

THESIS ON ECONOMICS H40

**Customer Orientation at a  
Higher Educational Institution: The Perspective of  
Undergraduate Business Students in Estonia**

RIINA KORIS

**TUT**  
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TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration  
Department of Business Administration

**This dissertation was accepted for the defence of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Economics on 21 May 2014.**

**Supervisor:** Professor Anu Leppiman  
Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration  
Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia

**Co-supervisors:** Professor Petri Nokelainen  
School of Education  
University of Tampere, Finland

Professor Katri Kerem  
Estonian Business School, Estonia

**Opponents:** Professor Juhani Vaivio  
Aalto University School of Business, Finland

Associate professor Andres Kuusik  
Tartu University, Estonia

Defence of the thesis: 12 September 2014

Declaration:

*Hereby I declare that this doctoral thesis, my original investigation and achievement, submitted for the doctoral degree at Tallinn University of Technology has not been submitted for doctoral or equivalent academic degree.*

/Riina Koris/



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ISSN 1406-4782  
ISBN 978-9949-23-656-5 (publication)  
ISBN 978-9949-23-657-2 (PDF)

MAJANDUS H40

**Kliendiorientatsioon Eestis kõrghariduses ärialast  
haridust omandavate bakalaureusetudengite  
vaatenurgast**

RIINA KORIS



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### *List of publications and the author's contribution*

This doctoral dissertation is based on the following three consecutive academic articles:

1. Koris, R. (2012). Customer Orientation Model for a Higher Education Institution: When is Student-Customer Orientation Appropriate? *International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives*, 19(1), 261–277.
2. Koris, R. & Nokelainen, P. (2015). The Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ): Application of Customer Metaphor to Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(2). (Forthcoming).
3. Koris, R., Örtenblad, A., Kerem, K., & Ojala, T. (2015). Student-Customer Orientation at a Higher Educational Institution: the Perspective of Undergraduate Business Students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. (Forthcoming).

### *The contribution of the author into the articles*

The author of this dissertation was solely responsible for the writing of Paper 1.

For Paper 2 the author of the dissertation prepared the literature review, compiled the empirical dataset, and was responsible for the conducting of the study. Both authors contributed to the formulation, interpretation and presentation of the results and conclusions of the paper.

The author of the dissertation generated the idea for Paper 3, prepared the literature review, compiled the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument, was responsible for the conducting of the study and, together with Katri Kerem, for the interpretation of the results. Anders Örtenblad contributed by ensuring a smooth and consistent flow of the text and Triinu Ojala's input lies in the presentation of numerical data.

### *Other publications related to this doctoral dissertation*

Örtenblad, A., & Koris, R. (2014). Is the learning organization idea relevant to higher educational institutions? A literature review and a „multi-stakeholder contingency approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2), 173–214.

Örtenblad, A., Koris, R., Farquharson, M., & Hsu, S-W. (2013). Business School Output: A conceptualization of business school graduates. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 11(2), 85–92.

Koris, R. (2010). Customer orientation: A dimension of a strong university brand? In *Proceedings: Conference Day 2010*, ed. Herbert Jodlbauer, Josef Arminger, Corinna Engelhardt Nowitzki, Hannes Hofstadler, Jörg Kraigher-Krainer, 123–129. Steyr: Upper Austria University of Applied Sciences, School of Management.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of customer orientation at a higher educational institution (HEI) and marketization of higher education started to gain ground in the beginning of the 1970s, as more radical and progressive positions were taken in education. The emergence of neoliberalism as a new mode of governmentality resulted in institutional and workplace changes to allow more freedom necessary for individual, institutional and national economic survival. As “for neoliberals, there is *one* form of rationality more powerful than any other: economic rationality” (Apple, 2000, p. 59), and neoliberal techniques involve the commercialization of education (Brenthall, 2013), HEIs found themselves face-to-face with demands for new responsibilities and low cost of entry into the business education sector. This, in its turn, has resulted in fierce competition, efforts to recruit and retain students as well as pursuit for favourable student ratings and accreditations (see e.g. Fannin & Brown, 2006, Hawawini, 2005, Misra & McMahon, 2006, Stewart, 2004).

Currently, institutions of higher education all over the world are competing for funds from both public and private sectors as well as from potential students (Conway, Mackay, & Yorke, 1994). To do so, many HEIs position themselves as value-creators, stressing academic excellence as well as practitioner orientation. However, because value-creation, academic excellence and practitioner orientation have become generic terms, a number of schools, in the hope of attracting more students, claim to be customer-oriented academic institutions where the process of acquiring education is flexible and convenient.

Student-customer orientation<sup>1</sup> is a key concept for this dissertation and is defined, using Bristow and Schneider (2002), as the degree to which a HEI makes decisions and acts upon the expectations and needs of the students as well as the goals and objectives of the institution“ (p. 21). Using Hill (1995), expectations have been defined as “desires, wants, ideal standards” (p. 12) and the understanding of those is of substantial essence in order to provide a satisfying service experience (see e.g. Palmer, 2011).

Debate in existing literature on positioning a HEI as a student-customer oriented institution stands polarized. At one extreme there are those who state that when demand is falling, HEIs should focus on the customer (i.e. the students) and remarket the product (i.e. education) (see e.g. Browne, 2010; Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005; Pesch, Calhoun, Schneider, & Bristow, 2008; Seeman, & O’Hara, 2006, Svensson, & Wood, 2007). Others at the other end of the continuum, however, oppose and claim that student-customer orientation does not contribute to professionalism and the worst approach a HEI can take to attract more students is the student-customer orientation approach (see e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> In the remainder of this dissertation the phrase customer orientation at a higher educational institution which features in the title of this dissertation is referred to as student-customer orientation, as is the case in a number of academic articles written on this phenomenon.

Argenti, 2000; Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002; Eagle, & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998; Holbrook, 2005, 2007).

In addition to being polarized, literature is frequently also hostile towards students executing the rights of customers and HEIs putting up with this (see e.g. Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Holbrook and Hulbert, 2002 among others). The prevailing sentiment in the existing literature is that students no longer take responsibility for their learning, but have rather deferred it to the educators and that they have taken full control of education (see e.g. Argenti, 2000; Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; Franz, 1998; Svensson, & Wood, 2007).

Existing literature is also mainly conceptual – of the numerous academic articles published on the topic of student-customer orientation, the author has been able to identify only six empirical studies that have an immediate connection to the phenomenon at hand. However, a detailed analysis of the existing studies reveals that, even though conclusive in their findings, existing literature may have overgeneralized student's views in several specific areas and the issue may not have been probed at a sufficiently detailed level.

**The problem of this research** constitutes itself in the following: competition in the sector of education is fierce and to differentiate, many HEIs have decided to position themselves as student-customer orientation. Even though student-customer orientation has been studied, the existing instruments and tools fail to gain an in-depth knowledge on whether or not students as the primary beneficiaries of education expect a HEI to be customer oriented. However, this knowledge is of utmost relevance when positioning a HEI as a customer oriented institution.

This problem whether a HEI should be customer oriented has been long debated on in the context of the marketized sector of education and this represents an opportunity for further investigation and insight, thus providing a significant contribution to the existing conceptual and empirical evidence. The theoretical contribution of the dissertation lies in identifying the separate categories that the educational experience consists of<sup>2</sup>. Concerning methodological contribution, the dissertation constructs and validates the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument which can be used in other (comparative) surveys with a similar aim. In terms of practical contribution, the study conducted among undergraduate business students shows whether HEIs offering business education, which have decided to position themselves as customer-oriented institutions, should employ student-customer orientation across all or only some categories of educational experience.

**The aim of this doctoral dissertation is therefore to contribute to the concept of student-customer orientation and to identify, at the detailed level of different educational experiences, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a HEI offering business**

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<sup>2</sup> The rationale and motivation for identifying the categories of educational experience before studying the phenomenon rests with James A. Muncy who in his article titled *The Orientation Evaluation Matrix (OEM): Are Students Customers or Products?* attests that before deciding on the role of the student in higher education, a systematic analysis must be conducted because educational experiences are multifaceted.



**education to be student-customer oriented.** To achieve this aim, the following Figure 1 presents the research tasks (T1-T7) that must be completed and their sequence. An elaboration of the tasks is also presented.

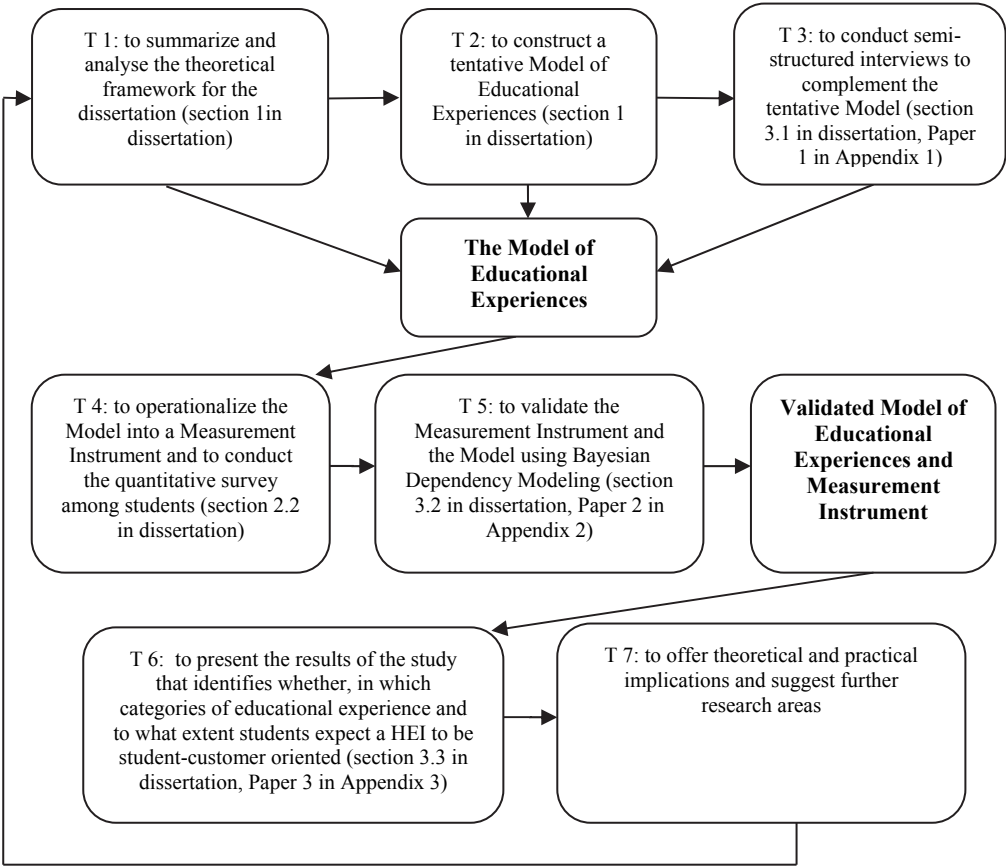


Figure 1 Research tasks for the dissertation. *Source: compiled by the author*

As can be seen in Figure 1, in order to achieve the main aim of the dissertation and to ensure that the phenomenon of student-customer orientation at a HEI is, indeed, approached at the detailed level of educational experiences, the theoretical framework serves as the first input into the study process to identify the categories of educational experience (task 1). The categories are then presented in the tentative model of educational experiences (task 2) and used in semistructured personal interviews with students to identify if there are further categories of educational experience that existing literature might have left uncovered or that the author might have ignored (task 3). Following the interviews, the constructed Model of Educational Experiences is presented. The Model also serves as the basis for the construction of the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) and the conducting of a quantitative survey among business students at

four HEIs in Estonia<sup>3</sup> which offer business education to measure whether or not and to what extent students expect a HEI to treat them as customers (task 4). Following this, both the Model and the Instrument are validated using Bayesian Dependency Modeling (task 5). The dissertation finishes with the presentation of the results of the quantitative survey (tasks 6) and the presentations of theoretical and practical implications as well as further research areas (task 7). To achieve the main aim of the dissertation, the author relies on **constructionism** as a methodological foundation and **mixed research approach with exploratory sequential design**.

Having conducted a quantitative study and employed the SCOMI among students at four HEIs offering business education in Estonia, the results indicate that students do not expect to be treated as customers across all categories of educational experience, as current literature suggests. The findings also show that existing empirical studies have offered overgeneralized findings on the issue at hand because they have so far approached the issue at a too general level. The current study reveals that students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not all categories of educational experiences, thus contributing to the solving of the research problem.

In addition to contributing to existing literature with new knowledge on the categories of educational experiences where students expect a HEI offering business education to practice student-customer orientation, the author has also contributed to existing literature by having constructed and validated the Model of Educational Experiences which aims to divide education as a service into meaningful categories. Identifying the categories of educational experience is essential if the aim is a detailed approach into the phenomenon of customer orientation within higher education;

Another contribution of this dissertation lies in the construction and validation of the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument which enables to tap students' expectations and perceptions of student-customer orientation at a HEI at a detailed level. The validation ensures that the SCOMI can be used across students majoring in different disciplines, at different levels of higher education, in different countries and cultures and different settings (e.g. part-time students, distant students)<sup>4</sup>.

Based on the findings of the research, the dissertation also offers practical implications to those HEIs in business education, who have decided to position themselves as student-customer oriented institutions.

The author has framed the study within higher education for personal reasons. In addition to being employed in the sector of higher education, the academia has been her passion for many years. Her interests lie particularly in the consequences of neoliberalism on higher education and on the society as a whole. She has chosen

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<sup>3</sup> Of the four HEIs in the sample, one is private and for-profit and the other three are state-subsidised and not-for-profit organizations. It must be noted, however, that at the time of conducting the study, all of the four HEIs were charging tuition fees from some of the students.

<sup>4</sup> The construction of the Model of Educational Experience and the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument was a prerequisite to achieve the main aim of the dissertation. However, even though not part of the main aim, it does not make the Model and/or the Instruments constructed less valuable in terms of theoretical and methodological contribution.

business education as the further focus based on a seminal author on this topic, Morris Holbrook, according to whom the customer-oriented logic “takes hold nowhere more strongly than in our schools of commerce or management where, quite literally, business is our middle name” (2004, p. 68). This limitation does not allow the findings of this research to be generalized to HEIs offering other majors or students at different levels of studies.

To the author’s best of knowledge, this dissertation includes the first research of such depth into the topic at hand as it taps students’ expectations and perceptions concerning student-customer orientation at the level of different educational experiences. It is hoped that results of the study contribute towards settling the debate on student-customer orientation at a HEI.

The dissertation is based on **three sequential academic papers**, each one feeding into the next. The first paper (Paper 1 in Appendix 1) is titled “Customer-orientation model for a higher education institution: When is student-customer orientation appropriate?” Based on literature review and personal interviews with undergraduate business students, this paper presents the Model of Educational Experiences. Relying on the categories in the Model, this paper also discusses the appropriateness of student-customer orientation at a HEI offering business education. The paper has been published in an open access scientific journal *International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives* (ETIS 1.2), a journal issued by Info Invest Ltd in Bulgaria. A preliminary version of the paper was approved at a doctoral seminar of the Department of Economics and Business Administration at Tallinn University of Technology and also presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Education, Research and Development in Bulgaria (September 6–12, 2014). The contribution of Paper 1 lies in the construction of the Model of Educational Experiences and conceptual discussion of the appropriateness of student-customer orientation at a HEI offering business education.

The second paper (Paper 2 in Appendix 2), co-authored with Petri Nokelainen, is titled “The Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ): Application of the Customer Metaphor to Higher Education”. The aim of the paper is to validate the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument used in Paper 2 and the Model of Educational Experiences in Paper 1. Employing Bayesian Dependency Modeling to investigate probabilistic dependencies between the variables, the validation process produced an optimized Measurement Instrument with 34 questions (out of the initial 90) and a Model of Educational Experiences with 11 categories (out of the initial 14). The paper has been accepted for publication in *International Journal of Educational Management*, a journal published by Emerald. The journal is indexed in Thomson Reuters ISI Web of Science (ETIS 1.1) and other databases. The contributions of the two authors of the paper were as follows. The author of the thesis prepared the literature review, compiled the empirical dataset, and was responsible for the conducting of the study. Petri Nokelainen provided ideas for the setup of the paper, was leading the selection and the conducting of the validation approach, and consulted on the final draft of the paper. Both authors contributed to the formulation, interpretation and presentation of the results and

conclusions of the paper. Paper 2 contributes to existing literature with a validated Model of Educational Experiences and a Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument.

The third paper (Paper 3 in Appendix 3), co-authored with Anders Örténblad, Katri Kerem and Triinu Ojala is titled “Student-customer orientation at a higher educational institution: The perspective of undergraduate business students” identifies whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. It shows that students expect a HEI that offers business education to be student-customer oriented in some, but not all categories of educational experience. The paper has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* (ETIS 1.2). A preliminary version of the paper was also approved at a doctoral seminar of the Department of Economics and Business Administration at Tallinn University of Technology and the final version at a multidisciplinary conference of International Journal of Arts and Sciences, Paris (March 31–April 3, 2014). The roles of the four authors of the paper were divided as follows. The author of the dissertation generated the idea for the paper, prepared the literature review, compiled the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument, and was responsible for the conducting of the study as well as the main body of the text of the article. Anders Örténblad was responsible for the smooth presentation of arguments in the article as well as for ensuring the wholesomeness of the text. Katri Kerem and the author of the dissertation worked together on the interpretation of the results and Triinu Ojala, using various statistical tools, was responsible for the presentation of the numerical data. The contribution of Paper 3 lies in the identification of the categories of educational experience where students expect to be treated as customers. Based on the results of the survey, Paper 3 also provides practical implications for HEIs who wish to position themselves as student-customer oriented institutions.

The remainder of the review article to this dissertation is organised as follows. Section 1 gives an overview of the theoretical framework on customer orientation within the marketing concept, neoliberalism as an antecedent to the marketized higher education and student-customer orientation as well as studies that have an immediate bearing on the phenomenon. Section 2 presents data and methodology, the design of the study, data collection and analysis as well as a description of the validation of the study as a whole. Section 3 presents the constructed models and results, followed by a discussion, conclusion and list of references. The three Appendices that follow present the three Papers that this dissertation is based on.

## *Acknowledgements*

Writing this dissertation has been a quest accompanied by a number of people from different walks of life whose support not only made the completion of this dissertation possible, but also guided me into the intense, sometimes unjust but nevertheless challenging and fascinating world of academic research.

I would first like to express my gratitude to my former supervisor, Associate Professor Emeritus Ann Vihalem for believing in my topic and the research proposal when I approached her several years ago. Her help proved invaluable during the data collection process and her comments on the interim and the final versions of the dissertation were accepted with gratitude.

I am also grateful to my supervisor, Professor Anu Leppiman, who believed in me as well as in my topic, stood by me during the past months of my studies and proved to be indispensable in finalizing the dissertation and during what sometimes seemed an endless number of bureaucratic procedures that I had to attend to.

My gratitude also goes to my co-supervisor Professor Petri Nokelainen at Tampere University for his teaching, invaluable help and support during the writing of the dissertation. I thank him for his deep insight in science, belief in the study, his constructive criticism and frequently ingenious solutions.

My equally sincere gratitude goes to Professor Katri Kerem at Estonian Business School for her reliance throughout the process of publishing and dissertation-writing. Her ever so relevant and constructive remarks and suggestions frequently fashioned in wit and humour were accepted with gratitude both content and form wise, and her invariably good spirit as well as modesty in her own achievements never cease to set an example for me.

I would like to thank Professor Anders Örtenblad at the University of Nordland for his enthusiasm in my research topic. Meeting him at Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration resulted in further academic articles and fruitful cooperation which will hopefully extend long into the future. Thank you for showing me the way into the world of academic publishing and for the sometimes painful but necessary comments on my work and the articles we were co-authoring. I still have a lot to learn from you in terms of rigour, diligence and commitment.

Professor Juhani Vaivio at Aalto University deserves special thanks for sowing the seeds of doctoral studies in me in spring 2007 and must therefore be largely considered responsible for my starting of the journey altogether. I am also honoured by his willingness to act as one of the opponents to my dissertation.

I thank my employer for enabling a free semester to fully concentrate on writing and ESSCA School of Management for providing me with a peaceful and intellectually rewarding environment to finish the writing of the dissertation.

I also thank the Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation established under the auspices of the European Social Fund for enabling the participation in academic conferences and individual research projects.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere admiration and appreciation to Aso, Triin and my mother Tatjana for their unwavering support during my journey – I would not have made it without you.

Tallinn,  
September 2014

# 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the theoretical framework and previous empirical studies represent the knowledge on the phenomenon of student-customer orientation that the author of the dissertation had when entering into the construction of the tentative Model of Educational Experiences (research task 2) and the first stage of data collection process in the form of personal semi-structured interviews (research task 3).

The section begins by outlining the discussion on the topic of customer orientation within the marketing concept. It then proceeds to neoliberalism which serves as a structural and economic background to marketization of higher education and the subsequent student-customer orientation that emerged in the field of higher education. The discussion then moves on to an overview of the strongly polarized viewpoints which existing literature on customer orientation at a higher educational institution (HEI) holds and finishes with an overview of previous empirical research on the topic.

## 1.1. Customer orientation within the marketing concept

The marketing concept emerged in the late 1940s and begun to receive focal attention in the world of business in the 1950s. The concept means “... discovering the wants of target audience and then creating the goods and services to satisfy them” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 5), “... achieving organizational goals by ...determining the needs and wants of target markets ...” (Kotler, 1972b, p. 48) and is considered to be a “powerful and viable idea that has influenced management philosophy and thought” (Barksdale & Darden, 1971, p. 36).

Nevertheless, regardless of the marketing concept’s power and viability for most organizations, the debate that has emerged as to its suitability as a business philosophy has been manifold. Some suggest that the concept is too general to be appropriate (see e.g. Sachs & Benson, 1978); others conclude that the concept is not wide enough and suggest that it needs broadening (see Kotler & Levey, 1969) and Barksdale and Darden (1971) doubt the concept’s applicability altogether. Thus, the marketing concept has also created a fair share of conceptual controversy, primarily in academic writing. Perhaps one of the greatest “faults” of the marketing concept is considered to be the creation of a consumerist society, which presents an idealized picture of desirable lifestyle and happiness that can allegedly be obtained by choosing the right products and brands. It therefore institutes in people a materialistic culture that draws on petty rather than sustainable values, thus, in the end, corrupting the society as a whole.

Within the marketing concept lies customer orientation, which means “the practice of the marketing concept at the level of the individual service provider and customer” (Hoffman & Ingram, 1992, p. 69) or “focusing the activities on the needs of the customers” (Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p. 460). The foundations that serve as the basis for the term customer orientation in this dissertation similarly approach the

phenomenon as identifying, understanding and catering to the expectations, needs and wants of customers.

In academic literature, customer orientation involves a host of activities. Some claim that the prerequisite for an organization's success is understanding customer expectations and needs (see e.g. Bell & Emory, 1971; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Danneels, 2003; Matthing, Sandén, & Edvardsson, 2004; Slater & Narver, 1998), but also anticipating changes in expectations and needs and being proactive (acting on those changes) (see e.g. Akinyele, 2010; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Johnson, 1998) and innovative (see e.g. Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Slater & Narver, 1998). Literature claims that a customer-oriented organization adapts the business' behaviour in response to customer expectations (see e.g. Johnson, 1998; Valenzuela, 2010) by customizing and personalizing the business' offerings (see e.g. Hillebrand et al., 2010; Lukas & Maignan, 1996). Such customization and personalization should result in creating value for customers (see e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001; Judd, 2003; Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1998), thereby satisfying, pleasing (see e.g. Danneels, 2003) and delighting them (see e.g. Dixon, Freeman, & Toman, 2010; Rust & Oliver, 2000). Johnson (1998) also adds that even if an organization is doing well, it should keep monitoring customer experience to understand their expectations and needs even better to ensure sustainable success.

As can be seen above, value to customers emerges via a continuous process of constant needs identification and anticipation by monitoring customer experience and customization of products and services to meet the (changing) needs.

Just like the activities that customer-oriented organizations engage in, the benefits are also multifaceted. Many claim that a customer-oriented business establishes trust between the organization and the customer (see e.g. Judd, 2003; Slater & Narver, 1998; Valenzuela, Mulki, & Jaramillo, 2010), as a result of which customers will appreciate the firm and value their products (see e.g. Valenzuela et al., 2010). Exercising customer orientation will also result in loyal customers (see e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001) and gain the firm an excellent position to acquire feedback and learn from their customers (see e.g. Hillebrand, Kemp, & Nijssen, 2010). The latter is of great relevance since as Hoffman & Ingram (1992) and Matthing, Sandén, & Edvardsson (2004) posit, the feedback, if used purposefully, helps to improve service quality perceptions, enhance customer satisfaction and mutually beneficial long-term relationship that are prerequisites for outperforming the competitors (see e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001), long-term profitability and sustainable growth over time (see e.g. Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009).

Even though the benefits of customer orientation presented above look lucrative and promising from the future perspective of an organization, there are also those who oppose to companies being customer oriented. They claim that concentrating too much on fulfilling the expectations and needs of customers will result in missing out on the new trends and technologies, thereby hindering radically innovation (see e.g. Anderson & Jap, 2005; Bonner & Walker, 2004; Fisher & Reuber, 2004; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). Additionally, as Martin (1995) claims, customer orientation



tends to create safe and bland new offerings and stand in the way of creating new breakthrough products and services that leave competitors far behind. Slater and Narver (1998) agree with Martin and warn that in case one is too customer-oriented, they would be following nothing more than a short-term strategy.

Even though Brady and Cronin (2001) claim that good service means “willingness to go “above and beyond” or to “go the extra mile” (p. 243), Dixon, Freeman and Toman (2010) proved in their study among 75 000 respondents that customers do not patronize a company because of its over-the-top service. Instead, they found that in the opinion of customers, companies are occasionally “trying too hard” (p. 118) and customers would rather have companies “deliver on their basic, even plain-vanilla promises” than have a dazzling service experience (p. 116).

To summarize, the marketing concept in general and customer orientation in particular are powerful dispositions that have played a major role in guiding the way organizations have been operating for many decades and has contributed to increased profitability. Evidence of the benefits of applying the marketing concept and customer orientation both in academic literature and in everyday life is almost endless. Nevertheless, there are also greater societal and forward-looking issues that should be considered. First, the creation of consumerist society that marketing is claimed to have created entails a larger relative negative impact compared to the relative positive impact of buying the “right” products or brands. Additionally, as many successful products rejected by concept-testing consumer groups attest, monitoring and researching customer needs and wants to meet the needs better may sometime result in marketplace stagnation with no innovation. Also, as nearly all organizations today are relying on the marketing concept and customer orientation, i.e. they all aim at establishing trust, enhancing customer satisfaction, learning from their customers and collecting feedback among other activities, they run the risk of overloading potential existing customers due to excessive attention as well as offering excessively similar products marketed in an excessively similar way.

## **1.2. Marketization of higher education as the result of neoliberalist rationality**

The academia embraced the marketing concept when neoliberalism as a new mode of governmentality emerged in the beginning of 1970s. Because for neoliberalists the economic rationality is more powerful than any other (Apple, 2000, p. 59), many institutions which had been previously state-supported were now reconstituted as part of the market on the grounds that education and healthcare as services are products like all others (Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; Greenberg, 2004; Peters, 1999). All this relied on the assumption that regardless of the nature of the product or service, institutions would function more effectively and efficiently if exposed to competition and became, as most other products or services, tradable on the marketplace.

As a result of neoliberalist rationality, in which subjects are active, entrepreneurial and responsible in maximizing their personal gain without burdening

the state (Varman, Saha, & Skålén, 2011), education became as commercialized and marketized as any other service. A central issue in neoliberalism is the creation of market subjectivity where agents (e.g. HEIs and students) are expected to make gains for themselves (Varman et al., 2011). By definition, marketization in education “refers to the adoption of free market practices in running universities. These include the business practices of cutting production costs, abandoning courses and programmes not in demand, offering more popular programmes and facilities and advertising to increase brand image, sales and the profit margins” (Hemsley-Brown, 2011, p. 118; see also Hussey & Smith, 2010; Khurana, 2007; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). A marketized HEI adapts swiftly to environmental changes and meets the needs of students-customers (Bok, 2003). With little respect from the academic community, education as a service has been turned into an input-output system (Olssen & Peters, 2007, p. 324) where students enjoy a substantial say in their learning (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 256) and in the end become commercially oriented (as opposed to socially oriented) professionals (Lynch, 2006).

Following the reconstitution of HEIs within the neoliberalist sentiment, competition on the market of higher education has become fierce. Relatively low-cost entry into the sector has created a situation where HEIs are mushrooming on all continents and HEIs, whether state-supported or private, for-profit and non-profit, have found themselves with the requirements of the market economy, and have embraced the marketing concept and customer orientation as a new philosophy for functioning and succeeding.

There are advocates of the marketized context of higher education (see e.g. Bok, 2003; Greenberg, 2004; Jongbloed, 2003; Khalifa, 2009), who claim that as a result, the HEI will be more innovative. Innovation is supposed to emerge from competition on the market as competing HEIs are trying to attract the same students. The more innovative HEIs would enjoy greater admission numbers and their profitability will increase.

