

## **Theories and models related to student satisfaction**

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### ***Abstract***

*The goal of this review research was to examine the theories and models related to students' satisfaction with a view to bring together the knowledge related to it. Though lots of literature is available related to students' satisfaction, especially in the context of western world, a synthesized information base was missing. For this, extensive literature was reviewed from journals across the globe and summarized, and related information has been collected and presented in simplified manner. Clearly, the paper will serve to be knowledge base for many who would wish to develop clarity about the topic.*

*As the article will elaborate upon, service quality model, despite being widely criticized for its association with education field has been the most applied model related to research on students satisfaction. Overall, the article assumes significance because it not only presents useful insight related to students' satisfaction related literature but also uses simple structures and language to ensure it is comprehensible and clear.*

Key Words: Students' satisfaction, theories, models, service quality.

## 1. **Introduction**

Satisfaction has been defined in varying way in various literature. While in services and consumer behavior, as pointed out by Oliver (1999), satisfaction has been defined as a pleasurable fulfilment. It is stated that consumers perceive that consumption fulfils some need and the fulfilment is pleasurable. Thus, as per Oliver (1999), satisfaction is the consumer's sense about the outcome between his standard of pleasure versus displeasure. In consumer terms, the very often quoted definition of satisfaction given by Hunt (1977, p.

49) says “Consumer satisfaction with a product refers to the favorableness of the individual’s subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with buying it or using it”.

Thus, in the context of education, student satisfaction refers to the favorability of a student’s subjective evaluations of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1989)

A look at the literature reveals that student satisfaction is a complex concept in the context of education as it consists of several dimensions (Richardson, 2005).

In this regard, Elliott and Shin, (2002, p. 198), describe student satisfaction as, “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”.

Though a number of studies have been undertaken and a number of variables have been studies empirically, there is a dearth of articles that summarize the contribution related to various theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It is pertinent to develop understanding about the various theories and models that form the base in any research endeavor. It has been stated that all research endeavors are built on the foundation of strong theoretical base, and hence, it is important to explore the literature and unveil important theoretical and conceptual frameworks of eminent researchers related to this field. Clearly, the

article fills in the information gap related to concise knowledge about theories and models related to students' satisfaction.

## **2. Theories related to students' satisfaction**

With an intention to better understand the psychosocial dynamics of student satisfaction, many theories have been put forward. Some of these theories are discussed hereunder:

### **2.1. The “happy-productive” student theory**

In 2002 Dollard, Cotton and de Jonge gave a theory named “Happy-Productive Theory” wherein it was suggested that students' satisfaction depended upon different psychosocial factors such as coping, well-being and stress. For this, the authors used job design and work stress theories to examine relationships between psychosocial work characteristics, well-being and satisfaction, and performance. The methodology adopted for their study was to collect data in a random sample survey of 176 Australian university students and using LISREL structural equation modeling the findings revealed that high levels of psychological distress and low levels of satisfaction, were both linked to high demands combined with low control. Further, findings supported the hypothesis that satisfaction mediated the impact of the work environment on performance.

