), more than 100,000 student study in London.

The interview results show that students have many reasons for the selection of course and institution. In the interviews, the participants were asked about the destination of a country that something Chen discussed in his interview:

*“Studying in a foreign country is a big decision; I was considering an English speaking country for my studies but you know choices are limited as we have only a few English speaking countries. First I decided to study in the UK”.*  
(Chen)

There was logic in the reply from Chen as he was only considering English-speaking countries, because to study in a different language becomes hard.

Like Chen, other participants also presented a similar view, for example, according to Syed

*"The university selection is a big challenge especially for an international student, when he has to leave his country. I was just considering a Good City and Good University. Good City..... location.....either in London or close to London with easy access to public transport" (Syed)*

One of the participants Minh has explained well, why students prefer big cities such as London

*Foreign students usually only know big cities like New York, London and Paris and decide to study in one of these big cities. I choose London because London was very famous in my country and I have heard about London is centre of education and many students go London for studies. (Interviewer: Did you know any other cities in the UK prior to your admission?) ...Hmmmmm I think Birmingham and Manchester only in England..... (Minh)*

Most of the participants presented the similar view of their selection of a particular institute based on location. For example Sara presented her view as

*I was considering a good institute whether public or private but my priority was location and really easy access to institute, as it was a commitment of one year. I do not want to spend much time and money on travelling cost, especially in this country where time is money and really valuable (Sara)*

Other participant Yasin, Shah, Faisal and Tayyaba also gave the similar responses to Sara

*There were also other factors but those were not major but I would like to mention here, the location of the college, commuting sources like public transport was very close to college. These were the factors; therefore, I selected this college. (Yasin)*

*I also selected this institute because of location. My place of study was very close to all amenities, City centre and major transport links. This saved me lots of time in travelling and I was able to use this time in other activities. (Shah)*

*I am very happy this is in the same town and also near to my house just a walking distance of fifteen (15) minutes..... I save lot of my time, I get up 8 am, get ready and take breakfast, leave at 9 am and my first lesson starts at 10 am.... (Faisal)*

*My first experience of studying at XXX was really a nightmare because of commuting difficulties, every day I used to spend more than five hours on travelling by changing public transport from train to bus.....going to university one way travel time was nearly three hours. Imagine when you have to attend a lesson of three hours and you spent more than five hours and £ 20 to £30 on transportation. I finished my course and took admission in this college, as it is only 15 minutes walk from my residence. As a bad experience in past, therefore, this time was my priority was location and really easy access to institute as it was a commitment of one year (Tayyaba)*

Tayyaba's previous experience of location was bad, therefore this time she was much careful about the selection of the institution based on the location.

### **Analysis**

The data from participants present a consensus that selecting a destination of a study abroad is a strategic decision and students usually prefer an English speaking country. In their decision making process, first is the selection of country, followed by selection of an institute. The category location relates to actual and useful information that influence a student's decision to study destination. The data analysis shows that a study destination's attractiveness is one of the crucial factors that influence a participant's decision of selecting the institute. International students try to seek admission in large cities because while seeking admission in a foreign country, only big names of cities come into their minds. The capital (London) has been the top choice for international students. The participants' data and contemporary literature confirm that student's value location and especially a big city.

A specific location is not merely a physical location for a service provider to deliver the products or services. Instead, it is contained, besides other things, in a physical infrastructural and a cultural context. Commercial activity transport links, provision of food and drinks and major socio-cultural events are also generally concentrated around specific locations. Therefore the attractiveness of the city may attract

international students, and the attractiveness of the city could play an essential role in decision-making and motivations to study (Roostika, 2017). Commuting problems such as long distance from home to the HE institution pose a potential barrier to fair access (Tsai, Roderiro, and Zanini, 2018). For example, one interviewee revealed her previous problem of commuting and the selection of the institute based on the location made her study and life easy. A right mix of such amenities provides students with opportunities to save time, socialise, and enjoy excellent infrastructural benefits.

#### *Category: Course (Availability and Content)*

There is substantial evidence, especially from the literature, that students are heavily influenced by a subject area to select one institute over another. The student's top priority in the selection of the HEI is the suitability of the course (Basha et al.'s 2016) and the benefits of the outcomes of the course (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2015). According to the research 'Tracking the Decision-Making of High Achieving Higher Education Applicants' (BIS, 2012) shows that course availability and relevancy are the most significant factors in student decision-making. Students prefer HE offering the course of their interest. Some of the students seemed more satisfied due to the availability of the programme of study, and their choice.

The availability of a favourite course was a source of satisfaction for Shakila, who was quick to highlight that she had to use her previous educational background to leverage any further studies and to build a professional career. The continuation of the same subject but at a higher level would allow her to build on top of her existing domain knowledge and will nicely fit into her long term subject orientation and professional career as well.

*"I choose this institute because my previous subject and this course both are similar. My previous educational background was in accounting and finance. I completed graduation in accounting and finance and wanted to do Masters in Accounting and Finance as well. This university also offered pre master course, after this pre master course just one week or may be two weeks holidays and then I can start my Master's in Accounting and Finance. I think in terms of time maintaining this is the perfect institute" (Shakila)*

Response from Faisal strengthened the thoughts provided by Shakila.

*“My previous study was related to this course and I wanted to study further in the same field so in this regard I have selected this course and ultimately a good job in future” (Faisal)*

For Minh and the primary criteria was also the availability of a suitable course.

*“Primarily I was looking at different institutes offering the course I was Interested in and.....these were the types of the criteria (Minh)*

Syed appeared to have a mix of criteria when choosing an institute and one of those criteria was again the course availability.

*“.....offering a subject of my interest, having international students and easy and fast admission process, they have four intakes in a year. I am doing a master course and feel that I did not waste much time in the admission process” (Syed)*

Response from Shah was very clear when it came to pinpointing the importance of availability of a course and the course granularity. Shah specifically spoke about the course content as well. This highlights how two otherwise similar courses, but with minor differences in course modules could influence students choice and satisfaction from their studies.

*“I really enjoyed this course. I really liked course modules. There were other colleges delivering this course as well. However the course offered by this college had most of the module I wanted to study” (Shah)*

Response from Romana was also along the thoughts expressed by other respondents. Romana’s response also reflected her satisfaction from the fact that her institute had assisted her in choosing a course which was in line with her previous studies and hence in her best interest, to develop a specialisation in a given field.

*“I initially considered five (5) institutes and finally chose this institute... (Interviewer ..... So why did you prefer this one?)..... I preferred this one for so many things. First of all I am a student of Law and course was available and, about the background of this university, it is at 31st position in the UK in this field and student satisfaction in this university is higher than in other*

*universities. There are so many foreign students where so it is relaxed and familiar environment here”*

*“First they (University) checked which subjects were matching my background. Then they gave me this opportunity to study international business Law because this is related to my previous study also and as I want to be a barrister so I have to finish my LLM degree. I also liked to take this course” (Romana)*

Response from Shoaib was very similar to that of Shah. Shoaib was clear in pointing out that course was a dominant factor and that course composition was taken into account when choosing between different institutes.

*“I looked at three colleges. All of them were offering this course. However course content was different. I chose this college as the course composition was best match for my likes and future job” (Shoaib)*

Response from Yasin also reinforced the significance of Course and course content.

*“There were different factors due to which I selected this institute. First on the basis of my prior research this institute offered the subject you know I was looking to study that was the first thing...” (Yasin)*

## **Analysis**

Quotes from participants clearly show that course availability is one of the first criteria applied when searching for an institute of higher education. This reconciles well with the literature as well. Surprisingly, students want to build new skills they have not learned in the past. Generally, students want to specialise in the area they have already been studying in the past. This way, existing knowledge and skills can leverage future progress. This is almost always true unless a significant shift in education career takes place.

Quotes further highlight that students do not treat all courses as same and equal in the curriculum. Private institutes not only differ in course names but, at times, also in course contents for the same course. An example would be an MBA course. Different institutes may have different package contents for the course. In an ideal

case, given all other factors constant, a student is more likely to favour an institute if the course and the course contents and composition match the student requirement. Ultimately HEI choice is guided by the scope of the studies (Hemsley-Brown, and Oplatka, 2015). Studying the course modules the one wants may add to satisfaction. This is depicted in table (12).

**Table 12: MBA Course Content at Public and Private HEIs**

<b>Master of Business Administration</b>			
<b>Private Higher Education Institutes</b>		<b>Public Higher Education Institutes</b>	
<b>London School of Commerce (LSC)</b>	<b>The University of Buckingham</b>	<b>City University of London</b>	<b>University of East London</b>
Strategic Human Resource Management	Practical Research Methods	Accounting and Financial Reporting	Managing Strategy, Operations and Partnerships
Marketing Management	Operations and Information Systems Management	Organisational Behaviour	Managing Financial and Human Resources for Sustainable Business Success
Financial Management and Entrepreneurship	Corporate Strategy and Leadership in Practice	Strategy	Marketing in the Digital Age and Corporate Social Responsibility
Managing Strategic Change	Personal Development and Professional Effectiveness	Markets for Investments	Business Simulation with Professional Development
Research Methodologies	<b>One of:</b> Entrepreneurship Or Managing People Across Cultures	Analytics for Business	Mental Wealth 4: Mental Wealth and Applied Research
Strategic Marketing or International Marketing Management	Strategic Marketing & Innovation	Business in the Global Economy	Applied Business Project
Corporate Finance Or Financial Markets & Investment Analysis	Personal Development and Professional Effectiveness	Human Resources Management	
Either Dissertation Business Project Integrated Case Study	MBA Project (Dissertation)	Operations Management	
		Marketing	

		Corporate Governance	
		Digital Technologies and Business	
		Business Mastery Project	

**Sources: London School of Commerce, The University of Buckingham, City University and East London University**

## **Emerging Theme: Flexibility in Policies**

Public sector policies are rigid in nature and policy formulation does not include all stakeholders especially in higher education, students are excluded while most of the private higher education institutions prefer interactive, collaborative and deliberating policy formulation and implementation improvements by reconsidering between upstream and downstream actors. (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2017). Higher education systems can only show flexibility in a complex, competitive, and international environment, and it is right that they should do so. However, this dual insight cuts two directions, 1) too little flexibility will inadequately respond to changing the environment and 2) too much flexibility will lack internal integrity leading to lowering standards and failing quality measures (Barnet, 2014).

Barnet (2014) attempts to define flexibility as

*“Flexibility’, it is apparent, is an umbrella term – and even a diffused term – that seeks to do justice to a family of concepts”. (P.30)*

Barnet (2014) further classified flexibility into four levels with the HE context

1. **Sector flexibility:** *to what extent does the sector as a whole (including state agencies) offer and/or encourage flexibility in the ways in which students gain their higher education experience?*
2. **Institutional flexibility:** *in what ways and to what extent might an institution itself be flexible, in responding to students’ emerging needs and wishes?*
3. **Pedagogical flexibility:** *in what ways might teaching processes evince greater flexibility in their engagement with students as learners? To what extent do academic teachers have personal control to respond to students as individuals and to vary their pedagogical stances? How open, how flexible, is the pedagogical relationship between teacher and the taught?*
4. **Learner flexibility:** *to what extent do students have choice over the modes of their learning? In what ways might learners as future graduates be*

*encouraged and enabled to develop their own forms of flexibility, in engaging with the wider world? (Barnet, P.30)*

The main difference between public higher education institute and private higher education institute that in former institute rules and regulations are blindly follow while in later institutes, there is some flexibility in their rules and regulations and administration demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness to meet students' needs.

### **Emerging Subtheme: Cost (Tuition Fee Policy)**

There has been a limited study on the relationship between cost and selection of the study programme and HEIs. According to a recent study by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON 2015), cost does not dominate the prospective student decision-making process but it does matter.

One of the respondents, Minh, was clear in highlighting a preference for lower cost of education. Minh described how he had to switch from public institute to a private one because of lower tuition fees in the later.

*“Private institutes are comparatively cheaper than public institutes (Interviewer: Did you compare fee structure with other institutes, public and private?) Yes I did compare, What Happened? Initially I was enrolled in a public institute and later I transferred to private institute. (Interviewer: Did you complete your course at public institute) Yes I completed my course at public university” (Minh)*

Chen was of similar view though in Chen's case a slightly different economic advantage was highlighted, that of having freedom to distribute the financial burden over a period of time. A lenient payment plan makes the costs affordable for Chen. Chen's response clearly showed that, if the payment had to be made in full, the affordability might have been reduced or even eliminated.

Chen was of a similar view, though, in Chen's case, a slightly different economic advantage was highlighted, that of having the freedom to distribute the financial burden over some time. A lenient payment plan makes the costs affordable for Chen. Chen's response clearly showed that the payment has to be made in full, and the affordability might have been reduced or even eliminated.

*"I was very happy when college allowed me to spread the tuition fee with flexible payment options. I made a payment plan according to my own affordability"* (Chen)

Shah, from Pakistan, clearly expressed the sensitivity of educational costs, particularly for those students who come from economically challenged backgrounds. Students from such countries often travel to ecumenically developed countries which have stable currencies. Students are willing to invest in their future by first prestigious degrees by sacrificing large amounts of local currency. This was clearly highlighted in response from Shah.

*"I used to convert British Pound into my country (Pakistan) currency. In my country currency tuition fee conversion used to become large amount of money. My family had limited resources and within certain budget, I needed to complete my study abroad. Therefore, I was tuition fee conscious."* (Shah)

While talking about the cost dimension, Yasin also expressed likeness for favourable tuition fee structure and told that this was a major contributing factor.

*"Alongside there were a few other factors which also attracted me to this institute Which was like the fee structure was relatively very competitive as compare to other institutes"* (Yasin)

Quotes reveal that PrHEIs are comparatively cheaper and less expensive than PuHEIs. The public institutes cost £ 27000 for a three-year degree programme while most of the private higher education institutes cost £18000 for the same three years degree programme, a few PrHEIs charge a higher tuition fee. The majority of PrHEIs are in London, due to the worldwide fame of London and to attract international students. On the other hand, PuHEIs are geographically diverse in the UK, and they charge the same tuition fee (£27000) for a three years degree whether the university is in the north or south of the country.

### Emerging Subtheme: Multiple intakes

Types of courses available and the availability timings for such courses as a spread over the year is also a decisive factor when choosing an institute of higher education. Access refers to the extent to which students can easily access the services offered by a university in terms of time and location (Arambewela et al., 2005; Telford & Masson, 2005). Some of the students seemed more satisfied due to flexibility in enrolment schedule.

For Sara, the number of intakes offered by the institute as a significant satisfaction factor. It appeared as if she believed that the number of intakes is in a way easy as well as 'fast. Sara's remarks are meaningful in a sense that, from her perspective, she does not have to wait long just to get enrolled and start her course. Due to a higher number of intakes, she was able to save time and avoid disruption in studies.

*".....Easy and fast admission process, they have four intakes in a year..."*

(Sara)

Sapna also appeared happy with the fact that multiple yearly intakes offered in some private institutes were beneficial and that this was something missing from public institutes. Sapna was quick to take the initiative and provide perspective on this spontaneously, without interviewer asking explicitly about a number of intakes. It seemed as if she unconsciously but significantly valued the multiple intakes.

*".....Last point; Private institutes have more entry points. We don't have to wait until September like in public institutes (only main September intake)....."* (Sapna)

Faisal's response was more detailed and appeared to strongly correlate the choice of the institute with ease of and admission. Faisal seemed to relate the ease and speed of admission with multiple intakes. It is quite possible and multiple intakes allow institutes to cut the time admission process takes and will be an exciting aspect to investigate further.

*"I have gone through a few colleges and universities but found that the admission process in private colleges much easier as compare to public universities. They have more intakes. Time for the admission is very less, to*

*get an admission in the private college, this is the fact I took admission in the private college". (Faisal)*

Tayyaba also liked the fact that, compared to public institutes, private institutes had more intakes per year. She seemed to conclude that having a single intake by most public institutes make the admission process 'slow'.

*"Public institute was big but admission procedure was slow and they have only one intake in a year for my course". (Tayyaba)*

Yasin highlighted a vital utility of having multiple intakes. It allowed him to relatively smoothly fit the admission schedule with his travel and visa arrangements.

*"The admission cycle which was regular throughout the year. There were four intakes in a year to recruit students; this was also the main factor. Due to my international student status and visa conditions I was looking forward to get admission in certain period of time/months, which are not offered by public institutes. There were also other factors but those were not major..." (Yasin)*

## **Analysis**

The above quotes also revealed that PrHEIs have more intakes in a year. Most of the public higher institutes usually have one or two intakes in a year. There are hardly any studies that linked to a number of intakes and students' decision-making. Maringe and Carter's study (2007) discuss faster and speedy admission process but do not consider number of intakes and influence on students' decision making.

## **Emerging Sub-theme: Fast Admission Process (Fast Communication)**

It was clear from the data that a key factor in the admission application process was the expected probability of quick but positive admission outcomes to their desired HEIs by the respondents. The perceived fast admission and successful outcome was an important catalyst that led students to look for study opportunities.

Usually the admission process for international students is lengthy and time consuming, according to Myklebust (2018), Norway considers admissions reforms to recruit more international students by making it simple and easy.

A study conducted by, Baranova, Morrison, & Mutton (2011) at the University of Derby discovered that the prime factors contributing to student satisfaction were quality of information, use of social media channels for fast and interactive communication and additional student services such as online enrolment and self-service system for student ID card. No doubt, digital technology is an integral part university student experience (Henderson, Selwyn and Aston 2015), with one of the benefits of fast and speedy communication

As in the previous extract, Sara mentioned the multiple intakes and related to fast admission cycle, especially when three to four intakes in an academic year.

*“Easy and fast admission process, they have four intakes in a year .I am doing master course and feel that I did not waste much time in the admission process” (Sara)*

As Sapna's interview extract also shows the similarity to reply of Sara in terms of fast admission process and prompt replies of email queries.

*“..... In, private institute it is an easy to apply and have fast administration. I can receive lot of help in admission. .... (Interviewer: What do you mean by fast administration?) They reply very quickly to emails and respond to queries immediately; I have been a received text message as well referring to check your emails about important information..... they also forward queries to relevant people and they directly (copied) send email to me.” (Sapna)*

Chen obtained admission through an educational agent and he recommended him (Chen) this institute based on quick admission process.

Chen obtained admission through an educational agent, and he (agent) recommended him (Chen) the institute based on the quick admission process.

*“My agency (Educational Consultant) provided the list of a few institutes both public and private and recommended this one, as he could get an admission offer quickly” (Chen)*

A further example of Shah demonstrated the evidence of fast admission, he applied within the country and an initial admission decision was taken within a day.

*“Admission process was really fast and quick. I submitted the application form and the next day I received the phone call that my application has been provisionally approved and college wanted me to visit them. (Interviewer: Were you already in the country?) Yes, I was looking for another higher course after the completion of my course” (Shah)*

Faisal's experience was similar to others and he also chose the institute based on fast admission process and much easier.

*“I have gone through a few colleges and universities but found that the admission process in private colleges is much easier as compared to public universities. Private colleges have multiple intakes. Time for the admission is very short, to get admission in the private college, this is the fact I took admission in the private college..... This one I was getting proper response and immediate response and they also have given the admission offer within a week” (Faisal)*

Tayyba shared remarkable information that admission process is slow in public HEIs because the large size and a large number of students apply, seems she had experience of Public HEI, but she took admission in the private HEI because of her comparison of admission duration.

*“Public institute was big but admission procedure was slow and they have only one intake in a year for my course. I also visited other private institute and made a comparison and found this was better” (Tayyaba)*

## Analysis

Above quotes reveal that one of the factors to consider PrHEI was the fast and speedy process of admission. Maringe and Carter (2007) identified one of the factors influencing student's decision in selecting the university is, 'Speed of University response to application' in their study, 'insights into International Students' choice of UK HEI'.