Nevertheless, many in the academia frown upon the use of marketing to solve the problems of increased competition and falling demand, denouncing it as corrupt and corrupting (Snyder, 2007) and ethically bankrupt (Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004). The marketized higher education has created a situation where students care only about the utility they can gain from any piece of new information and where education guides students into jobs with high rewards without any regard for their broader role in the society (see e.g. Holbrook, 2005; Khurana, 2007; Bertelsen, 2008). This reality has been well-documented by Naidoo, Shankar and Veer (2011) when they reveal that “the unreflective implementation of outdated consumer mechanisms has resulted in passive and instrumental learners” (p. 1156). The latter is explicitly illustrated by Varman, Saha and Skålén (2011) in a study they conducted among students in India which showed that the results of neoliberal discourse and marketized higher education include emphasis on job market saleability, uncritical pedagogy and elitist policies, instrumental approach to learning and commoditisation of knowledge, neglect of social concerns and, last but not least, disenchantment and exclusion (pp. 1171–1179). However, it is possible that the

findings are developing country-specific and if a similar study was conducted in a developed country, the findings would indicate a lesser degree of instrumentality and more societal concern among the young. All in all, opponents to neoliberal practices and the marketized higher education regard a HEI a “non-marketing context” (Svensson & Wood, 2007, p. 17), the marketing of an educational institution a “necessary evil” (Bush *et al.*, 1998, p. 16), and “the market a capricious beast which will follow short term demands and fads, going its own way irrespective of longer term consequences” (Hussey & Smith, 2010, p. 47).

The author of the current dissertation agrees that employing the marketing concept in the sector of higher education runs the risk of producing commercially-, rather than socially-minded people whose primary (and perhaps only) aim is to maximize their own benefit with very little or no concern for the general societal welfare. It must be borne in mind that in addition to students, there are many other beneficiaries of higher education: the future employees, the government bodies, the students’ families, the society in general, who all have similar legitimate interests in higher education, and such “dumbing down” of education, as called by Emery *et al.* (2001) and Holbrook (2007), would be detrimental for the other interested parties in the long run.

Regardless of the criticism, however, many HEIs today are facing the problem of not just standing out, but of surviving. The problem is especially acute for the under-subsidized, under-endowed private institutions, the survival of which rests with the tuition fees collected and thereby the student recruitment campaigns conducted that cannot afford to fail to attract and keep the minimum number of students that would enable financial operations. With this aim in mind, and armed with many successful examples in the commercial sector where the success (and survival) of an institution depends to a large extent on how effective its marketing efforts are (Michael, Hamilton, & Dorsey, 1995), the academia holds that marketing, if understood and applied suitably, accords with the concept of higher education and should not be avoided if the intention is survival and growth (Knight & Johnson, 1981; Harvey & Busher, 1996).

### **1.3. Customer orientation at a higher educational institution**

As indicated in section 1.1, in order to attain and retain success in business, the organization should be customer-oriented. Neoliberal disposition considers a HEI to be a business like any other (Greenberg, 2004; Peters, 1999) and the phenomenon of customer orientation has also become an everyday topic of discussion in the arena of higher education.

Bristow and Schneider define student-customer orientation (or customer orientations at a HEI) as „the degree to which a college/university takes actions and makes decisions based upon the needs and wants of the students as well as the goals

and objectives of the institution“ (p.21)<sup>5</sup>. To elaborate further, a student-customer oriented HEI bases its activities and decisions on what the students need and want and tries to match the students’ needs and wants to what the HEI wants to achieve. To draw inferences between the HEI sector and the conventional business sector, in the same way that the customer wants and needs the product, the students needs the degree and just as a business unit needs money, a HEI needs to collect tuition fees. Thus, the exchange mechanism works similarly to that in the conventional business world and in order to maximize instances of exchange, a HEI resorts to the marketing concept and within it student-customer orientation since it has proved to be effective in many other sectors on the market.

The application of the customer-oriented approach to a HEI has created a lot of controversy also in several other respects. Supporters of student-customer orientation believe that because of the fierce competition on the higher education market, HEIs should approach students as customers and make extra efforts to attract, retain and serve them (DeShields et al., 2005; Pesch et al., 2008; Seeman & O’Hara, 2006; Vetter, 2005). They posit that because teaching is a service as any other, students as customers “are best placed to make the judgment about what they want to get from participating in higher education” (Browne, 2010, p. 25). Svensson and Wood (2007) attest that students are encouraged to voice their discontent if they have problems with their studies and contend that surveys that look into what the students like and what they dislike about their university are frequent. One can therefore conclude from the authors above that because students allegedly know best what they expect to get from higher education, they should also be relied on to determine the quality of a HEI.

The author of this dissertation is of the opinion, however, that students cannot be relied on to drive the quality of higher education in factors related to the quality of content, process and outcome. Non-selective application of student-customer orientation across all categories of educational experience would be in conflict with the societal expectations to higher education if it was oriented towards catering to the students’ primary search for immediate gratification.

A rationale in existing literature that supports the author’s viewpoint above is that students cannot objectively evaluate the benefit of education while studying (see e.g. Ikeda, Veludo-de-Oliveira, & Campomar, 2009, Sirvanci, 1996). Based on Kotler (1972a), education as such is a salutary product which has low immediate appeal but high long-term benefit. Thus, it is only later in their life that students will be able to recognize the benefits of the physical, emotional, financial, etc. sacrifice made during their studies. This rationale is also in line with desire theory (see e.g. Heathwood, 2005; Rosati, 1995, among others). Even though the concept of customer orientation relies on the assumption that people know what they

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<sup>5</sup> The author relies on the definition of student-customer orientation using Bristow and Schneider (2002) within the theoretical framework. However, as the main aim of the dissertation is to investigate, at a detailed level, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to treat them as customers, a more detailed definition of the concept will be presented in section 2.2 titled *Designing the Study*.

want/desire and form expectations based on that (see e.g. Dickinson, Herbst, & O'Shaughnessy, 1986), desire theory states that people frequently have ill-informed desires (those that people want because they do not know better) and irrational desires (people are weak-willed and refuse to make an effort even though this would benefit them) (see e.g. Heathwood, 2005; Kraut, 1994; Sobel, 1994). The expectations of students, therefore, could be not objective because their expectations are either ill-informed or irrational.

Opponents to the phenomenon to student-customer orientation attest that the a HEI should not collect student feedback on teachers and teaching and that it is because of the feedback surveys that students feel even more strongly that they are customers (see e.g. Svensson and Wood, 2007, but also Chonko et al., 2002). Edmundson (1997) adds that treating students as customer has resulted in a common behaviour of floating in and out of classes with no commitment.

Applying the student-customer orientation metaphor to a HEI has additionally resulted in having turned teachers into salespeople who must accept that at least in principle the student as the customer is always right (Hussey and Smith, 2010, p. 50). The consequences are also said to include students' demands to design their own study programs and courses and the HEIs' primary strive to advance students' careers have positioned HEIs as flexible and convenient (as opposed to rigorous) educational supermarkets where everything is for sale and where attendance is uncritical and always open (see e.g. Franz, 1998; Koris, 2010).

One of the topics that frequently seems to appear in literature is the payment of the tuition fee and the subsequent treatment of students as customers (see e.g. Bellah, 1999; Delucci & Korgen, 2002 among others). Some studies indicate that this is rather the students' than the researchers' sentiment (see e.g. Delucci and Korgen, 2002; Denning, 2002). The latter mostly agree that students should not be treated in the same way as other purchasers of a service (Bejou, 2005). The fact that many students are paying for their education should not warrant good grades, easy programmes and generous assessment (Clayson and Haley, 2005; Chonko et al, 2002) or lectures that are entertaining and fun (Holbrook, 2004). In the opinion of the author of this dissertation, the payment of a tuition fee should warrant customer-oriented student support services (e.g. effective program management and consultation, etc), but it should not entail making concessions in terms of non-selective admission, convenient studies, lenient grading, easy graduation or other factors directly related to the quality of acquiring education.

The author would like to point out that just as students should not be relied on to drive the quality of higher education, the payment of the tuition fee should not warrant customer-oriented approach in categories of higher education related to the quality of content, process and outcome.

#### 1.4. Existing empirical evidence on student-customer orientation

A search through relevant academic journals on higher education and issues of the last two decades revealed that even though not many in number, there exist also empirical studies with an immediate bearing on the topic of student-customer orientation. Bristow and Schneider (2002), for example, using the 7-item Collegiate Student Orientation Scale, investigated “from the students’ perspective, the degree to which the institution is considered to be customer/student oriented“ (p. 24). They found out that even though the students find the HEI to be at least slightly student-customer oriented, the responses indicated that they would expect the HEI to be even more so. The same scale in a slightly modified form was also used by Pesch et al. (2008) in one of the universities in the US. The authors concluded that the university under study was not sufficiently student-customer oriented and should make extra efforts to do so because “the development of student oriented programs and the policies which are consistent with the overall business philosophy of the marketing concept is one way in which administrators can differentiate” their HEI (p. 105). The author of this dissertation would like to point out that the scale used in this study is a good attempt find out identify the level of student-customer orientation at a HEI; however, the scale contains too few items and the wording used for the items per se focuses on instant rather than long-term expectations and gratification. There has also been an attempt to modify the scale (see Pesch et al., 2008), but the modifications were too minor to address the problem of instant expectations and gratification in the scale developed by Bristow and Schneider (2002).

Obermiller, Fleenor and Raven (2005) asked students in the US and France whether they feel they are products or customers of higher education and found out that students view themselves as paying customers for whom the faculty design courses to meet the students’ expectations and needs and who make their teaching responsive to student demands lest the students take “their business elsewhere” (p. 29). In their *post hoc* questioning of the students they discovered that students expect the faculty to treat them with respect, be available and accessible, listen to and address legitimate academic and extra-curricular concerns, provide quality teaching and reasonable work load, show concern for students’ success and impart important life skills (p. 33). It must be noted, though, that the first part of the study, even though very simple to understand for the respondents, represented the evaluation of two extreme standpoints and the findings, therefore, also presented similarly extreme results. The *post hoc* study certainly added to the main study, but the sample is deemed to be too small (a single class of business school undergraduates) to draw valid conclusions.

White (2007), having conducted a qualitative study among undergraduate students in Australia, concludes that students experience higher education as commoditised, students feel that they are customers rather than learners and rely on teachers and the rest of the staff at a HEI to satisfy and to deliver. This study provided very interesting and insightful information on students’ expectations to

their studies. The illustrative quotes provided rich information which can be obtained using qualitative interviews. Nevertheless, if even further categories of educational experience had been covered during the interview, the findings would have been far more versatile.

Also Ikeda et al. (2009) set out to investigate student perspective on customer in education and did so using three open-end questions with students in Brazil. Following the content analysis that they conducted, they conclude that the majority of students are unaware of the societal principle, according to which HEIs exist mainly for the common good of the society (see e.g. Örtenblad & Koris, 2014), most of them are oriented towards short-term results and satisfaction and consider themselves to be customers of higher education (p. 3511). The open end questions used in the survey were designed to capture the essence of customer orientation as a whole and the results would probably have been different if the questions posed had been less general.

Delucchi and Korgen (2002), too, assessed the extent to which students approach college with a customer service orientation and assessed students' attitude to higher education. The survey results among the students in a university in the US attest that students approach higher education as a consumer-driven marketplace and reveal that 42.5% of the students agree that they payment of a tuition fee should warrant a degree (p. 103). Of the studies presented above, the one by Delucci and Korgen appears to be the most detailed and the results the most comprehensive as they surveyed several aspects of higher education. However, the categories covered within this survey could have been even more versatile to ensure that as many categories of educational experience as possible are covered.

As shown above, the problem with most existing empirical studies presented above concerns the issue of conducting research at a too general level. The suggestion that the author identifies with most, however, and that also inspired the author to conduct this research rests with Muncy (2008), according to whom one should first identify the different aspects of education and only then study the phenomenon itself (p. 16). The author agrees that by doing so one gains a much deeper insight into the phenomenon, thus avoiding overgeneralizations and misrepresentations.

The author is of the opinion that existing polarized literature and empirical findings which approach the issue at hand at a too general level represent an opportunity for further investigation.

### 1.5. The tentative model of educational experiences based on theoretical framework

Research task 2 in the section titled *Introduction* entailed the development of the tentative model of educational experiences based on theoretical framework. The following figure 2 presents the tentative model and elaborates on it below.

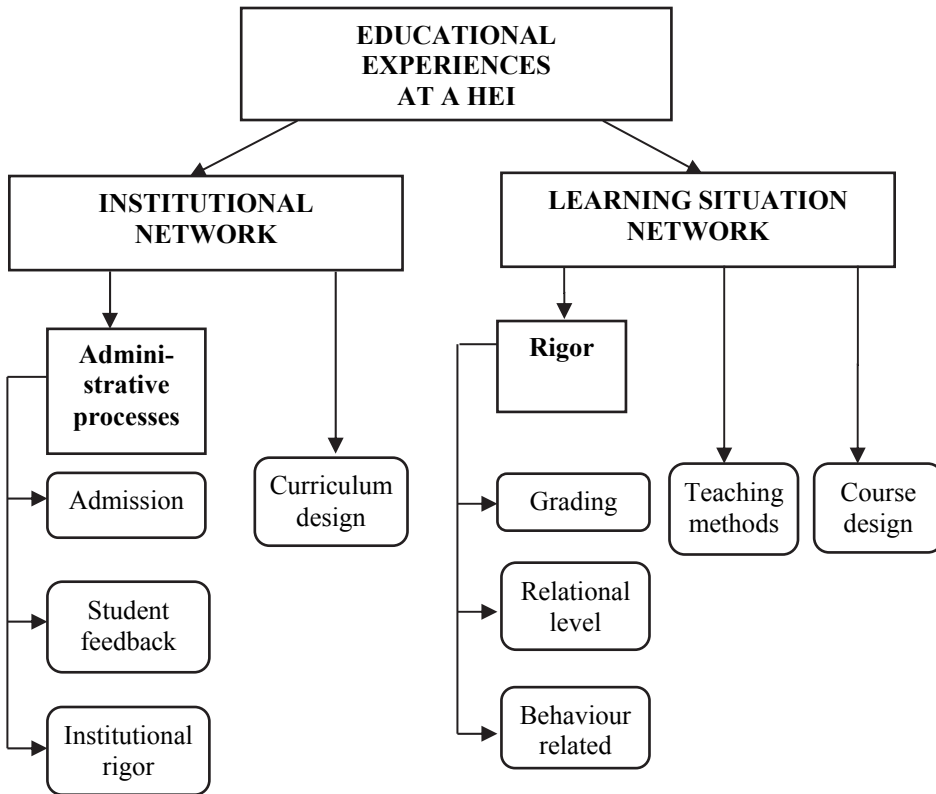


Figure 2 A tentative Model of Educational Experiences at an institution of higher education.  
 Source: compiled by the author based on theoretical framework

As the tentative Model shows, educational experiences at a HEI are divided into two broader networks – experiences related to the HEI as an institution and those related to the learning situation. Relying on theoretical framework, the author identified four categories of educational experience (*admission, student feedback, institutional rigor and curriculum design*) in the institutional network and five categories (*grading, relational level, behaviour related, teaching methods and course design*) within the learning situation network.



Thus, based on theoretical framework, the phenomenon of student-customer orientation may be practiced in terms of *admission* and the level of selectivity which the HEI employs (see e.g. Franz, 1998; Koris, 2010); *student feedback*, where students are requested to voice their (dis)satisfaction with teachers and teaching and the organization of studies (see e.g. Svensson and Wood, 2007; Chonko et al., 2002, among others); *institutional rigor*, which has been gravitating towards leniency, mollycoddling and accommodating behaviour in terms of office hours, course drop dates and procedures, attendance and much more (see e.g. Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson and Haley, 2005; Edmunson, 1997; Emery et al., 2001; Hatfield and Taylor 1998) ; and *curriculum design* (see e.g. Emery et al., 2005; Franz 1998). Within the latter category, existing literature suggests (and mostly reproaches) that a student-customer oriented HEI involves students in the process of designing their own curricula.

Within the learning situation network, the category of *grading* features very strongly in theoretical framework and discusses the issue of “I-pay-your-salary-I-deserve-a-good-grade”-attitude that allegedly prevails among student (see e.g. Scott, 1999; Clayson and Haley, 2005; Franz, 1998 among others). *Behaviour-related* category accommodates students’ superficial attitude and (mis)behaviour in- and outside the classroom (see e.g. Edmunson, 1997; Hussey and Smith, 2010); *relational level* indicates the changed role between the student and the teacher (see e.g. Argenti 2000; Bristow and Schneider, 2002; Edmunson 1997; Halbesleben et al., 2003;); *teaching methods* imply interactivity, entertainment and fun that students are said to expect during their studies (see e.g. Emery et al., 2001; Holbrook, 2004) and *course design* implies that a student-customer oriented HEI lets the students have a say what they would like to be taught within a course (see e.g. Clayson and Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2005; Franz, 1998).

It must be noted, however, that this model is an initial attempt to map the categories that make up the educational experience which will be further developed using semi-structured interviews with students (research task 3).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. The choice of methodology

It has been pointed out that in order to better understand the world and to produce better results in research, methodological choices are of significant relevance (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). This dissertation relies on constructionism as the epistemological foundation for the study as it “works from the understanding or meaning of phenomena, formed through participants and their subjective views.” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.40) and because it is linked with individuals’ interpretations and objective observations, which is a research procedure for producing constructions – models, diagrams, plans, organizations, etc, or entities which produce solutions to explicit problems (Kasanen, Lukka, & Siitonen, 1993; Taipaleenmäki, 2003). The latter is also supported by Dodig-Crnkovic (2010), according to whom constructionism as a methodology is used when 1) research is based on existing knowledge, which is used in novel ways, thus contributing to new understanding; 2) when the proceeds fill conceptual and other knowledge gaps by purposefully tailored building blocks to support the whole construction and; 3) where the solutions are designed and developed and not in the first place discovered.

According to Kasanen et al. (1993), both quantitative and qualitative methods may be used in such research. It comprises both a theoretical and an empirical analysis (Taipaleenmäki, 2003) and entails both practical and theoretical relevance (Dodig-Crnkovic, 2010). Following Dodig-Crnkovic (2010), a construction, when it differs from those previously existing, is a new reality against which pre-existing one can be examined and understood, so it has an undeniable epistemological value.

### 2.2. Designing the study

To achieve the research tasks (see section titled *Introduction*), this dissertation uses **mixed research approach** which, according to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) are “studies that combine or mix qualitative and quantitative research techniques” (p. 281). Mixed methods research “produces usable results that transcend the limits of mono-method research” (Bergman, 2011, p. 101) and therefore provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings and generalizability (Jick, 1979).

This research relies on the exploratory sequential design, which begins with qualitative and then moves on to quantitative data collection and analysis which should be used “if a researcher wants to explore a phenomenon, wants to expand on the qualitative findings or build a new instrument” (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 182).

The following Figure 3 presents the design of the study and elaborates on it below.

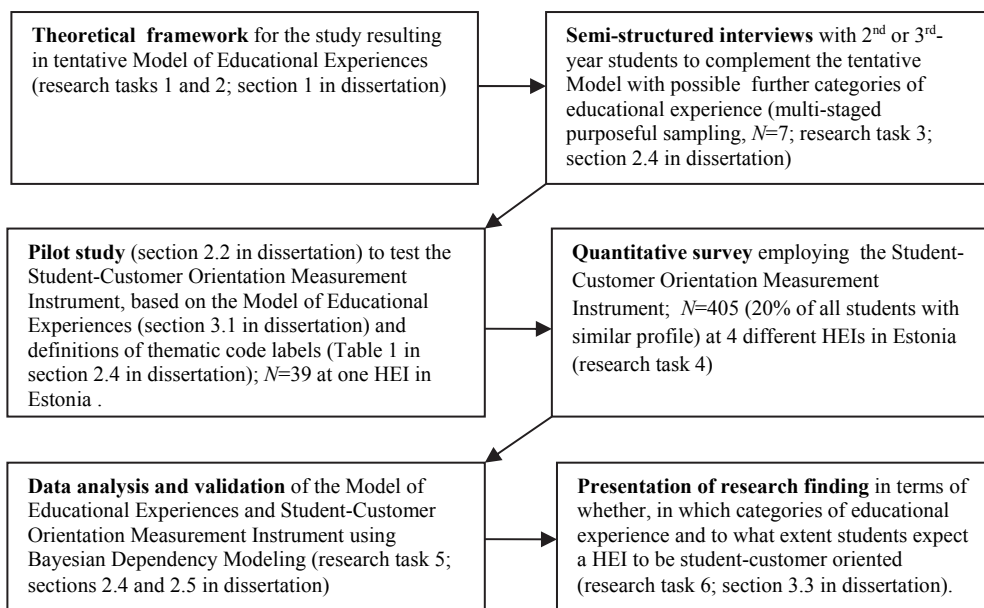


Figure 3 Design of the study. *Source: compiled by the author*

Building on theoretical framework, the first phase of the research aimed at constructing the tentative Model of Educational Experiences (see Figure 1 in section 1.4) containing the categories of educational experience (research tasks 1 and 2). The study then moves on to the second, qualitative phase of the study – personal semi-structured interviews with students (research task 3 in Figure 1) – and constructs the Model of Educational Experiences which complements the tentative Model. The Model of Educational Experiences and its elaboration are presented in Figure 4 and section 3.1, respectively.

All in all, seven personal semi-structured interviews were conducted as the last interview showed that data saturation and informational redundancy was achieved (see e.g. Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Altogether, the interviews yielded 7 hours and 21 minutes of discussion and 121 single-space pages of transcripts. The transcripts were then analysed and responses coded and categorized with the aim of eliciting further categories of educational experiences to be added to those in the tentative Model of Educational Experiences. Article 1 in Appendix 1 elaborates further on this phase of the research.

Based on the Model of Educational Experiences, the study moved on to the construction of the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) (research task 4 in Figure 1; for the Instrument, see Paper 2 in Appendix 2). The Measurement Instrument included 90 items (plus nine demographic questions) that are grouped under the same 14 categories that feature in the Model of Educational Experiences presented and elaborated on in section 3.1. Thus, the study aims at measuring student-customer orientation across all the 14 categories of

educational experience identified in the section titled *Theoretical framework* and the qualitative phase of the study.

To operationalize the categories in the Model of Educational Experiences into the SCOMI, the author relied on the rhetoric in the theoretical framework and defined a customer-oriented HEI as one which (1) admits as many students as possible with good academic ability and/or the capacity to pay a tuition fee (*admission*); (2) collects and acts on student feedback on teaching and other study-related processes (*student feedback*); (3) enables easy and stress-free graduation to all students (*graduation*); (4) offers a curriculum which is practical (as opposed to theoretical) and compiled based on the expertise of several stakeholders (*curriculum design*); (5) provides a smooth flow of support services and communicates effectively and promptly to accommodate students' individual needs and wishes (*communication with service staff*); (6) has a flexible attitude towards rules and regulations set and tailors those to students' individual requests (*rigor*); (7) grades students leniently rather than strictly and relies on the assumption that students want to receive good grades with little effort (*grading*); (8) accommodates students' (mis)behaviour during classes (late-coming, cheating, ignoring deadlines, etc) (*classroom behaviour*); (9) assumes that students and teachers are equals and friends (*relational level*); (10) expects teachers to always be available if students need to get in touch with them (*communication with teacher*); (11) ensures that new material is presented in a concise form in an environment which is convenient and always accessible (*classroom studies*); (12) does not require that students make extra efforts to study outside classroom hours (*individual studies*); (13) requires that its teachers use interactive teaching methods and that classes are fun and entertaining (*teaching methods*); and (14) offers courses which are practical in nature and delivered by practitioners (*course design*)<sup>6</sup>.

The SCOMI used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (6) "strongly agree". 6-point Likert scale was chosen to avoid the error of central tendency, described by Kerlinger as a "general tendency to avoid all extreme judgements and rate high down the middle of a rating scale" (1973, p. 549).

The Measurement Instrument (or the survey questionnaire) was pretested in a pilot study to detect possible shortcomings in the design and its administration (Krosnick & Presser, 2010) and to assess aspects such as clarity of instructions and questions, specific wording choices and question orderings, time taken to complete the questionnaire and whether any questions on key issues have been overlooked. The pilot study was conducted among 39 business students in one of the universities in Estonia. During the filling in of the questionnaire students were encouraged to voice any misunderstanding or concerns in terms of the wording, clarity of questions, question ordering, etc. As a result of the pilot study, minor changes concerning the wording of the questions were introduced. Also, one question was

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<sup>6</sup> The autor of the dissertation concedes that this definition give students more credence than they deserve/expect. However, the definition corresponds to the underlying assumptions in related literature and displays the sentiment that many in existing literature hold (and also criticize).

redesigned for the reason that it entailed the rating of more than one aspect. All in all, however, the students found the questionnaire clear and convenient to complete.

Following the quantitative study, the author validated the Model of Educational Experiences and the SCOMI using Bayesian Dependency Modeling (research task 5 in Figure 1). An alternative statistical approach based on Johnson and Creech (1983) which studies the categorization of findings could also have been used. However, it would have required a large sample size and a situation where normal distribution accurately reflects the true distribution of many underlying variables. Another approach – the asymptotic distribution free function by Browne (1984) – could similarly have been an option, but it can accommodate only a limited number of variables and similarly require large sample sizes of more than 2000 observations. However, since only Bayesian modelling approach addresses the problem of non-linear dependencies between observed variables, it was chosen as a viable statistical approach addressing all the modelling problems mentioned above (Nokelainen et al., 2007). Paper 2 in Appendix 2 elaborates further on this stage of research.

Finally, to contribute to the debate on student-customer orientation and building on the results of the quantitative phase of the study, the author identified whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented (research task 6 in Figure 1) and discussed theoretical and practical implications and further research areas (research task 7 in Figure 1). Article 3 in Appendix 3 offers deeper insight into this phase of research.

### **2.3. Sampling and data collection**

Of the 24 sampling schemes identified by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), this study relies on multistage purposeful sampling – also referred to as purposive sampling, nonprobability sampling, qualitative sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) or judgemental sampling (Nardi, 2003), – where the units in the sample “are chosen in two or more stages and in which all stages reflect purposive sampling of participants.” (2007, p. 287).

Because purposeful sampling finds instances that are representative or typical of a particular type of case on a dimension of interest, Teddlie and Yu recommend that the sample (1) addresses research question; (2) seeks generalizability; (3) is information-rich; (4) is either small or large depending on the phase of the research; (5) is created before the study begins; (6) includes participants based on expert judgement; and (7) generates narrative as well as numeric data (2007, p. 86). The sampling for this research aimed at following all the points indicated above.

The interview participants for the qualitative stage of the study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) both male and female participants had to comprise the body of respondents; (2) respondents had to be in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of undergraduate studies; (3) respondents had to be full-time students; and (4) respondents had to be willing to express their opinion in order for the researcher to obtain rich information. The participants were chosen based on the author’s previous

experience with students in the classroom. Students in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study were preferred because students in their 1<sup>st</sup> year would not have been as rich in information. The researcher chose full-time students because compared to part-time students the former spend proportionally more time at the HEI and therefore have more contact with the HEI and are richer in educational experiences. All participants' anonymity was guaranteed and permission for recording was obtained before the interview.

The parameters for the sample of the quantitative phase of the study remained the same (with the exception of parameter 4 above).

To ensure maximum response rate in the quantitative survey, the students were approached personally during lectures and permission to carry out the survey was obtained both from the lecturers in charge of the class as well as the students. Concerning the issue of ethics when conducting research among students, the filling-in of the questionnaire took place on a strictly voluntary basis and no students unwilling to participate were asked to do so. The filling in of the questionnaire was completely anonymous as well as confidential and answers were not in any way connected to any student personally.

The self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaire was distributed among undergraduate business students in all of the four universities in Estonia providing business education. The quantitative stage aims at statistical generalizability. Having used purposeful sampling, a total of 405 usable responses (20% of all the students in Estonia with a similar profile) were received, which makes the sample to some extent generalizable to the target population (Murphy & Myers, 1998).

## **2.4. Data analysis**

The results from the first, qualitative study (semi-structured interviews with students) underwent content analysis. The author resorted to directed content analysis, the aim of which is to "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1281). The author started manually coding the interview transcripts with predetermined codes from the theoretical framework. Data that could not be coded was identified and analysed to see if they represent a new category or a subcategory determined by the theoretical framework. While coding, the author used the data-driven approach, where the codes were obtained from raw information which, according to Boyatzis (1998), is of higher reliability because of the omission of intermediaries.

Following Coffey & Atkinson (1996) and Kvale (2007), during the process of coding, the meaning of statements (or words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs) were reduced to a few simple and meaningful categories. Of the major elements which can be counted, the author resorted to counting themes which the interviewees addressed while describing the educational experiences that a student encounters during his/her studies.

As suggested by Boyatzis, a good thematic code has a label, a definition of what the theme concerns and is both positive and negative (1998, p. 31). Some of the

elicited codes are based on theoretical framework (marked as TF in Table 1). As the aim of the interview was to elicit further categories of educational experience that theoretical framework might have ignored or the author might have missed, other codes were obtained from the interview transcripts (marked as I in Table 1). The thematic code labels were afterwards used to construct the Model of Educational Experiences as well as the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument.