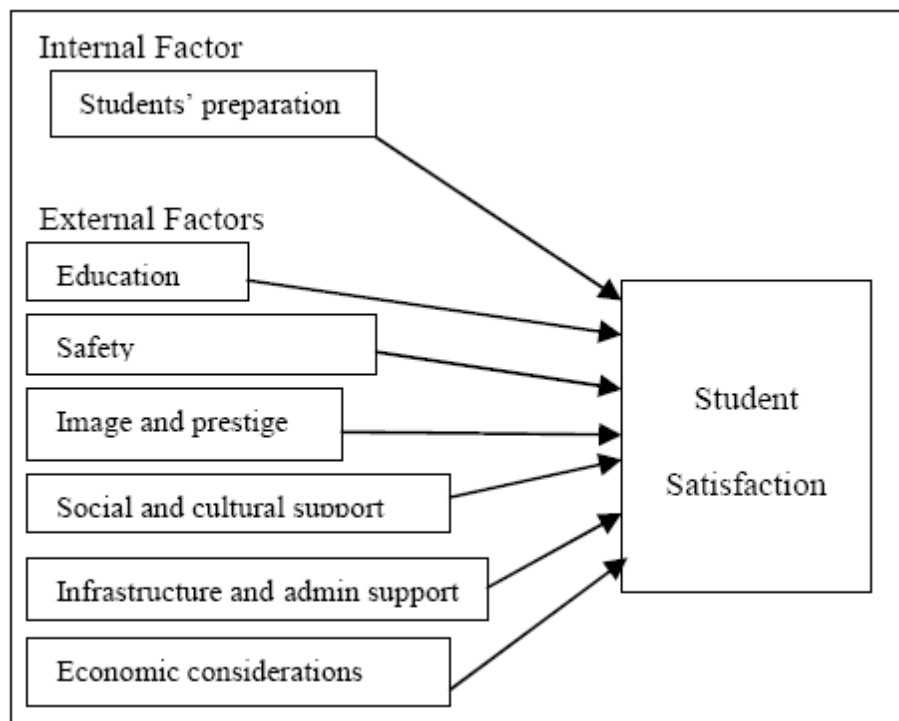
Thus, evidence was provided in the Happy-Productive Theory that if psychological distress was high among students it resulted in lower satisfaction. Also, the theory confirmed that the overall role of the students was stressful (Felsten & Wilcox, 1992; Winefield, 1993), the results showed students had a significantly higher level of psychological distress and lower levels of satisfaction compared with other occupations, including those of correctional officers, teachers, nurses, and human service workers (Dollard et al., 2001). Levels of psychological distress in university students were linked with the work environment (high work pressure, low control and low support from students). Job satisfaction was similarly linked to the way the work was designed (low demands and high control).

Even studies related to student's health and well-being and their retention the college have pointed out that satisfied students who isn't feeling stress and is comfortable in the

institutional environment is more likely to not only perform well but will also be lasting longer as compared to a dissatisfied and unhappy student.

## 2.2. Consumer satisfaction theory

A third theoretical approach, based on consumer satisfaction theory, considers satisfaction as a function of the extent to which students' expectations about university are met with positive confirmations of expectations leading to higher levels of satisfaction (Churchill & Suprenant, 1982).



Conceptual model of factors affecting Student Satisfaction

According to this model student satisfaction depended on both internal as well as external factors. Thus, while student's own preparations and efforts put in during the academic sessions were responsible for providing internal input to the satisfaction, external factors such as safety, education quality, social and cultural support, image and prestige, and the economic considerations also accounted for the student's satisfaction. Clearly, as per this model, student satisfaction resulted from both internal satisfaction derived from student's own efforts as well as the institution's culture safety social environment etc.

### **2.3. Self-determination theory**

The theory was proposed by the psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000), and it is based on the foundation n that three basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be taken into consideration to better understand motivation. Here, autonomy is the need to feel free of external constraints on behavior, and competence reflects the need to feel capable, while relatedness refers to the need to be connected with others around us.

In the context of education, the key idea of self-determination theory is that when students will feel that these basic needs are reasonably well met, they tend to perceive their actions and choices to be intrinsically motivated or “self-determined.” In such scenario, it was likely that the students will turn their attention to a variety of activities that they will find attractive or important.

Thus, while some of the students might read books that their faculty has recommended and others might listen attentively when a key concept was being explained. The theory states that if one or more basic needs are not met properly, then it was likely that the students might tend to feel coerced by outside pressures or external incentives. Thus, in that case, it was likely that they become preoccupied, in fact, with satisfying whatever need has not been met and thus exclude or avoid activities that might otherwise be interesting, educational, or important. Thus, in that case not only the learning was likely to suffer, but equally adverse effect was likely on their overall satisfaction as well.

Clearly, the self-determination theory asserts the importance of intrinsic motivation. Thus, a student can experience self-determination even if the student must, for example, live within externally imposed rules of appropriate classroom behavior. The theory proposes that to achieve a feeling of self-determination, however, the student’s basic

needs must be met—needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In motivating students, then, the bottom line is that teachers have an interest in helping students to meet their basic needs, and in not letting school rules or the teachers' own leadership styles interfere with or block satisfaction of students' basic needs.