The data analysis also shows that quality (fast and speedy) of communication is also an important factor that influences respondents' decision of study destination. The rapid adoption of information and communication technology in the HE is the symbol of 21<sup>st</sup> century with benefits to all such as students, employers and government

including cost and time effectiveness (Sing, 2014). According to Berkebile (2010) and Nedeljković–Pravdić (2010), communication that is directed to customers and stakeholders can affect positioning and image. Students are also considered key stakeholder and effective communication can influence their decision-making process in the HE sector (Sing, 2014). Therefore, in response to this, many international higher educational providers from the UK, US and Australia apply more proactive and creative techniques of communication, such emails and text messages to attract international students (Ancheh, 2006; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010)

The importance of effective communication cannot be ignored, as it plays a vital role in students' decision-making process. All of the participants felt that their course and institute selection decision was right.

## **Theme 2: Pre-Arrival and Arrival Information (Induction)**

This theme is particularly important for international students. Students are crossing geographical and cultural boundaries, and this is the first real experience they get of starting their new course journey in the institute they have chosen. Main elements, which fall in this theme, are complete, accurate and relevant information required by students before and after the departure from home country and before the course commences. The UK higher education system places a great emphasis on ensuring that new students are introduced adequately to the academic system and structure (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). Examples include contact details, maps and travel details to the location, student manual or a handbook containing significant policies and regulations, course timetables, and introducing new incumbents to existing students and faculty at the institute. It is more essential, especially for international students to familiarise with the new and different educational system and culture. Besides this, new international students may be facing possible challenges of initial adjustments such as accommodation, opening bank account and geographical orientation (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). If they are not handled correctly, these non-academic problems can affect the academic growth and achievement of a student. Ultimately, the obligation to support new international students lies with the appropriate HEI (QAA, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). Similarly, well planned, organised and successful induction leaves a good impression on new incumbents. Positive student experience during the induction stage can possibly be useful in terms of retention and results for both learners and the organisation (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014).

A study carried out by University of Central Lancashire even showed positive correlation between course retention and induction experience (Increasing Retention Rates of New Students by Improving the Induction Process, John Ashton Yamnikar, Department of the Built Environment, University of Central Lancashire)

### **(Pre-arrival)**

Extract from Shakila shows the way she had been provided pre arrival and arrival information.

*“University provided a link for online pre arrival information for students. My agency also provided information and we also directly contacted international desk over the phone and the information provided over the phone (information) was very helpful, prior to that I was bit nervous as going first time out of my country, (Interviewer: please more about information, type....), Information about travel documents which I need to bring, accommodation, transport links and orientation schedule. I was completely satisfied, I found them (international desk very friendly and provided all the information that is why I chose this university” (Shakila)*

Chen’s experience indicates that he had valuable information for the UK immigration to present relevant document.

*“The information provided in pre-departure hand-out helped me, got a list what to pack and how to go through journey, especially the documents need to show at the UK airport to familiarise myself well with what was expected” (Chen)*

Shah’s experience is similar to Chen as he mentioned the pre arrival info pack was very useful.

*“Info pack also having the packing list and that was very useful. It mentioned essential documents to bring such as admission letter, visa, passport, academic certificates and transcripts and recommended items such as umbrella and raincoat. It also mentioned the items which should not be brought, such as bedding, blanket, rugs etc.” (Shah)*

Romana's experience is similar to other participants but she clearly indicated that info pack for complete containing everything similar to previous participants. However she also mentioned that information about registration, weather and medical as also included.

*"When I got the visa then University sent me a text message and also info pack in an email (Interviewer: So you got a text message from the university, Please tell something about info pack) Yes, and I also got a text message from home office and info pack, there were indications on what to do before departure, what I can bring with me, information about registration dates, accommodation, weather and medical information etc. They introduced everything to me, before my arrival." (Romana)*

#### **Arrival Information (Induction)**

Sara seems satisfied, she was happy with the induction experience, and she also explained two types of induction viz general and academic, and she makes this clear in her interview extract below.

Sara seems satisfied, she was happy with the induction experience, and she also explained two types of induction viz general and academic, and she makes this clear in her interview extract below.

*"I had two inductions, one is General it was about policies and procedures, health and safety and the other was Academic. I was told about the modules, assessment, learning resources, academic staff, feedback and plagiarism (Do you think did you have enough information?) I belief more than enough, it was detailed induction. I had the opportunity to ask questions during the induction" (Sara)*

Sapna's experience is similar to Sara but she also mentioned the opportunity to ask questions during the induction.

*"We had whole week for orientation (induction). We had induction forms and activities; we had opportunities to ask questions to staff and students. It was really very effective week". (Sapna)*

Syed's additional point about classes' schedule (timetables) indicates his higher level of satisfaction as it helped to plan other activities.

*"Class schedule was provided in the beginning of each semester. This was very helpful as I could plan my other activities well. " (Syed)*

Chen's experience is same as Sapna, he also mentioned the opportunity to ask questions

*"....that (Induction) was a nice experience. It gave me chance to ask questions I had in mind. I felt very welcome and relaxed. I started looking forward to the commencement of course more positively" (Chen)*

Faisal's experience is same as Chen and Sapna. He mentioned that the induction covered everything from academic to administrative and support services.

*"Induction was very good. The instructors spoke on each and everything for example health and safety, Fire Exit and also about classes, attendance, duration the facilities available the lab facilities and library facilities available, I was quite happy with the induction was about General and Academic both" (Faisal)*

Romana's experience is mixed, She found induction staff helpful and friendly but she contradicts to Sara by mentioning that she had not been informed about plagiarism and she also mentioned that she had not been informed about the attendance policy in detail, such as what is the minimum attendance required.

*"When I came here on the first day, everybody was too much helpful and cordial. Administration section was also good; they brought me here and introduced me to the head of the department. All of them were very helpful and cordial and they loved me and I also loved them..... (Interviewer: Had you been informed about major college policies such as plagiarism, attendance?) No, I was not informed about this before studying here. (Interviewer: Did they tell you that attendance is compulsory, you need to attend classes?) They told me attendance is compulsory but I was not told how much attendance was compulsory; they did not tell anything about plagiarism. (Romana)*

Tayyaba reflected the similar experience to other except Romana, she particularly mentioned the criteria for grading and considered that helpful and makes her mind clear what is the expectation for the course in terms of Distinction, Merit and Pass.

*“No. I was within the Country. I was not provided with travel pack. However I was provided with handouts containing policies and procedures about attendance, plagiarism etc., also some material about how to get library membership and how to use the library. This increased my confidence in the system. I knew, for example, what was expected from me during the course when we have been informed about grading and criteria for Distinction, Merit and Pass” (Tayyaba)*

Shoaib's experience is similar to Chen, Syed and Sara.

*“The induction continued two days. I was bit nervous on first day but felt very comfortable speaking to management and fellow students on second day. It really helped me kick start my course.” (Shoaib)*

## **Analysis**

Responses from students suggest that pre-departure information is like a first impression and students show keen appreciation of this. For most international students, this is the first experience to travel to another country, a move from their local environment to a potentially significant geographical, cultural and political environment. A further pre-departure information pack, handouts, packing list and student welcome packs are the first one to one correspondence between the institute and the student. This alleviates any stress students may have when entering a very different socio-political climate. Institutes must get this right so that students are satisfied and spread word of mouth to other students and recommend the institute to prospective students.

Further such information and literature should be as much culturally neutral as possible. Special care should be taken when designing such material and make it as much usable and accessible as possible. Many respondents expressed satisfaction for pre-arrival information, how induction was conducted. Induction is probably the first non-formal interaction between the institute and the student and between students themselves. Students are exposed to the institute's culture, policies,

facilities, faculty members and management. Participants indicated the duration of induction from two days to a week, and all twelve participants were satisfied with induction except Romana as she mentioned that she had not been informed about plagiarism and attendance policy in detailed. A comprehensive induction phase allows students to ask questions and increase their familiarity with the institute as well as the upcoming course delivery.

### **Theme 3: Learning and Teaching**

Elements of learning and teaching are primarily the teachers, the learners and a conducive environment. Product of the three determines the quality of this experience. For a given student, teacher's professional and personal attributes combined with learning material and supportive environment dictates the quality of learning. This theme is probably the most fundamental aspect of the provision of higher education and therefore probably the most significant as well. All the respondents expressed detailed views about this theme. The learning environment attracted much focus and admiration from all the respondents.

#### **Category: Teacher and Teaching Methods**

Almost all participants were satisfied with the knowledge, experience and teaching. Sara reflected her real experience by mentioning qualified, experienced teaching staff and the small class size. She seemed satisfied, on her earlier experience of small class size she felt dissatisfied as she was demotivated but later she accepted and became more satisfied.

Almost all participants were satisfied with the knowledge, experience and teaching. Sara reflected her real experience by mentioning qualified, experienced teaching staff and the small class size. She seemed satisfied, on her earlier experience of the small class size she felt dissatisfied as she was demotivated but later she accepted and became more satisfied.

*“Good experience of learning qualified and experienced teaching staff. They are very friendly. Small class size, it is not possible in public universities, we are two students in the class and feel like one to one teaching, in the beginning I felt little bit demotivated but very happy and satisfied as*

*sometimes lecturers work with us to find out the article, data, take us to library” (Sara)*

Sapna’s experience is more natural, as she clearly mentioned that some lecturers are friendlier than others. She found all lecturers expert in subjects; her experience in this context is similar to Sara.

*“At the start of the course, I thought teachers are strict and I was really hesitant to ask a question but later they gave me the confidence to ask questions and I also found them friendly..... some teachers are more friendly than others, for example XXXX was more friendly than YYYY..... I found all teachers experts in their field and usually they develop discussion in the class. Their teaching demonstrated that they have thorough knowledge about their subject and encourage students’ participation in the class.....One teacher XXXX talks about cricket and culture about my country.....Teachers have high expertise and they are very friendly” (Sapna)*

Shakila’s experience is similar to Sara and Sapna, she added that lecturers encouraged asking questions and that practice of lecturer developed her confidence to ask questions.

Shakila’s experience is similar to Sara and Sapna, and she added that lecturers encouraged asking questions and that the practice of lecturer developed her confidence to ask questions.

*“I completed two semesters, one is pre sessional and other is pre master. In both the semesters lecturers were qualified and experienced, their way of teaching was very good and they were very friendly. This provides the confidence to students to ask a question if anything is not clear. I asked questions and teachers politely and friendly replied and this behaviour encouraged me to ask questions. Sometimes teachers ask questions to develop discussion. Teachers were qualified and know the art of teaching.” (Shakila)*

Chen adds more by mentioning the art of teaching; especially the example of class discussion on Brexit and then the same topic appears in assessment as well, making Check very satisfied about teaching strategy.

*“All professors were telling us how they are going to teach, how many formal sessions, how many presentations and seminars. They encourage developing discussions. We had a very good class discussion on Brexit and we also had an assignment question on Brexit. Teaching is very focused to assessment, It was quite satisfying teaching experience” (Chen)*

Tayyaba’s thought is similar to Sapna as she mentioned that some lecturers are stricter and some are polite. She also gave the example of Finance and Marketing lecturers but discussed in more Marketing lecturer.

*“....Finance lecturer was very strict and on the other side marketing lecturer was very friendly but both were knowledgeable, qualified and experienced. I really liked marketing lecturer because of his marketing knowledge, way of teaching with real examples from business industry and polite behaviour. He really cared about his students and motivated students to achieve higher grades. He used to speak English clearly and slowly, especially for with weak English Language skills. (Tayyaba)*

Shah shared his experience similar to most of the participants as he found lecturers friendly and approachable.

*“One lecturer was very friendly and he told students that you are most welcome to approach me for any academic problem. He was easily approachable, for any confusion, or anything that was not fully understood during the lesson. Sometimes I used to ask him after the class if anything needs more explanation or clarification” (Shah)*

Romana indicated getting the teacher’s attention, and she also mentioned that using student name when communicating is well appreciated and sometimes lecturer also remember students by face. She also mentioned that usually teachers cut jokes and make the session enjoyable.

*“Most of the teachers initially knew me by name, but later they knew me by face too. The class size was not too big. I was able to get teacher’s attention*

*for areas where I needed specific assistance.....they (lecturers) were good at explain and one thing which I do like to mention the art of making learning interesting sometimes they give us good jokes to make us laugh. I could understand the lectures very well. (Romana)*

Tayyaba mentioned her real experience of learning by doing an activity of Fishbone diagram. She seemed extremely excited and satisfied.

*“Interesting teaching, qualified lecturers (Interviewer: Could you please tell any activity if you remember?) Yes I do remember, Once topic was problem solving for cause and effects we produced fish diagram that was really interesting, I was learnt first time for any problem may be multiple causes and also root cause etc.” (Tayyaba)*

Shoaib's experience included lecturer's student centred approach as they paid attention to individual learning needs.

*“All teachers were very good (Interviewer Good means). I mean knowledgeable and know their subject of teaching very well, they include current examples from business industry. In addition to that they possess good communication skills. They paid attention to individuals. And also provided feedback. ....This was helpful and I improved my grades” (Shoaib)*

Yasin reflected his experience in terms of the good qualities of a lecturer, and he found all excellent qualities in his lecturers. He seemed more satisfied and excited to mention all this.

*“Teaching, I believe is the major factor I would say this is the factor which went beyond my expectations in this institute and I would say why because as a teacher there were all very professional they not only educated and qualified but also they possessed the background knowledge of the student satisfaction, on the level they were delivering the lecture with the information really wonderful There was no point that we were left behind in term of update knowledge or at any point you felt that you are behind so the teachers were very welcoming to support us even after the class they were well prepared and organised” (Yasin)*

### Category: Class size

Sara's extract is also used in the theme of teaching and learning as this is the overlapping area, initially she seems unhappy with the small class size but later she developed her satisfaction. Please see her extract for learning and Teaching

*"Small class size, it is not possible in public universities, we are two students in the class and feel like one to one teaching, in the beginning I felt little bit demotivated but very happy and satisfied as sometimes lecturers work with us to find out the article, data, take us to library" (Sara)*

Sapna's class size was ten and she likes to study in small class as she mentioned that lecturer could give equal time to all students. She seems happy and satisfied.

*"In my class I have only up to ten students. It is small number to me and I do like small class size as we know each other and equal opportunity for every one to get attention of the lecturer as enable lecturer to work with each student" (Sapna)*

Initially there was a misunderstanding because the participant took class size as the physical dimension of the classroom. Shakila prefers neither small nor big class size according to her the class size, which is easy to manage by a teacher and up to 12 students in a class, she thinks neither small nor big.

*"(Interviewer: What was your class size) It was a big classroom (Interviewer: Sorry I mean number of students in your class) Twelve (12) students, but classroom was very big classroom (Interviewer: Do you think this is big or small number?) I think this is the ok not small not big. Teachers can pay attention to all students, more interactions and it is an easy to manage for the teacher" (Shakila)*

Tayyaba felt that her class size was bit large, she thought that in a class there should not be more than 30 students, as in her class there were 40 students. Therefore she seemed a bit dissatisfied. She also mentioned that in a big class it becomes difficult for lecturer to pay individual attention and give equal time to all students.

*"I would say bit too large. (Interviewer: How many students were in the class?) I think around 40".....tell more about your class size experience*

*(Interviewer).....It becomes little bit difficult for a lecturer to give equal time to all students and allow all to participate if the class size is big. Lecturer spends less time on each student and sometimes no time ..... I think not more than 30 students should be in a class. (Tayyaba)*

### **Category: Assessment and Grading**

All the participants were satisfied with assessment criteria and their grades. Sara reflected her excitement on mock assessment.

*I did not have mock assessment in my country. When the lecturer told about the mock assessment I was little bit confused and thought we had to take assessment twice but when he explained and told us that it is a practice for the real assessment..... I found mock assessment incredibly beneficial, whatever the grades I obtained almost similar in actual assessment..... I was happy with my grades (Sara)*

Minh has shared a similar view like Sara in his interview

*During a mock presentation, I came to know the areas of improvements and in the final assessment I was able to obtain higher grades because of mock assessment. Mock assessment was a new experience for me. (Minh)*

Chen's previous interview extract on learning and teaching is the continuation of the assessment and grading

*".....We had a very good class discussion on Brexit and we also had an assignment question on Brexit. Teaching is very focused to assessment, It was quite satisfying teaching experience..... therefore we have been prepared for the assessment in the class and when the actual assessment came we were already familiar with the topic and content" (Chen)*

Faisal also seemed satisfied like Chen, Minh and Sara, additionally he pointed out the effectiveness of revision classes.

*Last whole week was about revision and that really improved knowledge and prepared us for the final examination, we have been informed that the*

*revision week should not be missed..... "I was 100% satisfied with my grading" (Faisal)*

Romana's extract is also linked to induction, as she mentioned that during induction she was provided assessment schedule and criteria. She seems satisfied with her grades.

*"I was provided with assessment criteria.....Assessment schedule was clear.....grading was fair.....I was happy with my grades.....I did not challenge any grade" (Romana)*

Tayyaba's experience is similar to Romana, she also mentioned the provision of assessment schedule and grading criteria. She also seems satisfied with her grades.

*"We have been told about Distinction, Merit Pass and Fail,.....provided assessment schedule.....fair grading..... satisfied..... One thing I would like to mention that my grades have been improving. If I compare my first semester's grades with second semester's grades are much better (Tayyaba)*

### **Category: Feedback**

Sara's extract is also linked to assessment and grading, she values feedback as an active tool to improve learning and achieve higher grades.

*"I have been provided assignment briefs and mock presentation and mock exams and feedback are really very helpful to practice and go through with the actual with good grades" (Sara)*

Sapna confidently mentioned that she had been receiving frequently feedback and it was really helpful, comparing formative and summative feedback she preferred formative feedback.

*"I receive feedback lots of time and helps to improve"..... both formative and Summative feedback but personally I like formative feedback as it helps to improve and achieve higher grades. (Sapna]*

Shakila' mentioned detailed feedback was really effective.

*"Every teacher provided feedback (Interviewee, can I mention the name: Interviewer better to use Initial, for example A, B, C...) Interviewee "ok no problem". Every teacher provided the feedback, if it a presentation, an assignment, they provided very detailed feedback, even teacher (A) provided for a sentence to sentence, what is wrong, how it can be improved further. Feedback is very helpful for me" (Shakila]*

Romana's reply is similar to Shakila and she also confirmed that detailed feedback provided the opportunity to improve further.

*"...they (lecturers) have been monitoring everything about me. First they told me which one is right and which subjects I am good and which subjects I am not good in..... They also provided feedback for us before the final submission..... First we had to submit the draft and they give us feedback what is wrong.....what is right and how it could be further improved..... in brief they (lecturers) give the information (Feedback) and we can correct it" (Romana]*

Tayyaba's response is similar to Shakila and Romana; she also valued the effectiveness of the feedback.

*"Very detailed feedback, helped me to achieve higher grades (Interviewer: How?) For example in my first semester the achieved grades were pass only and the feedback provided on pass modules clearly mentioned what was missing for higher grades. That really worked, followed the feedback and later I achieved higher grades in my next assessment" (Tayyaba]*

Yasin brought an interesting point regarding the formative feedback, he categorically acknowledged the importance of feedback but he showed his concern about the short time between final submission and prior formative submission. If time interval is big, students could improve more.

*"I would say the feedback system was also very good for formative and summative feedback. Before the final submission of assignments we were given formative feedback, we were provided two chances to obtain feedback prior to final submission from the tutor this helped us to improve according to feedback provided although I would like to say one thing that formative*

*feedback dates are too close to final submission, I understand that program run under tight time schedule, it was not possible to provide big interval between formative feedback and the final submission, as a student we prefer little bit more time.” (Yasin)*

## **Analysis**

Most of the respondents expressed satisfaction with learning and teaching theme covering teacher and teaching style, class size, assessment and grading and feedback. Effective teaching style and competent teachers make sure students are learning and produce good results. Teachers with attractive professional and personal attributes were favoured. For example respondents seemed to like teachers who knew them by face. Further teachers who could explain concepts in different ways were also admired. Respondents also found lecturers friendly and approachable. Providing effective feedback on students' assessments is an essential component of learning and teaching strategy, most of the respondents were happy with the quality of feedback as they informed that feedback has been providing clear and simple guidance for actions to improvements. They also confirmed that they had been getting both formative and summative feedback but they preferred formative feedback more than summative feedback. One respondent wanted to have a bigger gap between formative feedback and final submission this could provide more time to get maximum benefit of the formative feedback. Most of the respondents were happy with their grades and one particular respondent appreciated mock assessment and grading by peer student. This type of assessment further provided confidence to students on fair assessment. Class size was also discussed most of the participants preferred small class size, only two students in a class was also a point of dissatisfaction and class size with 40 students was considered large, students prefer average class size between 20 to 30 students in a class.