Table 1. Thematic codes and content of the codes based on interview transcripts

<b>Thematic code label</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Content of the code</b>
Admission	TF	the level of selectivity which a HEI to employs during admission
Student feedback	TF	the (un)importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback
Graduation	I	the level of strictness or lenience a HEI to employs during student graduation
Curriculum design	TF	designing the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum (practical vs. theoretical)
Communication with service staff	I	the ease or difficulty of communicating with the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities outside the classroom in accommodating the students' requests
Institutional rigor	TF	the lenience or strictness with which the HEI follows the established rules and regulations
Grading	TF	the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches the evaluation of various assignments
Classroom behaviour	TF	the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches students' (mis)behaviour in class
Relational level	TF	student-teacher closeness and friendliness or distance
Communication with teacher	I	the (un)approachability and (in)convenience that characterize teachers outside class hours
Classroom studies	I	convenience and ease of classroom studies
Individual studies	I	whether or not a HEI expects students to make academic efforts outside class
Course design	TF	the stakeholders responsible for designing the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical)
Teaching methods	TF	the use of modern and traditional techniques in teaching at a HEI

*Source: compiled by the author based on content analysis of interview transcripts*

Data from the second, quantitative study was obtained from 405 respondents in four HEIs in Estonia offering business education and was first processed in SPSS. Questions with negative wordings were re-coded (6 > 1; 5 > 2; 4 > 3; 3 > 4; 2 > 5; 1 > 6) before statistical analyses. Means with standard deviations and statistical error

margins (at 95% confidence level) were calculated for each question and categories of educational experience.

The first phase in optimising the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument was to investigate how the 90 items met the normality assumption. Normality analysis showed that only 25 items were within the suggested range of standard error of skewness. Based on skewness statistics and distribution of responses, the most skewed items were omitted.

The next phase in the optimization process was to study the dimensionality of the 51 items that passed the normality tests with the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Maximum likelihood (ML) method and Varimax rotation. The results of EFA showed that all the 14 categories of educational experience were present in the rotated factor matrix. EFA was also conducted separately for the two individual networks in the Model (as well as the Measurement Instrument), namely the institutional and learning situation (22 and 29 items, respectively).

The third phase was to conduct Bayesian Dependency Modeling (BDM) (see Myllymäki, Silander, Tirri, & Uronen, 2002) with the 51 items. The first aim of using BDM was to validate the results of EFA (parametric analysis) with a non-parametric analysis. The second aim was to investigate both linear and non-linear (Nokelainen, Silander, Ruohotie, & Tirri, 2007) dependencies between the variables and to find a Bayesian Network describing these dependencies.

BDM was chosen because unlike many other traditional statistical techniques, Bayesian models do not require multivariate normal distribution of the variables (Nokelainen, 2008). Also, Bayesian models allow the investigation of both non-linear and linear dependencies and enable one to verify if the omission of non-normal items was justified. Additionally, BDM produces the most probable statistical dependency structure between the observed variables based on parameter free data mining approach (Myllymäki, Silander, Tirri, & Uronen, 2002).

Thus, the validity of the resulting Model of Educational Experiences and the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument was determined by calculating the reliability estimates and performing Bayesian Dependency Modeling for both networks (the institutional and the learning situation network) in the Model of Educational Experiences.

## **2.5. Legitimation (validity) of the study**

Even though the term “validity” is frequently used in quantitative research, many qualitative researchers oppose to it. They claim that validity does not exist because first, there is no single reality and the proponents of this prefer the word “fallibilism”; second, because validity always depends on contexts situations, worldview, etc., the word “contextualization” should be used instead; and third, because there is no relationship between validity and objectivism (as suggested by “strong or radical relativism”). Thus, because the term “validity” in mixed methods research can be counterproductive, the use of the word “legitimation” is recommended instead (see Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).



To legitimize the study and produce a model with a good fit, the author of this dissertation relies on the typology and the legitimation types for mixed methods research developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) and advocated by a number of researchers in this field (see e.g. Dellinger & Leech, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008).

*Sample integration* legitimation refers to “the extent to which the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative sampling designs yields quality meta-inferences” (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p.288). To contextualize this, a large scale quantitative study ( $N=405$ ) was conducted after a preliminary qualitative study ( $N=7$ , see Koris, 2012) with participants drawn from the same student population (second or third year business students at one of the HEIs offering business education in Estonia).

In terms of *inside-outside* legitimation, which stands for “the extent to which the researcher accurately presents and appropriately utilizes the insider’s view and the observer’s view for purposes such as description and explanation” (p.288), the author of the dissertating aimed best not to become a “native” during the study and even though the context of the research was very familiar, she remained rather an observer during the qualitative phase of the study. The importance of being familiar with the context is also supported by Mertens (2003), according to whom the researcher should be involved in the project to a significant degree.

The legitimation type called *weakness minimization* means “the extent to which the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from the other approach” (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p.288). The mixed methods approach used provided stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings and paves the way for generalizability. Also, during the content analysis of the interview transcripts, the data-driven approach that utilizes raw information and eliminates intermediaries as potential contaminants contributed to the validity of the results.

*Sequential* legitimation type refers to “the extent to which one has minimized the potential problem wherein the meta-inferences could be affected by reversing the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative phase” (p.288). Concerning the design of questionnaire, the sequence of the methods, if reversed, would not have produced the desired results since a structured study of the phenomenon among a large body of respondents (quantitative phase) would be impossible without the prior development of the model (result of the qualitative phase).

In terms of *conversion legitimation*, which is achieved by using the appropriate data analysis methods, paying less attention to the obtaining of counts, the results of the study underwent factor analysis as well as Bayesian Dependency Modeling and were therefore validated using different techniques.

*Pragmatic mix* legitimation requires that the researcher make the use of paradigm assumptions clear and conducting research that fits the assumptions. While constructing a model for this research, the author relied on constructionism as the epistemological foundation, which “works from the understanding or meaning of phenomena, formed through participants and their subjective views.” (Creswell and

Plano Clark, 2011, p.40) and which produces constructions – models, diagrams, plans, organizations, etc, or entities which produce solutions to explicit problems (Kasanen, Lukka and Siitonen, 1993; Taipaleenmäki, 2003).

The *commensurability* legitimation was achieved by switching from qualitative to quantitative, thereby providing a third well-informed viewpoint based on both qualitative and quantitative thinking.

Finally, *political* legitimation was achieved by the researcher taking multiple roles and therefore did not have to deal with power issues surrounding planning, conducting and using the research.

By attending successfully to all of the legitimation types for mixed methods research developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006), the author aimed best to minimize all possible validity (or legitimation) issues that may sometimes compromise the findings.

### **3. THE CONSTRUCTED MODELS AND RESEARCH RESULTS**

Presentation of the Models and discussion of the results in this section is structured based on the main purpose of the research and the research tasks presented in Figure 1. This section first presents the Model of Educational Experiences that draws on the qualitative survey (research task 3). The section then introduces the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) and the validated version of both the Model of Educational Experiences and the SCOMI (research tasks 4 and 5). This is followed by the presentation of the results of the survey which identify whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. The section finishes with theoretical, methodological and practical contributions as well as limitations and suggestions for further research (research tasks 6 and 7).

#### **3.1. The Model of Educational Experiences as the result of qualitative study**

In order to find out, at the level of educational experiences, whether or not students expect a HEI to be customer oriented, there was first the need to identify the categories of educational experience where a HEI could potentially practice student-customer orientation. Muncy (2008) states that education as such is multifaceted, and it would be wrong to ask whether a HEI as such should be student-customer oriented, as a number of studies have done (see e.g. Bristow & Schneider, 2002; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002 among others). Instead, one should investigate this matter at a deeper level, i.e. separately at the level of each category of the educational experience.

As stated in section 2.2, the tentative Model which the author constructed based on theoretical framework (see section 1.5) preceded the Model of Educational Experiences. To complement the tentative Model of Educational Experiences, the author used a qualitative survey, the aim of which was to identify even further categories of educational experience that existing literature might have missed or the author might have ignored. In addition to the nine categories in the tentative Model, the qualitative interviews produced further categories. Figure 4 depicts the Model of Educational Experiences at a HEI which emerged as a result of the qualitative phase of the study. The categories that appear on grey background were elicited from theoretical framework. Those on white emerged as a result of semi-structured interviews with students. The model and elaboration on its construction also follows.

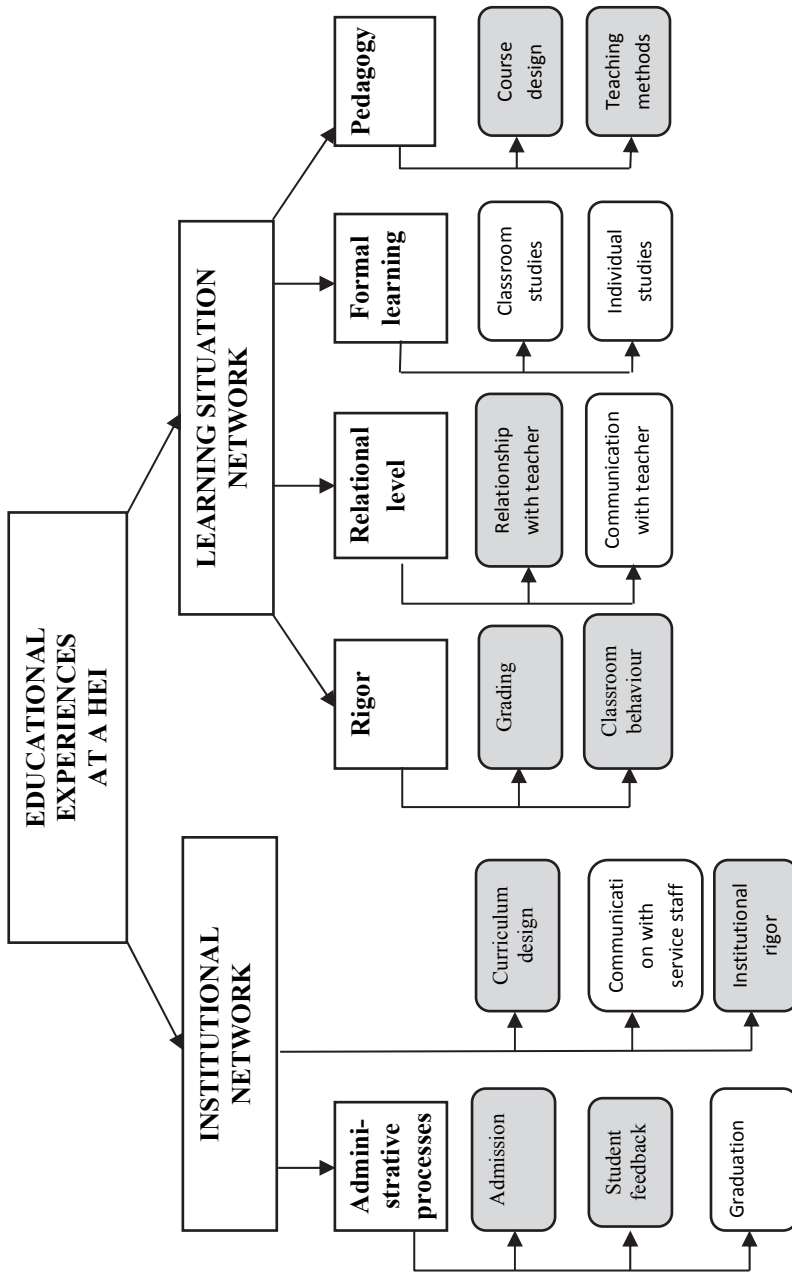


Figure 4 Model of Educational Experiences at a higher educational institution.

Source: compiled by author based on theoretical framework and semi-structured personal interviews

The Model of Educational Experiences in Figure 4 presents the different categories of educational experience which were elicited from theoretical background and semi-structured personal interviews. The content and origin of those categories which were elicited from the theoretical framework was presented in section 1.5. As a result of the semi-structured personal interviews, further categories were added to the Model of Educational Experiences. In addition to *admission*, *student feedback*, *institutional rigor*, *curriculum design*, *grading*, *relational level*, *behaviour related*, *teaching methods* and *course design* elicited from theoretical framework, the new categories that emerged as a result of the interviews include *graduation*, *communication with service staff*, *communication with the teacher*, *classroom studies* and *individual studies*. It must also be noted that the category *relational level* in the tentative model was established as a factor in the Model of Educational Experiences and incorporates the categories of *relationship with the teacher* and *communication with the teacher*. Also, category *behaviour related* was changed into *classroom behaviour* following the interviews as it better indicated the category's content. As a result of the interviews, the factor *pedagogy* was added and it incorporated categories *teaching methods* and *course design* that had already been identified within the theoretical framework. Additionally, the interviews also identified a new factor *formal learning* (containing the categories of *classroom studies* and *individual studies*) which had not been elicited from the theoretical framework. The Model of Educational Experiences thus includes 14 categories. The following will describe the content of the 14 categories in the model.

Category *admission* encompasses the level of selectivity which a HEI to employs during admission; *student feedback* refers to the (un)importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback; *graduation* includes the level of strictness or lenience a HEI to employs during student graduation; *curriculum design* incorporates designing the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum, i.e. whether it should be practical or theoretical; *communication with service staff* indicates the ease or difficulty of communicating with the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities outside the classroom in accommodating the students' requests; *institutional rigor* represents the lenience or strictness with which the HEI follows the established rules and regulations; *grading* refers to the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches the evaluation of various assignments; *classroom behaviour* indicates the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches students' (mis)behaviour in class and *relational level* indicates student-teacher closeness and friendliness or distance. *Communication with teacher* encompasses teachers' (un)approachability and how (in)convenient it is to approach them outside class hours; *classroom studies* indicate the (in)convenience and ease of classroom studies and *individual studies* determine whether or not a HEI expects students to make academic efforts outside class; *course design* contains the stakeholders responsible for designing the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical) and *teaching methods* indicate the use of modern and traditional techniques in teaching at a HEI.

The content of the categories served as an input in constructing the Student-

Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument. The content of the categories is also presented in Table 1 in section 2.4.

This stage of the research has also been published in International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives (Paper 1 in Appendix 1).

### **3.2. The Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) and validation of the SCOMI and Model of Educational Experiences**

The second research task was to operationalize the Model of Educational Experiences to a Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) and to validate both the Model and the Measurement Instrument using Bayesian Dependency Modeling (BDM).

The SCOMI presented in Paper 2 in Appendix 2 is the result of the operationalization of the Model of Educational Experiences. It was used in the quantitative phase of the study among 2nd and 3rd year business students ( $N=405$ ) in Estonia to identify the categories of educational experience in which they expect to be treated as customers.

The Measurement Instrument includes 90 items (plus nine demographic questions) and falls into two broader networks (*institution network* and *learning situation network*), which, accordingly, are divided into 14 categories of educational experience (*admission, student feedback, graduation, curriculum design, communication with service staff, institutional rigor, grading, classroom behaviour, relational level, communication with teacher, classroom studies, individual studies, teaching methods* and *course design*). The study aims at measuring student-customer orientation across all the 14 categories of educational experience.

Following the omission of the most skewed items, 51 items of 90 marked with an asterisk in Paper 2 (see Appendix 2) remained for further analysis. Upon having completed the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) separately for the two individual networks in the Measurement Instrument (the institutional and learning situation; 22 and 29 items, respectively), the factor analysis produced a six- and an eight-factor solution, which is in parallel with the Model of Educational Experiences.

Half of the reliability estimates in Table 2 below reached a satisfactory level of .70. This result is promising<sup>7</sup>, considering the initial stage of the optimization and validation process. It must be pointed out that both the correlations and internal consistency estimates rejected two categories, namely *admission* ( $\alpha = .32$ ) and *communication with the teacher* ( $\alpha = .30$ ). Nevertheless, because the instrument validation was at an initial stage, these as well as other categories with reliability estimates below .70 were also included in the next, BDM stage.

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<sup>7</sup> This finding is also present in the Paper 2 (Appendix 2), showing that from the psychometric perspective, the items selected for both Bayesian networks were exactly the same as accepted in this stage of the study.

Table 2. Internal consistency measures for the 14 categories in the Model of Educational Experiences

Category number	Category	Items in the category	Cronbach's Alpha
	<b>Institutional network</b>		
1	Admission	Q01, Q04	.32
2	Student feedback	Q05, Q06, Q07, Q08, Q09	.75
3	Graduation	Q13, Q14	.71
4	Curriculum design	Q18, Q19, Q23, Q24	.51
5	Communication with service staff	Q27, Q28, Q30	.70
6	Institutional rigor	Q34, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q39, Q40	.74
	<b>Learning situation network</b>		
7	Grading	Q42, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q47	.48
8	Classroom behaviour	Q48, Q49, Q51, Q52, Q53, Q54	.72
9	Relationship with teacher	Q58, Q61	.48
10	Communication with teacher	Q62, Q65	.30
11	Classroom studies	Q66, Q68	.58
12	Individual studies	Q71, Q74, Q76	.57
13	Teaching methods	Q77, Q78, Q79, Q81, Q84	.72
14	Course design	Q85, Q87, Q89, Q90	.73

Source: compiled by the author based on EFA

The next stage included the application of BDM to calculate the two networks in the Model of Educational Experiences. Based on the analysis, ten out of 14 theoretical categories were accepted in the most probable Bayesian network (Figure 5 below<sup>8</sup>). The omitted categories (due to a weakness or lack of linear or non-linear dependencies) in the Model of Educational Experiences were *admission*, *communication with service staff*, *relationship with the teacher* and *communication with the teacher*.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a standard way of presenting Bayesian models. The nodes in Figures 5 and 7 do not suggest that one category or question is part of another. E.g. categories *grading*, *classroom studies* and *course design* are not subcategories of *teaching methods* in Figure 5. Instead, nodes represent observed variables (or factors as combinations of several observed variables), and suggest that on the basis of the participants' answers in the survey, there is a statistically relevant connection (or a common response tendency) between the nodes.

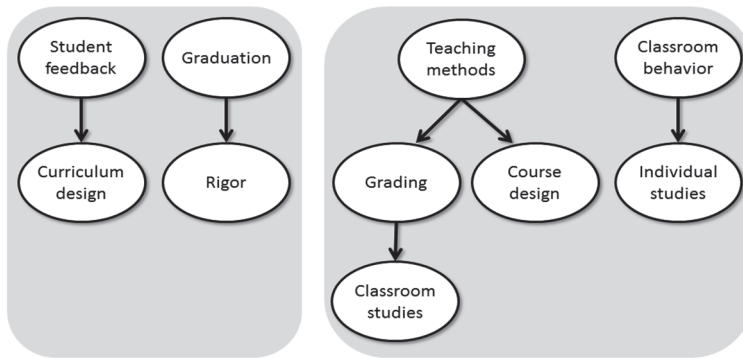


Figure 5 Category level dependencies: institutional (left-hand side) and learning situation (right-hand side) networks. *Source: compiled by the author based on Bayesian Dependency Modeling*

Nevertheless, instead of having only four categories (Figure 5, left-hand side), five categories in the institutional network were retained as the category of *communication with service staff* was also kept in the Model for the three reasons. First, because the EFA yielded a relatively strong internal consistency value ( $\alpha = .70$ ). Second, BDM validated the Measurement Instrument items in the category. Third, the topic of student-service staff communication featured strongly in the semi-structured interviews with students during the qualitative stage of the study.

In the learning situation network, BDM produced 6 categories (Figure 5, right-hand side) with the highest probability (*teaching methods, grading, classroom studies, course design, classroom behaviour and individual studies*) and rejected the categories of *relationship with the teacher* and *communication with the teacher*.

Based on EFA and BDM, the validated Model of Educational Experiences for student-customer orientation is presented in Figure 6.



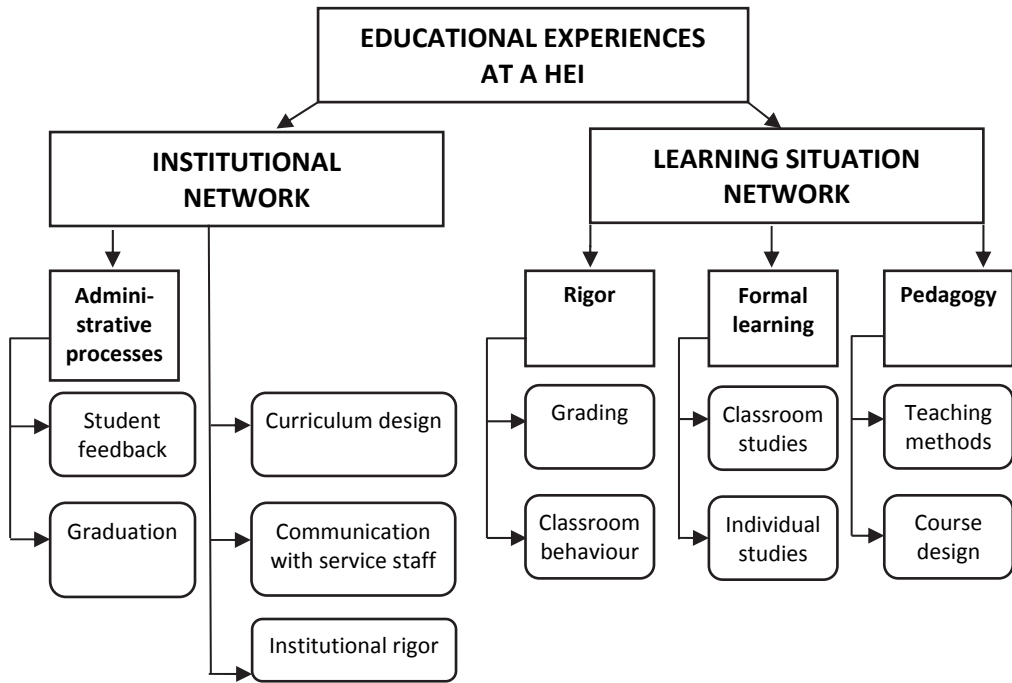


Figure 6 Validated Model of Educational Experiences. *Source: compiled by the author based on Bayesian Dependency Modeling*

Application of the BDM to detect the structure of the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument in Appendix 2 yielded two networks – a 14-item institutional and a 14-item learning situation network (see Figure 7, left-hand side and right-hand side, respectively).

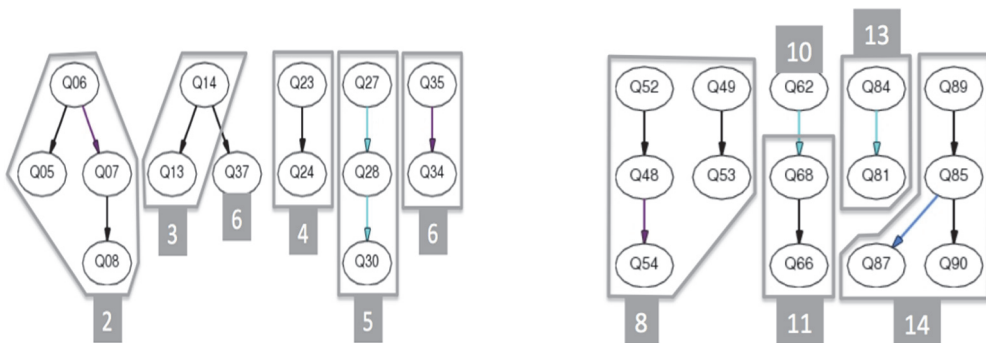


Figure 7 Item level dependencies in the SCOMI (see Paper 2 Appendix 1 for question labels and Paper 2 Table 1 for category labels). *Source: compiled by the author based on Bayesian Dependency Modeling*

The items with the highest probability in the institutional network are 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 34, 35 and 37 and in the learning situation network, the items with the highest probability are 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 62, 66, 68, 81, 84, 85, 87, 89 and 90 (Figure 7). It must also be pointed out that even though BDM rejected all the items on the category of *grading* and *individual studies*, the items with the strongest correlations and least skewness (42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 71, 74 and 76) were retained for the following reason: BDM validated the two categories in the Model and the two categories featured very strongly in the related literature on student-customer orientation as well as semi-structured interviews.

To summarize, the results of the Instrument-level analysis (Figure 7) were promising from the psychometric perspective as the items selected for both Bayesian networks were exactly the same as accepted by the normality analysis in the first phase. The validation of the Model of Educational Experiences (Figure 6) and the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (Paper 2 in Appendix 2) has been accepted for publication in *International Journal of Educational Management*.

### 3.3. Results of the student-customer orientation survey

This section will present the results of the research carried out among undergraduate business students at four HEIs offering business education in Estonia.

The data was collected from 405 respondents (20% of all the undergraduate business students in Estonia). It was first processed in SPSS. Reverse questions in the questionnaire were re-coded and arithmetical averages were calculated by questions and by categories of educational experience; standard deviations of the averages as well as statistical error margins were calculated at 95% confidence level.

Table 3 below presents the results of the survey by the 11 categories of educational experiences. Content of each of the category can be found in column 2 in the table.

Table 3. Average evaluations and standard deviations by categories of educational experience

<b>Category of educational experience</b>	<b>Content of the category</b>	<b>Average evaluation on a 6-point scale</b>	<b>SD</b>
Student feedback	the (un)importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback	5.1	0.7
Graduation	the level of strictness or lenience an HEI to employs during student graduation	4.7	0.9
Curriculum design	expectations towards who designs the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum (practical vs. theoretical)	4.3	1.1

Communication with service staff	the ease or difficulty of communicating with the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities outside the classroom in accommodating the students' requests	3.8	1.1
Rigor	the lenience or strictness with which the HEI follows the established rules and regulations	4.5	0.8
Grading	the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach the evaluation of various assignments	3.0	0.6
Classroom behaviour	the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches students' (mis)behaviour in class	4.4	0.9
Classroom studies	convenience and ease of classroom studies	5.5	0.6
Individual studies	whether or not an HEI expects students to make academic efforts outside class	3.4	0.9
Teaching methods	the use of modern and traditional techniques in teaching at an HEI	4.0	1.1
Course design	the stakeholders responsible for designing the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical) (practical vs. theoretical)	4.5	0.8

*Source: compiled by the author based on the data analysis*

To calculate reliability estimates for the coherent items, Pallant (2001) suggests calculating the mean inter-item correlations in case the number of items in the scale is less than ten (the most number of questions per one category in the Measurement Instrument is five – categories *grading* and *classroom behaviour*). The mean inter-item correlations of the items in the Instrument are presented below (see Table 4).

Table 4. Mean inter-item correlations for the 11 categories of educational experience

Category of educational experience	Mean inter-item correlations
<b>Institutional network</b>	
Student feedback	0.4
Graduation	0.4
Curriculum design	0.4
Communication with service staff	0.4
Rigor	0.4
<b>Learning situation network</b>	
Grading	0.2
Classroom behaviour	0.4
Classroom studies	0.4
Individual studies	0.3
Teaching methods	0.4
Course design	0.4

*Source: compiled by the author based on the data analysis*

According to Pallant (2001), the optimal mean inter-item correlation values range from 0.2-0.4. As can be seen in Table 4, all correlations appear as optimal (0.2-0.4), thus indicating the reliability of the category and the items in it.

### 3.4. Discussion

The aim of this doctoral dissertation was to contribute to the concept of student-customer orientation and to identify, at the detailed level of different educational experiences, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented. The following discussion of the results of the study will concentrate only on those 11 categories of educational experience which were validated by BDM (see Figure 6 in section 3.2). The letters *M* and *SD* that appear in brackets by each category stand for Mean and Standard Deviation, respectively.

The category of *student feedback* has been elaborated by many authors in existing literature (see, e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Holbrook, 2004; Koris, 2012; Muncy, 2008, among others). Results of this study confirm that students expect the HEI to collect and act on their feedback ( $M = 5.1$ ;  $SD = 0.76$ ). The results suggest that in the event of dissatisfaction among students the HEI should address the issue indicated by students and act accordingly. Thus, in terms of the category of student feedback, students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

In terms of *graduation*, students are mostly of the opinion that graduating a HEI should entail hard work ( $M = 4.7$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ). They claim that it is not the responsibility of a HEI, but that of the student to make an effort to earn the degree. Interestingly perhaps, this result is in conflict with those authors who claim that students defer the responsibility for learning to their educators (see e.g. Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Holbrook, 2004). Thus, the findings of the study did not support those authors who state that students expect to be made work as little as possible and still receive the diploma/degree.

Concerning the category of *curriculum design*, the results show that students expect a curriculum to be practical and compiled based on the expertise of several stakeholders ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ). They do not expect to be consulted on what a HEI should teach (see also Muncy, 2008). This result is quite contrary to Clayson & Haley (2005), who claim that students have a definite idea of what they would like to study (for further discussion on this topic see also Driscoll & Wicks, 1998; Holbrook & Hulbert, 2002). Nevertheless, it must also be pointed out that while drawing up a curriculum, a HEI should, in addition to its own expertise, also rely on alumni and employers.