However, the practical aspects related the theory posit that, in reality, for a variety of reasons, teachers in most classrooms cannot be expected to meet all students' basic needs at all times. This is because of the limited time the faculty has and in many institutions the number of students in a class, that is, the sheer number of students, make it impossible to attend to every student perfectly at all times. Further, the course requirements can create expectations for students' activities that sometimes conflict with students' autonomy or makes them feel less than fully competent.

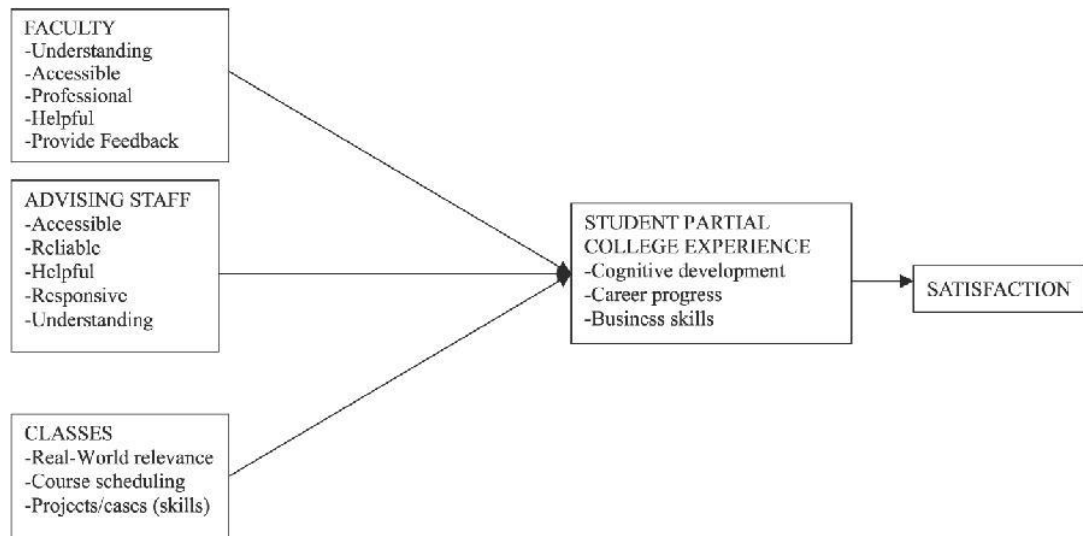
Overall, the theory can be applied to understand the students' satisfaction.

#### **2.4. Herzberg's two-factor theory**

Frederick Herzberg's motivation-hygiene factor theory, is considered as an important and widely respected theories for explaining motivation and job satisfaction. According to Herzberg's theory (Herzberg et al., 1967), for job satisfaction and performance in an organization, there are two sets of factors that are in action. One set of factors is called satisfiers or motivators results in satisfaction when adequately fulfilled, while the other set of factors are called "dissatisfiers" or "hygiene factors". It has been stated that motivators are intrinsic factors and are largely administered by the employee, while hygiene factors are extrinsic factors that are responsible for causing dissatisfaction when it is deficient.

DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, (2005) applied Herzberg two-factor theory in line with Keavency and Young (1997) model to study the determinants of business student satisfaction and retention in higher education. In context of students' satisfaction, it has been stated that performance of faculty members could be related to the outcome from a college experience and may be considered motivators or satisfiers (e.g. growth and achievement). While on the other hand, role of advising staff might be a hygiene factors

that may cause dissatisfaction. Importantly, it is worth noting that while the absence of good advising staff performance may lead to dissatisfaction, satisfaction may not result if the advising staff was present. This is in line with the Herzberg's theory wherein it has been stated that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of the same continuum. .