## **Theme 4: Resources**

Resources available to students play a vital role in the delivery of educational provisions. A resource is “a stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively” (Oxford Dictionary) In the context of an educational provision resources help students materialize their short and long term learning objectives. It is therefore hardly surprising that many students, when choosing an institute of study, tend to

look at resources provided by the institute for the purpose of study. Multiple sources in literature also mention resources as dominant theme and an element of student satisfaction.

### Category: Classroom Resources

Almost all participants were satisfied with the classroom resources

Sara's extract shows that she was satisfied with classroom resources

*"All classrooms are equipped with Audio Visual equipment such as smart board, TV, computer, projector. New and comfortable furniture and nice*

*Classroom"* (Sara)

Minh mentioned good use of classroom's resources for educational purposes, and he seemed satisfied like Sara.

*"Our class rooms had projectors and speakers. Teachers used to play educational videos. This helped me in understanding the concepts quickly"*

(Minh)

Shah's view is similar to Minh and Sara about classroom resources and usage

*"All of our classrooms had projectors and audio equipment. Teacher used this equipment to explain and show us real business world examples. This helped me quickly learn the concepts"* (Shah)

### Category: Library and Computer Lab

Participants gave mixed views on library, for example Sara seems satisfied with the induction on library and its facilities.

*"Big library and online portal both are very good; I have been instructed during the induction how to use the system (Resources)"* (Sara)

Sapna's view is similar to Sara and she also seems satisfied with library and classroom resources.

*"The facilities in our institute are very good because the biggest library. Other facilities are also good for example classroom audio visual equipment"*  
(Sapna)

Faisal seems unhappy with the timing of the library and he wants that the timing should be extended and also access to the library be provided during the weekends.

Participants gave mixed views on the library; for example, Sara seems satisfied with the induction on the library and its facilities.

*"I would say library timings are not bad but it would be better if library opening hours are extended to 10 pm (from 8 pm to 10 pm) and also open during the weekends"* (Faisal)

Chen wants strong Wi-Fi signals in the campus.

*Good facilities, especially those that are related to technology are very important in our life, I am happy with all the ICT facilities except in some areas of the campus where there are very weak Wi-Fi signals. We need to use WhatsApp to talk to our families back home* (Chen)

Romana shed light on the library resources and environment.

*"I am too much satisfied with this library, big library, new and fast computers..... I use library often but most of the time prior to exams.....quiet and comfortable environment .....I can get books. I can use computers, laptops* (Romana)

Tayyaba mentioned the library was not big but the system was in place to get any book by submitting a book request form to the librarian.

*If any book is not available in the library then there was a procedure to request librarian to buy that book. (Interviewer: What was the procedure?) We need to fill in a simple form and give it to Librarian, once a book is bought informed to collect..... Library was not big but almost all recommended textbooks were there. It was an additional service..... I don't have exact idea may be around five (5) to six (6) thousand books* (Tayyaba)

Shoaib showed his satisfaction with the library resources for his dissertation.

*“Library in our college had a huge collection of books and latest journals. I frequently used to use library resources. I could lookup same information from multiple resources. This was good for critical analysis. I think this helped me get very good grades in exams and especially in my dissertation”*  
(Shoaib)

One participant showed her concerns over student canteen facilities, for example see the extract of Shakila’s interview

*“In the canteen, there is no oven or microwave for student use. Most of the students bring lunch and they start at 9am and finish at 5pm. During lunch break, there is no facility in the canteen for students to warm up (reheat) their food.”* (Shakila)

Syed made a comparison of resources with other institutes

*“I visited both institutes, met staff, students, saw their resources and found one clearly better than the other”* (Syed)

## **Analysis**

Findings from respondents for this work are mostly in agreement with literature on the topic and both highlight the role of learning resources in student satisfaction. Students share the experience when it comes to giving importance to learning resources. The majority of students were satisfied with the learning resources available, however criticisms include one student who wants stronger Wi-Fi signals and another student who wants extended library opening times. Learning resources contribute towards learning experience both in terms of the learning content as well as activities supplementary to learning such as time management, attendance, submitting course deliverables, timely feedback, organised course work and systematic delivery of course over a period of time.

In terms of delivery of course content, teachers frequently guide students to consult primary and secondary learning resources such as books, magazines, journal articles and online research. A library functions as a location which facilitates access to resources which aid learning and plays a significant role in offering information,

services and academic resources to assist students in their study and research activities. Resources such as the library, Moodle and computer labs help both the student as well as the education provider. Such systems clearly specify expectations, timelines and boundaries for various interactions between student and teacher. They also provide 'individual' experience for students. The usage of audio-visual resources has been linked to memory retention and enhanced the learning experience (QA Education Magazine the UK, May 2017). Institutes, which provide audio-visual equipment in the classroom, seem to be favoured by students over those that use traditional methods. One respondent reflected his concerns on weak Wi-Fi signals.

## **Theme 5: Management**

This theme covers the management aspect of provision of education. The term management is common and generally understood as a process of managing organisation. Oxford dictionary defines Management as 'The process of dealing with or controlling things or people.' Contemporary literature includes many definitions, but only a few will be discussed here. According to Mullins and Christy (2010), "the process through which efforts of members of the organisation are co-ordinated, directed and guided towards the achievement of organisational goals" (p. 827). Another definition is presenting the same concept given by Cunliffe (2009) "management is a process of getting things done and achieving organisational goals through people" (p. 2). Taylor III (2019) states the act of making organisations successful by utilising available resources, solving problems and making the right decisions. Taylor considers management as a scientific approach to solve the management problem. In a common theme, management can be understood the act of planning, organising and coordinating activities to run a business organisation. In the context of education the people would include institute staff of all levels, students and third parties. Management of people dictates the nature of relationships and interactions between people.

The things would consist of tangible and non-tangible resources required for the delivery of education. Although academic management is of direct relevance to provision of higher education, the non-academic cannot be ignored and plays significant role in creating a culture inside the institute.

When expressing their views about the management aspects, respondents clearly pointed out educational and non-educational management being a favoured factor. Different respondents liked different management aspects although some new themes emerged.

## **Emerging Theme: Student Friendly Management**

Effectiveness, efficiency and value for money are vital issues for the UKHE (Universities UK, 2011) therefore the management should be efficient and effective in HEIs. Good management makes organisations efficient and effective while poor management make inefficient and failure. Student friendly efficient and effective management term was generated from the students' acknowledgement of 'Easy Access to Management', 'Simple structure', 'Fast Communication', 'Quick Decision Making', 'Solving Students' Problems', 'Simple Structure', and ready to listen students regarding their needs and take prompt actions.

### **Emerging Subtheme: Easy Access to Management**

Sara expressed her satisfaction from the fact that college management was easily approachable. She seemed to imply as if good access to management provided her confidence and support in the learning process.

*“Management especially the top management is accessible and supportive, ready to listen and solve student’s problems immediately. I have easy access to college Director, even once she invited students to Lunch” (Sara)*

Sapna shared views similar to Sara’s view, as she was also keen to elaborate on how close relationship with higher management was a source of satisfaction. Sapna also went on to compare the size of the institute and the institute being public or private, and how these factors, in her opinion influence the probability of ease of access to top management. In her opinion, the narrow social gap between higher management and students was a direct indicator of how much the college values its students. Sapna appeared to suggest this as some kind of value delivered to students, in addition to the direct value of educational provision itself.

*“Management means management of the university. We could have easily meeting with senior management. They know each other and they know students and students also know them. They were all easily approachable.*

*We also know each other (Management and Students) by name. It is really great and very friendly. (Interviewer: Do you think this is possible or impossible in public universities?) I think it is not possible in public universities to have easy access to senior management (Interviewer: Do you think it is an advantage or a disadvantage?) I think it is good thing to study in private institute and have access to senior management and feel that they will listen you and solve your problems. (Interviewer: Is it good if senior management knows you?) It is good because we feel that we are very valuable very reliable we can receive direct help from them (Interviewer: So have you met some director levels people) Yes I met xxxx director, she always listen me. Sometimes directors come to our class during the short break and had words with us. They do not wait for us to come sometimes they come to us. They are really very friendly” (Sapna)*

Another respondent, Shakila, specifically talked about cooperation from senior management persons in the private institute she was studying in. She shared the view with Sara and Sapna that ease of access to higher management in PrHEIs institutes was unlikely to be observed in public institutions. Shakila appeared to highlight her opinion that an institute may have other good elements in the provision of education, such as resources, but may lack in good management-student relationship. She was highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships and the support and confidence offered by quick and easy access to management and hence potentially quick resolutions of any problems.

*“XXXX is very helpful and XXXX is also very helpful. Both helped us in many things (Interviewer: What are their positions?) XXX is the Director and XXX is the Head of Department (Interviewer: So you have access to director) Yes, whenever I have any problem I usually see her and she always welcomes us. (Interviewer: Don’t you need an appointment) Sometimes but we can see her without an appointment, easy access to her and head of department. (Do you think this is also possible in public university to have an easy access to director or senior management?) I think it is not possible in public university, one of my friend completed her graduation from a public university, actually I don’t remember the name of this university, (Interviewer, its ok, not required) she told us that she had same resources and facilities like our university but he never got an opportunity to meet senior management (Director level)*

*(Interviewer: How senior management helped you, any experience or story) Whenever you have problem just see them and share your problem and they will try to help you or give possible solutions. (Interviewer: So according to you, you have easy and fast access to senior management) Yes, for example, one day I sent the email for the appointment and she replied immediately and the same day I had the appointment with her. (You don't have to go through her Personal Assistant (PA)?) No, although XXXX is her PA but we directly approach her.” (Shakila)*

Syed also specifically highlighted the fact that good access to senior management meant students could proactively raise their concerns regarding various issues, leading to better educational facilities and environment at the institute.

*“It was relatively easy to approach a higher member of education staff. I did it multiple times during my course. This was helpful as we could raise any concerns with senior faculty staff at any time” (Syed)*

Responses from Chen and Shah coincided with other responses and highlighted the shared perception among participants that ease of reach to higher management was a source of satisfaction.

*“Senior management was quite accessible whenever we had any problem we could go and speak to them and we were being in contact with them we had quite good access to them so it was good experience. You know whenever we reached to them they helped us and quite good to us, ready to listen and help us. (Interviewer: Any example of experience) Once guys had a problem to get a letter to do work during the vacations and then low management and student were having some problem with the dates, deadlines and other stuff, like waiting for the results to come and then they guys went to the director and talked to him and it was sorted..... Yeah we were happy” (Chen)*

Faisal reflected his experience by mentioning the college “Open Door” to access higher management without barriers

*We have been informed about college Open Door policy to contact senior management in case students need to discuss anything important and urgent without barriers..... even in my country we cannot think to have easy access to senior management even in schools..... (Faisal)*

### **Emerging Sub-Theme: Quick Decision Making and feel being customer**

Shah shared his real experience of prompt decision making by the senior management

*"I raised a (xxxx) concern with a management staff member. I was surprised on receiving response quickly. What we were demanding was a genuine request. The decision was made almost immediately. All students in my class were happy. I think that would have been difficult in a large public sector institute" (Shah)*

Tayyaba shared similar experience by mentioning a case where the top management even extended financial help to students in a specific case. Tayyaba seemed to really appreciate the fact that management could go this far to be helpful to students. She also shared a case where top management considered and accepted a proposal to appoint a female staff member (lecturer). Tayyaba, coming from an Asian background, was quick to appreciate such kindness and prompt decision-making by management.

*"Our Class Representative requested to college senior management the permission for the cultural event and they not only accepted the proposal but also allocated a small budget to students for the cultural event, which included drama, quiz, singing competition, fun activities and dinner" (Tayyaba)*

*"In my class more than 30% were female students and 70% were male students. Unfortunately there was no female lecturer for us. Male lecturers taught the whole first semester and we also did not make request for female lecturer. At the end of the first semester the feedback was obtained and we mentioned it is better to appoint a female lecturer for us. We also shared this information to Head of Quality Assurance and also put this request in the suggestion box. We also noticed in the whole college there was no female*

*lecturer and we also discussed this issue during student staff liaison committee meeting. Later the college appointed the female lecturer and she came to teach us in third semester. We were very happy and we did mention this to QAA Review Team that how college care about us”. (Tayyaba)*

### **Emerging Sub-Theme: Simple Structure and Fast Communication**

Yasin, when expressing his views about senior management, termed the access to management as a significant difference between public and private institutes. In his opinion a relatively shallow management hierarchy meant narrow communication and relationship gaps between students, which in turn produced a more conducive educational environment

*“Senior Management ah I believe this is the one of the factors that distinguish private higher education institutes from the public sector you know the management structure in the private institute is more simple and that means that customer experience or student experience I would say is more effective because the structure is simple so you know who to report who to ask for what as compare to public sector higher education institutes , there is three deans, sub dean associate dean and head of department and all that , this kind of structure not in, in private institutes very simple structure you better know and understand where to go because the structure is simple you expect and get response very quickly so on one hand simple structure helps the way how to communicate and who to communicate I think this is one of the factors which makes private higher education institutes little bit better than public higher education institutes” (Yasin)*

## **Analysis**

Majority of students were highly satisfied with their experience with middle and senior management. The student friendly management style is a relatively new theme emerged from this piece of work. As various respondents have submitted, elements such as the speed of decisions, ability to approach a senior member of staff or even higher management, ability to put forward proposals to management and expect speedy feedback add value to students a positive experience and hence satisfaction and ‘value for money’. Public institutes are relatively large bodies and inherit some culture from larger public bodies such as government institutes. Some degree of red

tape in public institutes is a well-known fact. Size of an organisation also matters. Larger organisations have to rely on processes to control staff and resources. This probably adds to time taken to make decisions. This also increases the number of staff in the hierarchy between an end user and higher management, involved in a process. Smaller private institutes have relatively thin management hierarchy. Management is closer to end-users and attaches more importance to proactive responses instead of reactive improvement if any, as in public sector organisations. When fair demands from students are heard, processed and fed back in a short time, this enhances the perceived 'value for money' for students. This also creates a more conducive learning environment where they can get matters directly related to studies resolved quickly and maintain focus on core aspects of their degree, the subject learning.

## **Theme 6: Overall Satisfaction**

This is the last theme of the study based on two categories, value for money and recommending to other (the institute and the course). Traditionally the overall student satisfaction is assessed by a simple binary question of "Yes" or "No" (Elliott and Shin, 2002). In order to evaluate overall student satisfaction, researchers could apply variety of methods and techniques (Munteanu, Ceobanu et al. 2010).

### **Category: Value for money**

Sara strongly felt value for money and the satisfaction level was the same as one the one she experienced when studying in her home country.

*"I feel happy, very satisfied and feel value for money. I feel I am studying at home" (Sara)*

Sapna's view is similar to Sara. She is confident of getting a good job in future based on the UK qualification.

*"(Value for money) in the end I have achieved the qualification and hopefully get a good job in future on the basis of this qualification, I don't regret ..... I think it was a good decision to come to study in the UK particularly in this college..... (Overall satisfaction) Good" (Sapna)*

Shakila also considers value for money.

*“Actually I just started my course, only completed two sessions, satisfied, I don't think so, wasted money, my rest of the future course will be good”*  
(Shakila)

Minh, Syed, Chen and Shah all are happy, seem their expectations exceeded, as Minh mentioned his satisfaction experience has been excellent and Syed mentioned overall he is delighted and Chen no regret and happy that he chose this institute. Shah particularly mentioned that the course was a good value for money.

“I will say Excellent”

(Minh)

*“I am very happy that I chose this institute for study. I am overall very satisfied”* (Syed)

*“ My expectations exceeded ..... definitely value for money) .....no regret for choosing the PrHEI.....my overall satisfaction is Excellent”*

(Chen)

*“I think overall this course was a good value for money”*  
(Shah)

### **Category: Recommending to others**

Sara has mentioned that her reasons to recommend her institute to others are based on the quality of teaching and friendly teaching staff.

*I will recommend this college to others because of qualified and experienced staff and their friendly way of teaching.* (Sara)

Sapna's interview extract shows that she is highly satisfied and ready to recommend this institute for her younger sister. She was satisfied with all aspects.

*I will recommend to study at this private institute..... everything is good..... teaching and teachers, resources and management. .... I also encouraged them (My parents) to send my younger sister to study here”*  
(Sapna)

Faisal links his recommendations for college to management as he thinks management is caring and responsive and solves problems

*I will highly recommend this to my friends and family members because of management, management is problem solving not problem creating.....Indeed ..... (Overall satisfaction) Very good* (Faisal)

Tayyaba referred to her previous replies and again concluded in terms of Access to senior management, quick decision-making and appointment of female lecturer and all these exceeded her expectations

*“(Expectations) in some cases exceeds (Interviewer: Which cases) Access to management and quick decisions, as already mentioned appointment of a female lecturer, valuing students”* (Tayyaba)

Shoaib’s response is similar to others.

*“I am very happy that I chose this institute for study. I am overall very satisfied”* (Shoaib)

Yasin’s response was detailed and he mentioned teaching quality, customer service and feeling of being treated as a customer

*“(Overall experience/satisfaction) I think is It is a very wide question, you ask what is the overall experience but I would like to say yes it is one of the things where I exceeded my expectations in terms of teaching quality, preparation in terms of contents, in terms of customer service that I got feeling of a customer.... It was really wonderful experience”* (Yasin)

## **Analysis**

Almost all students were overall satisfied and many of them were happy to recommend the institute to others. Majority of students were highly satisfied with their experience with middle and senior management. The students’ quotes indicate that

management treat them as customers and their business success depend on their satisfaction and recommended institute to others.

## **Conclusion**

In order to conclude the key findings of the study, it should help to reiterate prominent themes of the study, which are:

1) Course and Institute selection, 2) Pre-arrival & Arrival (Induction) experience, 3) Teaching and Learning, 4) Resources, 5) Management and 6) Overall satisfaction.

International students appeared to attach more importance to some of the themes, like Course and Institute selection, compared to other themes such as Resources. Consequently, new data, i.e. sub-themes, were generated from themes like Course and Institute selection while no new data was generated from themes of lesser importance to students. Course and Institute selection spawned new and exciting sub-themes and associated categories like Multiple Intakes, Fast and Speedy Admission Process, Fast and Speedy Communication, Cheaper Tuition Fees, Tuition Fee Flexibility. These new themes appeared to provide higher degrees of satisfaction to students. Management theme also generated new sub-themes such as Efficient and Effective Management, based on categories such as Easy Access to Management and Quick and Easy decisions.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented the interviewees' experience on satisfaction therefore a captured data was presented in quotes. The chapter made the analysis on the captured data and explore new trends and patterns of international student satisfaction and also presented in the table.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings obtained as a result of this study, in light of the literature review. It also illustrates why the findings are relevant to the research questions and objectives and relates the findings to researches carried out by others. The findings of this study are based on the interpretation and analysis of data obtained through the process of in-depth interviews of twelve participants who had experience of studying at Private Higher Education Institutes in London.

The research findings indicate that international students consistently expressed their overall satisfaction for their institute and unanimously concluded value for money. Then this chapter concludes the findings and makes the recommendations.

**Figure 29: Main contents of the chapter (5) Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**



## Understanding the Findings (New Data)

As expected from this study, the following new sub-themes (data) emerged from the existed themes as a result of the twelve (12) in-depth interviews.