Within the category of educational experience titled *communication with service staff*, students' expectations to activities related to their studies outside classroom were measured. The results indicate that students rather expect to be treated as customers ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ) in the communication with the service staff. They consider it the service staff's responsibility to inform them of any changes, to work out their study calendar to the students' satisfaction and help them solve problems

related to deadlines. Thus, in this respect, students rather expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. Nevertheless, the results show that students prefer the HEI to be uncompromising and *rigorous* in following its own regulations ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = 0.84$ ). They believe that a HEI should be strict concerning the established deadlines and rule-breaking.

Regarding the category of *grading*, Helms & Key (1994) state that students feel entitled to good grades because they pay the tuition fee. There are those who claim that students expect assessment should be easy and generous (see, e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2003). Even though this study shows that students do not have a clear inclination in terms of this issue ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ), results indicate that students do not expect to be graded generously just because they pay the tuition fee.

Concerning *classroom behaviour*, related literature demonstrates that teachers feel they have had to reduce academic standards (Eagle & Brennan, 2007), have turned into salespeople (Hussey and Smith, 2010) and sometimes feel the I-pay-your-salary-so give-me-what-I-want attitude among students (see, e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery & Tian, 2002; Helms & Key, 1994). However, the survey shows that this is not how the students feel ( $M = 4.4$ ;  $SD = 0.94$ ). They rather expect teachers to establish and follow the rules. They also expect teachers to express discontent towards those who are late for a class, ignore deadlines, cheat and engage in activities unrelated to classroom studies.

Regarding the category of *classroom studies*, the study results are rather in line with what existing literature suggests. According to Eagle and Brennan (2007), students want new material to be concise and pre-processed in the form, for example, PowerPoint presentations and, additionally, uploaded to an internet environment for their convenient access. This was supported by the survey ( $M = 5.5$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ) and demonstrates that in terms of classroom teaching, students expect to be treated as customers.

In terms of *individual studies*, existing literature claims that students are unwilling to make academic efforts outside class hours (see e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Emery & Tian, 2002; Holbrook, 2005; Sword, 2009). The results of the study rather confirm this and indicate that students would rather not work individually outside class hours ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ). Thus, even though studying is believed to be a journey where things are discovered, rather than pointed at (see e.g. Starkey & Tempest, 2009), this is not how the students feel.

Concerning the category of *teaching methods*, existing literature frequently claims that students want learning to be fun and based on as much interactive methods as possible (see e.g. Chonko et al., 2002; Holbrook, 2004; Koris, 2012). The findings confirm the claims ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ) – students rather expect teachers to employ methods which are interactive and entertaining. Nevertheless, concerning the category of *course design*, the results are in agreement with Muncy (2008), according to whom the teacher, having the proper credentials to teach the class, is positioned best to decide which topics should be covered within a course (see also Obermiller et al., 2005; Snyder, 2007) ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = 0.86$ ). Still, students

expect knowledge passed on during the course from the teacher to the students to be practical rather than theoretical. They also expect a HEI to increase the dissemination of practical knowledge at the expense of theoretical. The following Table 4 summarizes the research findings and presents the students' expectations concerning whether or not they expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented by the 11 categories in the validated Model of Educational Experiences.

Table 5. Students' expectations to student-customer orientation at a HEI (business students' perspective)

	Yes	Rather yes	Rather no	No	Comment
<b>Institutional level</b>					
Student feedback	X				Expect a HEI to collect and act on students' feedback
Graduation				X	Expect graduation to require hard work
Curriculum design			X		Expect curriculum to be practical and based on the expertise of several stakeholders, not just the HEI; admit that they are rather illiterate to dictate what a curriculum must contain
Communication with service staff		X			Consider it the service staff's responsibility to inform students of changes, to work out their study calendar in a way that suits the students best and help them solve problems related to deadlines
Institutional rigor			X		Expect a HEI to be rather uncompromising in having the students follow HEI's rules and regulations
<b>Classroom level</b>					
Grading					Remain undecided in terms of this category ( $M = 3.0$ ; $SD = 0.63$ )
Classroom behaviour			X		Expect teachers to rather frown upon students' misbehaviour in classes and to studying
Classroom studies	X				Expect material to be presented in a concise and processed form, available to download in the internet and as practical as possible
Individual studies		X			Rather consider classroom studying to be sufficient
Teaching methods		X			Rather expect teachers to employ methods which are interactive and entertaining
Course design		X			Rather admit that they are incompetent to dictate the content of a course, but expect a course to be practical

Source: compiled by the author based on survey results

Thus, the research results indicate that existing literature may have misrepresented or overgeneralized student’s views on student-customer orientation within several specific areas: when it suggests that they refuse to take responsibility for their studies and blame teachers for the mediocre results; when it states that students expect to have a say in what they should learn and which assignments must be done and graded; when it claims that students want to do the minimum to get the maximum and when it suggests that students treat teachers as salespeople whose salaries they are paying. However, although students admit that they cannot be relied on to be consulted on the issues of curriculum and course design, they expect the content of education to be practical rather than theoretical.

The following Table 6 presents the discrepancies between viewpoints in theoretical framework and findings of the study by the 11 categories of educational experience in the validated model.

Table 6. Discrepancies between viewpoints in theoretical framework and findings of the study

<b>Category of educational experience</b>	<b>Discrepancy</b>
Student feedback	
Graduation	X
Curriculum design	X
Communication with service staff	
Institutional rigor	X
Grading	X
Classroom behaviour	X
Classroom studies	
Individual studies	
Teaching methods	
Course design	

Source: compiled by the author based on survey results

In terms of socio-demographic and category-level correlations, there were no gender-dependent statistically significant differences in students’ expectations. Calculations on age-dependent differences were not conducted because 65% of the respondents belonged in the same age group (21–24 years) and the remaining age groups contained too few respondents to draw valid conclusions. However, in the categories of *communication with service staff* (category 5), *institutional rigor* (category 6), *classroom behaviour* (category 8), *individual studies* (category 12) and *grading* (category 7) there were statistically significant differences between those students who pay and those who do not pay for their education. Correlation analyses showed that paying students expect the service staff to accommodate their wishes more than non-paying students ( $M = 3.9$ ;  $SD = 1.13$  and  $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ , respectively),  $r_s = -.123$ ,  $p = .013$ . Paying students ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) expect the HEI to be less strict in following the established rules and regulations than non-

paying students ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .75$ ),  $r_s = .117$ ,  $p = .018$ . They also expect teachers to be more tolerant towards their (mis)behaviour in class ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .88$ ) than non-paying students ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .83$ ),  $r_s = -.139$ ,  $p = .005$ . Further, paying students expect individual studies to be more convenient and easy ( $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = .91$ ) than non-paying students ( $M = 3.1$ ;  $SD = .88$ ),  $r_s = -.103$ ,  $p = .039$ . Thus, just as has been pointed out in section 1.3 in discussion concerning whether or not the payment of the tuition fee should warrant being treated as customers, the results indicate that it is rather the fee-paying students who expect to be treated as customers than those who are not paying for their education. However, an interesting finding in this survey shows that compared to non-paying students, paying students expect teachers to be more strict in grading ( $M = 4.2$ ;  $SD = .68$  vs.  $M = 4.4$ ;  $SD = .72$ , respectively,  $r_s = -.135$ ,  $p = .006$ ). The author finds this to be a relevant and interesting finding considering the fact that existing literature more often than not claims that students expect the payment of a tuition fee to guarantee generous grades. It must be noted, however, that the effect sizes of these correlations were small according to Cohen (1988).

The research carried out in this dissertation has contributed to settling the debate on student-customer orientation at least to some extent and in some respects. Unlike former studies indicate, the research results show that students do not expect the acquiring of their education to be just an enjoyable consumption experience with no or very little effort on their part. In other words, strictness in education is part of students' educations and relying on this, if a HEI offering business education wishes to position itself as customer oriented, it should be strict (based on the findings, it should be difficult to graduate from a HEI, the curriculum should be designed based on academic considerations, students should be required to adhere to academic standards in the classroom and the institution as such should be rigorous in its rules and regulations). The research findings can be used as a strong argument to counter those who conceptualize student-customer orientation as meeting students' short-term expectations and implementing this orientation across all categories of educational experience; and to support those who have faith in the young generation and their willingness to acknowledge that the obtaining of education entails assuming responsibility.

Having analysed and presented the findings, the author hopes that a valuable contribution has been made to identify, at the level of each educational experience, whether business students themselves expect a HEI to treat them as customers. This stage of the research has also been accepted for publication in *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* special issue *Customer, Collaborator, or Co-creator? What is the role of the student in a changing higher education servicescape*. (Paper 3 in Appendix 3).



## CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation is based on three independent research papers, each feeding into the next one and connected by a common topic, which is student-customer orientation at a higher educational institution (HEI). The dissertation aims at contributing with theoretical, methodological and practical findings to existing literature on student-customer orientation which currently stands vastly polarized and, on many occasions, hostile towards students in its tone of voice. The research conducted also shows that the few empirical studies conducted so far on the topic stand conclusive and produce similar results mainly because the authors have approached the topic at a too general level, as the more detailed-level research conducted in this dissertation reveals. The problem of this research rests with today's intense competition in the sector of education and in many HEIs having positioned themselves as customer-oriented institutions and they have done so without prior in-depth knowledge on whether or not students as the beneficiaries of education expect a HEI to be customer oriented. However, this knowledge is of utmost relevance when positioning a HEI as a customer oriented institution. Thus, the main aim of the dissertation **is to contribute to the concept of student-customer orientation and to identify, at the detailed level of different educational experiences, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented.**

In order to achieve this purpose, the author has set the following research tasks:

- Task 1: to summarize and analyse the theoretical framework for customer orientation within the marketing concept, marketization of higher education and student-customer orientation;
- Task 2: based on theoretical framework, to develop a tentative Model of Educational Experiences;
- Task 3: to conduct semi-structured personal interviews with students to complement the tentative Model of Educational Experiences based on theoretical framework;
- Task 4: to operationalize the complemented Model of Educational Experiences into a Measurement Instrument and carry out a quantitative study among undergraduate business students;
- Task 5: to validate the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument and the Model of Educational Experiences using Bayesian Dependency Modeling;
- Task 6: to present the results of the quantitative study and contribute to the debate on student-customer orientation;
- Task 7: to discuss theoretical and practical implications and further research areas.

To ensure that the research probes deeper than previous research, the first step was to identify the categories of educational experience that a student encounters during his studies. The rationale for this rests with Muncy (2008), according to whom education as such is multifaceted and in order to research the phenomenon, the facets (or categories) of educational experience must first be identified. Because the research aims were achieved in different academic papers that served as the basis for this dissertation, the achievement of the research tasks indicated above will be discussed within the framework of the three academic papers that this dissertations is based on.

**Paper 1** (Appendix 1), which aims at achieving research tasks 1, 2 and 3, concentrates on constructing the Model of Educational Experiences (Figure 4 in section 3.1) based on theoretical framework. This Model was then complemented with further categories of educational experience which theoretical framework had either failed to cover or which the author had failed to identify. To complement the tentative Model, the author resorted to qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with undergraduate business students. Directed content analysis with data-driven approach of the interview transcripts was used to obtain thematic codes which were later used to construct the Model of Educational Experiences. Based on theoretical framework and the qualitative survey, the author was able to identify that the educational experiences consisted of 14 categories: *admission, student feedback, graduation, curriculum design, communication with service staff* and *institutional rigor* within the institutional network, and *grading, classroom behaviour, relationship with the teacher, communication with the teacher, classroom studies, individual studies, teaching methods* and *course design* within the learning situation network. The contribution of Paper 1 lies in the creation of the Model of Educational experiences and on the contribution into the discussion on the appropriateness of student-customer orientation at a HEI offering business education within each of the category of educational experience.

**Paper 2** (Appendix 2), which addresses research tasks 4 and 5, operationalizes the Model of Educational Experiences into the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument (SCOMI) and validates the Model as well as the Measurement Instrument using Bayesian Dependency Modeling. The initial Measurement Instrument consisted of 90 items and contained the same categories as those in the Model of Educational Experiences. Following Bayesian Dependency Modeling, the aim of which was to firstly validate the results of parametric analysis with non-parametric analysis; secondly to investigate both linear and non-linear (Nokelainen, Silander, Ruohotie, & Tirri, 2007) dependencies between the variables and find a Bayesian Network describing these dependencies; and finally to validate the Model of Educational Experiences as well as the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument, the results yielded a validated Model of Educational Experiences containing 11 categories (instead of the initial 14) and a validated Instrument including 34 items (instead of the initial 90) (Figure 6 in section 3.2 and Paper 2 in Appendix 2, respectively). Paper 2 contributes to existing theoretical and empirical evidence with the validated Model of Educational Experiences and

validated Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument which may be applied in different settings and diverse body of students for other (comparative) studies.

**Paper 3** (Appendix 3) completes research tasks 6 and 7. Using a quantitative survey among business students in Estonia ( $N = 405$ ), the author of the dissertation identifies whether, in which categories of educational experience in the Model and to what extent students expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented and by doing so hopes to achieve the main aim of the dissertation. It also seeks to contribute to theoretical framework with the findings. The results demonstrate that students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not all categories of educational experience. The categories where they perceive themselves as customers are *student feedback* and *classroom studies* and to some extent also *communication with service staff*, *individual studies*, *teaching methods* and *course design*. However, they do not expect to be treated as customers in the category of *graduation*, and to some extent also *curriculum design*, *institutional rigor* and *classroom behaviour*. Concerning the category of *grading*, the results show that students favour neither lenient nor strict grading ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = .63$ ). Therefore, this category might need further investigation in the future. For an overview of the research findings, see (see Table 5 in section 3.4). The contribution of Paper 3 lies in the identification of the categories of educational experience where students expect to be treated as customers. It must also be pointed out that because acquiring depth into researching the phenomenon by breaking education up into meaningful categories was an aim from the very outset, the findings probe much deeper than existing studies have done and therefore offer new insight into the phenomenon. Additionally, this research shows that unlike many academics state and existing studies indicate, students consider a student-customer oriented school to be strict and rigorous in several categories. Based on the results of the research, Paper 3 also offers practical implications for HEIs offering business education who wish to position themselves as student-customer oriented institutions.

Concerning socio-demographic correlations of the results, the only statistically significant differences were found between those students who pay for their education and those who do not. Compared to non-paying students, paying students appeared more demanding when communicating with the service staff; they expected the HEI to be more flexible in following the rules and regulations and look for a higher degree of teachers' tolerance towards students' misbehaviour; also compared to non-paying students, they expect individual studies to be less demanding. This result substantiated the claim in theoretical framework, according to which students believe that they payment of the tuition fee should ensure that the HEI treats them as customers. Yet, in comparison with non-paying students, paying students expect teachers to be stricter while grading. This finding is in conflict with arguments in theoretical framework, according to which the payment of the tuition fee should guarantee good grades. It must be noted, though, that according to Cohen (1988), the effect sizes of these correlations were small.

The following section will describe the author's theoretical, methodological and practical contribution throughout the dissertation.

### *Theoretical and methodological contribution of the thesis*

The author has made a contribution by mapping the educational experiences based on theoretical framework. Furthermore, based on semi-structured interviews with students and following directed content analysis with a data-driven approach of the interview transcripts, the author has constructed and validated **the Model of Educational Experiences** which introduces the different categories of educational experience. The Model serves as a meaningful categorization of the experiences that students encounter during their studies at a HEI. In this dissertation, the Model was used to construct the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument. However, it is hoped that the Model also provides a foundation for further research in education.

Additionally, the author's contribution lies in the construction and validation of the **Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument** which assesses whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI offering business education to treat them as customers. The Model of Educational Experiences and the Instrument have been validated using Bayesian Dependency Modeling and the study as a whole has been legitimized based on typology developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006).

Furthermore, the author **has contributed to the polarized debate on the topic of student-customer orientation and has identified the categories of educational experience where students expect/do not expect a HEI to be customer-oriented.** This study has shown that even though students expect to be treated as customer in some categories of educational experience (e.g. *feedback* and *classroom studies*), there are also categories where they consider student-customer orientation to be inappropriate (e.g. *graduation*, *curriculum design* and *institutional rigor*). It therefore appears that existing literature has done injustice to students on several accounts: contrary to what it holds, students believe that they should work hard before they earn a degree; they do not expect to be consulted on the subjects included in the curriculum or topics in a course and they expect a HEI and teachers to be rigorous towards students' misbehaviour.

**Another contribution of this research is to existing empirical evidence.** Studies have so far concluded that students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. The author has showed that existing empirical evidence mainly appears conclusive because the phenomenon has been studied at a too general level and if education as such is divided into meaningful categories and the phenomenon is studied within these categories, i.e. at a deeper rather than general level, the results are not as conclusive, but rather more versatile.

### *Practical contribution of the thesis*

The author has identified the categories of educational experience where students expect a HEI offering business education to be student-customer oriented. As the study was conducted among state-subsidized and private, for-profit and not-for-profit HEIs offering business education, it can be inferred that regardless of the form of governmentality and sources of income, a HEI, which, has decided to position itself as a student-customer oriented institution must bear in mind that being student-customer oriented does not mean embracing the same orientation across all the educational experiences.

If a HEI offering business education decides to adopt student-customer orientation at the undergraduate level to full extent, it should collect feedback, address the issues indicated by students and act accordingly. Also, while employing service staff, the HEI should have the employees ensure a smooth flow support services to contribute to students' satisfaction. Additionally, the HEI should have the teachers offer new material in a concise and processed form, upload the material conveniently for the students to access at any time in a web-based environment and require little academic work outside class hours. A student-customer oriented HEI should also have its teachers use interactive teaching methods and ensure that the course content is of practical nature.

However, a student-customer oriented HEI should not emphasize the ease of graduation as students expect the acquiring of the credentials to be hard work. Neither should a HEI consult their students on contributing to the designing of the curriculum or a course – undergraduate students claim that they are illiterate in this matter and trust the school and the teacher to know best. Additionally, a student-customer oriented HEI should be rigorous in its established rules and regulations both in- and outside the classroom and ensure that rule-breaking is punished.

### *Limitations and future research*

The author of this dissertation considers the greatest limitation of this study to be the fact that the results rely on a single country and that the demographics of the respondents represent local students only. It would therefore be most interesting to conduct a similar study in different regions of the world with a more versatile body of students. The fact that the findings apply only to HEIs offering business education represents a further limitation of the research.

Another limitation of the study is what Krosnick and Presser (2010) call “the social desirability response bias”, according to which respondent intend to be associated with socially desirable answers (see also Fowler, 2009; Nardi, 2003). To ensure that students give true instead of socially desirable answers, a self-administered survey questionnaire was used which, according to Fowler is useful when dealing with a sensitive topic or socially undesirable or negatively valued attitude and which greatly helps to minimize such bias (2009, p. 74). It is also hoped

that the anonymity and the confidentiality of the survey contributed to reducing the social desirability bias.

The author of the dissertation also acknowledges that the Model of Educational Experiences and its categories may not necessarily be exhaustive in all countries, cultures and contexts for there might be categories or services that exist in some, but not all HEIs across the world. In order to address this issue, the Measurement Instrument, if used in a setting where educational experiences are larger or more versatile in number, may be modified to fit the context of the HEI at hand. Nevertheless, the categories of educational experience identified in this dissertation are believed to be universal and hold for different contexts and cultures. It is also hoped that the legitimization of the design of the study contributed to minimizing possible weaknesses in the Model, the Measurement Instrument and the results.

Additionally, since the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument was developed and validated so that it may be readily applied in different settings and diverse body of students, the author recommends conducting additional empirical studies. Further research could be carried out among students majoring in different disciplines (e.g. medicine, arts, etc) and those at different levels of education (e.g. master students), but also among other possible settings (e.g. part-time students) and populations. It is also hoped that the Model of Educational Experiences, the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument and the results of the study pave the way for further comparative research.

### *Inconsistencies between Papers 1, 2, 3 and the review article*

The author would like to point out that the writing of this dissertation was rarely a linear process, but rather a journey with many detours where some aspects and their names changed during the course of writing, often after a paper had been published or accepted for publication. For example in Paper 1, the *Model of Educational Experiences* is referred to as *Model for Student-Customer Orientation at a HEI* and it was only at a later stage that the name was changed to *Model of Educational Experiences*, as referred to in Papers 2 and 3 as well as the review article. The name was changed because, in the author's opinion, it better represented the Model's content.

Also, the category of *rigor* in the Model of Educational Experiences exists both as a category of educational experience (in the *institutional network*) and as a factor (in the *learning situation network*). In order to distinguish better between the factor and the category bearing the same name, the former was changed into *institutional rigor* in Paper 3 and the review article.

Similarly, the factor *student-teacher relationship* in Papers 1 and 2 was changed into *relational level* in Paper 3 and the review article, and the categories within this factor into *relationship with the teacher* and *communication with the teacher* (*relational level* and *communication*, respectively in Papers 1 and 2).

The name Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire was also changed into Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument in the review article as it is rather a tool to collect data. It is referred to as a questionnaire only in those sections which describe its filling in by the students.

Nevertheless, the author is of the opinion that the changes made did not alter the research procedure, content or findings.

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## KOKKUVÕTE

Käesolev doktoritöö toetub kolmele üksteisega seotud teadusartiklile ning selle peamine eesmärk on uurida ja selgitada, kas, millistes hariduskogemuste kategooriates ja mil määral eeldavad tudengid kõrgharidusasutuselt kliendikeskset lähenemist. Selleks on autor püstitanud alljärgnevad uurimisülesanded:

- ülesanne 1: uurida ja analüüsida turunduskontseptsiooni, turukeskse hariduskeskkonna ja kliendikeskse lähenemise teoreetilist viiteraamistikku;
- ülesanne 2: põhinedes teoreetilisele viiteraamistikule konstrueerida esialgne hariduskogemusi sisaldav hariduskogemuste mudel;
- ülesanne 3: viia läbi poolstruktureeritud intervjuud äriharidust omandavate tudengitega, et täiendada esialgset hariduskogemuste mudelit uute võimalike hariduskogemuste kategooriatega;
- ülesanne 4: koostada hariduskogemuse mudeli ja selle kategooriate põhjal uuringuinstrument, mis mõõdab tudengite ootusi kliendikesksele lähenemisele kõrgharidusasutuses ning viia läbi uuring äriharidust omandavate tudengite seas;
- ülesanne 5: valideerida hariduskogemuste mudel ja uuringuinstrument, kasutades selleks *Bayesian Dependency Modeling* meetodikat;
- ülesanne 6: esitada uuringu tulemused ning panustada kõrgharidusasutuse kliendikeskset lähenemist puudutavasse diskussiooni;
- ülesanne 7: tuua välja uuringu teoreetiline ja rakenduslik panus ning edasised uurimisvaldkonnad.

Et käesolev uuring oleks sügavam ja mitmetahulisem kui olemasolevad uuringud, selgitab autor kõigepealt välja hariduskogemuse kategooriad, millega tudeng õpingute vältel kokku puutub (uurimisülesanne 1). Selleks kasutab autor erinevaid strateegiaid, töötab esmalt läbi vastavateemalist teoreetilist viiteraamistikku ja koostab esialgse hariduskogemuste mudeli. Lisaks viib doktoritöö autor läbi poolstruktureeritud intervjuud teise ja kolmanda kursuse äriharidust omandavate tudengitega ning täiendab esialgset hariduskogemuste mudelit. Tuginedes olemasolevale kirjandusele ja poolstruktureeritud intervjuudele, koosneb hariduskogemus alljärgnevatest kategooriatest: *sisseastumine, tagasiside kogumine, ülikooli lõpetamine, õppekava koostamine, suhtlemine teenindava personaliga, haridusasutuse rangus, hindamine, käitumine loengus, õppimine loengus, iseseisev õppimine, õpetamismeetodid ja kursuse ülesehitus*. Hariduskogemuste mudeli konstrueerimisega täidab doktoritöö autor esimese uurimisülesande. Artikkel 1 lisas 1 kirjeldab täpsemalt selle mudeli konstrueerimist.

Järgnevalt konstrueerib doktoritöö autor hariduskogemuste mudelile toetudes uuringuinstrumenti, mille eesmärgiks on mõõta tudengite ootusi kliendikesksele lähenemisele kõrgharidusasutuses, ning viib läbi uuringu teise ja kolmanda kursuse äriharidust omandavate bakalaureusetudengite seas neljas Eesti ülikoolis ( $N = 405$ , mis moodustab 20% kõikidest teise ja kolmanda kursuse äriharidust omandavatest

bakalaureusetudengitest Eestis). Järgnevalt valideerib autor nii uuringuinstrumendi kui ka hariduskogemuste mudeli, kasutades *Bayesian Dependency Modeling* meetodikat. Valideeritud mudel koosneb 11st hariduskogemuse kategooriast (esialgse 14 kategooria asemel; vt. lisa 2) ning valideeritud uuringuinstrument 34 küsimusest (esialgse 90 küsimuse asemel; vt. lisa 2). *Bayesian Dependency Modeling* meetodika valideeris alljärgnevad hariduskogemuste kategooriad: *tagasiside kogumine, ülikooli lõpetamine, õppekava koostamine, suhtlemine teenindava personaliga, haridusastutuse rangus, hindamine, käitumine loengus, õppimine loengus, iseseisev õppimine, õpetamismeetodid ja kursuse ülesehitus*. Meetodika lükkas tagasi kategooriad *sisseastumine, õppejõu ja tudengi vahelised suhted ning õppejõu ja tudengi vaheline kommunikatsioon*. Konstrueeritud uuringuinstrumendi koostamise ning hariduskogemuste mudeli ja instrumendi valideerimisega täidab autor teise uurimisülesande. Artikkel 2 lisas 2 kirjeldab detailselt selle uurimisülesande lahendamist.

Toetudes valideeritud hariduskogemuste mudelile ja uuringuinstrumendile, analüüsib doktoritöö autor uuringu tulemusi. Analüüsile tuginedes võib väita, et bakalaureusetudengid eeldavad ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist mõnes, kuid mitte igas hariduskogemuse kategoorias. Kategooriad, milles tudengid ootavad ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist, on *tagasiside kogumine* ja *õppimine loengus*, samuti mingil määral *suhtlemine teenindava personaliga, iseseisev õppimine, õpetamismeetodid* ja *kursuse ülesehitus*. Kategooriad, milles tudengid ei oota ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist, on *ülikooli lõpetamine* ning mingil määral ka *õppekava koostamine, haridusastutuse rangus* ja *käitumine loengus*. Mis puutub kategooriasse *hindamine*, siis ei väljendanud tudengid selget ootust ei leebe ega range hindamise osas ( $M = 3,0$ ;  $SD = 0,63$ ), mistõttu tuleks seda kategooriat tulevikus täiendavalt uurida.

Uuringutulemuste analüüs näitas, et ainsad statistiliselt olulised erinevused esinevad õppemaksu maksvate ja õppemaksu mittemaksvate tudengite vahel. Õppemaksu mittemaksvate tudengitega võrreldes on õppemaksu maksvad tudengid nõudlikumad teenindava personaliga suhtlemise osas, ootavad ülikoolilt reeglitest kinnipidamise osas mõningat paindlikkust ning näevad hea meelega, et õppejõud suhtuksid leebemini sellesse, kui tudengid hilinevad või tähtaegadest kinni ei pea. Küll aga eeldavad nad õppejõududelt rangemat hindamist kui õppemaksu mittemaksvad tudengid. Tuleb aga märkida, et Coheni (1988) järgi on korrelatsioonid võrdlemisi väikesed. Uuringu tulemuste analüüsi ning kirjeldamisega täidab autor kolmanda uurimisülesande ja ka doktoritöö peamise eesmärgi. Artikkel 3 lisas 3 kirjeldab uuringutulemusi detailsemalt.

Doktoritöö peamise eesmärgi täitmise ning uurimisülesannete lahendamise panustab käesoleva doktoritöö autor nii olemasolevasse akadeemilisse kirjandusse kui ka meetodikasse. Valideeritud hariduskogemuste mudel jagab hariduse omandamise tähenduslikesse kategooriatesse. Kuigi antud doktoritöös kasutati hariduskategooriate mudelit vaid tudengite ootuste väljaselgitamiseks kliendikesksuse osas, loodab autor, et edaspidised haridusalased uuringud leiavad sellele ka laiemat rakendust. Lisaks seisneb autori panus uuringuinstrumendi väljatöötamises

ja valideerimises. Valideerimisel kasutas autor *Bayesian Dependency Modeling* meetodikat ning kõiki uuringuetappe analüüsis autor Onwuegbuzie' ja Johnsoni (2006) tüpoloogiale tuginedes.

Samuti panustab autor käesoleva doktoritööga olemasolevasse polariseerunud arutelusse akadeemilises kirjanduses teemal tudeng kui ülikooli klient. Käesolev uuring näitab, et kuigi tudengid ootavad ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist mõningates hariduskogemuse kategooriates (nt *tagasiside kogumine* ja *loengus õppimine*), esineb ka selliseid hariduskogemuse kategooriaid, milles tudengid ei oota ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist (nt *ülikooli lõpetamine* ja *haridusasukuse rangus*).