**Source:** Keaveney and Young (1997)

Herzberg's two factor classification has been extended by Kano (1984) by proposing three types of satisfaction. According to Kano, "Dissatisfiers" or "must-be" factors are the factors related to customer experience that meet the customer basic needs or assumptions and the unavailability or below expectation performance quickly causes dissatisfaction. Then there are "satisfiers" or "more is better" factors being the components that customers readily equate with satisfaction and with meeting reasonable expectations. Thirdly, Kano proposed the "delighters" or "ah-hah" factors that address needs that the customer was not expecting and wasn't conscious about. Similarly, Petruzzeli et al. (2006) proposed the satisfaction factors as a) "must be" factors such as tutoring, administrative services, contacts with staff and professors, library, teaching equipment, lecture halls, and laboratories. Then, there are factors regarded as "more is better" such as scholarships, counseling, internships, educational offerings, internet access, refectories, and finally, the third factors called "delighters" such as career placement, leisure time, accommodations, etc.

### **3. Models related to students' satisfaction**

#### **3.1. The Investment Model**

It has been stated that from an investment perspective, the strength of people's commitment to their choices is determined by their views of rewards, costs, and the viability of alternative options (Rusbult, 1980). Thus, with regard to students' enrollment, the concept can be applied to understand that student behavior was in a way related to the potential reward and the time and money invested. The same was demonstrated by Hatcher, Kryter, Prus, and Fitzgerald (1992), who provided evidence through their research findings that Investment Model variables were statistically significantly correlated with institutional commitment scores and attrition. As pointed out Mashburn (2000-2001), cognitions about alternatives also played a key role in withdrawal behavior explained by the investment model. Similarly, Bean and Metzner (1985) reported that the opportunity to transfer (a viable alternative) was associated with discontinuing at the currently attended school.

The "investment model" explains the relationship between student satisfaction, attrition and academic performance. Thus, applying the investment model in relation to student satisfaction would mean theoretically approving that satisfaction of students increases when the rewards of study increase (higher grades). Further, the investment model can also be applied in relation to the cost incurred by the student during the academic program. These costs, like financial and time constraints are lower and alternate options are study are low, satisfaction was found to be higher (Hatcher, Kryter, Prus, & Fitzgerald, 1992).

Hence, with the help of investment model, students at risk for "dropping-out" can be identified and offered counselling and other student support services as a preventative