1. Flexibility in Policies (Tuition Fee-Comparatively cheaper and Flexibility in tuition fee policy)
2. Multiple Intakes (Fast and Speedy Admission process)
3. Efficient and Effective Management (Easy Accessibility to Senior Management, Simple structure, Fast Communication and Quick Decision making)
4. Feel being customers and Customised service

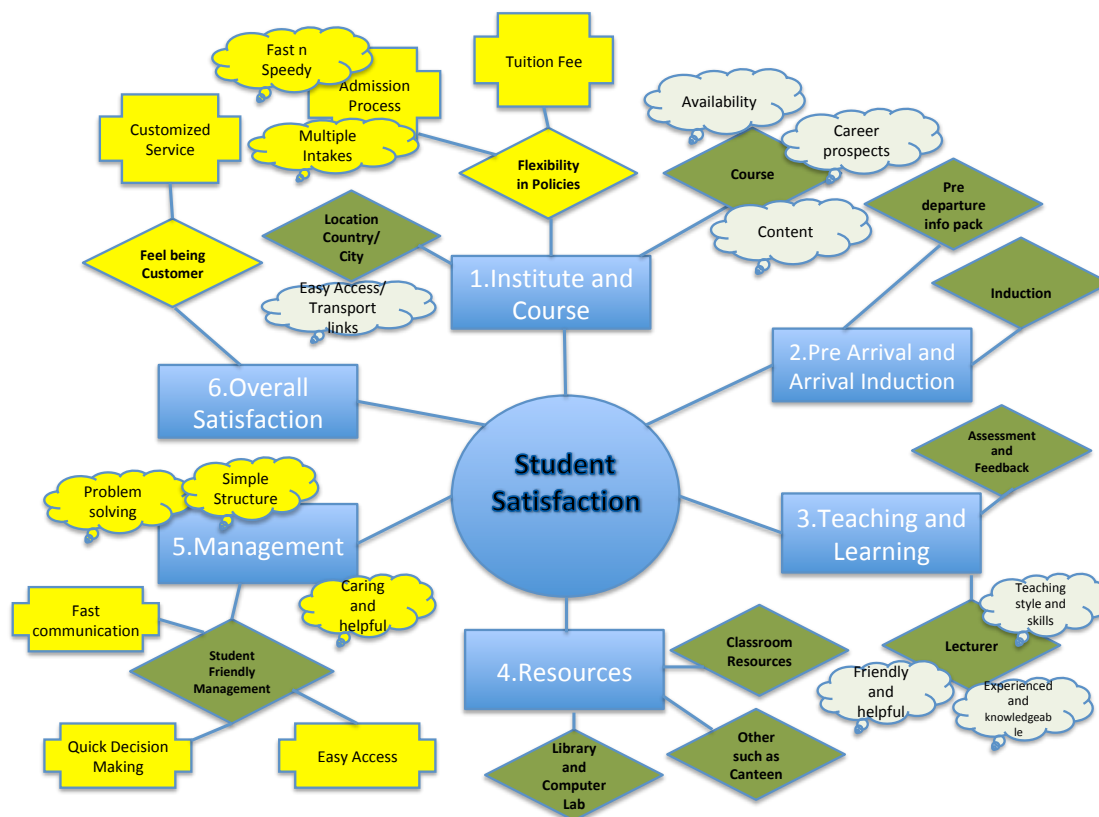
This can be seen better visually in the figures (30) and (31), here are the Thematic Maps before the emergence of new data (Figure 30) and with emerging data (Figure 31).

**Figure 30:Thematic map with existing themes and subthemes**



**Source: Author**

**Figure 31: Thematic map with existing and emerging themes and subthemes**



Source: Author

## Discussions on Existing Themes

In addition to above graphical representation of themes, findings are related to main existing themes and subthemes as follows.

### Theme 1 Institute and Course Selection

**Category: Location:** Most of the students were satisfied with the location.

#### Discussion

The location of the higher education institute is linked to students' choice through several points; those are the country, the city, infrastructure, safety, and destination image. Majority international students first choice is an English speaking country

such as United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia (Ammigan, 2019). Based on this the US is the top destination and the UK is the second most popular destination for international students (Higher Education Academy, 2017). International students also prefer big cities and big cities provide the best transportation links.

Geographic accessibility did play a role in determining the student choices of higher-education institute in this current study. Accessibility to higher-education institutes had a positive influence on going to university. The significance of location in student's point of view stems from the need for 'easy commuter access (Thomas and Jones 2017). Some students in this study considered the convenience of travelling from home to the university in terms of time and money spent. A study conducted by Smith (2018) on the experience of commuting students revealed that commuting is stressful, tiring, not cost effective and students do not participate in social activities and make minimum use of university resources. In this context Thomas and Hones (2017) recommend to Universities to balance the opportunities provided to commuter and non-commuter students. A report from HEPI (2018) suggests that universities should provide advice and guidance on commuting, adjusting timetables to better accommodate commuting students and provide co and extra-curricular activities during the day or early evenings to make sure participation from commuting students.

### **Category: Course (Availability and Content)**

Students' selection of the institute was based on the availability and suitability of the course and its contents. Majority of students were satisfied with their decision. No one regretted.

### **Discussion**

The choice to select an institution of destination country is usually affected by a number of "push and pull" factors that drive international students to leave their home country to study abroad (Banjong & Olson, 2016). Generally, international students aspire to study in another country in order to gain a high-quality education and international experience (Skinkle & Embleton, 2014). All universities cannot run all courses because of limited resources and overhead of running courses (Kardan, et.al, 2013). Therefore only selective and highly in-demand courses are offered. The

availability of the relevant desired course is the most important factor for students in the process of selecting the HEI (Kardan et al., 2013). Most of the participants selected the institute on the basis of the availability of the relevant course while a few participants were more interested in the course contents. All the participants were satisfied with their decision of selecting the institute and course.

A few participants were confident that getting a good job matching their qualification might lead to high levels of satisfaction with their learning experience. Obtaining a relevant job after the completion of the study is one of the student utility values of studying a particular course and the values could be in the form of a valuable qualification, soft skills or employability skills (Jones, 2014; Ripmeester, 2015). There is evidence that students who have studied abroad during their university studies are more likely to be employed after graduation, compared to their non-mobile peers (Di Pietro, 2013). Therefore one of the factors studying abroad is employability prospects and bright future career.

## **Theme 2: Pre arrival and arrival information (Induction)**

Majority of students were satisfied with pre arrival and induction services and the help provided by the institutes

## **Discussion**

It can be challenging for all students to cope with a new educational setting and environment, especially those from a variety of geographical, societal or cultural backgrounds, including international students (Jones, 2017).

Contemporary literature on pre-arrival and arrival experience of international students reveals student's mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety (Amaechi et al., 2013). The effective pre-arrival strategies such as E- orientations can play a significant role to help students to become familiar with the unfamiliar environment (Chan, 2017) and to release anxiety. Arrival can mean many things: pre-departure information, arrival at the airport, induction and orientation into university life. The importance of each stage will vary according to individual experience and circumstances. What remains true for nearly all, however, is that they are entering an unfamiliar environment in an emotionally charged state where simple things such as a friendly face can make a world of difference in how the initial experience is perceived.

Support for international students, especially for pre-arrival and arrival, is becoming an essential topic in the internationalization of policies of HEIs because of an increasing number of international students (Pérez-Encinas, 2017). In the context of UKHE, the regulatory bodies such as OfS and QAA demand support services for international students on pre-arrival and arrival but also throughout their study program in the country.

### **Theme 3: Learning and Teaching**

There has been abundance of literature on learning and teaching but from international student's point of view, there is still more to be discovered about learning and teaching practices, which best serve, the needs of international students.

#### **Category: Teacher and Teaching Styles:**

Majority students acknowledge teachers' knowledge and were satisfied with teaching style.

#### **Discussion**

Academic resources include classroom resources, libraries, information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and digital resources and, indeed, these resources enhance the quality of learning and of teaching (Taib, Warokka & Hilman, 2012; Mahmood, Dangi & Ali, 2014). Ndirangu and Udoto (2011) note that high-quality educational resources not only influence learning and teaching but also motivate students and lecturers to feel proud of the top quality resources in their universities.

**Teaching Styles:** Teaching styles is one of the key themes related to quality education. Most of the respondents mentioned that the lessons conducted by lecturers were clear, exciting and easy to understand, as they were able to relate with real life examples. Majority of students were satisfied but they found differences in teaching styles and teacher's personalities. Some were friendly while a few very strict. Excellence in teaching in universities has relevance to global reputation and recognition (Gunn and Fisk 2013). The UKHE has recently introduced Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as a national exercise in England to assess excellence

in teaching in HE and to ensure excellent outcomes for students in terms of graduate employability (OfS, 2018).

The TEF was introduced as a way of tackling the challenge of measuring teaching quality in higher education so that students can be served better in the future.

It is intended that

*The TEF will provide clear, understandable information to students about where teaching quality is outstanding. It will send powerful signals to prospective students and their future employers, and inform the competitive market. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016, p. 13).*

Teaching is the most crucial aspect of the learning and, accordingly, the teacher's role is crucial. Effective teaching style is fundamental key to student success (Radin and Orlova, 2018). This is needed not only to implement the programme but also for the overall development of human potential of each student (OECD, 2018). The teaching style should not create fear and make learners hesitant to ask questions (Ivić, 2017). A student who learns in a pleasant environment is a relatively quick learner, takes active participation, thinks faster, responds quickly and solves problems more creatively (Hattie, 2015).

**Class Size (Number of students):** The class size found varied from very small number, i.e. two students in class, to 40 students. One student showed his concern about the class size (02) at the start of the course but later he was very happy. A few students considered small class size good and pointed out that they could get teacher's attention easily and teacher could also pay attention to them. Students consider up to 10 to 12 students in class as a small class. All students were happy with the physical environment of the classroom. Neither small nor big but appropriate class size and comfortable physical environment have moderating effects of satisfaction (Han, Kiatkawsii, Wansoo, Hong, 2018). Classrooms are one facility where satisfaction surveys are necessary because students (of any discipline) spend a considerable amount of time using this facility (Han, Hong, Wansoo 2018)

**Assessment and Grading:** All students were satisfied with their assessment schedule and grades they obtained. No student challenges the grade.

Grading refers to symbols assigned to student work pieces or composite student performance measures on student report cards (Brookhart et al., 2016). Bloxham

and Price (2013) call these symbols as standards of awards, which students achieve at the end of each study session.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education explains grading as academic standards

*'Individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that UK threshold academic standards are met in their awards by aligning programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptors in the national frameworks for higher education qualifications. They are also responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marking schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards'. (QAA 2014: 5)*

Assessment and grading are essential to study because these provide what student have achieved and have a persuasive influence on studies (Pattison, Grodsky, & Muller, 2013). Furthermore, grades provide future educational directions such as dropping out or promoting to the next level (Bowers & Sprott, 2012; Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2013). Reliability and consistency in assessment and grading are valuable to students (Brookhart et al., 2016) but inconsistencies in the making are well documented; however lacks studies (Bloxham et, al. 2016).

**Feedback:** Mixed views, the majority of students were satisfied with the quality of feedback, acknowledging it was detailed, helped them to improve, was timely, and was both formative and summative feedback. One student showed his concerns about the short time between formative feedback and final submission.

Effective feedback is an essential component of learning and teaching in HE (Ackerman and Gross, 2010; Carless et al., 2011; Hattie 2015; Mulliner and Tucker, 2015, Pereira et al., 2016). There are many different views on feedback (McLean, Bond and Nicholson, 2014). Many different approaches and feedback styles are used in HE. One of the components in NSS is the feedback, and it has been noted over a past couple of years it remains the least satisfactory aspect of HE (Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2013) and the object of hand wringing and scrutiny (Gibbs, 2015). Further, it is also noted that students have been consistently expressing their dissatisfaction with the quality and timing of feedback (HEA, 2012).

Contrary to this, academics, on the other hand, assume that their students receive prompt, comprehensive and informative feedback (Robinson et al., 2013), which is often reflected resonated in a much more optimistic in external examiner's reports.

The reasoning behind this dissatisfaction is, therefore, often unclear to the tutors who provide feedback (Bohnacker-Bruce, 2013).

## **Theme 4: Resources**

All students were satisfied with Library and Classroom Resources (Computer, Smart board, Audio Visual Aids, Furniture and ambience).

## **Discussion**

### **Library and Classroom Resources**

Majority of student's views were mixed but most of the students were satisfied with the library and classroom resources. Learning resources are important and resources such as library and physical and online books facilitate students in assignments and research (Lei, 2016). The size of the library was varied from small library to large library. Although the size of the library matters, the collection and quality of academic resources and libraries is important and could play a significant role in student retention and hence the value of libraries should not be underestimated (Murray, Ireland and Hackathorn, 2016). One student showed her concern about the opening and closing timing of the library, she recommended library timings should be extended and should also open during the weekend. This demand seems rationale, as students need to spend some time in libraries while they are not in the classroom. This could be only possible if library timings are longer than classroom timings and also libraries are open during the weekends. A study conducted by Koufie (2017) confirms that students are more satisfied with extended library hours.

Contemporary literature confirms that classroom resources and facilities are important for students. Yang, Becerik-Gerberb and Mino (2013) conducted a study on the classroom resources and facilities in a university in the US. The results revealed that expectations of students rely heavily on spatial attributes, specifically visibility and furniture, and environmental attributes, specifically air quality and temperature, which are highly impacted by classroom architecture, management and maintenance.

## Computer Labs, Internet, Wi-Fi and Canteen

A majority of students were satisfied with computer lab and related facilities, however one student did bring attention to the weak Wi-Fi signals at premises. Another student recommended the need to have a microwave in the student canteen.

Oluwunmi, (2015) conducted a study on student satisfaction with classroom facilities in three private universities in Nigeria and the study revealed the student satisfaction with classroom facilities such as furniture, ambience but dissatisfaction with air conditioning and the Internet. Internet and Wi-Fi service has become significant in higher education as it facilitates the teaching and learning for both students and teachers and this facility provides many advantages and the usage has become the part of the daily life (Hernandez, et al 2019). Students need access to the Internet Wi-Fi service to use their laptops and smartphones for educational purposes such as searching online databases or watching educational videos on You Tube. This could be possible if they have access to Internet Wi-Fi service available at HEIs. Berba (2018) conducted a study on Wi-Fi Internet Service in Higher Education Institute and Customer (student) satisfaction. This study found that student satisfaction was related to fast Internet Wi-Fi service.

The student canteen is an essential place as it not only provides a designated space for eating but also provides opportunities for students to interact with other students (Spiteri, 2015). Galabo (2019) conducted research on canteen service quality and student satisfaction and recommended that the canteen should be more presentable, tidy, convenient and more relaxing in terms of ambience. It is advantageous to have the option to buy food from outlets situated near the HEI, but these shops often don't cater to the plethora of dietary needs out there such as religious needs, allergies and intolerances, and a requirement for vegetarian/vegan options. Therefore some students, especially international students, wish to bring their own food into the HEI to heat up, and if there was the provision of microwaves, toaster sets and kettles on campus to use could enhance their level of satisfaction. A recent survey conducted by the Student Union of Wolverhampton University, (2018) and 89.3% strongly agree, and 7.1 % agree to have access to Microwave to heat their food on the campus.

Various other studies also point out the strong positive correlation between availability of academic resources and student satisfaction. For example Coskun

(2014) found that students give significance to academic resources and facilities because they spend much time during their study in interacting with the facilities as a result bring creative learning and contribute to student satisfaction with resources.

## **Theme 5: Management**

Majority of students were satisfied with the easy access to senior management and the way they quickly take decisions and solve students' problems. They found management was friendly, easily approachable, caring, and quickly solved their problems. As this theme has generated new data, therefore it will be discussed under the heading of emerging themes and Sub-themes.

## **Theme 6: Overall Satisfaction**

### **Category: Value for money**

All students were satisfied and considered their course, institute and educational experience good value for money

### **Category: Recommending to others**

Majority of students were satisfied and most likely they were ready to recommend their institute to others (Friends and Family members) One student strongly recommend his institute to his parents to send her younger sister here for studies.

Overall satisfaction was very good, some students very highly satisfied and they said that their expectations were exceeded and rest of the students said that their expectations were met.

## **Discussion**

A student's life is interconnected with many aspects, such as academic, social and financial, and many of the areas are overlapping. In assessing the overall student satisfaction the sum of the student's all institutional experiences are considered. Therefore, in this study, the participants were asked to shed light on their overall satisfaction with their educational experience with reference to value for money, whether they would recommend this course or institute to others and overall their

satisfaction over the entire course and their stay. Where students pay tuition fee in that context, it is obligatory for HEIs to improve quality of learning and teaching to make value for money visible (Douglas et.al, 2015). The OfS regulatory body considers students as key stakeholders and emphasizes on value for money for students (OfS, 2018). OfS actually intend to ensure that educational providers are delivering quality of education and it is equivalent to value for money. In regard to support services, Douglas, et al. (2015) linked it to value for money and Woodall, et.al (2014) supporting this, found a relationship between students' overall satisfaction and net value. Therefore, HEIs need to enhance both academic and non-academic services to make sure students receive value for money.

According to Ammigan (2019) a strong relationship exists between overall student satisfaction and recommendations from others, and this could really increase international students' recruitment and retention. Most of the respondents had overall good satisfaction experience and they consensually commented that they would recommend the course and institute to others. Therefore, overall satisfaction is very important from a marketing perspective as it helps the HEIs to recruit and retain international students (Zhou and Cole, 2017). This could be achieved if students are considered customers and HEIs meet their needs (Gullbault, 2016). Jabbar et.al. (2018) assert that consumerisation in the UKHE has turned students into customers and they demonstrate customer behaviour as they pay for the service. There may be both positive and negative consequences to this approach, but if any HEI adopts this approach and treats students like customers and meets their needs, it will definitely attract more students. Dhaqane and Afrah (2016) considered students as the most valuable assets for the HEIs, and they further added value to students by mentioning HEIs without students have no value.

## **Emerging Themes and Sub-themes**

### **Theme Flexibilities in Policies**

### **Discussion**

As it is noted in the literature review that the international student population is heterogeneous as they come from different cultures and countries to study in the UK, making their needs and expectations are diverse. PrHEIs are also considered by the government to be more responsive to the evolving skills and needs of graduate

employers. PrHEIs are also more flexible in delivery and meeting the changing demands of international students for UK HE (Hunt and Boliver, 2019). In this context PrHEIs in particular and PuHEIs in general could offer learning experience that is flexible and customised according to the expectations of students and this could be achieved in a better way if students are considered customers. Both the international as well as home students pay tuition fees in the UK. This situation creates a push-pull phenomenon between students and institutes where HEIs act as suppliers and students act as customers (Barnet, 2014). Both the students as well as HEIs could benefit from this, students becoming more satisfied and HEIs generating more revenue by attracting more students based on positive feedback from satisfied students.

### **Subtheme: Tuition Fee Policy (Flexible payment options)**

***Main findings: Tuition Fee (Comparatively Cheaper) and Flexible Payment Policy***

### **Discussion**

Getting higher education, particularly abroad, is not a simple affair in terms of costs. Universities and colleges normally charge higher rates of fees from international students. Mostly students come from backgrounds where quality of education is relatively poor and education much cheaper compared to the country where they are enrolling for studies. Consequently students make a better choice in comparison to their home country in terms of quality of HEI, because they are paying higher tuition fee (see Brown 2012, 2013, 2015, 2018; Marginson 2009, 2016a, 2016b; Naidoo 2016). A degree from a foreign institute is therefore perceived as an achievement worth having in life. On the other hand the countries of departure typically are poorer economies, compared to the target country of education. In addition to higher tuition fees, expenses like accommodation, travel and maintenance build up the costs for the course. Costs are one of the main elements when evaluating study options. All factors put into the equation; there is a hefty cost to compare the benefits against. The higher cost of study and meeting day to day living expenses can impact negatively on wellbeing and concentration on academic work and students are forced to take paid work to meet financial academic needs (Atherton et al, 2016; Clark et al, 2015). Students have to cover that cost sooner or later. Flexibility in making tuition fee payments can provide students some sort of relief. It is clear from most of responses that international students are quite sensitive to costs and any savings in

costs, particularly tuition fees, and fee payment flexibility are lucrative opportunities where available. The opportunity to spread the tuition fee cost according to students' convenience of payments by weekly, fortnightly, monthly or quarterly help them to concentrate on their studies without financial stress.