Olemasolevad empiirilised uuringud näivad ühel meelel kinnitavat, et tudengid ootavad ülikoolilt kliendikeskset lähenemist. Autor panustab olemasolevatesse uuringutesse uute, hoopis teistsuguste tulemustega, mis näitavad, et kui antud fenomeni uurida sügavamalt, st hariduskategooriate kaupa, ei ole tudengite ootused sugugi nii ühesed kui olemasolevad uuringud kinnitavad.

Doktoritöö rakenduslik panus hõlmab nende hariduskogemuste väljaselgitamist, milles tudengid ootavad kõrgharidusasutuselt kliendikeskset lähenemist. Sellest tulenevalt võib doktoritöö autor soovitada, et kui kõrgharidusasutus otsustab end positsioneerida kliendikeskse haridusasukusena, tuleb tal koguda tudengitelt tagasisidet ning viia koolikorralduses sisse tudengite tagasisidest tulenevad muudatused; ülikooli tugipersonal peab tegutsema piisavalt efektiivselt, et tudengite rahulolu oleks tagatud; õppejõud peavad uue materjali esitama tudengitele kokkuvõtlikus ja eelnevalt läbitöötatud vormis, tagama veebipõhise juurdepääsu õppematerjalidele ning nõudma tudengitelt vaid väheses mahus iseseisvat tööd; samuti peavad õppejõud kasutama interaktiivseid õpetamise meetodeid ning kandma hoolt selle eest, et esitataval materjalil oleks pigem praktiline kui teoreetiline väärtus. Siiski ei tohiks kliendikeskne kõrgharidusasutus õppeprogrammi koostamisel ja kursusetemade valimisel kaasata tudengeid ja küsida nende arvamust; peaks reeglite ja eeskirjade järgimises olema range ning seisma hea selle eest, et õpingute lõpetamine oleks pigem vaevanõudev kui lihtne.

## ABSTRACT

The problem of this research rests with today's intense competition in the sector of education and in many HEIs having positioned themselves as customer-oriented institutions. However, they have done so without prior in-depth knowledge on whether or not students as the beneficiaries of education expect a HEI to be customer oriented. Nevertheless, this knowledge is of utmost relevance when positioning a HEI as a customer oriented institution. The main purpose of the dissertation is therefore **to identify, at a the level of educational experiences, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect/do not expect a higher educational institution (HEI) to be student-customer oriented.**

In order to achieve this purpose, the author has set the following research tasks. The author summarizes and analyses the theoretical framework for customer orientation within the marketing concept, marketization of higher education and student-customer orientation (research task 1); based on theoretical framework, she develops a tentative Model of Educational Experiences (research task 2) and then conducts semi-structured personal interviews with students to complement the tentative Model of Educational Experiences based on theoretical framework (research task 3); she then operationalizes the complemented Model of Educational Experiences into a Measurement Instrument and carries out a quantitative study among undergraduate business students (research task 4); the Student-Customer Orientation Measurement Instrument and the Model of Educational Experiences are validated using Bayesian Dependency Modeling (research task 5); the results of the quantitative study are presented and contribution to the debate on student-customer orientation is made (research task 6). Finally, the author discusses theoretical and practical implications and indicates further research areas (research task 7).

Based on the results of the literature review and the directed content analysis with a data-driven approach of the interview transcripts, the educational experiences that a HEI offers are the following: *admission, student feedback, graduation, curriculum design, communication with service staff, institutional rigor, grading, classroom behaviour, relationship with teacher, communication with teacher, classroom studies, individual studies, teaching methods and course design*. The constructed Model of Educational Experiences completed the achievement of research goal 1. Paper 1 in Appendix 1 describes the construction of the Model.

Following this, the Model of Educational Experiences was operationalized into a Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ) and administered to second- and third-year undergraduate business students ( $N=405$ , 20% of all the students in Estonia with a similar profile) in four different universities in Estonia providing business education. Following this, the Questionnaire as well as the Model of Educational Experiences were optimised and validated using Bayesian Dependency Modeling. The validated Model of Educational Experiences contains 11 categories of educational experiences (instead of the initial 14) and a validated Questionnaire including 34 items (instead of the initial 90). The educational experiences validated

by BDM are *student feedback, graduation, curriculum design, communication with service staff, institutional rigor, grading, classroom behaviour, classroom studies, individual studies, teaching methods* and *course design*. The validation process rejected the categories of *admission, relationship with teacher* and *communication with teacher*. The operationalization of the Model of Educational Experiences into the SCOQ and the validation of both the Model and the SCOQ achieved research goal 2. Paper 2 in Appendix 2 elaborates in more detail on this research goal.

Following the validation of the Model of Educational Experiences and the SCOQ, the results of the study were analysed. Based on the analysis, students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not all categories of educational experience. The categories where they perceive themselves as customers are *student feedback* and *classroom studies* and to some extent also *communication with service staff, individual studies, teaching methods* and *course design*. However, they do not expect to be treated as customers in the category of *graduation*, and to some extent also *curriculum design, institutional rigor* and *classroom behaviour*. Concerning the category of *grading*, the results show that students favour neither lenient nor strict grading ( $M=3.0$ ;  $SD=0.63$ ). Therefore, this category might need further investigation in the future.

The analysis of the results showed that the only statistically significant correlation differences exist between those students who pay for their education and those who do not. Compared to non-paying students, paying students appeared more demanding when communicating with the service staff; they expected the HEI to be more flexible in following the rules and regulations and look for a higher degree of teachers' tolerance towards students' misbehaviour; also compared to non-paying students, they expect individual studies to be less demanding. However, in comparison with non-paying students, they expect teachers to be stricter while grading. Nevertheless, according to Cohen (1988), the effect sizes of these correlations were small. The survey results achieved research goal 3 as well as the main purpose of the study. Paper 3 in Appendix 3 concentrates in more detail on the findings.

Regarding the **theoretical and methodological contribution** of the thesis, the author has constructed and validated the **Model of Educational Experiences**. The Model serves as a meaningful categorization of the experiences that students encounter during their studies at a HEI. Even though this dissertation used the Model to construct a Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire, it is hoped that it also provides a foundation for further research in education.

The author's contribution also lies in the construction and validation of the **Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire** which assesses whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI to treat them as customers. The Model of Educational Experiences and the Questionnaire have been validated using Bayesian Dependency Modeling and the mixed-methods study as a whole has been legitimized based on typology developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006).

Additionally, the author **has contributed to the polarized debate on the topic of student-customer orientation**. This study shows that even though students

expect to be treated as customer is some categories of educational experience (e.g. *feedback* and *classroom studies*), there are also categories where they consider student-customer orientation to be inappropriate (e.g. *graduation*, *curriculum design* and *institutional rigor*).

Previous empirical evidence appears conclusive that students expect a HEI to treat them as customers. However, **the author has contributed to existing empirical evidence by showing** if higher education as such is divided into meaningful categories and the phenomenon is studied within these categories, i.e. at a deeper rather than general level, the results are not conclusive, but rather more versatile.

Concerning the **practical contribution of the thesis**, the author has identified the categories of educational experience where students expect and those they do not expect a HEI to treat them as customers. Therefore, if a HEI decides to adopt student-customer orientation at the undergraduate level to full extent, it should collect feedback, address the issues indicated by students and act accordingly; the HEI should ensure a smooth flow support services to contribute to students' satisfaction; have the teachers offer new material in a concise and processed form, upload the material conveniently for the students to access at any time in a web-based environment and require little academic work outside class hours; have its teachers use interactive teaching methods and ensure that the course content is of practical nature. Nevertheless, the customer-oriented HEI should not involve students in curriculum or course design, it should be rigorous in its established rules and regulations and ensure that the acquisition of a degree or a diploma entitles hard work.

## **APPENDIX 1**

Koris, R. (2012). Customer orientation model for a higher education institution: When is student-customer orientation appropriate? *International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives*, 10(1), 261–277.





**Customer orientation model for a higher education institution: when is  
student-customer orientation appropriate?**

Riina Koris

Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn, Estonia

**Abstract**

Extensive debate surrounds the topic of student-customer orientation at an institution of higher education. Some argue that student-customer orientation benefits both the university and the student; others claim that practicing customer orientation at a university is detrimental to both parties. This article argues that it is only after breaking the educational experience into meaningful categories can we ask whether or not student-customer orientation is appropriate at a higher education institution. Relying on review of literature and especially on James A. Muncy's Orientation Evaluation Matrix (OEM), published in *Marketing Education Review* in 2008, as well as personal interviews with undergraduate students, the primary aim of the article is to elaborate Muncy's OEM even further and develop the "Student-Customer Orientation Model" which holds the various categories of an educational experience. The secondary aim is to discuss the appropriateness of student-customer orientation at a higher education institution, relying on the categories in the model.

**Key words:** Student-customer orientation; model construction; higher education institutions

**Student-customer orientation at higher education institution (HEI)**

Outside the world of higher education customers today have a variety of products and services from a wide variety of suppliers (Bristow & Schneider, 2002). With a myriad of sellers who are not homogeneous, but excessively similar, the customer has the power and can vote with his or her purse, wallet, or pocketbook (Chekitan & Schultz, 2005). In other words, the customer is now in control.

The situation is quite similar in the field of higher education (Hussey & Smith, 2010) and to respond to the changes on the marketplace, university officials have begun to apply the marketing concept to the academia. The two authors claim that due to the increased commercialism and consumer-oriented culture within the field

of education, one of the most severe changes can be witnessed in the relationship between the students and their universities. Since marketing terminology has become commonplace within the university, the perception that students are customers is only logical to set in (Driscoll & Wicks, 1998; Pitman, 2000).

University marketers now are busy assessing the institution's student-customer orientation, aim at targeting the market segments they feel their institutions' strengths would be most likely to appeal to, match the university's offerings to the needs of the segment, and study the sometimes incomprehensible purchasing decisions of the „customers“ (Bristow & Schneider, 2002). Edmunson adds, “More and more of what's going on at the university is customer driven.” (1997). According to Svensson and Wood (2007), “students feel that they have rights equivalent to those rights that they see in the everyday marketplace ... and they transfer the dominant marketplace “customer” model to their perceived relationship with the university” (p. 19–20).

Based on Valenzuela (2009), Saxe and Weitz (1982), Hillebrand (2010), Cross et al. (2006), Kotler and Andreasen (1996), Hoffman and Ingram (1982), Sharp (1991), Parasuraman (1987), Hennig-Thurau (2004), Matthing, Sandén and Edvardsson (2004), Danneels (2003), Jaworski, Kohli and Sahay (2000), Narver and Salter (1990), Kohli and Jaworski (1990), Desphande, Farley and Webster (1993), Bell and Emory (1971), Bailey and Dangerfield (2000), Slater and Narver (1998) and Brady and Cronin (2001), this article defines customer orientation as designing, communicating, pricing and delivering the appropriate and competitively viable product offerings to respond to customer existing as well as future preferences, needs and wants, thereby customizing and personalizing the offerings to provide customer satisfaction. In the remainder of the article the abbreviation HEI will stand for “higher education institution” as an umbrella term for universities, business schools and other higher education institutions.

Regarding customer orientation within a company's activities, there have been a number of claims made as to it being of utmost importance for an organization's sustainable development (see Narver & Slater, 1990; Kilic & Dursun, 2007; Christensen & Bower, 1996; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Doyle, 1990; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Pesch, Calhoun, Schneider & Bristow, 2008; Bejou, 2005). Hamel and Prahalad additionally point out that customer orientation enhances business performance, regardless of the size of the firm and, most importantly, perhaps, regardless of the *industry* it is in (1994).

Applying the customer oriented approach to an institution of higher education has also created a lot of controversy. To begin with, some claim that when universities face falling demand they should focus on customer (i.e. the students) and remarket the product (i.e. education) and that viewing students as customers provides a competitive advantage for higher education and enhances a HEI's ability to attract, retain and serve its customers (DeShields et al., 2005; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006; Vetter, 2005). Desai, Damewood and Jones (2001) clearly state that “Teaching in a setting of higher education is analogous to service delivery in the business sector. Students, as consumers of professional output, have needs and

wants, which, if better understood, should result in an improved educational experience” (p. 136).

Browne (2010) claims that students should be put in the heart of the system and that “students are best placed to make the judgment about what they want to get from participating in higher education” (p. 25). According to Browne, schools should rely on student choice to drive up quality.

However, there are also those who disagree that students should be treated as customers. They claim that customer orientation does not contribute to professionalism and the biggest problem of all schools trying to use marketing to solve their problems was the idea that students are customers, thus likening the school to an upmarket training provider, rather than a HEI (Argenti, 2000; Franz, 1998; Holbrook, 2005, 2007; Chonko, Tanner & Davis, 2002). Holbrook and Hulbert (2002) state that education is one of the areas, where customer orientation does not belong because it would be at odds with the educational system if it was oriented toward “catering to the potentially low-brow and careerist tastes of students redefined as customers” (p. 100).

Hussey and Smith (2010) state that there are areas in which the “customer” analogy is simply inappropriate and even damaging. They claim that “the product (education) does not exist at the point of purchase and it may remain unavailable because unless the student has the necessary ability and works sufficiently hard, they may get neither an education nor a qualification” (p. 49).

One of the arguments that seems to prevalent in academic literature on this topic is the deduction that students should be/are viewed and treated as customers on the grounds that since they are paying for their education, they are entitled to have the goods delivered. The ultimate good or product that is to be delivered is the degree upon the completion of the programme. Nevertheless, some authors who have discussed this topic (Emery et al., 2001; Clayson & Haley, 2005 among others) adamantly claim that the payment of the tuition fee does not automatically guarantee the degree. Irrespective of their effort, payment should not warrant good grades (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Scott 1999), programmes should not be easy or assessment generous (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002) and lectures should not be entertaining and/or fun (Holbrook, 2004). Some maintain that in addition to students, there are other beneficiaries of higher education: the future employees, the government bodies, the students’ families, the society in general (Eagle and Brennan, 2007), who all have similar legitimate interests in higher education, and such “dumbing down” of education, as called by Emery et al. (2001) and Holbrook (2007), would be detrimental for the other interested parties in the long run.

Holbrook (2004) is using a sarcastic term “edutainment” and depicts a situation where customer orientation suggests the merits of offering students information which for them would be easy and fun to master, collecting feedback in order for the teachers to be able to create more popular course offerings and designing programs, the aim of which is to foster the graduates’ career on the job market and which Holbrook calls “vocationalism” or “trade-school mentality”. Similarly, Emery et al. (2001) depict a customer-driven course, where students compile their own syllabi,

decide the course objectives, texts, assignments and assignments weights, on the amount spent on various topics and guest speakers and even though they attest that most HEIs do not practice these extreme methods of customer orientation, the mentality is still there in terms of office hours, course drop dates and procedures, attendance and teaching evaluations.

## **Review of existing research and Muncy's orientation evaluation matrix (OEM)**

Concerning studies which have an immediate bearing on the issue at hand, there is no lack of empirical evidence. Bristow and Schneider (2002), for example, developed and empirically tested a seven-item scale called the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS) designed to measure students' perception of the degree to which a higher education institution is student oriented. To develop the scale, the two authors relied on the scale for Customer Orientation of Sales people developed by Saxe and Weitz in 1982. However, the scale developed by Saxe and Weitz primarily intended to measure customer orientation of sales people and therefore the author of this article believes that it does not fit the context of a HEI.

Delucchi and Korgen (2002) surveyed sociology undergraduates and the 41-item Questionnaire administered to 195 students was aimed at measuring the extent to which students believe that a school should be customer oriented. The survey rated the students' attitude toward learning, faculty and grades. In the survey 43% of the respondents agreed that "If I'm paying for my college education, I'm entitled to a degree", 53% agreed that it is the instructor's responsibility to keep their attention in class and 73.3% of students contended that they "would take a course in which they would learn little or nothing but would receive an A". All in all, the authors have illustrated the students' consumerist approach to education in some categories, but have remained rather superficial in terms of the other categories of higher education. Also Obermiller, Fleenor and Raven (2005), relying on two definitions (students as customers and students as products) and a questionnaire, conducted a quantitative study in two US and one European university both among the faculty and the students. Regardless of the relatively small sample, they provide insight into differences of perceptions across different fields of study as well as across different types of universities among students and faculty. Yet, it is the author's opinion that the study once more ignores many of the aspects which the educational experience contains.

Regarding the findings described above, it must be acknowledged that even though the issue has been approached, the existing studies have not managed to probe as deeply into the matter as one would expect. Research so far either aims at incorporating all of the aspects of educational experience into a single or very few rather general questions (Bristow and Schneider 2002) or measures only some aspects of the educational experience and then generalize the findings across the whole array of experiences (Delucci & Korgen, 2002; Obermiller, Fleenor & Raven,

2005). As a result, this avails only a very limited and rather superficial understanding of the issue at hand because one should not hold that a HEI *per se* should or should not be student-customer oriented. Because the educational experience consists of a number of aspects, the educational experience should be broken up into categories (Muncy, 2008), and it is only in terms of each category that the question of student-customer oriented can be asked.

To construct the student-customer orientation model, this article draws on Muncy (2008) who claims, “Before deciding whether students are customers, products, or partners, a systematic analysis needs to be done” (p. 16). Muncy’s OEM suggests that the educational experience consists of course content, curriculum, pedagogy and style, rigor and student evaluations of teaching. According to the matrix, student-customer orientation is appropriate concerning pedagogy. Other educational experiences in the matrix should follow either faculty orientation (course content), where the key influencer is the teacher; balanced orientation (curriculum), where the teacher, the student and the external stakeholder are all significant influencers; external stakeholder orientation (rigor), where external stakeholders are key influencers, the teacher a significant influencer and the student a minimal influencer; and content-specific orientation (use of student evaluations), where the teacher should have a significant influence on content, student on pedagogy and external stakeholder on rigor. He suggests that there are times when student-customer orientation is appropriate and times when it is inappropriate (2008, p. 22).

Nevertheless, an even more thorough understanding of the matter can be obtained if the OEM categories suggested by Muncy are broken up even further and additional sub-categories are added.

It must be noted that even though the article agrees with Muncy and a number of other scholars who state that education as a service has many customers (e.g. the students, the students’ parents, the labour market, etc.), this article concentrates on only one of the many, namely the students.

## **Construction of the Student-Customer Orientation Model**

In order to address the issue at hand, a multifaceted model incorporating an array of educational experiences must be constructed. According to Kasanen, Lukka and Siitonen (1993), a study may be called constructionist if it is linked with individuals’ interpretations and objective observations and produces constructions – models, diagrams, plans, organizations, etc, or entities which produce solutions to explicit problems (p. 244–245).

Following Dodig-Crnkovic (2010), this research method implies the building of an artefact (practical, theoretical or both) that solves a domain problem (including a model for existing phenomena) in order to create knowledge about how the problem can be solved (or understood, explained or modelled), and if previous solutions/models exist, how the solution/model is better than previous ones.

In order to construct a new model which would include the various educational experiences, existing literature was first analysed. As a result, a tentative model for student-customer orientation is presented in Figure 1 and then explained.

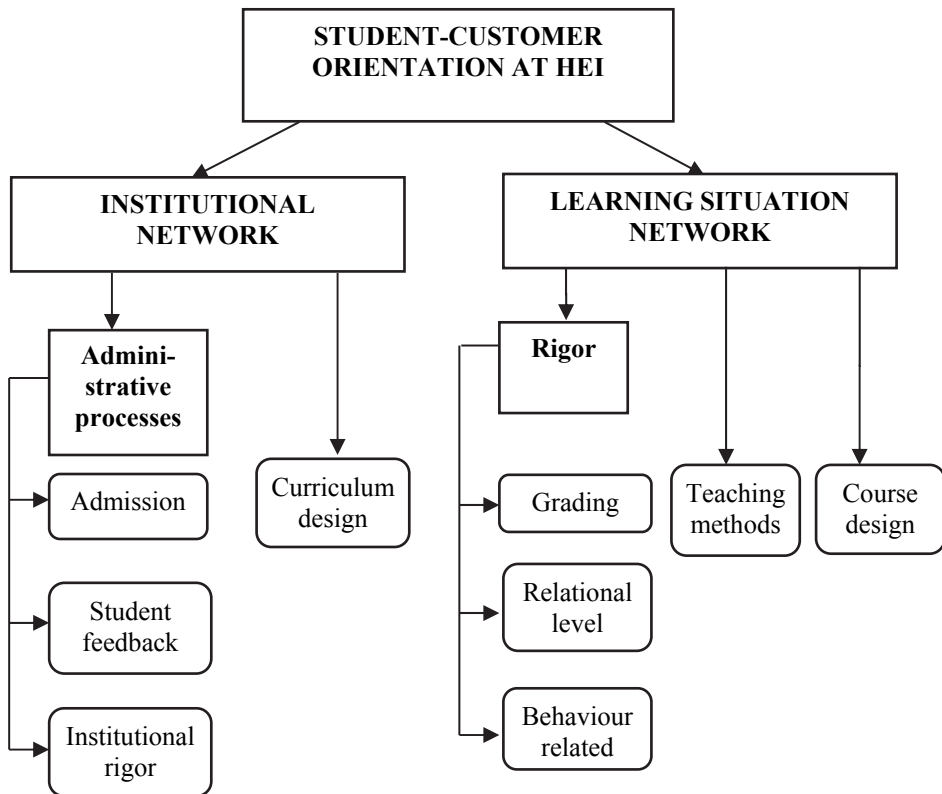


Figure 1 Tentative model for student-customer orientation at a HEI based on literature review

Based on the review of literature, student-customer orientation at a HEI can be classified into two major levels – the level of the institution and the learning situation. Those two fall into several subcategories. At the institutional level, student-customer orientation is divided into administrative processes, which is made up of admission (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000), student feedback (Holbrook, 2004; Emery et al., 2001; Eagle and Brennan 2007; Bailey and Dangerfield 2000; Muncy 2008; Khalifa 2009) and rigor (Edmunson 1997; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2001) and curriculum design (Franz, 1998). At the level of the learning situation, student customer orientation falls into rigor, which is composed of grading (Kezim, Pariseau & Quinn, 2005; Franz, 1998; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002; Emery et al., 2001; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Scott, 1999; Chonko et al., 2002; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000), behaviour related aspects (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998; Muncy, 2008) and relational level (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Franz, 1998; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000); learning (Holbrook,

2004; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998), teaching methods (Chonko et al., 2002; Muncy, 2008) and course design (Emery et al., 2001; Franz, 1998; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002; Muncy, 2008).

Upon the completion of the tentative model for student-customer orientation, qualitative semi-structured personal interviews were conducted to elicit even further possible categories which the existing literature may have left uncovered. The interviews also sought the participants' viewpoint on student-customer orientation within the educational experiences.

The interviews were conducted during two months with 7 undergraduate business students of both sexes and in either their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study. Relying on Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), according to whom the size of the sample is sufficient when no new information emerges, the number of interviewees remained at 7 since the last interview showed that data saturation and informational redundancy was achieved. Altogether, the interviews yielded 7 hours and 21 minutes of discussion and 121 pages of transcripts (font Times New Roman, 12). The transcripts were then analysed and results categorized with the aim of eliciting further dimension of educational experiences to be added to those in the tentative student-customer orientation model.

The participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) both male and female participants has to comprise the body of respondents; 2) respondents had to be in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study; 3) respondents had to be full-time students; and 4) respondents had to have an open mind towards the subject and willing to express their opinion. The reason for choosing students in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study, the researcher guaranteed a body of respondents with some experience in being a student. Students in their 1<sup>st</sup> year would have had little experience with the different aspects of what constitute the educational experiences. The researcher chose full-time students because compared to part-time students they spend proportionally more time at the HEI and attend the HEI on a more frequent basis, as a result of which they have more contact with the HEI and are richer in educational experiences. Based on the researcher's prior experience in the classroom, talkative rather than quiet students were chosen because this ensured that the interview would reveal richer information.

The interviews were scheduled in advance, mostly by approaching the participants in person. Having familiarized the students with the topic of the interview, all eagerly agreed to participate with the exception of one participant, whose schedule did not permit the proposed times. Instead of him, another participant was chosen. All participants' anonymity was guaranteed and before the interview, permission for recording was obtained.

As a result of the semi-structured interviews, there emerged a number of further dimensions of educational experience in which student-customer orientation could be (and sometimes is) practiced. The following categories were added to the model in Figure 1: graduation, communication with administrative staff, communication between the student and the teacher, classroom studies and individual studies. Figure

2 below depicts the student-customer orientation model based on literature review as well as personal interviews. The model is explained in more detail below.

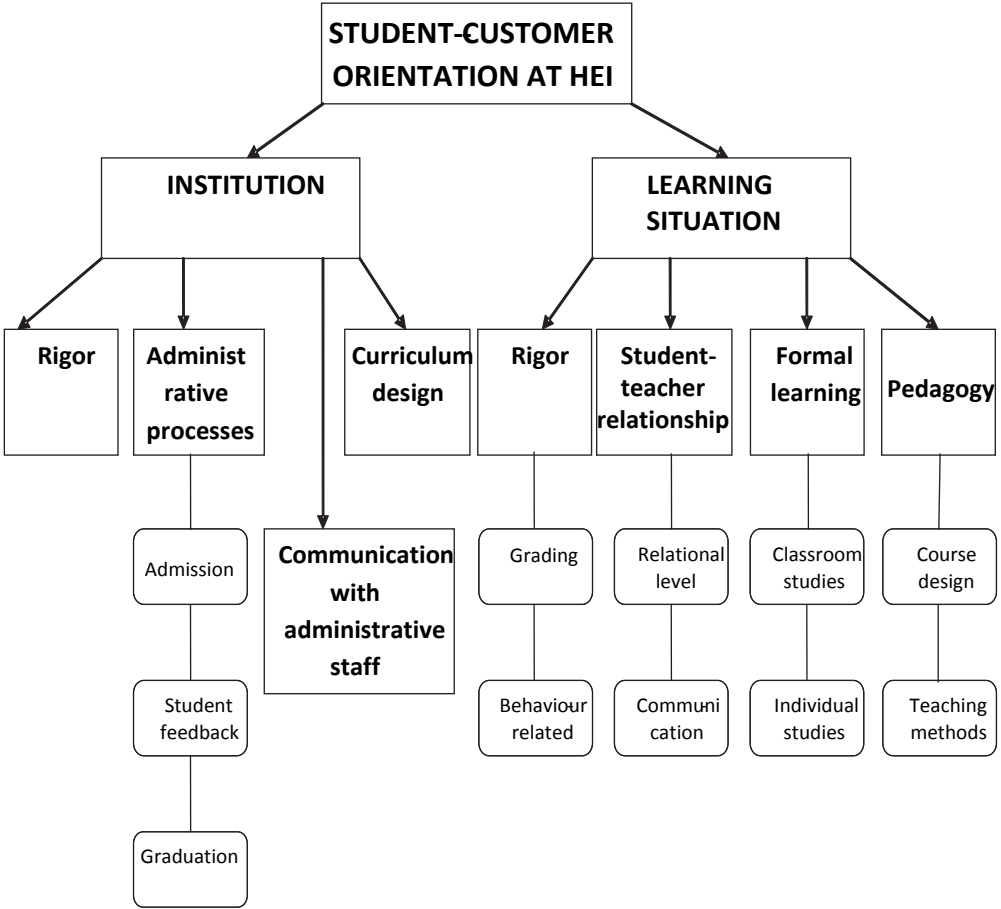


Figure 2 Model for student-customer orientation at a higher education institution

As a result of the literature review and interviews, the educational experiences within which student-customer orientation can be practiced fall into administrative processes (consisting of admission, student feedback and graduation), curriculum design, communication with administrative staff and rigor at the institutional level. At the level of the learning situation, student as customer orientation is made up of rigor (divided into grading and behaviour-related elements), student-teacher relationship (further divided into communication and other relationship matters), formal learning (both individual and in the classroom) and finally pedagogy (consisting of teaching methods and course design).



Compared to Muncy's OEM, this model contains a number of further categories of educational experiences and thus provides a more thorough insight into the issue of student-customer orientation at a HEI.

If a HEI decides to practice student-customer orientation across all categories, or adopt pure market orientation (Snyder, 2007), the HEI will become nothing but a diploma-mill, whose aim is to provide as many students as possible with a degree which, on the students' side entails easy access, minimal effort and input in an entertaining environment with easy grading, pleasing teachers, little work and lax graduation requirements. The author agrees with Muncy (2008), according to whom "to do so, the school would ruin its reputation and cease to fulfil a viable purpose in society" (p. 17). However, if the HEI decides to completely ignore the student's needs and desires, it risks being left behind with very few students (if any at all). Relying once more on Muncy (2008), "the students have viable needs and wants in the educational experience" (p. 17) and unless the needs and wants are met, the students have a vast array of HEI offerings to choose between.

## **Discussion: applying the model**

When placing the concept of student-customer orientation into each of the categories in the model, more contextualized and meaningful answers emerge. Whether or not a HEI should apply student-customer orientation now depends on which category of the educational experience is being considered. The article will proceed to discussing each of the 14 categories in the model in terms of whether or not a HEI should adopt student-customer orientation. The categories in the model will be substantiated with references in existing literature, results of interviews as well as the author's personal opinion.