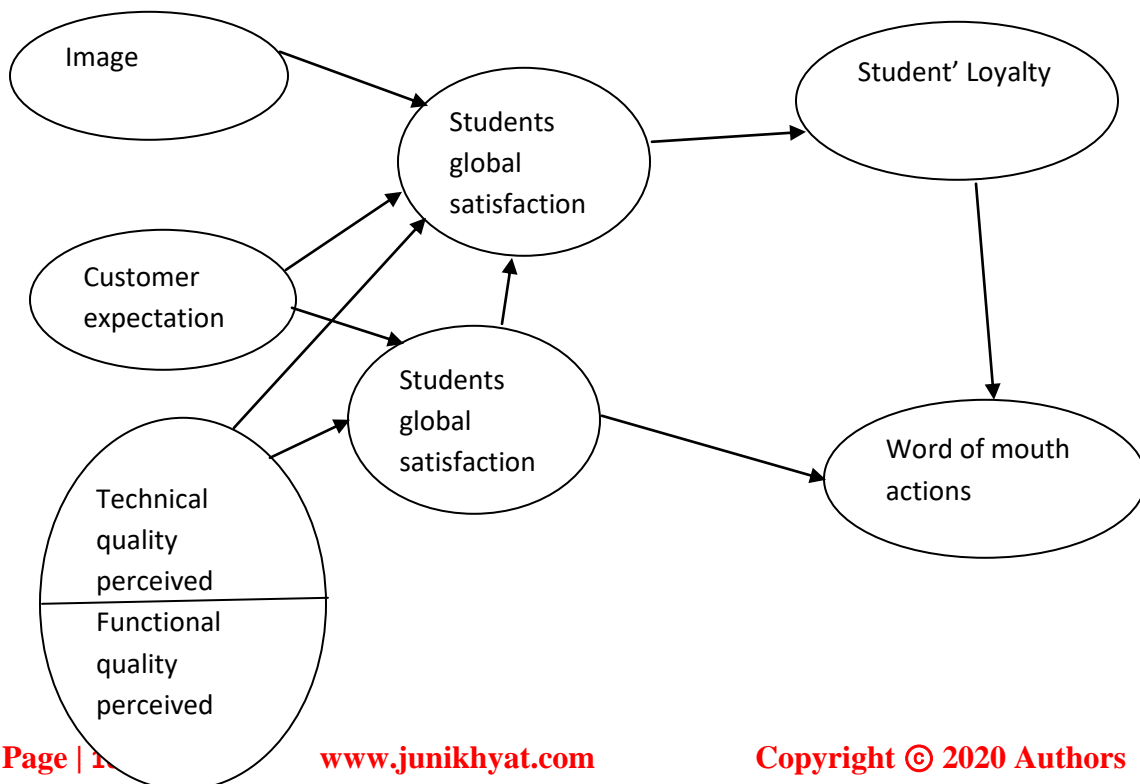


measure. Also, to improve retention rates and the quality of graduates, universities need to consider the satisfaction needs of students including those currently under-represented such as non-traditional, indigenous and regional Australians (Bradley, 2009).

### **3.2. Model of Student Satisfaction in Higher Education (by Helena Alves & Ma´ Rio Raposo, 2006)**

A conceptual model of the antecedents and consequences of student satisfaction in higher education model was developed to develop understanding about factors that influenced student satisfaction in higher education. The basic premise of the model framework was both institution as well as the student benefit from the satisfaction as a long term relationship with student meant ion, while on the other hand, a dissatisfied student means ominous consequences for both the university and the student.

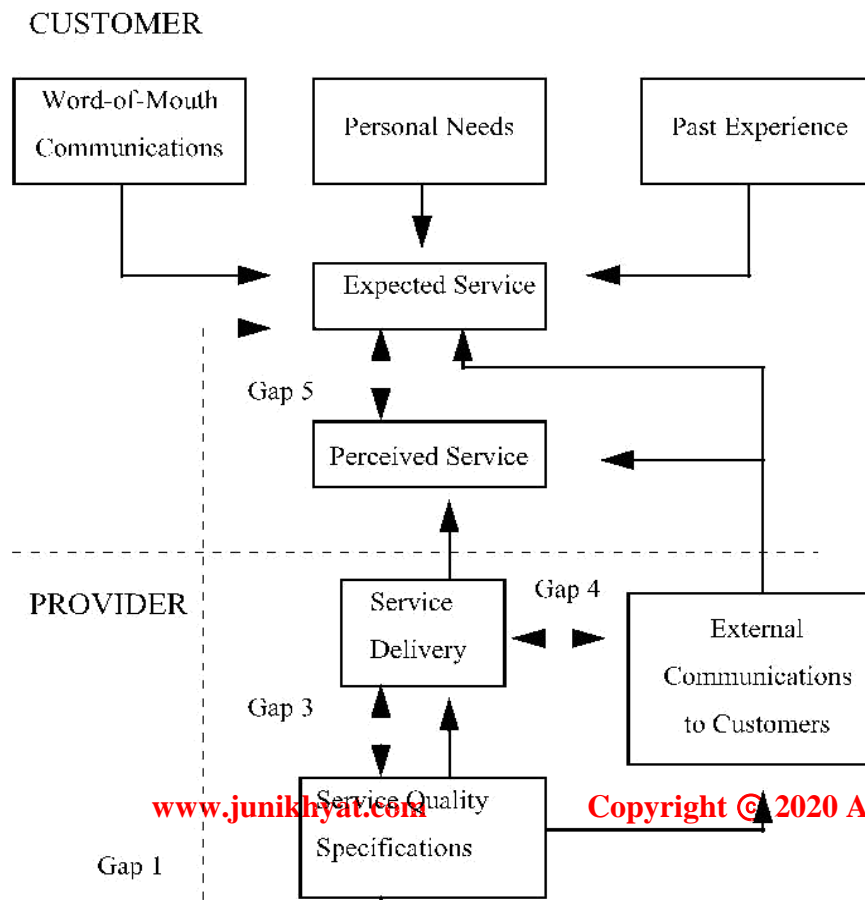
The model was tested through the utilization of structural equations and showed that the variable which has the most influence in student satisfaction in higher education is the variable – image followed by value and afterwards quality perceived. Additionally, the study also concluded that expectations created negative influence on satisfaction.