**Table 13: Maximum fulltime undergraduate tuition fee across the UK, 2017/18**

*Maximum full-time undergraduate tuition fees across the UK, 2017/18*

Place of study Place of residence	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
England	£9,250	£9,250	£9,000	£9,250
Scotland	£9,250	No fee	£9,000	£9,250
Wales	£4,296	£4,296	£4,046	£4,296
Northern Ireland	£9,250	£9,250	£9,000	£4,030
EU (non-UK)	£9,250	No fee	£4,046	£4,030

Partially based on: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/tuition-fees#skip-link>

The above table shows the maximum tuition fee charge by the UK universities, though the tuition fee structure is different for each country, the highest tuition fee charging country is England in the UK. A study report by the Times Educational Supplement on tuition fee found PrHEIs are charging an average of £6,000 per year for their degrees while PuHEIs charge £ 9000 per year. The University of Buckingham charge higher for a degree £ 6436 per year for Home and EU students and £12,600 from international students, but one must remember that the degree programme is two years instead of not three years at Buckingham University. Therefore it is still cost saving for both Home/EU and International students in terms of time and money.

The most popular course in business studies is Masters of Business Administration MBA. This course is very expensive for international students as well as home students.

Please see the MBA tuition fee at public universities in table (14) below

**Table 14: Fees in PuHEIs in London (MBA)**

<b>S.NO</b>	<b>Name of PuHEIs</b>	<b>Tuition Fee 2017/18</b>
1	Durham University	£28,000
2	Cranfield University	£ 36,000
3	Imperial College London	£ 47,000
4	Warwick University	£ 35,650
5	University of Oxford	£52,000
6	University of Manchester	£ 42,000
7	London Business School	£75,100
8	University of Cambridge	£51,000
9	London School of Economic Trium MBA	\$175,500
10	University of Chester	£11,205

**Source: Author**

The above table shows the huge variation of tuition fee differences among PHEIs from minimum around £11,000 to more than £ 100,000.

Please see the MBA tuition fee at private higher education institutes in table (15) below.

**Table 15: Fees in PrHEIs in London (MBA)**

<b>S.NO</b>	<b>Name of PrHEI</b>	<b>Tuition Fee 2017/18</b>
1	The University of Buckingham	£ 10,350
2	Arden University	£ 9,855
3	University of Law	£ 11,900
4	London School of Business and Finance	£ 8,500
5	BPP	£ 11,000
6	London School of Commerce	£6,950

**Source: Author**

The PrHEIs tuition fee structure is competitive and there are no huge variations in the fee structure as in the PrHEIs. As mentioned elsewhere, the range of tuition fee at PuHEIs is from £11,000 to £100,000, while in PrHEIs this variation is very low,

ranging from £7000 to £11,000. London School of Commerce is offering very affordable tuition fee for the MBA programme, costing just £ 6,950

Public higher education institutes have strict policies on tuition fee while PrHEIs have flexible tuition fee policy, which provides financial comforts to students.

### **Flexible tuition fee payment policy**

The practice of flexible tuition fee payments has been found at one of the PrHEIs- Arden University. The university provides the incentive of 10% discount for those students who pay the full tuition fee and bite-size chunks of payments according to student's affordability, calling these as 'pay as you go' payment plans.

### **Multiple Intakes (Fast and Speedy Admission Process)**

#### **Discussion**

One of the important components of the student decision-making process for the selection of the course or institute is "Evaluation Of Alternatives" (Schiffman & Kanuk 2007, Kotler and Keller 2009). PrHEIs have multiple intakes, while PuHEIs have limited intakes, usually one or two. When it comes to evaluation of alternatives, in this case, the number of intakes at both the sectors, definitely the sector with multiple intakes becomes the top choice for the international students. Multiple intakes could attract students who missed the September intake or were unwilling to start in September (Massoud and Ayoubi, 2018). Higher education institutes have already started to consider different methods of admission and study such as Flexible Admission System-FAS (UCAS, 2011). The top management and policy makers propose that adopting such systems may enhance the student enrolment (Massoud and Ayoubi, 2018) and create more opportunities especially for mature students.

What was noticeable from analysing the data obtained through this study was that majority of participants acknowledged multiple intakes and that this provision is ubiquitous at PrHEIs? Actually it is one of the most important factors for the selection of the institute.

The researcher has randomly selected ten PrHEIs from London to show the numbers of intakes at PrHEIs are offering. Please see the number of intakes details in following table.

**Table 16: Number of Intakes in Private Higher Education Institutes**

S.NO	Private Higher Education Institute	No of Intakes
1	London School of Commerce	6
2	Kaplan International College London	6
3	ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad	4
4	BPP	4
5	The University of Buckingham	4
6	Arden University	4
7	The University of Law	4
8	University of Greenwich International College	4
9	Amity University London	3
10	London Brunel International College (LBIC)	3

**Source: Author**

The speed and precision with which HEIs respond to student significantly matters (Gamage et al., 2008). HEIs need to be quick and fast to their enquiries. Students also observe the attitude and behaviour of the service provider; it should be positive and friendly as it matters to students (Abdullah, 2006; Gibbs and Kuling, 2017). Many previous studies have empirically proved that HE administrative services exert a significant influence over student satisfaction (Gamage et al., 2008; Mavondo & Zaman, 2000),

As a result of the above brief discussion, the aspects that are discussed in relation to students' course and institute selection are fast and speedy admission process and frequent intakes, at least 4 in a year.

## **Student Friendly Management (Efficient and Effective Management)**

### **Discussion**

Student friendly Efficient and effective management term generated from the students' acknowledgement of 'Easy Access to Management', 'Simple structure', 'Fast Communication', 'Quick Decision Making', 'Solving Students' Problems', 'Simple Structure', and ready to listen students regarding their needs.

Logic in private higher education to operate for profit, and this could be only achieved if HEIs operate efficiently and demonstrate effectiveness. Effectiveness of management is its capability to show noticeable results with minimal efforts (Virtanen and Vakkuri 2015). Optimum utilisation of resources and minimum wastage of resources are the characteristics of efficient and effective management in PrHEIs.

### Quick Decision Making

Decision-making is considered to be one of the significant aspects of any management system. There are many definitions of decision-making. However, the author has selected the most appropriate, for example, according to Eisenfuhr (2011) it is a process of problem-solving, similarly according to Nicholas, (2017) decision making is a cognitive activity of judgement among the several options and choosing the best and if possible applying new tricks to solve problems better. In HE, the most effective decision-making process is presented and evaluated from the position of the user (Kadoic', Redep and Divjak, 2017). This means if any decision is made and that decision is beneficial to users (students), then it is considered valid otherwise not.

In the competitive era of deregulation and privatization, HE management should adopt self-organizing, decision-making models (Sam & van der Sijde, 2014; Schofield et al., 2013) are complement of entrepreneurial approach, which seeks efficiency, effectiveness, and success, and in addition to that also creates value (Lackeus, 2015).

One of the significant components of quality management (efficient and effective) is the right and quick decision-making, and effects are beneficial to all stakeholders. Carr-Hill, Rolleston and Schendel (2016) conducted a study on school-based decision making effects and revealed that effective decision-making reduces the drop out rate.

Najjar (2008) conducted a comparative study on the effectiveness of management, in his comparative analysis he found private schools are more efficient in management as compare to public schools. The study further revealed management take input from all key stakeholders before making any decisions. Bush (2011) emphasizes that there should be a link between educational values, purposes, strategy and day-to-day tasks in order for the management to be successful.

In a nutshell, good decision-making is the process of making right decision timely, and the consequences are favourable to all.

### **Fast and Speedy Communication**

Communication is the key to human interaction and occurs when a sender sends a message to the recipient with a purpose (Ruler 2018). Communication is widely used in the business world to communicate with key stakeholders such as customers, employees, and suppliers to inform and persuade to make a decision and implement (Dwyer, 2019). Communication is also widely used in the higher education industry to inform all stakeholders about course offerings, research subjects, possibilities, opportunities, unique selling propositions, and more with the aim of fulfilling information needs, making promises, and displaying a certain image (Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009).

On the basis of communication, students take their decisions. Therefore universities are actively using social media as marketing tool for two-way interactive communication (Galan, Lawley and Clements, 2015) and the initial focus of the impact of communication is on decision-making. Over the last two decades, there have been advancements in the communication technology. Today traditional communication is vanishing and social networks methods are mostly used for effective communication (Hysa, and Spalek, 2019) and social media has made the world smaller and communication faster and interactive. Qualman (2009) refers to social media as the age of instant communication while Blanchard (2011) confirms social media to be the most effective tool in the business world. This is happening in the today's world by the Internet, an important instrument for communication following globalisation and technology advancement (Matthews, 2012). According to Internet World Stats, total number of internet users in the world are more than four billion (4156,932,140) on 31 December 2017. Today (2018) social media users are 2.62 billion and it is estimated that there will be around 2.77 billion social media users around the globe by 2019, up from 2.46 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2018). It has been noticed in the data analysis chapter that students were happy with the fast communication; they received email, text messages and quick and speedy responses from their institutes.

## Accessibility to Senior Management

For the purpose of this theme, researcher has confined himself to 'Management Style' instead of Management of the institute as a whole. Therefore focus has been more on 'People' side of Management and the culture that exists in the institute and what does this style mean for the students. This style defines how communication flows between participants, what the barriers to this communication are, how quickly decisions are made and what methods students have to adopt to request a change to be implemented to an element of provision of education when such change is needed as well as well justified. There is very limited literature on Higher Education Management and Student satisfaction. Bloom (2012) links student satisfaction to good management of universities. She further found in her study that student satisfaction levels are higher when universities are managed better at the departmental levels. HE sector has decentralised management system and there is variation in the quality of management. Some departments are managed better while others managed poorly within the same university. According to Professor Propper (2013), the universities are managed differently. For example Russell Group universities are managed well as compared to other universities. Her study also found that there is a relationship between management practices and performance and that better management practice universities have better performance in terms of higher research ranking and better students' performance. Her study also surprisingly found that centralised management system is better and decentralised system, especially the management of the department, is not effective as compared to centralised system. The study also surprisingly found that management is associated to better student satisfaction. The research also concluded that better departmental management practices improve research and teaching. Departments that are better managed have better performance in terms of research, student satisfaction and a wider set of metrics. The better the management, the better the outcomes.

## Students as Customers

### Discussion

Consistence with contemporary literature, students should be considered customers (Guilbault, 2016, 2018, Long, Wu and Wang, 2017, Carter and Yeo, 2016), this research finds highest student satisfaction when they are considered customers and treated like customers.

As mentioned elsewhere that international students contributed £10.8 billion to the UK economy in an academic year 2014/15. For this reason it is important to convert international students into satisfied 'customers' and this must serve as a primary goal of higher education within the marketing orientation perspective (Ostrom et al. 2011, Tomlinson, 2017 and Guilbault, 2018). The Millennium generation requirements are changing and the learners have become more informed as a result of globalisation (Pedro, 2010). The government white paper of 2016 states that students are at the heart of HE system and emphasis is on creating broader competition to create choice for students. The contemporary competitive HE environment with the support of Government empowers a student to be considered as a rational economic consumer, and the contemporary literature takes logic from service marketing by recognising the hegemonic power of student as consumer and satisfaction as sovereign (Nixon, 2018).

The competition has become fierce with many HEIs investing massive advertising and marketing budgets, erecting iconic buildings for aesthetic pleasure, and displaying an insatiable desire for student growth. Therefore, it is crucial for HE to develop a thorough understanding of students' requirements as to which of their (HE) services have the greatest impact on student satisfaction. As mentioned elsewhere, the PrHE sector is growing in the UK and Government intends to create competition in the HE sector. In order to succeed in such a competitive market HEIs should consider student satisfaction a vital source of competitive advantage (Poturak, 2014). International students make significant contribution to UK economy; therefore HE sector must make international student satisfaction a key priority (Brochado, 2009) and treat them as customers inside and outside the class (Han et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

This final and last part of the report concludes the findings in and contributions made by this study. And then considers the recommendations for HE UK sector wishing to seek to enhance international student satisfaction. The aim of this research was to develop an understanding of international student satisfaction in institutes of private higher education in London. The findings of this research are relevant to the wider study of the student satisfaction in higher education and this study explored new data with reference to international student satisfaction in the private higher education sector.

It is important to appreciate that each international student's experience was unique, thus there was the possibility that references to the international student experience and expectation would suggest the degree of consensus that actually does not exist in academic and practice literature. However, this study discovered the nuances of similarities and differences. For example in the selection of course and institute, quality of teaching, teaching style, feedback, number of intakes and access to management. Although there is plenty of literature on learning and teaching and learning resources but there is scarcity of literature on multiple intakes and access to senior management and student satisfaction.

Over the six main themes, the overall satisfaction was good and almost all students were satisfied. Minor concerns were shown for resources, library timings, lack of microwave facility in the student canteen and timing between formative feedback and final submission. The emerging new data include easy access to senior management, multiple intakes, fast and speedy admission process and communication, lower tuition fee with an added advantage of flexible tuition payment options. To sum up providing greater flexibility and greater choice to students in terms of tuition fee payment or admission intakes demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness from students and HE management perspective. These factors seem to contribute to increased student satisfaction.

The UK HEIs attract students from home as well as from abroad. However higher education institutes should not just adopt their traditional approaches but develop comprehensive marketing strategies based on an understanding of customer expectations, needs, and behaviour for delivering satisfactory and competitive services experience (Wali & Nwokah 2018). The recent changes in the UKHE sector

and establishment of the Office for student in 2018 indeed are the consumer focused approach and such approach should ensure delivery of quality education and better experience for students during their academic sojourn. The name “Office for students” portrays that it only represents students and protects their rights by making sure the value for money is delivered. In this context students are, to some extent, considered customers.

In the context of private higher education sector, it is concluded that as PrHEIs only depend on students for the source of revenue (tuition fee) and quality in PrHEIs can be judged looking at the student satisfaction, it is more important for them to have satisfied students to attract more students for more revenue and profit.

It is recommended that HE sector adopts fast and speedy communication, more intakes, tuition fee payment flexibility, the cap on higher tuition fee for MBA courses. At the moment, a huge difference between low to high MBA fee structure with the Public HE exists.

With development of private higher education sector in the world, the importance of student satisfaction has started to emerge in the literature and during the last few years some quality literature has been produced. It is hoped that student satisfaction consensus definition will be produced in near future. Below are the detailed recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

### **Multiple Intakes**

PrHEIs have multiple intakes (up to 6) while PuHEIs usually have one or two intakes a year. One of the findings of this research revealed that most of the students prefer multiple intakes so that without wasting any time they could enrol on a course and the provision of this facility becomes important factor in selecting the course and institute.

HEIs Institutes determine their own admissions policies, the minimum entry requirements for each programme, numbers of intakes in a year, deadlines for application submission and the time to process and finalise the admission.

## **Recommendation**

Therefore it is recommended that HE sector particularly public sector should consider more than two intakes per academic year.

## **Fast and Speedy Admission Process**

PuHEIs have usually one or two intakes and their admission procedures are lengthy and slow. For some top UK Universities like Cambridge, Oxford, London School of Economics, London School of Business and Imperial College London the admission process takes more than a year to finalise. The situation in other normal PuHEIs is not competitive to PrHEIs. Arden University finalise admission within couple of weeks while London School of Commerce has six (6) intakes and their admission procedures are fast and quick.

## **Recommendation**

HEIs should make the admission process simple, more straightforward and fast. It is also strongly recommended that HE sector should standardise the minimum time required to finalise the admission process. Admission related queries should be resolved quickly and possibly the provision of online chatting with the admission team.

## **Flexible Policies (Tuition Fee)**

Students appreciated a personalised experience such as tuition fee payment options according to the convenience of their affordability, to pay weekly, monthly or quarterly any amount. One of the PrHEIs offered this personalised service, the student who availed this service was very happy.

## **Recommendation**

Different students have different needs according to their unique circumstances. Therefore they need different kinds and levels of support and the institutes need to be responsive to students' financial needs. A standardised policy and procedure could not be more effective than flexible and accommodating policy and procedure. Students want acknowledgment of their individual financial circumstances and these should be accommodated, with flexibility of tuition fee policy, providing a range of

options for students to select the best option according to their personalised circumstances.

- This type of service should be extended across the HE sector to benefit maximum number of students.
- There should be a cap on maximum MBA tuition fee. At the moment it ranges from £11,000 to more than £ 100,000 in Public HEI's.

### **Access to Senior Management**

The trend towards centralized management and easy access to senior management has been seen in the PrHEIs and it is believed to be necessary for providing students with good, consistent levels of service. This however may create difficulties in large-scale public higher education. As already mentioned there are two universal views of management, Good and Bad management. In this regard Douglas et al. (2015) identified that the good practice of employees (management) is the ability to understand diverse needs of students and the readiness to provide support and help to them. This is one of the major factors of student satisfaction.

HE should provide students with an easy access to senior management and they need to adopt the good practice of management by efficiently solving their genuine problems and putting system in place to meet their needs.

### **Student Satisfaction Priority**

Students should be considered customers as education costs money (Rudge, 2014) and therefore, they should be treated as customers.

An understanding of the student market requires HEIs to gain knowledge regarding the institute-selection process. Studying the student choice criteria provides a basis for HEIs to understand their customers, since it presents an integrated view of all the characteristics that may influence the students' satisfaction and their word-of-mouth communication about the HEI.

HE sector should adopt customer-centred approach and endeavour to meet students' expectations.

## Academic Feedback

Students' experiences of feedback were slightly variable. One student did not know the difference between formative and summative feedback but he used to get regularly feedbacks from his teachers. Some students mentioned that quality of feedback was good and helped them to improve their work, especially formative feedback on their draft assignments. One student mentioned that with the help of feedback she could improve her grades. They considered the feedback they received as much as they were expecting, while another student mentioned that there was short time between summative feedback and final submission. The effective feedback is provided prior to the final submission of assessment with an ample time for student to easily make changes to improve without the pressure of short time

## Recommendation

Feedback should be quality feedback, the HE sector should standardise minimum requirements for quality content and avoid generic feedback. Feedback should be specific as well as detailed according to individual and the context, so that they students can improve their performance. In terms of timing, realistic time should be allocated for improvements. There should be justification for the grade granted and how grade could be improved. Feedback should be given in a positive way to encourage students to improve further. It should not be provided in a negative way to discourage them

## Class size

Students' experiences of class size were variable, a few students found class size to be very small whereas others found that their class sizes were large. There has been extensive study on the size of classes and the impact that they have, and the majority of studies agree that large class size is not suitable for students (Huxley et al., 2018). For example, large class size negatively affects on student academic performance and grades (Huxley et al., 2018), average grade points decline as class size increases (Kokkelenberg, Dillon and Christy, 2008) and higher teacher-student ratios reveal lower achievements (Koc and Celik, 2015).

There are many benefits to a small class size; they are easy to manage, produce better results, and students get more individual attention. In order to differentiate

between large and small class sizes the following guide can be used: a large class is considered to hold 40 students or more, and a small class is considered to contain under 20 students. Very large classes contain 50 or more students and very small classes contain 5 students or less, however both of these latter class sizes are not preferable from the perspective of both teachers and students alike. Teachers may feel low motivation for a small class, and students might think negatively about the course and think that the institution is unable to attract a higher number of students. Large class size may be the result of numerous factors: a lack of physical space, a shortage of faculty members, tight budgets, unusually high enrolment, or higher demand for a particular course. The academic members usually have experience teaching both very small classes and very large classes.

### Recommendation

There are drawbacks to teaching a class of less than 5 students, just as there are drawbacks to teaching classes of more than 100 students. The optimal number of students in a class is approximately 20 to 30 students.

### Library – Timings

The role of the library in HE is of significant importance in terms of supporting teaching and the learning activities of students. Therefore in the recent past students have been demanding 24/7 access to libraries. In order to satisfy this demand, many UK universities now provide 24/7 access to their libraries. The National Student Survey (NSS) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) are placing increasing emphasis on learning resources and student experience. Emphasis is now placed on the student experience, involving not only teaching, learning and engagement (Ravenwood, Walton and Stephens, 2019) but also other support services, including the library (Temple et al., 2014). Currently, both international and home students are paying tuition fees for their undergraduate and postgraduate courses, irrespective of the type of HEI they are studying at. It could be suggested that students should have the privilege to access the library at any hour of the day. Currently, not all HEIs are providing this facility, most of the PuHEIs and a few PrHEIs are providing this facility (Oluwunmi, 2016). In the recent past, students have been lobbying and putting pressure on institutions for the need to provide a library facility that is open 24/7. So that they can access whenever required, for example, see “The Case for a 24-Hour Library”, (Warwick Students’ Union, 2016).