### **Institutional network**

#### *Rigor*

This category refers to all the student's dealings with the HEI during the process of acquiring higher education. It constitutes the perception and experience of the students when weighing the ease or hardship of the educational experience as a whole. It is an aggregate perception of the time spent acquiring a degree in terms of whether it was rather about sweat, blood and efforts or about entertainment, fun and wiggling out.

Based on a number of authors (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Hussey & Smith, 2010; Franz, 1998; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002; Holbrook 2004 among others), the interviewees and personal experience, a HEI should rather exercise rigour than lenience because only after a lot of effort and diligence can one be truly proud of the acquired academic degree. According to the interviews, a rigorous HEI would also be appreciated by the potential employers on the labour market and the graduates are in a better position to be employed.

### *Administrative Processes: Admission*

Whether a HEI decides to admit all, most or only a limited number of students is for the management of the HEI to decide (Muncy, 2008). One way or another, each of the three practices has its merits and drawbacks. If a HEI decides to admit all applicants irrespective of their intellectual abilities, the HEI can benefit from large enrolment numbers and fees. On the other hand, it runs the risk falling reputation and becoming a HEI for students with very low academic qualifications, thus alienating students with great academic abilities (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000). Students with high commitment to study would feel disturbed by a number of demotivated students whose primary aim is anything but to study.

Admitting most applicants diminishes the risk described above to some extent, but not fully and the line between who gets admitted and who does not is excessively difficult to draw. On the one hand, the HEI is motivated by another potential tuition fee; on the other hand, it wants to have a high rather than low quality student body.

The last alternative – to admit only a limited number of students – is probably the most desirable from the vantage point of the reputation of the HEI, but has its disadvantages in terms of income generated from the tuition fees. Because HEIs today greatly depend on funding (Conway, Mackay & Yorke, 1994), the possibility of admitting only the best is unattainable for many, if not most. As unfortunate as it is, such a situation has, on a wider scale, led to what a number of authors describe as commercialization of higher education (Kolesnikov et al., 2005; Söderqvist, 2002; Bok, 2003 among others) in which academic qualifications are being bestowed upon a number of those who are undeserving.

Which of the three alternatives the HEI goes for is obviously for each of the school's management to decide (Muncy, 2008), but the merits of the first two should be weighed against the drawbacks.

### *Administrative Processes: Student Feedback*

Whether or not a student is qualified to give feedback on the various aspects of his educational experience has been widely debated in academic literature (Holbrook, 2004; Emery et al., 2001; Muncy, 2008; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000). However, this topic remains outside the scope of this article. Instead, it agrees with Muncy (2008) that administering and drawing on student feedback should also be the HEI's management's decision (Muncy, 2008). If a HEI wishes to take a student-customer oriented approach, it will ask its students for feedback and draw necessary conclusions. Nevertheless, regardless of today's marketing mantra, which claims that customer orientation is the key to success (Bennet & Cooper, 1981; Johnson, 1998; Kotler & Andreasen, 1996; Hillebrand, Kemp & Nijssen, 2010 among others), a HEI should invariably remember that a school with its service of education differs from a car dealership (Svensson & Wood, 2007), where one can choose a car in desirable colour, with appropriate extras and negotiate the price. It is true that

students today can determine the major as well as the minor, they also have a choice as to electives, teachers, times and days, but all these choices, one way or another, entail certain rules and regulations put in place by the HEI and should not be negotiable. Or as Hussey and Smith attest, “ the academic teaching the class is not in the position of a salesperson, who has to accept that, at least in principle, that the customer is always right” (2010, p. 50).

One cannot, for instance, choose not to take a compulsory course or have one’s way regarding whether or not to perform tests, exams and assignments. Therefore, while crafting the student feedback questionnaire, the HEI should carefully consider the categories which it seeks students’ feedback on and those it does not.

### *Administrative Processes: Graduation*

Upon graduation the HEI will testify that the graduate is eligible to be the proud owner of an academic degree from the particular HEI. From there on the name of the school will forever be a part of the graduate’s life, both professional and personal. Based on the graduate’s performance, it is not only the quality of the graduate that will be assessed, but also the quality of the HEI. The respondents in the interviews all agreed that a HEI should realize the importance of deciding whether or not a potential graduate deserves to have the name of the HEI on his/her resume in the future, and depending on this, make a decision on the criteria which determine whether a student is or is not deserving of an academic degree. The respondents add that if graduation is easy, it is not only the reputation of the HEI which is tarnished, but also the reputation of those students who have worked hard for their degree.

### *Communication with Administrative Staff*

The role of administrative staff in the students’ educational process is crucial. They act as consultants whom the students can turn to in case problems related to studies occur. Based on the interviews, the students would like to be treated as customers by the administrative staff. However, they specified that communication with administrative staff should be friendly and helpful, but it is the following of the regulations and not exceptions that accommodate students’ wishes that should be a norm. The interview participants added that exceptions should be very difficult rather than easy to obtain.

Ideally, the degree of student-customer orientation of administrative staff should be officially determined by the HEI’s code of conduct.

### *Curriculum Design*

Based on personal interviews with students as well as Franz (1998) and Holbrook (2004), (bachelor) students, while entering a HEI, do not know which courses will benefit them most. Therefore, quite contrary to Walker and Ainsworth (2001) and Lashine, Gill and Molnar (2002), this article states that student-customer orientation

should not be practiced at the level of curriculum design and students should not be consulted on the choice of courses within a curriculum (Muncy, 2008). Instead, the body to decide on the courses within the curriculum should comprise professors, but also specialists of respective fields as well as alumni. A HEI, while (re)designing a curriculum, should draw not only on internal, but also external expertise, thus balancing the academic with the practical.

The article will now turn to the level of learning situation which is even more multifaceted than the institutional level. It is first divided into four and then into eight further sub-categories and will be discussed in terms of student-customer orientation below.

## **Learning Situation network**

### *Grading*

Many authors who have written on student-customer orientation touch upon the topic of grading to a greater or lesser extent (see e.g. Kezim, Pariseau & Quinn, 2005; Franz, 1998; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002; Emery et al., 2001; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Scott, 1999; Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000). The prevailing viewpoint in the existing academic literature seems to be that grading should be strict rather than lenient and that one should work hard to earn a good grade. Even though easy grading may seem student-customer oriented – one does not have to make great efforts to receive good results – such practice will be detrimental to the students in the future when it appears that the knowledge they received good grades for is (close to) non-existent.

Quite contrary to a number of authors who write that students prefer easy-grading, the interview participants insisted that they would have teachers be strict in their grading rather than lenient. They claim that even though they occasionally wish they could score a good grade with minimum effort, they would later on feel dissatisfied and wish they would have had to work harder for the good grade.

### *Behaviour-Related Aspects*

According to existing literature, the I-pay-your-salary-so give-me-what-I-want attitude among students towards their teachers is occasionally detected (Helms & Key, 1994; Bejou, 2005; Emery et al., 2001; Clayson & Haley, 2005 among others). A clear analogy can be traced back to an everyday commercial setting where the customer has the right to get what he wants because he pays for the product/service. This article strongly agrees with those authors who claim that such student-customer oriented behaviour, if accommodated, will lead to the very demise of education (e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Scott, 1999; Emery et al., 2001). The interview participants similarly attest that payment of a tuition fee should never translate into behaviour where the teachers are dancing to the tunes of the students. If there is no looking-up to the teachers, the educational experience is devalued.

### *Relational Level*

Where the teacher stands at the relational level with students is of crucial matter. The interviews revealed that there are teachers who become very friendly with their students, as a result of which the students might start taking advantage of such a relationship and assume that the passing of a particular course/assignment is easier or that the deadline is of no relevance.

Whether or not a teacher is friendly is matter for the teacher himself to decide. However, based on the interviews with the students, friendly behaviour in or outside a class should not translate into less rule-following or ungrounded allowances. Even though some teachers are on more friendly terms with students, it does not mean that a deadline set in the beginning of the course could be ignored. Neither does it mean that a course could be passed with less effort if the relationship is of less formal nature. Therefore, at the relational level student-customer orientation should end where rules start.

### *Communication*

When we decide to purchase a car, one characteristic of customer orientation is the availability of the agent in the dealership – the salesman is always available, gives us his mobile phone number and encourages calling him any time we have a question. However, based on the interviews with the students, the same degree of customer orientation would be ridiculous at a HEI.

A HEI should (and some have) develop certain rules. It is the HEI as an institution, not the teacher, who should determine how they should be contacted (by personal appointment, by e-mail, by phone). If by e-mail, then students should know when to expect answers – within an hour, a (working) day, a week.

The reason why these rules should be worked out by the HEI is simple – it would entail consistency and fairness regarding both teachers and students. If a teacher is required to answer an e-mail within, say, two days, students will not expect (or demand) and answer within an hour.

Thus, it is once again the rules set by the HEI that would design the principles for communication between the students and the academic staff.

### *Classroom Studies*

In this article formal learning is defined as learning that occurs within a student-teacher relationship within a structured learning setting, where the teacher sets the objectives and evaluation criteria. In the model, the category of formal learning falls into classroom studies and individual studies. In terms of classroom studies the teacher should be very specific about his/her requirements regarding study books and other materials, attendance, participation, preparation, involvement, the use of computers in class, etc. This viewpoint is agreement with the interviews where the respondents stated that rules, when established and followed, contribute to a more

facilitating learning environment, decreased efforts on maintaining discipline and a more focused learning.

### *Individual Studies*

Existing literature as well as personal experience reveal that individual work and tasks that require an effort outside the classroom is something that students frown upon (Sword, 2009). Education, on the other hand, is more than just a couple of PowerPoint slides per class. In some way, it is a journey where many things are discovered, rather than pointed at (Starkey et al., 2004; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). Relying on existing literature as well as personal experience, students would prefer all material necessary to pass a course to be covered in a classroom rather than by complementary individual studying done outside the class. This, however, resembles a training course rather than a university course (Holbrook, 2005). At a HEI, students should develop the habit of being curious, wanting to find out more and making an effort to know more. This is not to say, of course, that classroom-teaching is redundant because teachers still need to provide feedback comment on individual assignments. Rather, it suggests that individual learning, which from the students' perspective is not an element of student-customer orientation since it requires personal extra efforts, should be an inextricable part of higher education.

### *Course Design*

The issue of course design is about *what* to teach. Just like curriculum design is about courses within a curriculum, course design is about topics within a course. The author is in agreement with Muncy (2008) who claims that the teacher, having the proper credentials to teach the class, is in best position to decide which topics should be covered within a course. Because teachers often devote their professional career to studying one particular field, frequently have close connections with the respective industry and sometimes also work in the field outside the HEI, they are likely to be experts in the field and are therefore better informed about the theories, practices and changing trends in the field. This is also in agreement with the personal interviews where students stated that they are, by no means, in a position to dictate the topics to be covered since in this respect they are quite illiterate. They claim to always trust the teacher's judgement. Or as Muncy says, "the fact that students are taking a class from a professor indicates that they are not as informed on the subject as the professor is" (2008, p.19).

### *Teaching Methods*

The aim of various teaching methods is clearly to enhance learning outcomes. Teachers should employ methods which would help students learn more effectively and this is an aspect in which the HEI should be very student-customer oriented. Even though, as pointed out above, it is the teacher, who decides upon the course

design, it is the students whose voice should also be heard in terms of delivery. This, of course, is not to mean that classes should be only about fun and entertainment. Nevertheless, based on Chonko et al. (2002) and personal interviews with the students, teachers should strive to discover which teaching methods constitute effective teaching and create a facilitating learning environment. The ultimately aim is to create opportunities for independent thinking and problem-solving and the “factory” approach (Chonko et al., 2002) might not be the best method. Relying on the interviews as well as personal experience, a student, while acquiring new material, would greatly benefit from more interactive teaching methods (dialogues instead of monologues, team working and projects instead of plain cramming) and in an environment which would invite discussion, scepticism and questions.

## **Conclusion**

The primary aim of the article was to construct the student-customer orientation model at an institution of higher education. While developing the categories for assessing, the aim was to cover and categorize the various aspects of the educational experience. While constructing the model, the article relied on existing academic literature, semi-structured interviews with students as well as personal experience.

The secondary aim was to conceptually apply the model to the HEI context. As can be seen from discussion, there are categories in the model in which student-customer orientation is appropriate and categories in which it is inappropriate. Even though this may seem at odds with aiming at consistency across the whole organization in terms of the marketing concept, evidence from literature, interviews and personal experience calls for such an approach. Just like a bank serving its clients in a customer-friendly way has strict rules and regulations in place concerning interest payments and the like, so should a HEI remain true to its established rules and be strict in some categories of the educational experience (e.g. rigor, grading). In others (e.g. admission, student feedback) it may exercise a greater degree of student-customer orientation and in yet others (e.g. teaching methods) it should be very student-customer oriented.

Research body shows that different opinions regarding customer orientation at the HEI prevail (Bristow & Schneider, 2002; Pitman, 2000; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Obermiller, Fleenor & Raven, 2005; Ikeda, Campomar & Veludo-de-Oliveira, 2009). However, one should not simplistically hold that a HEI *per se* should or should not be student-customer oriented. Because acquiring education as such consists of a number of aspects, the educational experience should be broken up into categories and it is only in terms of each category that the question of student-customer oriented can be asked.

Therefore, even though academic literature claims that customer orientation has made a variety of accommodating school administrations willingly jump to cater to students’ whims and wishes (Holbrook, 2004), one should realize that by doing just this the HEI is doing a disservice to all, including the HEI itself. For this reason the author agrees with Muncy (2008) and claims that it is wrong to ask *whether* a HEI

should be student as customer oriented. Instead, it would be better to ask *when* and *to what extent* a HEI should be student-customer oriented.

## Limitations and future research

As mentioned earlier, this article addresses just one of the many customers of higher education – the undergraduate student. Because higher education has a variety of stakeholders (Muncy, 2008; Holbrook, 2007; Bristow & Schneider, 2002), the issue of student-customer orientation may be analysed from different perspectives.

Also, the student-customer orientation model might differ in some of the categories if the interview respondents had been chosen from among students at a different level of their studies. This is to imply that future research should conduct a similar study among master and doctoral students.

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## **APPENDIX 2**

Koris, R. & Nokelainen, P. (2015). The Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ): Application of Customer Metaphor to Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(2). (Forthcoming).



**DOI: 10.1108/IJEM-01-2013-0010**

**International Journal of Educational Management**

**The student-customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ): application of customer metaphor to higher education**

Riina Koris

Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn, Estonia

Petri Nokelainen

School of Education., University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland

**Structured Abstract:**

*Purpose* – This study applies Bayesian Dependency Modeling to validate the model of educational experiences and the student-customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ) and to identify the categories of educational experience in which students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

*Design/methodology/approach* – Cross-sectional quantitative survey study, mixed methods research, exploratory factor analysis and Bayesian Dependency Modeling.

*Findings* – The validated model of educational experiences and the student-customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ); results indicate that students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not all categories of educational experience.

*Research implications* – We contribute to existing literature on two fronts: the validated model of educational experiences and the categories of educational experience in which students expect to be treated as customers.

*Practical implications* – The validated student-customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ) presented in the article may be used by other higher educational institutions (HEIs) to assess the degree to which students expect a particular HEI to be customer-oriented. Also, HEIs should assess students' expectations concerning student-customer orientation before employing such an approach.

*Originality/value* – The paper presents a validated model of educational experiences and a student-customer orientation questionnaire. Additionally, the study does not investigate whether students expect a HEI as such to be student-customer oriented (as most studies have done so far); instead, the aim is to find out whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. Thus, the study explores the phenomenon of student-customer orientation at a deeper level, i.e. separately at the level of educational experiences.

**Keywords:** higher education, student-customer orientation, questionnaire validation, Bayesian statistics

**Article Classification:** Research paper

## **Introduction**

In the vast amount of articles written on the marketing concept, authors mainly concede that any successful organization needs to be customer-oriented. Some authors point out that this is true regardless of its size or the industry area (see e.g. Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). Based on this argumentation, higher educational institutions (HEIs) as business organizations should also practice the customer orientation approach (see e.g. Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; Greenberg, 2004).

Positioning a HEI as a student-customer oriented institution has been extensively discussed, but the discussion stands fairly polarized. One research paradigm suggests that when HEIs face falling demand, they should focus on the customer (i.e. the students) and remarket the product (i.e. education) (see e.g. Browne, 2010; Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; DeShields et al., 2005; Pesch et al., 2008; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006; Svensson & Wood, 2007; Vetter, 2005). The other paradigm states that the biggest problem of all HEIs trying to use marketing to solve their problems is the idea that students and recruiters are customers (see e.g. Argenti, 2000; Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998; Holbrook, 2005, 2007).

Most of this discussion is based on conceptual analysis and only few empirical studies have been conducted on student-customer orientation. Unfortunately these studies are not focused on deep-level analysis of student-customer orientation phenomenon, and therefore fail to reveal whether or not students expect the HEI to treat them as customers. We strongly agree with Muncy (2008) who claims that a HEI contains many educational experiences (e.g. curriculum, pedagogy, feedback, etc.), that one should first determine the experiences and only then set about studying student-customer orientation within each of the category of educational experience.

Thus, the main aim of the study was to validate the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) as well as the model of educational experiences (see Figure 1). The second aim was to study the phenomenon of student-customer orientation at a detailed level, i.e. at the level of each of the educational experience separately. In other words, our aim was not to investigate whether students expect a HEI *as such* to be student-customer oriented (as most studies have done so far); instead, our aim was to find out in *which* categories of educational experience and *to what extent* students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

The first section of the article contextualizes the phenomenon of student-customer orientation within the neoliberalist paradigm, and presents the conceptual and empirical studies that have been conducted on the topic. The second section describes the development and validation of the Model of Educational Experiences



and the Student-customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ). In the validation process, we first applied the validation (legitimation) types for mixed methods research developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006), followed by Bayesian Dependency Modeling. The third section describes the results of the study and discusses the future research directions.

It must also be pointed out that the intent of the article is not to side with or oppose to student-customer orientation at a HEI, as is the case with the majority of the existing literature on this topic. Instead, the aim is to contribute to the on-going debate by revealing the categories of educational experience and the extent to which students expect a HEI to treat them as customers in those categories.

### **Student-customer orientation at higher educational institution as a result of neoliberalism**

As more radical and progressive positions were being taken in education in the beginning of 70's, neoliberalism emerged as a form of new mode of governmentality. As a result, institutional and workplace changes were introduced to allow more freedom necessary for individual, institutional and national economic survival. At the same time schools as well as hospitals, which were previously supported by the state, were reconstituted as part of the market. Following this, to justify their institutional existence, the previously state-supported services faced increased exposure to competition, accountability measures and the implementation of performance goals for the HEIs (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 250–254). All this relied on the assumption that “there is nothing distinctive or special about education or health; they are services and products like any other, to be traded on the marketplace” (Peters, 1999, p. 2).

Based on this assumption, and after May 1968 student rebellions in Paris, major educational reforms took place in the Western world. Students enjoyed a much greater say in their education, learning became more responsive to students' desires (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 256) and education became no more than “an input-output system which can be reduced to an economic production function” (Olssen & Peters, 2007, p. 324) since “for neoliberals, there is *one* form of rationality more powerful than any other: economic rationality” (Apple, 2000, p. 59).

Nowadays HEIs are operating in a dynamic environment of intense competition and students from all around the world may choose the best place for them to study (Bristow & Schneider, 2002; Pesch et al., 2008). Because neoliberal techniques involve the commercialization of education (Brenthall, 2013), it is quite logical that students easily transfer the marketplace “customer” model to their perceived relationship with the university. This has resulted in a situation where increasingly more of HEIs are customer driven and embrace a tendency to serve (as opposed to challenge) the students (see e.g. Driscoll & Wicks, 1998; Pitman, 2000; Svensson & Wood, 2007). HEIs concentrate on professional work-based (as opposed to academic) practice (Olssen & Peters, 2007) to serve the “prevailing economic growth agenda” (Manteaw, 2008).

Quite in line with one of the central presuppositions shared by neoliberals, according to whom “the individual is a rational optimizer and the best judge of his/her own interests and needs” (Olssen & Peters, 2007, p. 314), Desai, Damewood, and Jones contend that because students as consumers of professional output have needs and wants, these should be better understood and met in order to provide an improved educational experience (2001, p. 136). A number of authors agree with Desai et al. (2001) and suggest that a key to successfully implementing the marketing concept and adopt customer orientation in academia is to assess students’ perceptions of the institution’s commitment to understanding and meeting their needs (see e.g. Browne, 2010; Hatfield & Taylor, 1998; Pesch et al., 2008). Existing literature also suggests that HEIs should start paying more attention to being student-customer oriented because students know best what they want to get from higher education. Thus, students should therefore be relied on to drive up quality.

However, as pointed out earlier, the debate is rather polarized. Because no professional, whether in the field of education, medicine or law, has ever been willing to embrace guidance from outside groups or other structural levels (except their peers) (Olssen & Peters, 2007), there are a number of those who claim that student-customer orientation does not contribute to professionalism: treating students and recruiters as customers makes the school to look like an upmarket training provider, rather than a university (see e.g. Argenti, 2000; Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998; Holbrook, 2005, 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2007). There is also a claim that education is one of the areas, where customer orientation with its short-term financial benefits and negative consequences does not belong (Emery et al., 2002; Holbrook & Hulbert, 2002) because of the risk that it would result in the academic values of education to decline, decay and ultimately demise (see e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Snyder, 2007).

Hussey and Smith (2010, pp. 49–50) state that there are areas in which the “customer” analogy is inappropriate and even damaging because a student will get neither education nor qualification if they do not work sufficiently hard. According to them, a teacher or lecturer should not be likened to a salesperson who must acknowledge that the customer is always right. Franz (1998) warns to compare the university to a shopping mall, where students shop around for classes and majors and where the goal of the educator is to attract, delight and retain the student-customer. If a HEI decides to embrace the customer-oriented logic, it will result on a situation where teachers would cater to students’ wishes, yielding to their complaints, and caring more about the students’ concerns for advancing their careers than about what they actually learn (Holbrook, 2004, p.68).

However, because 1) neoliberalism puts the “market-driven” programme in the very centre of the fierce competition, 2) education is considered to be a service like any other, and 3) “proponents of neoliberalism hold positions of incredible power in university think-tanks” (Brenthall, 2013, p. 3), the universities’ responsiveness to the market interests of their customers can be considered as a supply-side lever (Olssen & Peters, 2007, p. 326). Taking into consideration the fierce competition on the

market of higher education, it is understandable that there are economic advantages for HEIs to adopt the customer-oriented approach, or – as Olssen and Peters put it – “to demonstrate their relevance to labour market conditions and prospects” (2007, p. 326). Thus, it is not surprising then, that many HEIs are turning to student-customer orientation, in which the driving forces, as Bailey and Dangerfield (2000) have pointed out, are the demands for increasing student enrolments, the pressure to satisfy the students' desires for higher grades, and the use of student evaluations as the primary indicator for teaching effectiveness.

### **Measuring student-customer orientation**

Based on the literature review encompassing prior research, student-customer orientation at a HEI has been studied in several dimensions. We have chosen to describe four studies, which have an immediate bearing on the topic of this article.

Based on the scale for Customer Orientation of Sales People developed by Saxe and Weitz in 1982, Bristow and Schneider (2002) developed and empirically tested a 7-item scale called the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS) designed to measure students' perception of the degree to which a higher educational institution is student oriented. Having used and validated the scale in a survey of 119 undergraduate students, the authors concluded that the 7-item scale can be used by university administrators to evaluate and compare students' perceptions of the school and if the perceived student orientation is low, the administrators should investigate which elements of the educational experience detract from the institution's student orientation (p.29). We believe, however, that because the scale does not attend to the different experiences that a HEI provides, it fails to offer a detailed insight into the phenomenon.

Delucchi and Korgen (2002) surveyed sociology undergraduates and the 41-item questionnaire administered to 195 students was aimed at measuring the extent to which students believe that a school should be customer oriented. Among others, the survey also rated students' attitude toward learning, faculty and grades. Even though this study addresses several of the educational experiences that a HEI offers (e.g. learning, grading, etc), we feel that there are many other experiences that the study fails to cover.

Also Obermiller, Fleenor and Raven (2005), relying on two definitions (students as customers and students as products) conducted a quantitative study in two US and one European university both among the faculty and the students. Even though their study covered both the faculty and the students and provides insight into differences of perceptions across different fields of study as well as across different types of universities, we feel that the two statements they used (“students as customers” and “students as products”) were too extreme (and perhaps also radical) to provide a detailed and objective insight into the phenomenon. Even though the study showed that students perceived themselves as customers (as opposed to products), it fails to shed light on how the students would perceive themselves if education as such was

dismantled into the many categories that it consists of and therefore the study, in our opinion, remains overly simplified.

Ikeda, Campomar and Veludo-de-Oliveira (2009) asked higher education students to reflect on whether students feel they are customers of a course, whether the customer is the king in the educational context and asked the students to analyse short-term vs. long-term satisfaction regarding educational services. They conclude that even though education is oriented towards long-term results and the society as a whole, most students look for immediate, short-term results and satisfaction and a host of them perceives themselves as customers of a HEI (p. 3511).

We believe that even though the issue has been approached from different angles, the existing studies have not managed to probe as deeply into the matter as one would expect. In our opinion one should not hold that students expect a HEI *per se* to be student-customer oriented (as most of the studies have done). We agree with Muncy (2008), according to whom one must perform a systematic analysis before deciding the role of students in education (p. 16) and because the education as such consists of a number of educational experiences, those should first be identified and it is only in terms of each category that one can research the topic of student-customer orientation in more depth.

## **Development and validation of the Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SQOC)**

This section describes the operationalization of the student-customer orientation model developed by Koris (2012) into the Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ) and the validation of the questionnaire. We first present the development of the categories and items in the questionnaire, their source of origin and the questionnaire's legitimation process based on Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006). We then proceed to describe the exploratory optimization process that lessened the number of items in the initial questionnaire from 90 to 51. Finally, we validate the number of categories in the questionnaire using exploratory factor analysis and data mining (Bayesian), which resulted in a questionnaire containing 11 categories and 34 items.

Based on Koris (2012) and the student-customer orientation model (see Figure 1 below), the initial questionnaire contained 14 categories of educational experience divided into two networks (*institutional* and the *learning situation*) and consisted of 90 items (questions) (see Appendix 1). The items in the questionnaire relied on literature review on student-customer orientation as well as personal interviews with business students. The interviews were conducted during two months with seven undergraduate business students of both sexes (4 male and 3 female). These students were in their second or third year of study and thus, compared to first-year students, had longer experience in being a student. We chose full-time students because they spend proportionally more time at the HEI and thus are richer in educational experiences than part-time students.

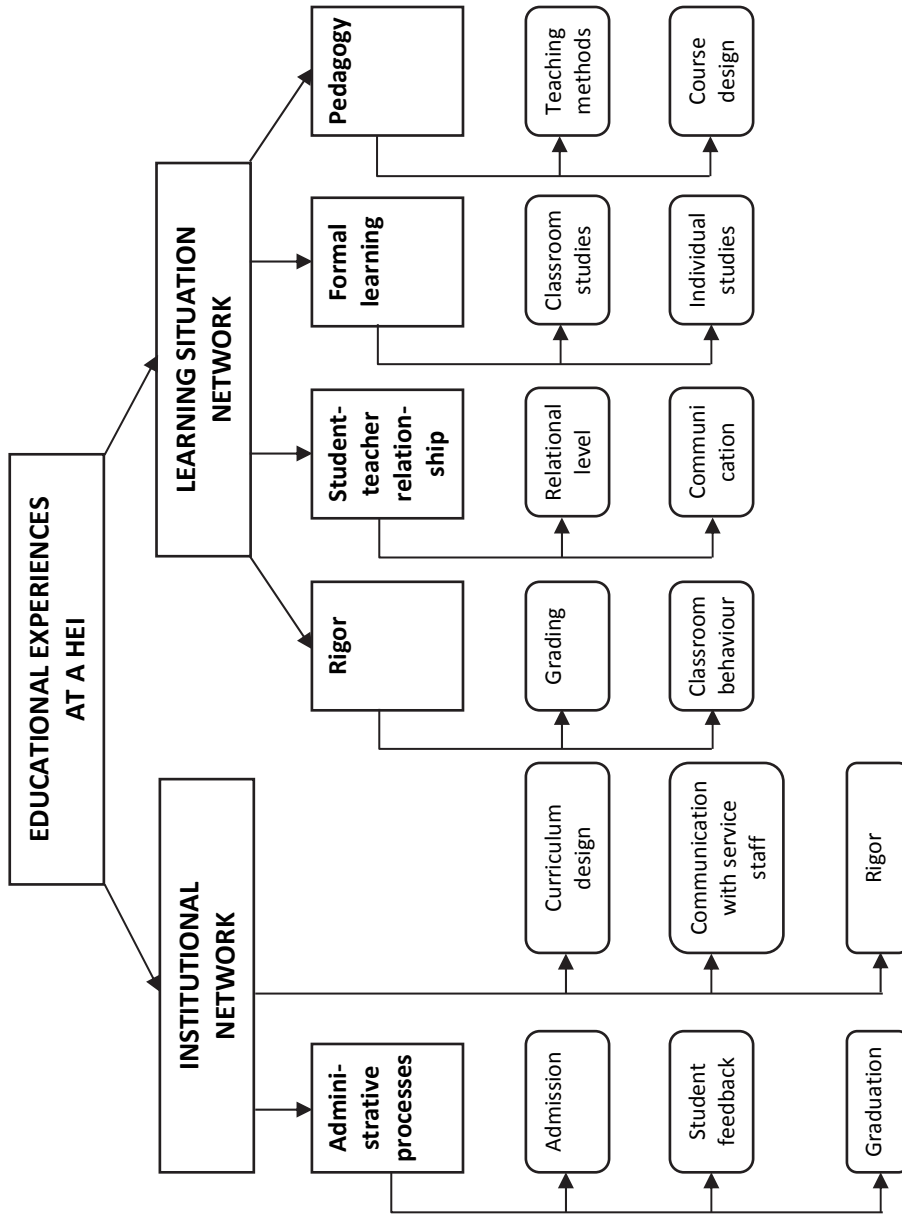


Figure 1 Model of educational experiences offered by a HEI (Koris 2012, 276) adapted with permission from the author

## Legitimation process of the study

Before pre-testing the questionnaire in a pilot study, it was analysed in the context of the validation (legitimation) types for mixed methods research developed by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) and advocated by a number of researchers in this field (see e.g. Dellinger & Leech, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008).