### 3.3. Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL)

The Service quality model popularly known as the SERVQUAL has been a very widely framework that relates the quality of service provided to the satisfaction felt by the service receiver. Developed by Parasuman in 1985 to assess the relationship between service quality dimensions of quality – namely, tangibility, reliability, empathy, responsiveness and assurance- and the customer satisfaction, the model has been extensively and debatably used in many education related studies. In SERVQUAL related studies a questionnaire is administered to measure customer expectations and customer perception Though the model has been widely applied in the industry, it has received lots of criticism for its utilization in higher education (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998).

Critics argue that education being a non-for-profit industry means it is inappropriate to apply a business model. Further, it has been proposed that In a university environment, student satisfaction is determined by multiple factors in which quality of service providers is a small part.



Many authors have stated that application of service quality in education is a venturing into a complex web of identifying service quality dimensions in education as well as about assessing the student satisfaction.

As stated by Rowley :

“While the quest for service quality dimensions has an attractive simplicity, it is important to recognise that this is but a part of the complex jigsaw associated with managing and measuring service quality in higher education” (1997, p. 7). It has been stated there could be no single correct definition of quality’, because quality should be seen as a ‘stakeholder-relative’ concept.

As pointed out by Clewes (2003) many studies have used many well-validated, if contrasting, questionnaires that highlight important dimensions of quality in education. Some of these factors related to service quality in education highlighted by Clewes (2003) are mentioned below:

Roberts and Higgins (1992)	Mazelan <i>et al.</i> (1992)	Hill (1995)	Aldridge and Rowley (1998)
Library service	Library service	Library service	Services/facilities for students:
Computing/information technology support	Computing Service	Computing Facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> accommodation
Bars/catering	Food outlets	Catering service	<input type="checkbox"/> careers
The Students Union	Accommodation	Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> catering
Course organisation/efficiency	Course organisation and assessment	Course content	<input type="checkbox"/> child care
Quality of lecturing/communication	Teaching staff/teaching style	Personal contact with academic staff	<input type="checkbox"/> campus cleanliness
Subject content	Teaching Methods	Teaching methods	<input type="checkbox"/> counselling
Entertainment	Student workload and Assessment	Teaching quality	<input type="checkbox"/> health care
Social facilities/clubs	Social life	Student involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/sport
Private study facilities	Self-development	Work	<input type="checkbox"/> students’ union
Resources and equipment	Financial		<input type="checkbox"/> welfare rights
Sporting facilities			Teaching and learning
Involvement in course-			Teaching and learning Development
			Teaching and learning support:

development	Circumstances	experience	<input type="checkbox"/> library services
Overall learning	University	Financial	<input type="checkbox"/> mediaTech services
experience	Environment	services	<input type="checkbox"/> general
		Feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> computing services
		Joint consultation	Communication,
		Bookshop	consultation, feedback and
		Careers service	Complaint
		Counselling	Equal opportunities,
		welfare	disability and
		Health service	Environment
		Students' Union	
		Physical education	
		Travel agency	

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#### **4. Conclusion**

The article provides useful insights about various theirs and models related to students' satisfaction. , theories such as Herzberg's two factor theory and self-determination theory link the satisfaction possibilities with the satisfiers and non-satisfiers, and the three basic needs, respectively. Another widely applied theory, the consumer satisfaction theory, considers satisfaction as a function of the extent to which students' expectations about university are met with positive confirmations of expectations leading to higher levels of satisfaction. Also few major models related to students' satisfaction have been discussed in the article.

Among the models, the most widely applied service quality model assesses the relationship between service quality dimensions of quality – namely, tangibility, reliability, empathy, responsiveness and assurance- and the customer satisfaction.

Overall, the article provides clear and applicable knowledge base to be utilized by researchers related to the field of students' satisfaction.

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