Consequently, some universities have in turn provided such a facility; examples include Leeds, Kings, Reading and Warwick 24/7, some with either 24/6 or 24/5 facility (The Student Room, 2020). This trend is growing and an increasing number of HEIs have now agreed to provide this facility.

### **Recommendation**

In PrHEIs, the managers need to take into account a couple of factors such as financial and limited human resources before deciding on library opening and closing hours. Students would prefer not to have any unnecessary barriers in their academic path, so an improved and more convenient access to services can be of great benefit. The library provides a location for students to learn and study, and students expect easy or 24/7 access and the comfort, services and functionality of a modern office, with auxiliary resources. Libraries should respond to meet the needs of students and extend library opening times according to the needs of students.

### **Access 24/7**

The 24/7 opening of libraries will have a positive impact on student performance, as there is no uniformity in the studying patterns of students; some students work best during the day, and some prefer to study late at night in the library. The opening of libraries 24 hours a day will cater to the different needs of students, with multiple options of times in which students can access the library. The provision of a 24-hour library ensures that students can study flexibly depending on their availability.

### **Extended library timings**

As the majority of PrHEIs are comparatively much smaller than PuHEIs and many have more limited resources, if it is challenging to provide 24/7 access to the library, then alternatively library timings could be extended.

It is recommended that library timings should be extended from a closing time of 6 pm to a closing time of 10pm or midnight, and also the provision of library access should be extended to weekends. Students should have access to key academic resources after their lessons (9am to 5pm generally), in order to complete their assignments. This is of particular importance for research students who need to complete their research projects within a short period of time and extensively search for literature in an intensive fashion. It could be suggested that there is no other area

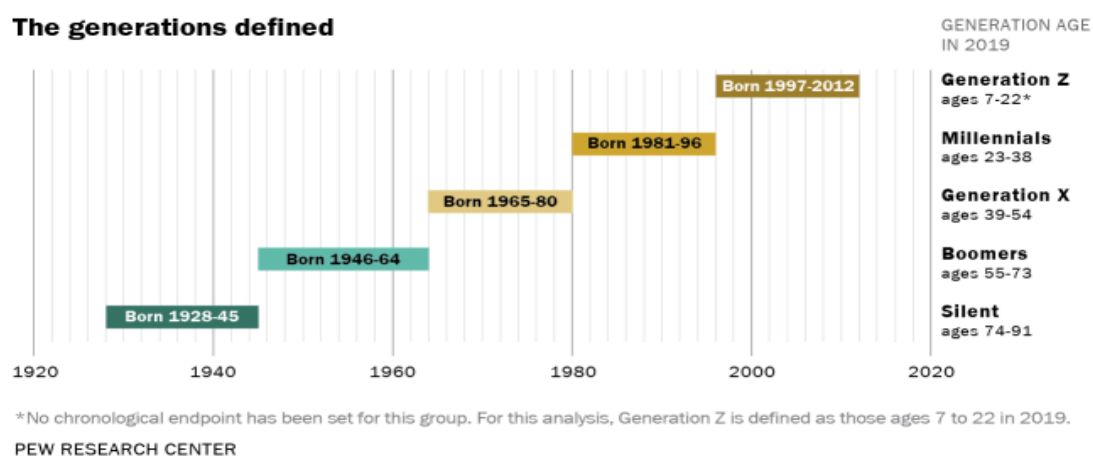
within a HEI that has such a high level of footfall and that facilitates student interaction than the library, so it is an important space in which students can have their needs satisfied.

Based on the researcher's experience of working in the private higher education sector and following consultation with some key members working in the sector, it is estimated that for 24-hour library provision it would incur an extra cost of between £60,000 and £70,000, and to extend library opening hours from a closing time of 6pm to a closing time of 12am on weekdays and to also extend opening times to weekends, this would cost between £30,000 and £40,000.

## Technology-Wi-Fi

The term Wi-Fi stands for Wireless Fidelity, while the Wi-Fi Alliance is any Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) product that certifies with the IEEE 802.11 standards (Sun, Liu and Meng, 2014). Wi-Fi allows users to access services like the Internet while on the move by providing wireless Internet connectivity to devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones. Wi-Fi has become popular and widely used across the world, especially amongst what is referred to as the millennial generation, a younger generation of people that have grown up amongst a wave of technological advancements. For this generation in particular, mobile devices are often integral to day-to-day life and Wi-Fi services facilitate access to the Internet. The first millennial Z generation has recently joined universities for their studies and not only millennial Z generation but also Y generation have a demand for fast, reliable and efficient Wi-Fi connectivity (Xu and Guo, 2018).

**Figure 32: The Generation defined**



Based on this demand, universities acknowledge the need for Wi-Fi network services on campus.

Wi-Fi is used for many purposes, for instance, web browsing, e-mailing, sending text or chat messages, phone or video calling, and to access live audio and video streams. Wi-Fi is used in many public spaces including shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and airports and also within HEIs. Many HEIs provide free Wi-Fi service to students on campus so that they can easily access the Internet to support their independent learning. Many recent studies have confirmed that Wi-Fi service has become an essential part of students' life. According to Times Higher Education (2017), the top ten universities in terms of the provision of Wi-Fi service for students are: 1) Durham University, (2) Lancaster University, (3) University of Sheffield, (4) Loughborough University, (5) University of Leeds, (6) Keele University, (7) Newcastle University, (8) Royal Holloway University, (9) University of Winchester and (10) University of Leicester. UK universities in general believe that students not only enjoy the convenience of Wi-Fi in order to stay connected with their friends and family but also that students use it as a way in which to access library and other educational resources, thus Wi-Fi acts a learning tool.

### **Recommendation**

Wi-Fi has become a critical resource for students within higher education and is widely used everywhere on campuses, whether that be in the classroom, library, canteen or within student common areas. It is recommended that HEIs should provide strong, reliable, fast and free Wi-Fi networks to students, no matter where they are on campus, to enable students to easily access an Internet connection through Wi-Fi on their mobile devices.

### **Student Canteen**

HEI canteens play a vital role in student life, as mentioned elsewhere; the spaces enable the opportunity for student interaction (Spiteri, 2015). It is an environment that can facilitate student satisfaction' (Galabo, 2019). A recent study by Czarniecka-Skubina et al. (2019) confirms that the more choices and facilities available and the better the service quality in canteens, the more satisfied students feel.

The dietary requirements of students especially international students including vegetarian/vegan/gluten-free/lactose-free/requirements related to religion are not always met by student canteens or by local food shops, which further backs up the need for microwaves, kettles and toasters in the campus. Also, students often have short breaks, and lunch break is usually for one hour, and it could be suggest that it is not convenient for students to leave campuses and walk to local shops nearby to the HEI, as the process can be too time-consuming depending on the circumstances and the time available.

### **Recommendation**

A few of the HEIs in the UK are now providing electrical appliances such as microwaves, toasters and kettles to students (Mahmood, 2018) so that they can reheat their home-cooked food. As many students prefer to bring in their own food (Bragg, 2017). HEIs should provide a provision of microwaves, toasters and kettles on campus for students to utilise. This facility can be extended to staff as well. The provision of this facility would make students feel more satisfied.

### **Students as Customers**

Firdaus (2006) expounds students as customers. Today both international as well as home students pay higher tuition fees. Therefore HE is a big investment for all students whether home or international. Home students want value for money because they need to repay the high education debts. This investment and concerns about future debt turns students into customers. Small (2008) extends his thought on the analysis of the “customer” in HE by considering the students as the internal customers of academia. Small argues that there is a general perception that students are behaving increasingly as “customers” because of the levy of tuition fee and rising costs of higher education. Students who have experienced increases in the costs of attendance often feel entitled to proportionate increases in the levels of service they receive. This makes the sense to a common person; higher price is associated to higher quality and vice versa. Thus, just as it is imperative for any organisation to recognise customers’ needs and satisfy their needs in a better way, it is also essential for HE to establish a way for student (customer) satisfaction and accountability for those who fail to satisfy students and do not meet their needs.

Akbaryeh (2012) establish a relationship between students and service quality. If students are considered customers then there will be competition in the HE sector and this competition will force them to enhance their service quality and ultimately customer (student) satisfaction becomes a critical factor for the organisation success. Therefore, all HEIs are treating students as customers and endeavour to satisfying their various needs both inside and outside of class (Han et al., 2018). According to Guilbault (2016; 2018) implementing customer orientation in higher education institution will have a positive effect on student satisfaction and retention.

### **Recommendation**

HE sector should consider students as customers and should take their voice seriously. Positive outcomes from NSS survey could be a marketing advantage for the HEIs. Therefore HE sector should have a sound understanding of the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. HE operations are highly interrelated, and it is the best practice to know the areas of improvements and intervene to provide excellent student experience.

### **Overall Satisfaction**

The NSS also asks students to rank overall satisfaction that is sum of the all areas' satisfaction, in this study it was based on main five themes. Most of the respondents agreed that they received value for money and would like to recommend course and institution to others. Some of the respondents were confident in getting better jobs. One of the perceptions among international students is that UK qualification is better in terms of quality (Shafaei et al, 2016) with added benefit of better job opportunities on returning home with UK qualification (Terry, 2011). Therefore, international students usually come to the UK with expectations of receiving a better and valuable qualification, improved language (English) proficiency that will allow them to have better opportunities in their professional lives (Calder et al., 2016; Miller, 2012; Oliveira and Soares, 2016). At the moment there is no overall student satisfaction survey for recently graduated students (Alumni)

## Recommendation

HE should arrange student satisfaction survey during and at the end of programme of study and also for Alumni to have their overall level of satisfaction. At the moment, there is no satisfaction survey for Alumni satisfaction.

## Other (Academic Staff- Male and Female Proportion)

Across the world women are a significant minority in senior academic positions and, as of 2013, make only 17% of vice chancellors (VCs) of UK universities (Reed and Kehm, (2016). According to HEFCE Report on Equality and Diversity (2015/16) the HE sector is still dominated by male. According to the report fifty per cent (50%) of lecturers were female. Only forty per cent (40%) of senior lecturers were female and just twenty four per cent (24%) of professors were female. According to HESA (2015/16) the total female presentation in the HE sector is forty five per cent (45 %)

It is recommended that more opportunities for female lecturers should be provided not only in the Private sector but also in HE.

## Limitations

The first limitation concerns the generalisability of the findings. As part of the study, only participants from Asian countries were interviewed; therefore, results cannot necessarily be generalised to represent all international students. Secondly, as the sample contained only international students, the findings may not fully apply to others, such as home students.

## Future Research

A need for further research was identified, to study more closely the relationship between new themes and subthemes and student satisfaction. For example, one of the findings is related to easy access to senior management.

As elsewhere mentioned the private higher education sector is comparatively smaller than public higher education sector, and students enrolments are very large in PuHEIs, for example, the University of London with 161, 270, the University of Manchester with 39,700 and the University of College London with 37,135 students

enrolled in 2017 (World Atlas, 2020). How can a large number of students get easy access to senior management?

Another important finding is related to quick decision-making. No doubt quick decision-making makes students happy, as they do not have to wait long. Here again, if a PuHEI is large with a large number of students, how it can make quick decisions, naturally complexity of hierarchy and bureaucratic procedures do not allow them to make quick decisions. So there is a need for further study on such issues with different context such as large public higher education institutions.

The lack of literature on Wi-Fi networks has indicated the need for further research on the performance of wireless networks in teaching and learning and of wireless networks as a source of student satisfaction.

## Action Plan

The action plan is based on the findings of the research, with the primary purpose to bring research (findings) to professional practice. A few of the findings have already benefited the researcher organisation and the brief explanations are in the reflection.

**Table 18: Action Plan**

<b>Action Plan</b>				
<b>S. No</b>	<b>Action Points</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Time Scale</b>
1	Multiple Intakes	Part time admission staff,	£ 50,000	3 months
2	Fast and Speedy admission Process	Part time admission staff,	£ 00,000	3 months
3	Flexible tuition fee payments	Changes in policy	£ 00,000	1 month
4	Access to Senior Management	Changes in policy	£ 00,000	1 month
5	Student satisfaction Priority	Changes in policy	£ 00,000	1 month
6	Academic Feedback	Academic staff training	£ 500	3 months
7	Class Size	Part time sessional lecturers	£ 50,000 to 100,000*	6 months
8	Technology-Wi-Fi	Wi-Fi signal booster installations	£ 5000	3 months
9	Library Timings	Full time library staff for 24/7 and Extended opening hours	£ 60,000-70,000 £ 30,000-40,000	6 months
10	Student Canteen	A couple of Microwave, toaster and kettle	£ 500 to £ 1000 to	1 week
11	Student as customer approach	Changes in policy and management style	6 months	1 month
12	Academic Staff Male Female Proportion	Implementing equal opportunity policy	6 months	6 months

**Depending on number of courses\***

**Source: Author**

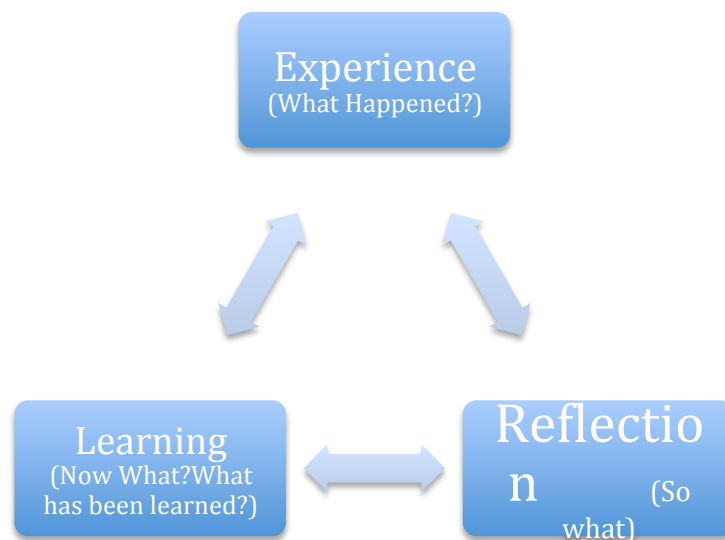
**Note:** This action plan is a guideline for a private higher education institute, but the other stakeholders can take benefit.

## Reflection

The strategic goal of my life is to accomplish the Professional Doctorate, has had a far-reaching impact on many areas of my life. The professional doctorate study on “Exploring International Student Satisfaction in Private Higher Education Institutes in London” has led to significant changes in my life in terms of time, money, health (anxiety, stress etc.) and quality of life. I also successfully managed to some extent the factors such as time management, self-management, work, study & life balance and self-motivation to complete this study. Last but not least, it has been possible to embed parts of the findings of the research into my workplace.

Reflection is the process of learning from experience and gaining new insights into self and practice (Boud et al. 1985, Jarvis, 1992). According to Cottrell (2008), reflection is a way to recognise strengths and weaknesses, both personally and professionally. It is a way of evaluating working practices (Johns, 2013), and naturally, it is a method of self-analysis of experience so that it can be improved. According to Howatson-Jones (2013), reflection is a method of examining experience to find out alternative options of doing the same thing in a better way while Jasper (2003) links the practice to theory, the best example can be seen in the healthcare sector where professional consciously think about their practice and relate to theory.

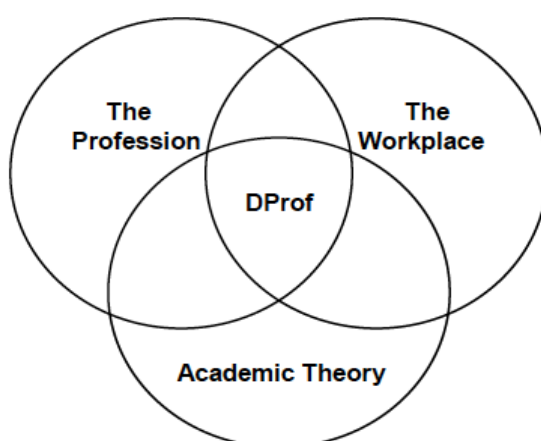
**Figure 33: Reflective Model**



Conceptualise from Boud's Reflective Model

Undertaking the professional doctorate provide the opportunity to develop practitioner-based research projects, which bring together challenges within the work environment and doctoral education (Drake & Heath, 2011). This extended research journey provided an understanding of professional practice with relevant academic theory. The outcomes of the research were applied to solve the problems pertinent to international students not only in private but also in public higher education.

**Figure 34: The Professional Doctorate concept**



**Source: (Maxwell, 2008)**

Several influential people, for example, my wife, children (two daughters), bosom friend, supervisory team and Support staff of the University of Chester, have influenced the personal development during the doctoral journey. The involvement of these influential people made the research a vital part of my life. The studying spells were usually during the weekends and often at late nights; family members commonly understood the situation and avoided to spend time together. Although the family members naturally have had the most significant influence on any changes regarding time management and motivation, other members, especially supervisory team, has impacted as well, especially when needed to meet the deadlines.

This doctoral level study was based on two components, taught modules and research. The first phase modules included "Personal and Professional Review", "Practitioner Enquiry", "Minor Practitioner Research Project", and the second research component was based on "Major Practitioner Research Project". These

modules aided in the development of a greater grasp of theory and research. Examples of this include the Practitioner Enquiry module, which formed the solid foundation for the understanding of research, and the Minor Research Project module also aided with the conceptualisation of theory concerning student satisfaction.

The outcome of this journey was the generation of new knowledge and the extension of existing knowledge through the use of fundamental approaches and writing methods (Trafford and Leshem, 2009; Wellington, 2013). A doctorate level research is a path, which I believe helps practitioners to change or improve practice. Looking back to the beginning of the research, and comparing my past thoughts to the present, I find myself a different person with a new academic approach towards student satisfaction.

I have more than twenty years of experience in private higher education (see table 17) and choosing a research topic that could aid my professional career while also satisfying research curiosity was a difficult task. Moon's explanation of reflection also considers the future into account, especially in terms of applying lessons learnt from the past and present (Moon, 2004). It is not straightforward to look ahead by considering professional reflective practice in the past and present. From personal perspective the benefit was the opportunity to further enhance research skills and knowledge by attending the annual Doctoral Students Research Colloquium and symposiums at the University of Chester. These events provided the opportunity to listen to staff and students and their experiences of research, with the option to ask questions. I would like to mention a very fruitful workshop entitled "The Artful Inquirer - an arts based approach to re/de-fining your research" which was held on 29th April 2016.

As previously mentioned, the first phase provided a solid foundation for this research by aiding the development of a greater depth of knowledge and skills required for a major research project. Consequently, I designed and developed the research enquiry based on a selection of the most appropriate methodological and philosophical concepts to be applied in this study.

From a personal and professional perspective, the table 17 shows that there were some research related activities in the past and currently the major academic engagement in terms of a doctoral thesis. Changes from past to present concerning the philosophical viewpoint, at Masters level, I did not study in depth research philosophies but at the doctorate level, I had studied research philosophies and opted for interpretivism philosophy for this study.

**Table 17: Personal and Professional Reflection**

Reflection			
Past	Educational Journey	Academic Contributions	Professional Career Path
	BA, BSc, MA, MBA, MSc, Pgd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thesis on Varieties of English Language,</li> <li>• MBA (28 Research papers presented in workshops)</li> <li>• MSc (Dissertation)</li> <li>• PgD (Group Research Project)</li> <li>• 6 articles in newspapers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Teacher</li> <li>• Lecturer</li> <li>• Head of Business Department</li> <li>• Vice Principal</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>
Present	D, Prof	D'Prof Thesis	Visiting Lecturer, Module Leader
Future	Post Doctorate (May be)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Review Course</li> <li>• Peer Reviewer</li> <li>• Publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professorship</li> <li>• Dean</li> </ul>

Source: Author

I intend to do further research (post-doctorate) in the field of customer satisfaction. Also, there might be an opportunity for bright academic career of acquiring a full-time or part-time professorship in the UK or elsewhere in Asia.