*Sample integration* legitimation refers to “the extent to which the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative sampling designs yields quality meta-inferences” (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p.288). To contextualize this, we conduct here a large scale quantitative study ( $N=405$ ) after a preliminary qualitative study ( $N=7$ , see Koris, 2012) with participants drawn from the same student population (second or third year business students at one of the HEIs in Estonia).

In terms of *inside-outside* legitimation, which stands for “the extent to which the researcher accurately presents and appropriately utilizes the insider’s view and the observer’s view for purposes such as description and explanation” (p.288), we did not become “natives” during the study and even though the context of the research was very familiar, we remained rather observers during the qualitative phase of the study. The importance of being familiar with the context is also supported by Mertens (2003), according to whom the researcher should be involved in the project to a significant degree.

The legitimation type called *weakness minimization* means “the extent to which the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from the other approach” (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p.288). The mixed methods approach used provided stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings.

*Sequential* legitimation type refers to “the extent to which one has minimized the potential problem wherein the meta-inferences could be affected by reversing the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative phase” (p.288). Concerning the design of our questionnaire, the sequence of the methods, if reversed, would not have produced the desired results since a structured study of the phenomenon among a large body of respondents (quantitative phase) would be impossible without the prior development of the model (result of the qualitative phase).

In terms of *conversion legitimation*, which is achieved by using the appropriate data analysis methods, paying less attention to the obtaining of counts, the results of the study underwent factor analysis as well as Bayesian Dependency Modeling and were therefore validated using different techniques.

*Pragmatic mix* legitimation requires that the researcher make the use of paradigm assumptions clear and conducting research that fits the assumptions. While constructing a model for this research, we relied on constructionism as the epistemological foundation, which “works from the understanding or meaning of phenomena, formed through participants and their subjective views.” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.40) and which produces constructions – models, diagrams, plans, organizations, etc, or entities which produce solutions to explicit problems (Kasanen, Lukka, & Siitonen, 1993; Taipaleenmäki, 2003).

The *commensurability* legitimation was achieved by switching from qualitative to quantitative, thereby providing a third well-informed viewpoint based on both qualitative and quantitative thinking.

Finally, *political* legitimation was achieved by the researcher taking multiple roles and therefore having to deal with power issues surrounding planning, conducting and using the research.

## **Method**

Once legitimized based on Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006), the questionnaire was pre-tested in a pilot study ( $N = 47$ ) among business students in one of the universities in Estonia. The aim of pre-testing was to detect possible shortcomings in the design and its administration (Remenyi et al., 1998 citing Emory & Cooper, 1991) and to assess aspects such as clarity of instructions and questions, quality of evidence and ability to perform meaningful analysis of the evidence, time taken to complete the questionnaire and whether questions on key issues have been overlooked. The pilot study revealed no major shortcomings and the instructions and questions were clear to participants.

### *Procedure*

The paper and pencil questionnaire was distributed among second and third year students majoring in business administration at four different universities in Estonia. We excluded students in their first year as they would have had less experience in the categories in the model. To ensure maximum response rate, the researcher approached students personally during lectures and permission to carry out the survey was obtained both from the lecturers in charge of the class as well as the students. Concerning the issue of ethics when conducting research among students, the filling-in of the questionnaire took place on a strictly voluntary basis and no students unwilling to participate were asked to do so. The questionnaire was completely anonymous as well as confidential and answers were not in any way connected to any student personally.

To express opinion on the 14 different categories of educational experience, the students responded to 90 items using a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “6 = strongly agree”). The six-point scale was used to avoid the error of central tendency, described by Kerlinger as a “general tendency to avoid all extreme judgements and rate high down the middle of a rating scale” (1973, p. 549).

### *Participants*

The target population for the study was defined as fee and non-fee paying business students in Estonian universities. Concerning the participants being business students only, we relied on Holbrook, according to whom the customer-oriented

logic “takes hold nowhere more strongly than in our schools of commerce or management where, quite literally, business is our middle name” (2004, 68).

Having used non-probability sampling, a total of 405 usable responses (10% of the universe of the country) were received which makes the sample to some extent generalizable to the target population (Murphy & Myors, 1998). Since all the students who were approached filled in the survey, the response rate was 100%. Concerning the demographics of the participants, the respondents comprised both male (40.7%) and female (59.3%), the mean age of the respondents was 22.7 years and 72% of the students who participated in the survey were those paying the tuition fee.

### **Parametric optimization of the questionnaire**

With the aim of optimising the questionnaire, the first phase was to investigate how the 90 items in the questionnaire met the normality assumption. The general response tendency showed that students used all six response options. Nevertheless, distribution of responses in most cases showed either positive or negative skewness (G1). The skewness values ranged from -3.072 to 2.436. Standard error of skewness

(ses) for this sample is estimated to be  $\sqrt{\frac{6}{405}} \approx .122$ . According to Brown (1996),

generally accepted range of skewness values within normal distribution is two times ses, i.e. in this case  $|\cdot 244|$ . Normality analysis showed that G1 value of only 25 items was within the suggested range of ses. Based on skewness statistics and distribution of responses, we omitted the most skewed items.

The second phase was to conduct the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the remaining 51 items (marked with an asterisk in Appendix 1). We started EFA with a full model of 14 categories. The dimensionality of the 51 items in the questionnaire was studied with Maximum likelihood (ML) method and Varimax rotation. The factor analysis suggested a 14-factor (category) solution (44.5% variance explained). We also conducted EFA separately for the two individual networks in the model, namely the *institutional* and *learning situation* (22 and 29 items, respectively). The factor analysis resulted, in parallel with the theoretical model, in six and eight-factor solutions (41.6% and 39.4% variance explained, respectively).

The reliability estimates presented in Table 1 range from .30 to .75. Half of the categories' estimates reached satisfactory level of .70. However, due to initial development stage of the instrument, we consider the internal consistency values below .70 also worth further investigation. Investigation of the correlation matrix and the internal consistency estimates suggested the rejection of two categories, namely category 1: *admission* ( $\alpha = .32$ ) and category 10: *communication with the teacher* ( $\alpha = .30$ ). However, we decided to proceed to the next stage (Bayesian analysis) with all of the 14 categories.



Table 1. Internal consistency measures for the 14 categories in the model of educational experiences (see the Appendix 1 for item labels)

Category number	Category	Items in the category	Cronbach's Alpha
	<b>Institutional network</b>		
1	Admission	Q01, Q04	.32
2	Student feedback	Q05, Q06, Q07, Q08, Q09	.75
3	Graduation	Q13, Q14	.71
4	Curriculum design	Q18, Q19, Q23, Q24	.51
5	Communication with service staff	Q27, Q28, Q30	.70
6	Rigor	Q34, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q39, Q40	.74
	<b>Learning situation network</b>		
7	Grading	Q42, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q47	.48
8	Classroom behaviour	Q48, Q49, Q51, Q52, Q53, Q54	.72
9	Student teacher relationship	Q58, Q61	.48
10	Communication with teacher	Q62, Q65	.30
11	Classroom studies	Q66, Q68	.58
12	Individual studies	Q71, Q74, Q76	.57
13	Teaching methods	Q77, Q78, Q79, Q81, Q84	.72
14	Course design	Q85, Q87, Q89, Q90	.73

### Non-parametric optimization of the questionnaire

The third phase of the analysis was to conduct Bayesian Dependency Modeling (BDM) (*B-Course*, see Myllymäki, Silander, Tirri, & Uronen, 2002) with 51 items in the questionnaire suggested by EFA. The first goal of BDM was to validate the results of parametric with non-parametric analysis. The second goal was to investigate both linear and non-linear (Nokelainen, Silander, Tirri, & Ruohotie, 2007) dependencies between the variables and find a Bayesian Network describing these dependencies.

We chose BDM for several reasons. First, unlike many other traditional statistical techniques, Bayesian models do not require multivariate normal distribution of the variables (Nokelainen, 2008). Second, Bayesian models allow investigation of both non-linear and linear dependencies. Applying these models allows us to examine if the omission of non-normal items in the first phase of analysis was justified. The third reason for using BDM is that it produces the most probable statistical

dependency structure between the observed variables based on parameter free data mining approach (Myllymäki, Silander, Tirri, & Uronen, 2002). This allows comparable dimensionality investigation to EFA (Nokelainen, Silander, Tirri, & Ruohotie, 2007).

BDM was applied to calculate the two networks in the model presented in Figure 1. The institutional network consisted of category-level summative variables (six categories containing 22 questionnaire items, for details see Table 1). During an extensive search for the most probable model given the data (data mining approach), 19 930 026 category level models were evaluated. Based on the analysis of the six categories entered, only four had statistical dependencies and were thus accepted in the Bayesian Network (see Figure 2; left-hand side). The omitted categories present in Figure 1 were *admission* and *communication with service staff*.

The learning situation network contained eight categories and 29 questionnaire items (for details see Table 1). From the original eight categories in the model (Figure 1) entered in the analysis, six were accepted to the most probable Bayesian network (see Figure 2) and two categories (*student-teacher relationship* and *communication with the teacher*) were omitted.

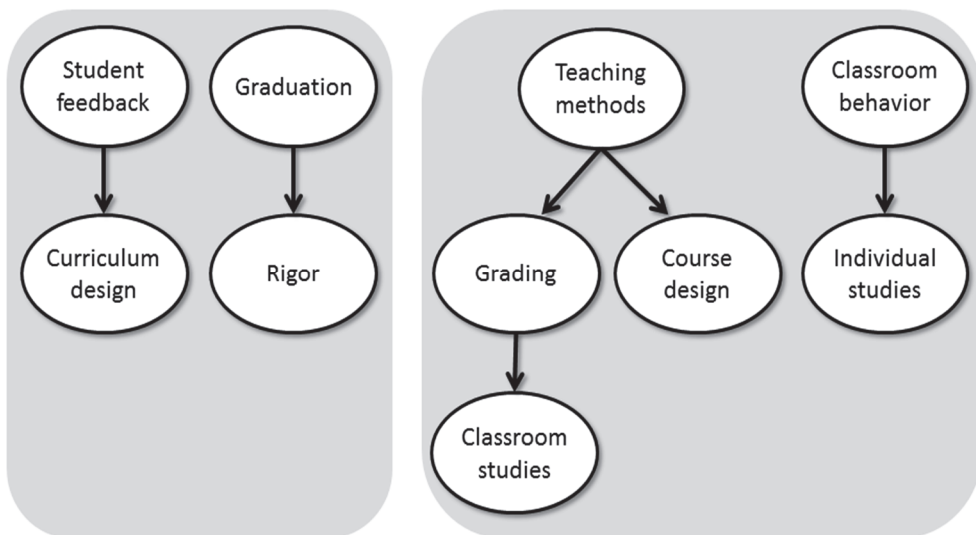


Figure 2 Category level dependencies: institutional (left-hand side) and learning situation (right-hand side) networks

As the Bayesian statistics is not relying on normality assumption, we decided to calculate two Bayesian Networks representing institutional and learning situation networks based on the 90 items in the initial questionnaire. 51 items were entered in the analysis to represent both networks. During an extensive search, 17 964 711 item level models were evaluated. The results yielded two networks – a 14-item institutional and a 14-item learning situation network (see Figures 3 and 4, respectively).

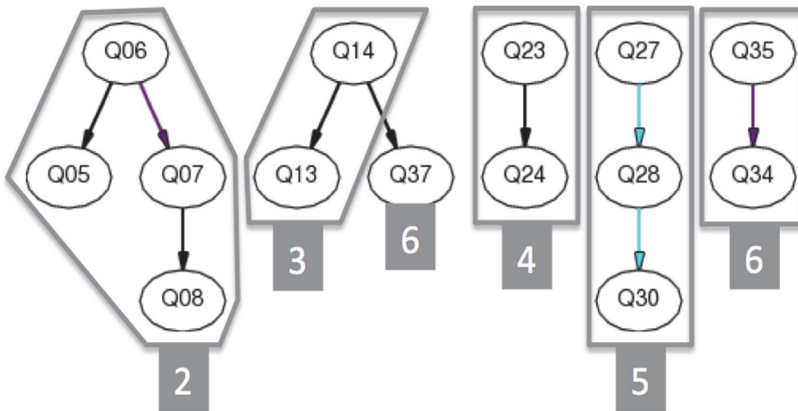


Figure 3 Item level dependencies: Institutional network (see Appendix 1 for question labels and Table 1 for category labels)

The selected items clustered correctly within categories based on the model presented in Figure 1, except for one item, namely item 37 (*In my opinion students' academic life should be fairly hard because later on they will be grateful to the school and feel respect towards it*). Although the item belonged to category six (*rigor*), it showed quite strong statistical dependency with item 14 (*When I receive a diploma and/or a degree, I'd like to feel that I have worked hard for it*), representing category three (*graduation*). As can be seen, the wording of item 37 represents more closely grading than rigor of studying. As the wording of the two items are quite identical, we decided to remove item 37 from the final version of the questionnaire.

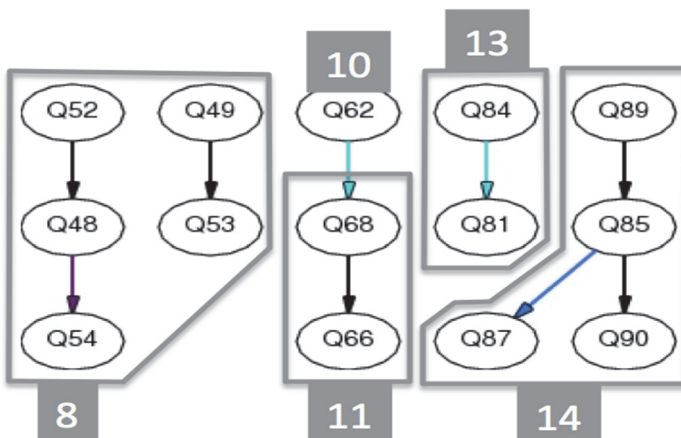


Figure 4 Item level dependencies: Learning situation network (see Appendix 1 for question labels and Table 1 for category labels)

As the figure above shows, the items clustered in the categories according to the model (see Figure 1), except for item 62 (*If I need to get in touch with my university teacher, I should contact him/her by e-mail*). We chose to remove this item from the final version of the questionnaire for three reasons: first, the item was the only one validated by BDN within the category labelled *communication with the teacher*; second, the variable's correlation with other variables was weak (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .30$ ); and third, BDN did not validate the category of *communication with the teacher* where this variable belonged.

To conclude the third phase of the analysis, instead of having only four categories (Figure 2), we decided to retain five categories in the institutional network. The following Figure 5 shows that we have included the category labelled *communication with service staff* and we have done so for three reasons. First, because the exploratory factor analysis yielded a relatively strong internal consistency value ( $\alpha = .70$ ); second, Bayesian modelling validated the questionnaire items in the category, and third, the topic of student-service staff communication features rather strongly in existing literature on the topic.

Concerning the learning situation network, dependency modelling produced 6 categories (Figure 2) with the highest probability (*teaching methods, grading, classroom studies, course design, classroom behaviour and individual studies*), rejecting the categories of *student-teacher relationship* and *communication with the teacher*. Thus, the final number of categories within this network remained six.

Based on exploratory factor analysis and Bayesian modeling, the validated model of educational experiences for student-customer orientation is presented in Figure 5 below.

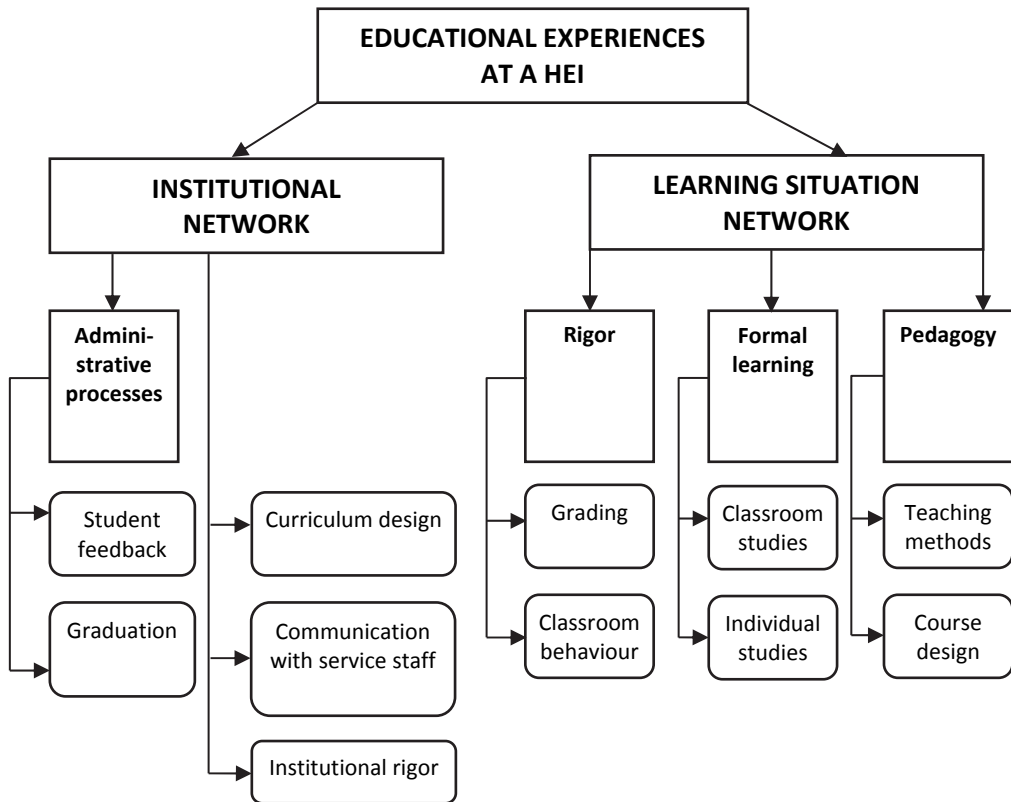


Figure 5 Validated Model of Educational Experiences.

At the questionnaire level, the items with the highest probability in the institutional network are 5,6,7,8, 13, 14, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 34, 35 and 37 (Figure 3). Concerning the learning situation network, the items with the highest probability are 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 62, 66, 68, 81, 84, 85, 87, 89 and 90 (Figure 4). Nevertheless, even though Bayesian modelling rejected all the items on the category of *grading* and *individual studies*, we decided to retain the items with the strongest correlations and least skewness (42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 71, 74 and 76) in these categories in the initial questionnaire for the reason that Bayesian modeling validated the two categories in the model and the two categories feature very strongly in the existing literature on student-customer orientation.

To conclude, the results of the questionnaire-level analysis (presented in Figures 3 and 4) were promising from the psychometric perspective as the items selected for both Bayesian networks were exactly the same as accepted by the normality analysis in the first phase. The validated student-customer orientation questionnaire is presented in Appendix 2.

## Results

The second aim of the study was to investigate in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. Next we will present the students' responses to the survey in terms of the 11 categories validated by Bayesian modeling (see Figure 5).

The importance of *student feedback* (category 2) has been stressed in many studies (see, e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Holbrook, 2004; Koris, 2012; Hussey & Smith, 2010; Muncy, 2008). Results of this study confirm that students expect the HEI to collect and act on their feedback ( $M = 5.1$ ;  $SD = .76$ ). Should there be any kind of dissatisfaction, the school should address the issue by introducing a strategy and then acting accordingly.

Concerning the category of *graduation* (category 3), students mostly agree that if one wants to graduate, one should work hard for it ( $M = 4.7$ ;  $SD = .92$ ). They state that it is not the school's but the student's responsibility to make efforts and earn the degree. This is quite contrary to some authors who claim that students happily relinquish responsibility for learning to their educators (see e.g. Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Holbrook, 2004). Thus, our data did not support some authors' suggestion that students want to work as little as possible and still receive good results.

In terms of the *curriculum design* (category 4), the results show that students expect a curriculum to be practical and compiled based on the expertise of several stakeholders ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ). Further, they do not feel comfortable dictating what a HEI should teach (see also Muncy, 2008). This finding was quite contrary to Walker and Ainsworth (2001) and Lashine, Gill and Molnar (2002).

Regarding items related to the *communication with service staff* (category 5), students expectations to study-related activities outside classroom were measured. According to responses, students expect to be treated as customers ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ). They consider it the service staff's responsibility to inform them of any changes as soon as possible, to work out their study calendar in a way that suits the students best and help them solve problems related to deadlines. Thus, in this respect, students rather expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. However, the survey indicates that students would rather prefer the HEI to be uncompromising and *rigorous* (category 6) in their rules and regulations ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = .84$ ). They believe that a HEI should be strict in having the students follow the deadlines set, that rule-breaking should be punished and that the same rules should apply to all students.

Concerning the educational experience of *grading* (category 7), literature claims that students feel they are entitled to receive good grades because they are the customers (Helms & Key, 1994) and believe that assessment should be easy and generous (Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2001). Results show that students stand rather indifferent in terms of this issue ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = .63$ ).

In terms of *classroom behaviour-related* (category 8) category in the model, review of literature shows that teachers feel they have had to reduce academic

standards (Eagle & Brennan 2007), have turned from teachers into salespeople (Hussey & Smith, 2010) and that the I-pay-your-salary-so give-me-what-I-want attitude among students towards their teachers is occasionally detected (see, e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2001; Helms & Key, 1994). Nevertheless, the survey indicates that students rather do not approve of such changes ( $M = 4.4$ ;  $SD = .94$ ). They expect teachers to establish certain rules and follow the rules throughout the course. They also expect the teachers to frown upon students when they come late to classes, ignore deadlines, cheat and engage in activities unrelated to classroom studies.

Concerning *classroom studies* (category 11), the study results are rather in line with what the literature suggests. According to Eagle and Brennan (2007), students want new material to be presented in a concise and pre-processed form for the ease of studying. This was also supported by the survey ( $M = 5.5$ ;  $SD = .69$ ) and demonstrates that in terms of classroom teaching, students expect to be treated as customers.

Regarding *individual studies* (category 12), existing literature is rather pessimistic towards students' willingness to make efforts outside class hours (see e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Emery et al., 2001; Holbrook, 2005; Sword, 2009). Our survey rather confirms this sentiment and shows that students would rather not work individually outside class hours ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .92$ ).

In terms of *teaching methods* (category 13), the prevailing discourse is that students want learning to be fun and based on as much interactive methods as possible (see e.g. Chonko et al., 2002; Holbrook, 2004; Koris, 2012). Our survey also supports this ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ) – students rather expect teachers to employ methods which are interactive and entertaining. However, concerning the category of *course design* (category 14), students admit to their illiteracy in this respect and are in agreement with Muncy, according to whom the teacher, having the proper credentials to teach the class, is in best position to decide which topics should be covered within a course (2008, p. 19) ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = .86$ ). Nevertheless, students are also rather voicing their support for classes which are practical as opposed to theoretical and are of the opinion that teachers should also be active in their field of knowledge outside the school (i.e. be practitioners rather than theorists), and that while designing a course, the amount of practical should be increased at the expense of theoretical.

## **Demographic and category-level correlations**

In terms of socio-demographic variables, results showed no gender-dependent statistically significant differences in students' expectations to the 11 categories validated by Bayesian Dependency Modeling. Calculations on age-dependent differences were not conducted because 65% of the respondents belonged in the same age group (21-24 years) and the remaining age groups contained too few respondents to draw valid conclusions. However, we found statistically significant differences between those students who pay and those who do not pay for their

studies in the following four categories: *communication with service staff* (category 5), *institutional rigor* (category 6), *classroom behaviour* (category 8), *individual studies* (category 12) and *grading* (category 7). Correlational analyses showed that paying students ( $M = 3.9$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ) expect the service staff to accommodate their wishes more than non-paying students ( $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $r_s = -.123$ ,  $p = .013$ . Paying students ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) expect the HEI to be less strict in following the established rules and regulations than non-paying students do ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .75$ ),  $r_s = .117$ ,  $p = .018$ . They also expect teachers to be more tolerant towards their (mis)behaviour in class ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .88$ ) than non-paying students ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .83$ ),  $r_s = -.139$ ,  $p = .005$ . Further, paying students expect individual studies to be more convenient and easy ( $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = .91$ ) than non-paying students do ( $M = 3.1$ ;  $SD = .88$ ),  $r_s = -.103$ ,  $p = .039$ . Curiously, however, compared to non-paying students, paying students expect teachers to be more strict in grading ( $M = 4.2$ ;  $SD = .68$  vs.  $M = 4.4$ ;  $SD = .72$ ,  $r_s = -.135$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Effect sizes of these correlations were small according to Cohen (1988).

No statistically significant correlations were found between students' expectations to the 11 categories.

## Conclusion

The article served two purposes. First, to validate the model of educational experiences and the student-customer orientation questionnaire and to identify the categories in which students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

With the aim of optimizing the model as well as the questionnaire, the initial 14-category model with 90 items underwent the validation process of calculating the reliability estimates, conducting exploratory factor analysis with the Varimax rotation and Maximum Likelihood extraction method and Bayesian Dependency Modeling to investigate probabilistic dependencies between the variables. The validation process produced an optimised questionnaire with 34 items (see Appendix 2) and a model of educational experiences containing 11 categories (see Figure 5). A questionnaire containing 34 items instead of 90 makes the questionnaire shorter and more convenient to administer in the future.

Concerning the second aim of the study, and to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the results indicate that students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not in all categories of educational experiences (as some scholars suggest). Students expect to be treated as customers in terms of *student feedback*, *classroom studies*, and to some extent also in terms of *communication with administrative staff*, *individual studies*, *course design* and *teaching methods*. However, they do not view themselves as customers when it comes to *curriculum design*, *rigor*, *classroom behaviour* and *graduation*. Regarding the category of *grading*, students did not display specific expectations.

It must therefore be pointed out that existing literature, when it suggests that students expect a HEI to cater to their every request and they approach studies as nothing more than an enjoyable consumption experience with very little personal



input, appears rather short-sighted since there are a number of categories where students do not consider themselves to be customers.

Concerning the audience for this study and using the research in practice also in the future, we believe that our work comprising the validated questionnaire, model of educational experiences as well as the survey results includes both the scholars in the field of higher education and the management of a HEI. The former may find the developed and validated student-customer orientation questionnaire a useful tool to conduct a comparative study in a different country, setting, etc.; the latter may draw on the results in their future policy-making. Even if the management of a HEI decides to position the HEI as a customer-oriented one, it should not treat its students as customers when it comes to curriculum design, rigor, classroom behaviour and graduation.

### **Limitations and future research**

Probably the greatest limitation of this study is that the findings are based upon a single country and the demographic make-up of the respondents represented local students only. It would be most interesting to replicate a similar study in various regions of the world with a more heterogeneous population of students.

Another limitation of our study is what Krosnick and Presser (2010) call “the social desirability response bias”, according to which respondent intend to be associated with socially desirable answers (see also Fowler, 2009; Nardi, 2003). To ensure that students do not provide socially desirable answers instead of true ones, we used a self-administered survey questionnaire which, according to Fowler is useful when dealing with a sensitive topic or socially undesirable or negatively valued attitude and which greatly helps to minimize such bias (2009, p. 74). Because the survey requested no identifying information, we hope that that anonymity, too, helped to reduce social desirability bias.

Additionally, the student-customer orientation questionnaire was developed and validated so that it may be readily applied across different settings and diverse student population and the authors strongly recommend researchers to conduct additional empirical studies. For example, it would be of great interest to compare the results and findings across students majoring in different disciplines (e.g. medicine, arts, etc), those at different levels of education (e.g. bachelor vs. master students) and different stakeholder groups (e.g. parents, the labour market, etc) among other possible settings and populations.