The professional doctorate developed my attention to detail, providing the experience of questioning and analysing arguments at a deeper level, whilst offering a real grasp at becoming an expert within a specialist topic. In the final year of the study, I thought about the significance of the study, what is the contribution to knowledge and professional practice, the findings of the research answered by valuing students,

considering them as customers and also the UK education system says “students at the heart of the system”

The Doctor of Professional Studies helped me to identify real-world issues related to students in the private higher education industry and I applied the results to resolve some of the issues by embracing a multidisciplinary approach.

From a professional perspective, the outputs of the study have offered some insights, which have informed my current and future pedagogic and pastoral practices. For example, I have implemented an open door policy for students to feel free to access senior management in order to discuss any significant matters with them. It was decided to recognise students as customers, to enable them to be treated with priority service. I also put a system in place to hear student voices by implementing a monthly newsletter and suggestion box “What you (students) said, and we did”. For example, students demanded common area with electrical appliances such as Microwave, Fridge, and Teakettles immediately provided that facility with free tea/coffee and biscuits for them. Students made a complaint about weak Wi-Fi signals in some areas of the campus; that issue was resolved with reliable and robust Wi-Fi connectivity anywhere on the campus. I also included students in the academic staff appointments; the sample mini-lectures from a new academic staff applicant deliver not only to recruiting team but also to students. Students are requested to provide their feedback and opinion on the quality of the sample lecture and their feedback plays a significant role in the recruitment decisions. These are just a few examples, which have been implemented at my workplace, and more have to be implemented in future. In conclusion, I would like to mention that this study has provided a valuable insight into both the private and public higher education sectors, and has informed the need to value students and to endeavour to meet their needs.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the research findings of this study within the context of contemporary literature. It also logically discussed the relevancy of the findings to the research questions and objectives of the study. On the basis of findings recommendations were made to UKHE. This chapter also included limitations of the research, future research areas and the reflective review of the research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 01: Dimensions of Student Satisfaction

Dimensions of Student Satisfaction		
Year	Authors	Dimensions/Factors/Variables
1995	Harvey and Hill	Library services, accommodation services, course content, teaching quality, catering services, academic workload and so on
1996	Bitner & Zeithaml	Communication skills of teaching staff, the effective interaction between staff and students can help students achieve study objectives
2001	Elliot and Healey	<p>The Student Satisfaction Inventory which measures levels of perceived importance and satisfaction on the following eleven dimensions-</p> <p>1) academic advising effectiveness, 2) campus climate</p> <p>3) campus life, 4) campus support services, 5) concern for the individual, 6) instructional effectiveness, (7) recruitment and financial aid effectiveness, 8) registration, effectiveness,</p> <p>9) campus safety and security, (10) service excellence, and</p> <p>11) Student centeredness.</p>
2001	Kuh and Hu	Effective interaction between student and faculty
2002	Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Groggaard	<p>1) Quality of teaching (academic and pedagogic).</p> <p>2) Quality of supervision and feedback from academic staff.</p> <p>3) Access (Access refers to services are conveniently available to students in terms of time)</p> <p>4) Composition, content and relevance of curriculum.</p>

		<p>5) Balance between different forms of organized teaching activities and self-tuition.</p> <p>6) Quality of support facilities. 7) Quality of physical infrastructure 8) Quality and access to leisure activities. 9) Social climate.</p>
2004	Thomas et al, 2004)	<p>Characteristics of students</p> <p>Demographic factors and personal ability</p>
2005	Oscar et al	1) Faculty, 2) Advising Staff, 3) Classes, 4) student college experience
2005	Firdaus	Non-academic aspects, academic aspects, program issues, access and reputation
2005	Delaney	Academic staff, academic experience, residential life, social life on campus, personal development opportunities, student service and resources
2005	Navarro et al	<p>Personal and Institutional factors</p> <p>Personal factors cover age, gender, employment, preferred learning style, student's GPA</p> <p>Institutional factors cover quality of instructions, promptness of the instructor's feedback, clarity of expectation, teaching style</p>
2005/6	Arambewela et al., 2005; Petruzzellis et al., 2006	City Location, Easy access by public transport, Operational hours, library, building
2006	Appleton-Knapp & Krentler	Classified two groups of influences factors on student satisfaction in HE as 1) personal and 2) institutional factors. Personal factors cover gender, age employment, preferred learning style, student's GPA and Institutional factors cover quality of teaching, promptness of the teachers' feedback, clarity of expectation, teaching style
2006	Douglass et al	Professional Environment, Student assessment and

		Learning experiences, Classroom environment, Lecture and tutorial facilitating goods, Textbooks and tuition fees, Student support facilities, Business procedures, Relationship with the teaching staff, Knowledgeable and responsive faculty, Staff helpfulness, Feedback, Class sizes
(2008)	Clemes et al.,	Relationship between reputations and satisfaction, another relationship satisfaction and intended future outcomes (Employment)
2009	Afzal et al.	Design, Delivery and Assessment, Academic facilities, Non-academic facilities, Recognition, Guidance, Student representation, Study opportunities and Group size
2009	Garcla-Aracil, A.,	Influenced by quality of class room, quality of feedback, lecturer-student relationship, interaction with fellow students, course content, available learning equipment, library facilities and learning materials
2012	Astin and Antonio	Campus social life, academic advising, financial aid, relevance of course work for everyday life, etc.
2012	Sojkin, B., Bartkowiak, P. & Skuza, A.,	Influenced by quality of class room, quality of feedback, lecturer-student relationship, interaction with fellow students, course content, available learning equipment, library facilities and learning materials
2013	Couper	The 'delivery' environment such as facilities offered, educational staff, the location and social standing of an institute can all significantly affect a student's satisfaction.
2013	Wilkins, S. & Balakrishnan, M. S.,	Quality of lecturers, assessment and feedback, quality of physical facilities, effective use of technology as key determinant factors of student satisfaction and social life
2014	Richard Garrett	Subject expertise of faculty, Good contacts, Academic content of program, Organized social activities, Ability to understand faculty English (Effective communication), Visa/immigration advice from school, Lecture quality, Worship facilities, Time with faculty outside class, Level of Institutional research activity, English language skills,

		Smooth running of program
2015	Aftab Dean Paul Gibbs	Top ten factors influencing student experience, 1) good friends at UNI, 2) Education is a worthwhile investment, 3) safety, 4) benefits of HE, 5) meeting Uni deadlines, 6) Good social Life, 7) Good relations among class fellow, 8) Online system and material , 9) Friendly tutors, 10) attendance
2015	MazirahYusoff Fraser McLeay Helen Woodruffe- Burton	Professional Environment, Student assessment and Learning experiences, Classroom environment, Lecture and tutorial facilitating goods, Textbooks and tuition fees, Student support facilities, Business procedures, Relationship with the teaching staff, Knowledgeable and responsive faculty, Staff helpfulness, Feedback, Class sizes
2016	Faizan Ali Yuan Zhou Kashif Hussain Pradeep Kumar Nair,	Academic aspects, Non-academic aspects, Access, Program issues, Reputation, Image
2015	Nara Martirosyan	Faculty services, Academic experience Student support facilities Campus life Social integration
2017	Asare-Nuamah	(The service– product bundle) Lecture halls, Laboratory, Equipment, Library, Canteen, Accommodation, Leisure, Language course, Educational offer, Scholarship, Internet access, Exams booking, Contact with teachers, Administrative services, Tutoring, Counselling, Internship, International relationship, Placement, English as medium of instruction, Student's recognition, Prestige of university, Willingness to solve student's problem, Socialization, Lecturers. Scenic and serene environment, Mode of lecturing, Class size, Course/subject content, Reading materials
2017	Gakhal, Wilson, Broughan and	Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ) Teaching, Online Tools, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support,

	Sparks	Organization & Management, Learning Resources and Overall satisfaction.
2017	Jia-Haur Goh, Yen-Nee Goh, T. Ramayah	Image, perceived value, price fairness, service quality and trust
2018	Han, Heesup; Kiatkaws, Kiattipoom; Kim, Wansoo;	Specific aspect-Physical environment (classroom), Ambient conditions, Spatial layout and functionality
2018	Fernández E, García AM, Serés E, et al.	Immediate student satisfaction after completing a short course  Course Material, Theoretical sessions, Practical sessions, Lecturers, organisation of the course and overall opinion
2018	Ciprian Marcel POP, Mihai Florin BĂCILĂ, Clarisa Doriana SLEVAȘ-STANCIU	Teaching process, administrative service, courses content, library, accommodation, eating spaces and medical services, university's space and campus's facilities, university's reputation and the provided career prospects

## Appendix 02: Recent research works on Student Satisfaction area

Author Year	Topic	Methods	Public Higher Education Sector	Private Higher Education Sector	Home Student s	International Students
Jacqueline Douglas, Alex Douglas and Barry Barnes (2006)	Measuring student satisfaction at a UK university	Quan	✓		✓	
Michael D. Clemes Christopher E.C. GanTzu-Hui Kao (2008)	University Student Satisfaction: An Empirical Analysis	Quan	✓		✓	
Hishamuddin Fitri Abu Hasan (2008)	Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: A Case Study at Private Higher Education Institutes	Quan		✓	✓	
Rodney Arambewela and John Hall (2009)	An empirical model of international student satisfaction	Quan	✓			✓
McLachlan, D. A. & Justice, J. (2009).	A grounded theory of International students well-being	Qual		✓		✓
Celia C. Lo1 (2010)	How student satisfaction factors affect perceived learning?	Quan	✓		✓	
Galina Stoltenberg (2011)	Investigating the Concept of Student' Satisfaction	Quan	✓			✓
Ioan Constantin Enache (2011)	Customer Behaviour and Student satisfaction	Quan	✓		✓	

Nadia Korobova (2012)	A comparative study of student engagement, satisfaction, and academic success among International and American students	Quan	✓		✓	✓
Amal Keblawi Isak Johansson Dennis Svensson (2013)	Student satisfaction in higher education context	Quan	✓		✓	
Poturak, M. (2014)	Private universities service quality and students satisfaction	Quan		✓	✓	
Mazirah Yusoff Fraser McLeay and Helen Woodruffe-Burton (2014)	Dimensions driving business student satisfaction in higher education	Quan	✓		✓	
Ioana Roman (2014)	Qualitative Methods for Determining Students' Satisfaction with Teaching Quality	Qual	✓		✓	
Natalia Yanova (2014)	Assessment of Satisfaction with the Quality of Education: Customer Satisfaction Index	Quan	✓		✓	
Richard Garrett (2014)	Explaining International Student Satisfaction	Quan	✓			✓
Lola C. Duque (2014)	A framework for analysing higher education performance: students' satisfaction,	Quan	✓		✓	

	perceived learning outcomes, and dropout intentions					
Mazirah Yusoff Fraser McLeay Helen Woodruffe-Burton, (2015)	Dimensions driving business student satisfaction in higher education	Quan	✓		✓	
Teerapat Ngamkamollert and Athapol Ruangkanjanases (2015)	Factors Influencing Foreign Students' Satisfaction toward International Program in Thai Universities	Quan	✓	✓		✓
Siti Falindah Padleea and Vaughan Reimers (2015)	International student satisfaction with, and behavioural intentions towards, universities in Victoria	Quan	✓			✓
Aftab Dean Paul Gibbs (2015)	Student satisfaction or happiness?	Quan	✓		✓	
Lorraine Sweeney (2015)	An Understanding of Student Satisfaction	Quan	✓		✓	
Jebril A. Alhelalat (2015)	Consumer Behaviour Analysis of Hospitality Students' Evaluation and Satisfaction with their Universities	Quan	✓		✓	
Nara Martirosyan (2015)	An examination of factors contributing to student satisfaction in Armenian	Quan	✓	✓	✓	
Hana Šuster	Customer	Quan	✓		✓	

Erjavec (2015)	satisfaction and customer loyalty within part time students					
Arran Caza, Holly H. Brower B, Julie H. Wayne (2015)	Effects of a holistic, experiential curriculum on business students' satisfaction and career confidence	Quan	✓		✓	
Tamer H. Elsharnouby (2015)	Participation behaviour among international students The role of satisfaction with service augmentation and brand choice attainment	Quan	✓		✓	
Johan W. de Jager, Muhammad Tahir Jan (2015)	Antecedents of customer satisfaction in the higher education institutes of South Africa	Quan	✓		✓	
Pui-Yee, Chong (2015)	Internationalisation of Higher Education: Proposed Framework on International Students' Satisfaction	Quan	✓			✓
Stephen Carter (2016)	Students-as-customers' satisfaction, predictive retention with marketing implications: The case of Malaysian higher education business students	Quan	✓		✓	
Elsharnouby	Participation	Quan	✓			✓

(2016),	behaviour among international students: The role of satisfaction with service augmentation and brand choice attainment					
Susie Khoo Ngee Ann Huong Ha UON Sue L.T. McGregor (2016)	Service quality and student/customer satisfaction in the private tertiary education sector in Singapore	Quan		✓	✓	
Faizan Ali Yuan Zhou Kashif Hussain Pradeep Kumar Nair, (2016)	Does higher education service quality effect student satisfaction, image and loyalty?	Quan	✓			✓
Tina Shahsavara, Frantisek Sudzina (2017)	Student satisfaction and loyalty in Denmark: Application of EPSI methodology	Quan	✓		✓	
Finn & Darmody (2017)	What predicts international higher education student satisfaction with their studies in Ireland?	Quan	✓			✓
Zaid Yaseen Saud AL- DULAIMI  (2017)	Education, educational services and students' satisfaction - comparative study between Romanian and Iraqi universities	Quan	✓		✓	
Christopher R.	Predictors of	Quan	✓		✓	

Sears, Melissa A. et al (2017)	Student Satisfaction in a Large Psychology Undergraduate Program					
Daniel Muijs, Christian Bokhove (2017)	Postgraduate student satisfaction: A multilevel analysis of PTES data	Quan	✓		✓	
Fraser McLeay, (2017)	New applications for importance-performance analysis (IPA) in higher education: Understanding student satisfaction	Quan	✓		✓	
Asare-Nuamah (2017)	International Students' Satisfaction: Assessing the Determinants of satisfaction	Quan	✓			✓
Gakhal, Wilson, Broughan and Sparks (2017)	Evaluating student satisfaction at a top-performing UK university	Quan	✓		✓	✓
Jia-Haur Goh, Yen-Nee Goh, T. Ramayah (2017)	Student Satisfaction and Loyalty in Malaysia Private Higher Education Institutes	Quan		✓	✓	
Jörg Vianden; Tamar a Yakaboski (2017)	Critical incidents of student satisfaction at German universities	Qual	✓		✓	
Han, Heesup; Kiatkawsı , Kiattipoom; Kim , Wansoo;	Physical classroom environment and student satisfaction with	Quan	✓		✓	

(2018)	course					
Fernández E, García AM, Serés E, et al.  (2018)	Students' satisfaction and perceived impact on knowledge, attitudes and skills after a 2-day course in scientific writing: a prospective longitudinal study in Spain	Quan	✓		✓	

## Appendix 03: Student Satisfaction Measurement Models

Author(s) and Year	Model	Description	Criticism
Parasuraman et al.,  (1988)	SERVQUAL	Satisfaction is the gap between expectations and perceived performance perceptions. Elements of service quality are  1) Reliability, 2) Assurance, 3) Tangibles, 4) Empathy and 5) Responsiveness.	Measures satisfaction from organizational perspective not from student perspective Expectations not relevant when determining satisfaction.  Expectations not stable  Validity of quality dimensions disputed  Length of questionnaire
Cronin and Taylor,  (1992)	SERVPREF	Satisfaction is exclusively based on perception alone.	Not exhaustive.
Noel –Levitz (1992)	Noel –Levitz student satisfaction index	faculty services, academic experience, student support facilities, campus life, and social integration	SERVQUAL gap was filled with Noel-Levits student satisfaction index, especially for HE
Noriaki Kano et.al., (1995)	Kano Model	Model of customer satisfaction  The model is based on three types of attributes viz. (1) basic or expected attributes, (2) performance or spoken attributes, and (3) surprise and delight attributes, Outcomes Satisfied, dissatisfied	Widely used across the industries, educational and other industries as well
Keaveney and Young (1997)	The Student Satisfaction and Retention Model (SSRM)	Set of limited independent variables and self-reported experiential assessments  Faculty services, advising staff, classes and	Too narrow lacks organizational factors such as facilities, lectures and services assessing satisfaction

Elliot & Shin (2002)	Student satisfaction inventory	<p>11 dimensions and 116 indicators to measure the satisfactions of students</p> <p>1) academic advising, 2) effectiveness, 3) campus climate, 4) campus life, 5) campus support services, 6) concern for individual, 7) instructional effectiveness, 8) recruitment and effectiveness of financial aids, 9) registration effectiveness, 10) campus safety and security, 11) service excellence and student centeredness.</p>	This index covers all services provided by academic and non-academic staff to students as well as physical facilities and other related services being affected to students in a university environment.
The National Student Survey (NSS) - 2005	The National Student Survey (NSS) -	Based on student feedback on learning experience instead of educational performance	Mostly used for public funded institutes and is based on final year undergraduate students. Does not take into account Masters levels and research students
Firdous A, 2006	HEdPERF	Links performance to a relatively more exhaustive list of determinants, particularly developed for higher education	<p>Mostly focuses on the administrative parts of the university. Only a few statements are related to academic aspects.</p> <p>Modified replica of the SERVPERF</p>
Douglas, et al (2006)	Service Product Bundle	<p>12 dimensions</p> <p>1) professional and comfortable environment, 2) student assessments and learning experiences, 3) classroom environment, 4) lecture and tutorial 5) facilitating goods, 6) textbooks and tuition fees, 7) student support facilities, 8) business procedures, 9) relationship with teaching staff, 10) knowledgeable and responsiveness of faculty, 11) staff helpfulness, 12) feedback and class</p>	Combination of academic and nonacademic factors, has been used widely

		sizes	
Alves, Helena, Raposo, Mario (2010)	Conceptual Model for Satisfaction	Image, Customer expectations, technical and functional quality of education and perceived value	Most of the variables are dependent variables. It is not easy and straightforward model. For example Image is dependent on other various variable
Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2012)	HiEdQUAL	The model possesses 27 items and 5 dimensions (teaching and course content, administrative services, academic facilities, campus infrastructure and support services).	Balanced and no negative criticism yet.
Guo, Teng and Sun (2014)	Satisfaction Evaluation Model	Relationship between latent and observable variables Latent Variables 1) Expectations, 2) Perceived quality, 3) Satisfaction, 4) Loyalty Observable variables- 1) Pre-understanding of teaching, 2) Pre-visibility of school, 3) Pre awareness, 4) Relationship between teachers and students, 5) Teachers' teaching ability, 6) The whole school hardware level, 7) School rules and policies, 8) On the teaching activities of satisfaction, 9) The infrastructure of satisfaction, 10) Students to remain in school, 11) Recommend the school to others, 12) Choose again, still choose this school	Demonstrates clear relationship between latent and observable variables
Thor – Erik Sandberg Hanssen and Gisle Solvoll (2015)	Satisfaction Framework	University Facilities, Location, Reputation Cost of Study, Job Prospects,	Framework is similar to others, job prospects makes it distinguish

## **Appendix 04: Ethical Principles Agreement**

### **University of Chester - Faculty of Business and Management**

#### **Ethical Principles Agreement**

**Ethical principles you must adhere to from the start of your programme:**

- All students and staff will operate with as full a consideration as is reasonably practical for the consequences of their work for society at large and groups within it. All staff and students are expected to act in accordance with the Principles of Management Education ([PRME](#)) and the [Prevent Agenda](#).
- Students and staff will handle all confidential information with appropriate levels of discretion, compliance with the law and with due diligence as to the security of that data. As standard practice students and staff will normally seek to prevent the publication or use of information in any way that could compromise a participant's confidentiality or identity.
- Any material being prepared for submission will be produced in such a way as to reduce the possibility of breaches of confidentiality and / or identification.
- All learning claimed for, and all work submitted for assessment, will be the student's own, unless clearly stated otherwise.
- Students and staff will try to avoid overburdening the participants in their research, causing them inconvenience or intruding into their private and personal domains.
- Participants will be informed of the risk, purpose and nature of any inquiry in which they are being asked to participate.
- Students and staff will avoid misleading research participants or withholding material facts about research of which they should be aware.
- Where the research methodology allows for it, a research participant will be expected to be provided with a copy of this document along with a consent form which will also indicate a participant's right of referral and appeal to the relevant Programme Team. Where the research methodology suggests that a different kind of consent is the only one possible this will be made clear and participants will be referred to relevant departmental web pages or otherwise made aware of these principles by the researcher.
- All students are required, before their work based projects and research projects begin, to complete a proposal with their tutor. Only after formal approval from their tutor (which may involve review by the Faculty Ethics Committee) will work normally be allowed to commence. Staff will need to seek approval from a Faculty's Ethics Committee member before commencing their projects.
- All members of staff and all students at all levels are required to read and agree to comply with these statements and to operate them in the full spirit in which they are written.

- Failure to comply with these statements may be regarded as a matter of academic malpractice and will be dealt with according to the relevant University guidelines, regulations and procedures.
- All work based learners, researchers and supervisory staff at all levels are required to indicate their acceptance of these Principles.
- Data collected for the purposes of student projects must be kept for a period of five years by the researcher, and data for staff research projects are required to be held for at least 10 years (if not indefinitely). In either case, such timings may be subject to much shorter obligations depending on the nature of the research project.

**In signing below, I agree to the ethical principles outlined above, and any updates to these which may be made after signing (which will be posted on programme areas of the University's portal):**

**PRINT your  
name:**

**Your signature:**

**Date:23/04/2018**

**Fayyaz  
Qureshi**



## Appendix 05: Ethics Checklist & Approval Form

**University of Chester**  
**Faculty of Business and Management**  
**Ethics Checklist & Approval Form**

(Please see guidance notes for help completing this form – please ensure you type into this document)

<b>Student / researcher name: FAYYAZ QURESHI</b>	<b>Student number: 1126507/1</b>
<b>Lead supervisor name: Dr Tony Wall</b>	<b>Module number: IS8003</b>
<b>Programme name: Doctor of Professional Studies</b>	<b>Site/partner: NA</b>
<b>Department: Centre for Work Related Studies</b>	<b>Anticipated end date:</b> <b>10/2018</b>
<b>Title of project: “Exploring International student satisfaction in private higher education institutes in London”</b>	
<b>Brief description of project (between 200-400 words max):</b>  Overall aim of research: The main aim of the study is to explore the contemporary understanding of student satisfaction in private higher education in London and comprehensively examine the determinants, which dictate the degree of it.  Proposed research method(s): A sample size of 24 will be taken from three private institutes of higher education in London (eight respondents from each of the three PHEIs selected). Unstructured but in-depth interviews will be conducted to link their opinion and experience between provisional of private higher education and student satisfaction.  Method of respondent recruitment (if relevant): The researcher has been working in private higher education sector since 2000. The researcher will visit and request to students to participate if any of the students would like to be participated with the research.	

## Part A: Ethics Checklist

		Yes/No
Is it <i>likely</i> that the research will dis-benefit any of the following:	Participants?	NO
	The researcher?	NO
	Other persons?	NO
	Equality of opportunities for individuals or communities?	NO
	The natural environment including other species?	NO
	The environment in terms of inappropriate use of natural resources?	NO
Does the research involve contact with any of the following:	Children or young people?	NO
	Vulnerable groups or individuals?	NO
	Sensitive topics/questions?	NO
	Extremist views or organisations (see <a href="#">Prevent Agenda</a> )?	NO
	Sensitive commercial or industrial information?	NO
	Any dangerous substances?	NO
	Any potentially dangerous equipment?	NO
Does the research involve the collection of audio, photographic or video materials?		YES
Could the research induce psychological/physiological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants or the researcher (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?		NO
Will financial incentives be offered to participants?		NO
Will it be necessary for the participants to take part without their advance knowledge or consent?		NO
Might there be any other potential risks or hazards for the researcher or the participants?		NO
<p>If you have replied <b>YES</b> to ANY of the questions above, please complete <b>PART B</b>.</p> <p>If you have ticked <b>NO</b> to all questions above, then <b>complete PART C</b> and submit with your proposal.</p>		

## Part B: Action Plan

Please address each 'yes' ticked in part A by giving a brief description of the potential ethical issue and a relevant action that you will put in place to manage the situation.

<b>Potential Ethical Issue or Risk</b>  (e.g. You will record the voice of an interview participant)	<b>Action</b> (e.g. You will design a consent form that informs the participants of the purpose of the research; their rights; the way you will handle/use the data, a CRB check will be conducted etc.)
Interview  Voice recoding	The researcher will ask participants to sign a participant information sheet and consent form before the interview.

## Part C: Governance

Please give details below of how you plan to deal with any unexpected issues or risks during your project (related to any ethical or other project risk issue). For example, name individuals who you may seek advice or who may be able to offer supporting in managing any issues as they arise. This may also include people who need to be informed of unexpected information related to the Prevent Agenda (see [Prevent Agenda](#)).

No risk is involved, all participants will be adults.

## Part D: Declaration and signature

<b>Organisational permission</b>  <p>(please mark one box with an 'x')</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>I have permission to undertake this project, and have attached evidence</b>  (e.g. an email from a line manager)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>I have not attached evidence of permission (but this is likely to be needed)</b>  (your project will typically not be approved without permission)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>I do not need permission (e.g. you are self-employed) and have attached evidence where possible</b> (e.g. an email from a line manager)

**Declaration:** I believe the information I have given in this form is correct. I have read the attached guidelines and have consulted an appropriate research textbook/source to help me develop an appropriate action plan to address any relevant issues identified. I also confirm that all data/information will be handled and stored in line with the Data Protection Act.

Signed by applicant:

FAYYAZ

QURESHI



Date: 23/04/2018

## Part E: Ethical approval outcome

**Module Tutor / Lead Supervisor** Please select one of the following options (with an 'x'):

I have reviewed the detail of the application, and can confirm all relevant documents have been provided.

☐

**Option A** Based on the information / conditions presented in this form the research can proceed

☐

**Option B** To be returned to the student for further consideration/development

☐

**Option C** The project needs to be referred for further consideration to a second opinion

☐

**Option D** To be referred for further consideration by the Faculty Ethics Committee

**Name of Lead Supervisor:**

**Signature of Lead Supervisor:**

**Date:**

*When Option C is selected ONLY:*

<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 20px; margin: 5px auto;"></div>	<p>Please state outcome of discussion: <b>A, B or D</b></p>   <p>Name of staff providing second opinion:</p>  <p>Signature of staff providing second opinion: <span style="float: right;">Date:</span></p>							
<b>OFFICE USE ONLY</b>								
<p><i>If 'A' is selected, then copies of this form are sent to:</i></p> <p>Student file (Programme Administrator)</p> <p>Recorded on "Ethics Approval Document" and forwarded to the RKTO</p> <p><i>If 'B' is selected, the Lead Supervisor will advise the student to further develop the proposal.</i></p> <p><i>If 'C' is selected, the Lead Supervisor will seek advice from the Module or Programme Leader (or where these are the same person, then the Deputy Dean or Executive Dean).</i></p> <p><i>If 'D' is selected, then this form is sent to the Faculty Ethics Committee Coordinator (Andy Lilley) to convene a Committee meeting.</i></p>								
<b>FACULTY ETHICS COMMITTEE USE ONLY</b>								
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; padding: 5px;"> <b>DATE:</b> </td> <td style="width: 70%; padding: 5px;"> <b>**CONDITIONS/REQUIREMENTS:</b> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>PROCEED (A)</b> </td> <td rowspan="3"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>CONDITIONAL PROGRESSION** (B)</b> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>REJECT** (B)</b> </td> </tr> </table>			<b>DATE:</b>	<b>**CONDITIONS/REQUIREMENTS:</b>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>PROCEED (A)</b>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>CONDITIONAL PROGRESSION** (B)</b>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <b>REJECT** (B)</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>**CONDITIONS/REQUIREMENTS:</b>							
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<b>Committee member name:</b>	<b>Committee member name:</b>	<b>Committee member name:</b>						

<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>

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## **Appendix 06: Participant Information and Consent Form**

### **Participant Information and Consent Form - 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018**

#### **Exploring international student satisfaction in private higher education institutes in London**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to assess the student satisfaction at private higher education institutes, which could help this sector to pinpoint their strengths and identify areas for improvement.

A written report will be produced at the end of the project. The findings from the study will be used to inform the approaches used to further enhance student satisfaction in the private higher education sector.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen purposefully because you have experienced private higher education.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive in any way.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the consent form. You will then be invited to attend an interview meeting at your earliest

convenience. The duration of the interview not more than 60 minutes. The interview that takes place between the researcher and yourself will be **entirely confidential**.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may be able to explore and reflect what is important to you in private higher education.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the collection of primary data (Interview), please contact:

Professor Clare Schofield

Chair of Faculty Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee

Faculty of Business & Management, University of Chester, United Kingdom, Chester CH1  
4BJ

+44 (0)1244 511000 or [c.schofield@chester.ac.uk](mailto:c.schofield@chester.ac.uk)

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence (but not otherwise), then you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for this.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this project may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

### What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up by the researcher as part of his doctorate. It is hoped that the findings may be used to improve the support provided to private higher education sector or individual institutes and as a result further enhance their professional practice. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.

### Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is funded by the researcher.

### Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact: Fayyaz Qureshi **Fayyazqureshi@gmail.com**.

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet, dated **23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018** for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. ☐  
☐
4. I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the audio/video recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation,

report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of ParticipantDateSignature

Name of Person taking consentDateSignature

(if different from researcher)

ResearcherDateSignature

## Appendix 07: Sample Interview Questions and Transcription

Interviewer	Interviewee (XXXXXX) 10
	I have read and signed the Ethics form and given consent for this interview on exploring international student satisfaction in private higher education institutes in London
Thank you	
Why did you choose PrHEI?	I was considering a good institute whether public or private but my priority was location and really easy access to institute as it was a commitment of one year
So it means this institute was close to your residence and other were not, am I right	No other two were also close, as I was not looking to go out from this town. All were in the same town
Other two were also private	No one was private and other was public
Why did you prefer this one over the other two?	Public institute was big but admission procedure was slow and they have only one intake in a year for my course. I also visited other private institute and made a comparison and found this was better
Hmmm what comparison? What did you consider in your comparison?	I visited the both the institutes, Met staff, students, see their resources and other found better. One thing more, I also checked QAA report on the internet about this institute and really impressed me. I finally decided this institute
Do you think your decision was right ?	Yes, I don't regret, I achieved qualification and had a good time
Have you been provided pre-arrival info pack?	What do you meant pre arrival information
International students usually are provided pre arrival information before leaving their country and these are provided by the institute	I was already in the UK, institute provided basic information regarding the course
Could you please tell more	I remember....Time table, Student handbook

about those basic information?	
What was in the handbook?	Mostly policies and rules and regulations
Could you please mention a few important policies?	Health and safety, conduct/ behavior of students and plagiarism, and attendance etc
Did you have induction?	Yes They gave us induction over two days  Day one was on general induction a day second Academic
Have your learning needs identified?	Yes. I did couple of activities filled couple of forms and later each student has been allocated a personal tutor
Personal tutor, could you please tell more on the role of personal tutor	They told us that the role of the personal tutor is to support you during your studies and you can discuss any problem whether academic financial and personal
Would you like to share any experience to that any thing special ?	Yes, we usually have on and off meeting with personal tutor. Once I made an appointment to discuss career options. Session went very well, was informed to choose that field in which you have interest and passion, based on qualification, knowledge and skills  He also mentioned emerging fields
Which emerging fields he mentioned?	Data science and big data, he also told there is a shortage in this sector. Now on his advice I am planning my career in this field
Tell about teaching and lecturers	Interesting teaching, qualified lecturers
What do you mean by interesting teaching?	Lecturers sometimes include activities to make learning interesting
Could you please tell any activity if you remember?	Yes I do remember, Once topic was problem solving for cause and effects we produced fish diagram that was really interesting, I was learnt first time for any problem may be multiple causes and also root cause etc
Did you enjoy your teaching and feel the you are learning something?	Some subjects I really enjoyed but Finance I did not enjoy

Did your lecturer know you by name or by face?	I think by both, a few by name and a few by face
Were lecturers good at explaining things?	Yes but each was different but overall I a  Was satisfied with teaching. Some were friendly and some were very strict
Do you think you had been provided with assessment criteria	Yes,
You know the grading criteria which defines how to achieve higher grades and how to achieve lower grades.	We have been told about Distinction, merit pass and fail
Have you been provided with assessment schedules, when your exams are your assignments you need to submit?	Yes
Do you think assessment of grading was fair or was unfair?	Fair
You did not challenge any grading?	No I did not
So you were satisfied with your grading.	Yes
Have you been provided with feedback?	Yes
Is that feedback a detailed one or generic?	Very detailed feedback, helped me to achieve higher grades
How ?	For example in my first semester achieved pass and in feedback provided what was missing to achieve higher grades

	That really worked and later I achieved higher grades
Did a member of staff discuss your overall achievement with you	Yes at the end of each semester we get progress report
was the programme well organised and running smoothly?	yes
Do you think the timetable perfectly worked for you?	Yes over a two days a week
Was it part time programme?	No full time  9 am to 5 pm
Any changes to timetable communicated to you efficiently	Before the end of the first semester, we have been asked, are you happy with the time table they also discussed other option coming four half days but majority of students were happy and throughout the course we stick to this timetable  We were told that this is the best timetable student like.  We felt college is so caring and consider convenience for students
Are staff members helpful and willing to listen to your concerns and solve them?	Yes  Majority of the students in our class were international.....I would say more than 90%. Our first semester was tough and students had been busy with their assignments and at the end of autumn semester, students had an informal discussion and thought they should have some fun at college and also need to enjoy student life. Our Class Representative requested to college senior management and they not only accepted the proposal but also allocated a small budget to students for the cultural event, which included

	drama, quiz, singing competition, fun activities and dinner
Do you know senior management?	Yes
Are they helpful?	Yes
Tell something about the experience with senior management if there is any	“In my class more than 30% were female students and 70% were male students. Unfortunately there was no female lecturer for us. Male lecturers taught the whole first semester and we also did not make request for female lecturer. At the end of the first semester the feedback was obtained and we mentioned it is better to appoint a female lecturer for us. We also shared this information to Head of Quality Assurance and also put this request in the suggestion box. We also noticed in the whole college there was no female lecturer and we also discussed this issue during Student staff liaison meeting. The college appointed the female lecturer and she came to teach us in third semester. We were very happy and we did mention this to QAA Review Team that how college care about us”.
Senior management director level or which level?	yes
Head of department level	yes
What he did?	
Do you think your class size was too large or too small?	Large
How many students?	I think around 40
In general, do you think you received effective support and guidance on your programme?	Yes
Are you satisfied with the resources such as library, online?	Yes

Do you use library	Yes
You can get books	Easily  If any book is not available in the library then there was a procedure to request librarian to buy that book.
What was the procedure?	We need to fill in a simple form and give it to Librarian, once a book is bought informed to collect
Do you think library did not have enough number of books?	Library was not big but almost all recommended textbooks were there. It was an additional service
What was the size of the library in terms of number of books ?	I don't have exact idea may be around 5 to 6 thousand books
Do you think at the end of this course, you will be able to get a good job?	I am already working but hope to get promoted
Do you think you have gained skills on your programme that will help you to get you promoted?	Yes of course
Do you think your experience match your expectations?	In some cases exceeds
Which cases?	Access to management and quick decisions, as already mentioned appointment of a female lecturer, valuing students"
So you met all your expectations	Yes
Do you think your course is value for money?	Yes
So you don't regret	No not at all
What is your overall satisfaction, poor Average, Good, Excellent?	Excellent
Thank you for your time	

## Appendix 08: Satisfaction, Customer Satisfaction and Student Satisfaction Overview

Satisfaction		
Source/ Author	Conceptual Definition	Explanation
Parker and Mathews (2001)	Customer satisfaction: contrasting academic and consumers' interpretations  Neither process nor outcome	Neither process nor outcome. It is feeling to be a case customers are usually unaware of the process
Giese and Cote, (2000)	Satisfaction is a summary, affective and variable intensity response centered on specific aspects of acquisition and/or consumption and which takes place at the precise moment when the individual evaluates the objectives	Instantaneous response on evaluation of consumption
Oliver (1997)	Satisfaction is as a judgment following a consumption experience - it is the consumer's judgment that a product provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment (p13)	Consumer judgement during the consumption of product
Halstead, Hartman, and Schmidt (1994)	A transaction specific affective resulting from the customer's comparison of product performance to some pre purchase standard (e.g., Hunt 1977, Oliver 1989) (p.122)	Comparison before and after purchase, perception before purchase and consumption and after purchase and consumption
Zeithaml et al. (1990)	Satisfaction as an overall judgment, perception or attitude on the superiority of service. The judgment is based on the discrepancy between expectations and actual experiences of customer	Perception of quality during and post consumption Identification of discrepancies
Oliver (1981)	Customer satisfaction is the evaluation of surprising level caused by product acquired and consumptive experiences. Essentially, it is a summarized mind set from expected disconfirmation feelings accompanied with previous consumption experiences. (p.27)	Immediate evaluation after consumption, comparison of before and after consumption
Customer Satisfaction		
Kotler (2000)	Satisfaction is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product perceived performance or outcome in relation to his or her expectations	Overall evaluation, positive – satisfaction, negative- dissatisfaction
Kotler (1991)	Customer satisfaction is the difference between what customers recognize product performances and personal expectations, which is the function of cognitive performances and expectations	Expectations and actual experience, expectations met satisfaction, not met dissatisfaction, Subjective and personal approach
Yi (1990)	Customer satisfaction was involved in customers' affective responses	Experience evaluation rather than experience itself
Tse (1988)	Customer satisfaction is a kind of evaluation that is the cognitive difference between prior expectations and cognitive performances	Feeling based on difference of expectations and actual experience
Student as a customer		

Bunce, Baird & Jones (2017)	The student –as- Consumer orientation approach	Tuition fee paying students act like customers, higher expectations especially for highly demanded courses such as Business, Medical and Engineering
Laing and Laing 2016	Student as customer/ consumer metaphor	Needs to consider their needs, students like other customers do have their needs
Clayson and Haley 2015	Marketing Models in Education: Students as customers, Products, or partners	Customer orientation considers students as customers but ignore other important stakeholders
Hubbel 2015	Not customers but as learners	Should be considered learner or trainee, cannot be considered customers in the classroom
Tight 2013	Students: Customers, Clients or Pawns?	A new, and perhaps rather darker, metaphor, that of the student as a pawn, is then proposed
Finney and Finney 2010	Are students their universities' customers? An exploratory study	Consistent with exchange theory, students are customers
William, 2002, Joseph, Yakhou and Stone 2005	Students as customers	Receiver of service provided by the education institutes and mostly it is paid service
<b>Student Satisfaction</b>		
Asare-Nuamah 2017	International Students' Satisfaction Assessing the Determinants of Satisfaction	University services to meet students' needs and increase their satisfaction.
Carter and Yeo 2016	Students-as-customers' satisfaction, predictive retention with marketing implications: The case of Malaysian higher education business students	Students as customers and their satisfaction lead to retention
Dean and Gibbs 2015	Student satisfaction or happiness?: A preliminary rethink of what is important in the student experience	A distinct notion of happiness which has specific attributes from those that deliver satisfaction.
Petruzzellis et al. 2006	Student as customers	Recognition of significance of student's role
Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Grogard (2002)	Student's assessments of the services provided by universities and colleges.	Assessment of services provided by institute during and after the consumption
Elliott and Shin 2002	It is a dynamic process that requires clear and effective action as a result of an institute listening to its students	Complex and continuous process helpful for quality improvement
Sanders & Chan, 1996 Harvey, Plimmer, Moon & Geall, 1997	"quality enhancement tool designed to improve the quality of the student experience"	Formalisation of assessment of satisfaction