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## Appendix 1

### Student-customer orientation questionnaire (SCOQ)

Note: Items marked with an asterisk symbol (\*) were selected to the final stage of the validation process

#### 1. Admission - the level of selectivity which students expect a HEI to employ during admission

- Q1 \* I'd like to study at a school where it is difficult to be admitted
- Q2 I think that a school should admit students by previous academic achievements only
- Q3 I believe that a student should be given a chance to be admitted to a university even if the admission procedure shows that his academic capabilities are poor
- Q4 \* I believe that an admission interview is necessary to screen out those who are not suitable to study in a particular school

#### 2. Student feedback - the importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback

- Q5 \* In my opinion, the school should collect students' feedback on a regular basis (e.g. once per semester/year)
- Q6 \* I believe that the school should report on the changes that have been introduced based on students' feedback
- Q7 \* It is my opinion is that when organizing studies, the school should consider the students' wishes
- Q8 \* I think that the school should act on students' feedback on their teachers
- Q9 \* In my opinion, whenever a student is dissatisfied with the school, the school should address the student's dissatisfaction and do its best to ensure student's satisfaction
- Q10 I believe that a student is not in a position to evaluate the teaching ability of a teacher
- Q11 I believe that if the whole group does not like a particular teacher and they complain, the school should replace the teacher

Q12 Even if there is something I don't like about the study process, I should not complain because the school knows best what is good for me from the point of view of my future

**3. Graduation - the level of strictness which students expect a HEI to employ during student graduation**

Q13 \*I think that the graduation requirements of a school should be strict

Q14 \*When I receive a diploma and/or a degree, I'd like to feel that I have worked hard for it

Q15 I believe that if a student has been admitted to a university, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that the student also received a diploma and/or academic degree

Q16 I think that the school should ensure that those who have not worked hard for it should not receive a diploma

Q17 In my opinion the graduation procedure from a school should be rather easy because I have done all the hard work already during my studies

**4. Curriculum – expectations towards who designs the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum (practical vs. theoretical)**

Q18 \*I believe that the school should take into consideration the students' opinion in terms of the courses that are included in the curriculum

Q19 \*I think that all subjects in the curriculum should have a clear practical link to the field of study

Q20 Even though some subjects seem too theoretical, I still find it necessary to study them

Q21 It is my opinion that each student him/herself should determine which subjects he/she will study

Q22 I believe it is the university, not the students, who should decide which subjects are included in a curriculum

Q23 \*In my opinion the school should consult their alumni when deciding which subjects should be included in the curriculum

Q24 \*In my opinion the school should consult employers when deciding which subjects should be included in the curriculum

**5. Communication with service staff - expectations of students towards the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities (except classroom activities) in accommodating the students' requests**

Q25 If there are changes in the timetable or deadlines, the study department should inform me personally and in due time

Q26 The study department should work out my study calendar in a way that suits me best

Q27 \*The study department should remind me of things that I have forgotten

Q28 \*The study department should solve my problems with a teacher

- Q29 It is my own responsibility to make sure that I know all the changes in the timetable and deadlines
- Q30 \*The study department should support me when I have a problem with a deadline
- Q31 I think that when dealing with students, the study department should follow established school rules rather than take a personalized approach to each student

**6. Rigor - the lenience or strictness with which students expect the HEI to follow the established rules and regulations**

- Q32 If I do not like a subject, I should be allowed not to study it
- Q33 When making exceptions, the school should consider the student's responsibilities at work
- Q34 \*I think the school should be strict regarding any deadlines
- Q35 \*In my opinion, school rules must be the same for everyone to follow
- Q36 \*I find that rule-breaking must be punished
- Q37 \*In my opinion students' academic life should be fairly hard because later on they will be grateful to the school and feel respect towards it
- Q38 I think that is a student pays for their education s(he) should be entitled to demand more of the university
- Q39 \*I believe that among other things, the university should teach students discipline
- Q40 \*I find that a school should have and follow rules on making exceptions concerning deadlines and an exception should generally not be an option
- Q41 In my opinion class attendance should be optional at a university, i.e. class participation should not be graded

**7. Grading - the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach the evaluation of various assignments**

- Q42 \*The teacher should justify my grades
- Q43 \*I think that if a student pays the tuition fee, s(he) should be taught by the teacher as long as it takes for her/him to receive a good grade
- Q44 \*Getting the best grade must be a hard job
- Q45 \*If I feel that I deserve a better final grade in a subject at the end of the semester, the teacher should give me another possibility to improve the grade
- Q46 Sometimes I wish that I could pass things with little effort, but later on I do not feel happy with the good grade and wish the whole things had been more difficult to achieve
- Q47 \*Teachers should grade also my eagerness, not only academic achievements

**8. Classroom behaviour - the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach students' (mis)behaviour in class**

- Q48 \*If I cheat, there should be negative consequences for me

- Q49 \*In my opinion, deadlines for a test and homework are very important to follow and no exceptions must be provided
- Q50 I should be allowed to use a laptop and other electronic devices in a class
- Q51 \*I think that being late for class should be frowned upon
- Q52 \*I believe that during a test or exam the teacher should keep a very close watch on the students in case someone is cheating
- Q53 \*All those student who cannot hand in their assignments in due time should be graded more strictly
- Q54 \*It is my opinion that plagiarism (using other people's ideas and words and presenting them as your own) should entail negative consequences
- Q55 I think that it is the teacher's job to ensure that students pay attention in class, not surf the internet or chat on MSN, Skype or Facebook
- Q56 I should be given the possibility to hand in assignments after the deadline without any negative consequences
- Q57 I think that when the lecture starts, the teacher should lock the door and all latecomers are left out

#### **9. Relational level - student-teacher closeness and friendliness**

- Q58 \*In my opinion university teachers should keep distance from students rather than be on friendly terms
- Q59 I think that university teachers should be friendly, yet make sure that students do not abuse their friendliness
- Q60 If I work and study simultaneously, the teacher should be available to consult me on professional, work-related problems
- Q61 \*I believe university teachers and students should be like friends

#### **10. Communication with teacher - the approachability and convenience that students expect from teachers outside class hours**

- Q62 \* If I need to get in touch with my university teacher, I should contact him/her by e-mail
- Q63 If I need to get in touch with my university teacher, I should have the possibility to contact him/her by mobile phone
- Q64 If I need to get in touch with my university teacher, I should contact him/her only during consultation hours
- Q65 \*If I need to talk to the teacher outside class hours, I should make a prior appointment

#### **11. Classroom studies - convenience and ease of classroom studies**

- Q66 \* In my opinion new material should be presented to students in a previously processed and concise form, e.g. in the form of a course reader or PowerPoint slides
- Q67 I'd like every class to start with a small quiz on last class' material, because this would make me study harder
- Q68 \*It is my opinion that all necessary study material should be made available in the internet for the student to download



Q69 While in class, studies should concentrate on practical activities rather than on material in books

Q70 I believe that all material that the student needs to know should be covered in class

### **12. Individual studies - students' willingness to make academic efforts outside class hours**

Q71 \* I think that working individually at home to prepare for next class is an inseparable part of getting the higher education

Q72 I think that if I don't want to, I should not be made to do all home works

Q73 I feel that reading scientific articles is too much of an effort for a student and should not be required

Q74 \*I believe that additional reading at home must be made obligatory because knowledge provided in class alone is insufficient to grasp different aspects of the subject

Q75 I should not be made to study outside class hours

Q76 \*If I come to class unprepared, there should be some negative consequences for me

### **13. Teaching methods – students' expectations concerning teaching methods**

Q77 \*I think that a university teacher who is unable to deliver a class in an interesting manner should be replaced

Q78 \*In my opinion all subjects should be taught interactively – by way of discussion and group-work, not listening and individual reading

Q79 \*I feel that it is the teacher's job to make sure that everybody understands a topic

Q80 I believe that at a university, it is rather the expertise and knowledge of a teacher that matter, not his/her teaching ability

Q81 \*A class should contain entertaining elements, because then I pay attention

Q82 In my opinion bringing examples from real life while teaching a subject is essential

Q83 If I do not understand something in class, I should study harder individually

Q84 \*If I cannot take interest in a particular subject, it is the teacher's job to inspire and motivate me with different teaching methods

### **14. Course design – expectations towards who designs the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical)**

Q65 \*I think that generally, a course should be practical, not theoretical

Q86 It is my opinion that the topics within a subject depends solely on the teacher's choice because the teacher knows best which topics are the most important

Q87 \*In today's world, the teaching of theoretical material is outdated at the university

- Q88 The teacher, while designing a course, should pay attention to my suggestions and wishes
- Q89 \*I'd like to be taught by people who do business in the field that they teach
- Q90 \*The teaching of practical material should receive precedence over teaching theoretical material

## **Appendix 2**

### **Validated student-customer questionnaire (SCOQ)**

#### **Category 1: Student feedback – the importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback**

1. In my opinion, the school should collect students' feedback on a regular basis (e.g. once per semester/year)
2. I believe that the school should report on the changes that have been introduced based on students' feedback
3. My opinion is that when organizing studies, the school should consider the students' wishes
4. I think that the school should act on students' feedback on their teachers

#### **Category 2: Graduation – the level of strictness which students expect a HEI to employ during student graduation**

5. I think that the graduation requirements of a school should be strict
6. When I receive a diploma and/or a degree, I'd like to feel that I have worked hard for it

#### **Category 3: Curriculum design – expectations towards who designs the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum (practical vs. theoretical)**

7. In my opinion the school should consult their alumni when deciding which subjects should be included in the curriculum
8. In my opinion the school should consult employers when deciding which subjects should be included in the curriculum

#### **Category 4: Communication with service staff – expectations of students towards the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities (except classroom activities) in accommodating the students' requests**

9. The study department should remind me of things that I have forgotten
10. The study department should solve my problems with a teacher
11. The study department should support me when I have a problem with a deadline

**Category 5: Rigor – the lenience or strictness with which students expect the HEI to follow the established rules and regulations**

12. I think the school should be strict regarding any deadlines
13. In my opinion, school rules must be the same for everyone to follow

**Category 6: Grading – the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach the evaluation of various assignments**

14. The teacher should justify my grades
15. I think that if a student pays the tuition fee, s(he) should be taught by the teacher as long as it takes for her/him to receive a good grade
16. Getting the best grade must be a hard job
17. If I feel that I deserve a better final grade in a subject at the end of the semester, the teacher should give me another possibility to improve the grade
18. Teachers should grade also my eagerness, not only academic achievements

**Category 7: Classroom behaviour – the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach students' (mis)behaviour in class**

19. If I cheat, there should be negative consequences for me
20. In my opinion, deadlines for a test and homework are very important to follow and no exceptions must be provided
21. I believe that during a test or exam the teacher should keep a very close watch on the students in case someone is cheating
22. All those student who cannot hand in their assignments in due time should be graded more strictly
23. It is my opinion that plagiarism (using other people's ideas and words and presenting them as your own) should entail negative consequences

**Category 8: Classroom studies – convenience and ease of classroom studies**

24. In my opinion new material should be presented to students in a previously processed and concise form, e.g. in the form of a course reader or PowerPoint slides
25. It is my opinion that all necessary study material should be made available in the internet for the student to download

**Category 9: Individual studies – students' willingness to make academic efforts outside class hours**

26. I think that working individually at home to prepare for next class is an inseparable part of getting the higher education

27. I believe that additional reading at home must be made obligatory because knowledge provided in class alone is insufficient to grasp different aspects of the subject
28. If I come to class unprepared, there should be some negative consequences for me

**Category 10: Teaching methods – students' expectations concerning teaching methods**

29. A class should contain entertaining elements, because then I pay attention
30. If I cannot take interest in a particular subject, it is the teacher's job to inspire and motivate me with different teaching methods

**Category 11: Course design – expectations towards who designs the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical)**

31. I think that generally, a course should be practical, not theoretical
32. In today's world, the teaching of theoretical material is outdated at the university
33. I'd like to be taught by people who do business in the field that they teach
34. The teaching of practical material should receive precedence over teaching theoretical material

## **APPENDIX 3**

Koris, R., Örtenblad, A., Kerem, K., & Ojala, T. (2014). Student-Customer Orientation at a Higher Educational Institution: the Perspective of Undergraduate Business Students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. (Forthcoming).



## Journal of Marketing for Higher Education

### Student-customer orientation at a higher educational institution: the perspective of undergraduate business students

Riina Koris

Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration, Tallinn, Estonia

Anders Örténblad

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nordland, Bodø, Norway

Katri Kerem

Estonian Business School, Tallinn, Estonia

Triinu Ojala

Estonian Business School, Tallinn, Estonia

#### Abstract

Existing literature is polarized and primarily conceptual on the topic of student-customer orientation. Research into this phenomenon has failed to realize that higher education as such consists of several different educational experiences and has therefore addressed and studied the issue at a too general level, i.e. at the level of the higher educational institution (HEI) as a whole, not at the level of educational experiences that a HEI provides. Based on a validated model of educational experiences, validated student-customer orientation questionnaire (Koris & Nokelainen, 2014) and a survey conducted among business students (N=405) in Estonia, the aim of the article is to identify whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. The results of the study show that students expect to be treated as customers in some, but not all categories of educational experience that a HEI offers.

**Keywords:** higher education, student-customer orientation, educational experiences, student-customer orientation survey

#### Introduction

The marketing concept emerged in the late 1940s and was generally accepted in the 1960s. In the myriad of articles that have been written within the marketing area, scholars mostly seem to agree that successful firms are customer-oriented (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Danneels, 2003; Johnson, 1998; Valenzuela, 2010). Hamel and Prahalad (1994) additionally point out that customer-orientation enhances business

performance, regardless of the size of the firm and, most interestingly, perhaps, regardless of the industry it is in, and are thus in agreement with Greenberg (2004) and Desai, Damewood and Jones (2001), who claim that HEIs are also considered to be a business like any other and should therefore embrace the customer orientation approach within the marketing concept if they want to succeed.

Like many other industries, HEIs, too, are operating in a highly competitive and dynamic environment with intense competition and a host of comparable alternatives (Bristow & Schneider, 2002; Pesch, Calhoun, Schneider, & Bristow, 2008). This has resulted in a situation where institutions of higher education all over the world are having to compete for funds from both public and private sectors as well as for potential students (Conway, Mackay, & Yorke, 1994). To withstand the competition, some HEIs focus on historical heritage, sustainability and academic excellence and position themselves as value-creators. However, because just a handful can stress historical heritage and sustainability, and academic excellence or value-creation no longer entail a differential advantage, a number of HEIs position themselves as customer-oriented academic institutions, stressing flexibility and convenience of attendance to attract prospective students (Koris, 2010).

As the next section of the paper will show, existing literature on student-customer orientation has tended to either apply polarized presumptions rather than conduct open-ended empirical studies, or, in the far fewer cases where previous literature has conducted empirical studies, the approach has been too general. In contrast, the aim of this article is to identify whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented.

This aim has been achieved through a survey. The questionnaire which measures students' expectations for student-customer orientation was validated using exploratory factor analysis and Bayesian Dependency Modeling. The latter was chosen because it does not require multivariate normal distribution of the variables, allows the investigation of both non-linear and linear dependencies and produces the most probable statistical dependency structure between the observed variables (for further discussion on this topic see Koris & Nokelainen, 2014). Thus, the authors have tapped the students' expectations on this issue at a substantially deeper level than current studies so far have done.

Regarding the target group for our work, it is primarily the management of HEIs and the academics who have written on the topic, but also students that might find the article and the results of the survey interesting.

In this work the authors do not take sides with either opponents or promoters of student-customer orientation (as is the case with most of the existing literature on this topic). Instead, the authors remain neutral while tapping the students' expectations on this issue at a substantially deeper level than current studies so far have done and aim at contributing to existing literature with the findings of their study that identifies whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented.



The paper is structured as follows: it first reviews previous literature on student-customer orientation, thereafter it describes the methods employed and procedures used for the study. This is followed by the results of the study, discussion and a conclusion. The paper ends with a section on limitations and possible future research.

## **Literature review**

Positioning an HEI as a customer oriented (or student-customer oriented) institution has been widely discussed and stands fairly polarized. There are those who claim that when HEIs face falling demand, they should focus on the customer (i.e. the students) and remarket the product (i.e. education) (see e.g. Browne, 2010; Desai et al., 2001; DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005; Pesch et al., 2008; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006, Svensson & Wood, 2007; Vetter, 2005). Others, however, say that customer-orientation does not contribute to professionalism and the biggest problem of all HEIs trying to use marketing to solve their problems is the idea that students and recruiters are customers, thus likening an HEI to an upmarket training provider, rather than a university (see e.g. Argenti, 2000; Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Franz, 1998; Holbrook, 2005, 2007).

In its tone of voice, the polarized literature is primarily hostile towards students executing the rights of customers. Among others, for instance, it calls the students 'coddled beneficiaries' (Holbrook, 2004, p. 68) with 'low-brow and careerist tastes' (Holbrook & Hulbert, 2002, p. 100) or 'in-and-out-of-the-class floaters with no commitment' (Edmunson, 1997, p. 6) who expect new material to be entertaining and fun to master (Holbrook, 2004), who are seeking the easiest way to obtain a qualification, and so expect pre-packaged learning delivered by happy, smiling service delivery staff (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). Additionally, literature is blaming the student for having taken control of education (see e.g. Argenti, 2000; Desai et al., 2001; Franz, 1998; Svensson & Wood, 2007).

In addition to being hostile, literature is also mainly conceptual, and even though some studies on whether or not HEIs are/should be customer oriented exist, they only touch the surface of the topic. Bristow and Schneider (2002), for example, investigate whether students feel an HEI cares about them, takes time to learn their needs, provides good value for money and a satisfying educational experience; Delucci and Korgen (2002) used a questionnaire containing four questions which tapped the issue of paying the tuition fee vs. receiving an academic degree, the generosity while grading, and the teacher's responsibility for the students' learning; Obermiller, Fleenor and Raven (2005) asked students whether they feel they are products or customers of higher education; Ikeda, Veludo-de-Oliveira and Campomar (2009) set out to determine whether students feel they are customers of a course, whether the customer is the king in the educational context and asked the students to analyse short-term vs. long-term satisfaction regarding educational services; and Woodall, Hiller and Resnick (2012) identified key value drivers highlighting both benefits and sacrifices that were vital for the students in an HEI.

We believe that the studies pointed out above tap the students' viewpoint at a too general level. We agree with Muncy (2008), according to whom an HEI as such consists of a number of educational experiences (e.g. curriculum, pedagogy, feedback, etc.) and that one can study the phenomenon of student-customer orientation in more depth only after the experiences have been elicited. Relying on Muncy (2008) and the validated model of educational experiences and the validated student-customer orientation questionnaire (Koris & Nokelainen, 2014), another study has been conducted which looks into the matter at a deeper level, i.e. separately at the level of each of the educational experience in the model. Thus, the study does not investigate whether students expect an HEI as such to be student-customer oriented (as most studies have done so far); instead, the aim is to find out whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented. Such knowledge is relevant both for HEIs who sometimes promote and practice student-customer orientation and for those who write on the topic and are (overly) hostile in their tone of voice towards students' attitude and behaviour at an HEI.

It must be pointed out, however, that even though existing literature suggests several customers of higher education, such as the students, their parents, the labour market, the society (see e.g. Bristow & Schneider, 2002; Holbrook, 2007; Muncy, 2008), this study is limited to students in general and business students in particular since, as Holbrook (2004) claims, the customer-oriented logic 'takes hold nowhere more strongly than in our schools of commerce or management where, quite literally, business is our middle name' (p. 68).

## **Method**

Even though higher education as such has multiple beneficiaries, such as the labour market, the society, etc., the immediate beneficiary of education is the student and for this reason we decided to conduct a study looking into the students' expectations concerning student-customer orientation. As shown above, although a number of studies on this topic have been conducted, they tend to provide an insight at a too general level, i.e. at the level of the HEI as such, not at the level of the different educational experiences that a HEI offers, and therefore fail to address the issue in more depth. Therefore, the aim of our study was to measure, whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

Our study relies on quantitative research and is based on the validated model of educational experiences and validates student-customer orientation questionnaire (Koris & Nokelainen, 2014). Because the questionnaire taps various categories of educational experience, it provides a deeper insight into the phenomenon of student-customer orientation than the studies conducted so far and briefly described above. In order to guarantee a maximum response rate, we aimed at approaching the students in person during classes and did so in all of the four HEIs in Estonia that offer business education. The students' responses by the 11 categories of educational

experience aim at showing whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

## **Respondents and procedure**

In order to find out whether, in which categories of educational experience and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented, we approached business students in all of the four HEIs providing higher education in business in Estonia and selected the survey participants based on the following criteria: 1) both male and female participants had to comprise the body of respondents; 2) respondents had to be in their 2nd or 3rd year of study; and 3) respondents had to be full-time students. Choosing students in their 2nd or 3rd year of study guaranteed a body of information-rich respondents with longer experience in being a student as students in their 1st year would have had little experience in all the categories of educational experience.

To test the mechanics of the questionnaire and identify unforeseen problems with question wording, answer categories, instructions, etc. (Goodwin, 2009), the authors relied on Isaac and Michael (1995) who suggest that before administering a questionnaire, a pilot study with 10–30 people should be conducted. Following this, the questionnaire was pre-tested in a pilot study (N=47) among business students in one of the HEIs in Estonia. The aim of pre-testing was to detect possible shortcomings in the design and its administration (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Schwartz, 1998 citing Emory & Cooper, 1991) and to assess aspects such as clarity of instructions and questions, quality of evidence and ability to perform meaningful analysis of the evidence, time taken to complete the questionnaire and to discover whether questions on key issues have been overlooked.

Following that, the main study was conducted and the questionnaire was distributed among students of business administration at four HEIs in Estonia (N=405). To ensure maximum response rate, the data were collected during regularly scheduled classes. Students were approached personally during lectures and consent to carry out the survey was obtained both from the lecturer in charge of the class as well as the students. To motivate the students to participate, we offered to share the results once the data had been analysed.

To address the issue of ethics when conducting research among students, the filling-in of the questionnaire was strictly voluntary and no students unwilling to participate were asked to do so. The questionnaire was anonymous and confidential and no answers were connected to any student personally.

While filling in the questionnaire, the students used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. 6-point Likert scale was used to avoid the error of central tendency, described by Kerlinger (1973) as a ‘general tendency to avoid all extreme judgements and rate high down the middle of a rating scale’ (p. 549).

## Results

With the purpose of identifying whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented, the following section will describe the processing of the data collected and present the results of the study.

The data obtained from the 405 respondents in four HEIs in Estonia (20% of all the students in Estonia with a similar profile) was first processed in SPSS. Reverse questions in the questionnaire were re-coded and arithmetical averages were calculated by questions and by categories of educational experience; standard deviations of the averages as well as statistical error margins were calculated at 95% confidence level.

Table 1 presents the results of the survey by the 11 categories in the model of educational experiences for student-customer orientation (Figure 1). It also describes the content of each of the category.

Table 1. Average evaluations and standard deviations by categories of educational experience.

<b>Category of educational experience</b>	<b>Content of the category</b>	<b>Average evaluation on a 6-point scale</b>	<b>SD</b>
Student feedback	the (un)importance of collecting and acting on students' feedback	5.1	0.7
Graduation	the level of strictness or lenience a HEI to employs during student graduation	4.7	0.9
Curriculum design	expectations towards who designs the curriculum and the nature of the curriculum (practical vs. theoretical)	4.3	1.1
Communication with service staff	the ease or difficulty of communicating with the study consultants and other bodies responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities (except classroom activities) in accommodating the students' requests	3.8	1.1
Rigor	the lenience or strictness with which the HEI follows the established rules and regulations	4.5	0.8
Grading	the lenience or strictness with which students expect the teacher to approach the evaluation of various assignments	3.0	0.6
Classroom behaviour	the lenience or strictness with which the teacher approaches students' (mis)behaviour in class	4.4	0.9
Classroom studies	convenience and ease of classroom studies	5.5	0.6

Individual studies	whether or not a HEI expects students to make academic efforts outside class	3.4	0.9
Teaching methods	the use of modern and traditional techniques in teaching at a HEI	4.0	1.1
Course design	the stakeholders responsible for designing the course and the nature of the course (practical vs. theoretical) (practical vs. theoretical)	4.5	0.8

To calculate reliability estimates for the coherent items, the Cronbach's Alphas are frequently used. However, based on Pallant (2001), it is recommended to calculate the mean inter-item correlations instead in case the number of items in the scale is less than ten. Because the most number of questions per one category in our questionnaire is five (categories grading and classroom behaviour), we relied on Pallant and calculated the mean inter-item correlations as reliability estimates. The mean inter-item correlations in the questionnaire are presented below (see Table 2).

Table 2: Mean inter-item correlations for the 11 categories of educational experience.

Category of educational experience	Mean inter-item correlations
<b>Institutional network</b>	
Student feedback	0.4
Graduation	0.4
Curriculum design	0.4
Communication with service staff	0.4
Rigor	0.4
<b>Learning situation network</b>	
Grading	0.2
Classroom behaviour	0.4
Classroom studies	0.4
Individual studies	0.3
Teaching methods	0.4
Course design	0.4

The optimal mean inter-item correlation values range from 0.2 – 0.4 (Pallant, 2001). As can be seen in Table 2, all correlations appear as optimal (0.2 – 0.4), thus indicating the reliability of the category and the items in it.

## Discussion

The study was designed to empirically investigate whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented. The article

will now present the students' responses to the survey by the 11 categories in the model of educational experiences (Koris & Nokelainen, 2014).

Existing literature claims that being customer oriented means, essentially, acting on customers' expectations, needs and wants. In order to improve the product or service, the identification of customers' expectations, needs and wants is a continuous process. Collecting *student feedback* to tap the areas of dissatisfaction with the HEI has been discussed by a number of authors (see, e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Holbrook, 2004; Hussey & Smith, 2010; Koris, 2012; Muncy, 2008). Some claim that the collecting of student feedback creates 'trade-school mentality' (Holbrook, 2004, p. 25), and results in a situation where students have a strong say in the content of the course, home assignments, allocation of time, visiting speakers, etc ( see e.g. Emery et al., 2001). The survey conducted reveals that students, indeed, expect the HEI to collect their feedback ( $M = 5.1$ ;  $SD = .76$ ) and want the HEI to introduce changes based on feedback to ensure students' satisfaction. Because existing literature states that a customer-oriented HEI should collect and act on student feedback, one can say that concerning this category of educational experience students expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

Nevertheless, at the level of *graduation*, students are of the opinion that if one wants to graduate, one should work hard for it ( $M = 4.7$ ;  $SD = .92$ ). They state that it is not the school's but the student's responsibility to make efforts and ensure that they deserve the degree and the diploma. This is in disagreement with Eagle and Brennan (2007), according to whom students happily relinquish responsibility for learning to their educators, and believe that failure to achieve desired outcomes should be blamed on the educator rather than the student (see also Koris, 2012). Thus, even though some authors suggest that students want to work as little as possible and receive good results, this is not what the survey supports. Quite to the contrary, our survey shows that students expect a HEI to insist that they work hard before they can graduate.

Literature claims that if a HEI implements student-customer orientation, students should be asked what they would like to be taught and that students would prefer to receive information which would be fun and easy to master (see e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Holbrook, 2004). In terms of the *curriculum design*, the survey reveals that students rather expect a curriculum to be practical and compiled based on the expertise of several stakeholders ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ). Quite contrary to Clayson and Haley (2005), students are of the opinion that they are not in a position to dictate what a HEI should teach (for further discussion on this topic see also Driscoll & Wicks, 1998; Emery et al., 2001; Holbrook, 2002; Muncy, 2008). Nevertheless, they do expect that a HEI, while drawing up a curriculum, relies on the advice of several stakeholder groups (e.g. alumni, employers), not just the expertise of the HEI itself.

Another educational experience is *communication with service staff*, i.e. those who are responsible for the smooth flow of study-related activities (except classroom activities) and, according to Koris (2012), act as consultants whom the students can turn to in case problems related to studies occur (p. 269). Eagle and Brennan (2007) state that students expect to meet happy, smiling service delivery

staff. The survey revealed that this is, indeed, mostly the case ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ). Students rather consider it the service staff's responsibility to inform them of any changes as soon as possible, to work out their study calendar in a way that suits the students best and help them solve problems related to deadlines. Thus, in this respect, the survey results rather support the prevailing discourse in literature and indicate that in terms of communication with the service staff, students expect rather than not a HEI to be student-customer oriented.

Literature suggests that students search maximum gain with minimum effort (Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000), are looking for fitted schedule and optional attendance (Emery et al., 2001), expect the HEI to cater to their every wish (Holbrook, 2004), and are seeking the easiest way to obtain qualification (Eagle & Brennan, 2007) i.e. that they expect the HEI to be flexible and lenient rather than strict and rigorous in terms of the established rules and regulations. However, our survey demonstrates that students would rather prefer the HEI to be uncompromising and *rigorous* in their rules and regulations ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = .84$ ). They believe that a HEI should be strict in having the students follow the deadlines set and that rule-breaking should be punished. Students are also of the opinion that their academic life should be rather hard because later on they will be grateful to the HEI and feel respect towards it. Some authors (Clayson & Haley, 2005; Helms & Key, 1994; Scott, 1999) claim that students tend to display the I-pay-I-am-entitled-to-good-grades attitude. Our survey, however, rather does not support this: students do not expect the payment of a tuition fee to guarantee a diploma and expect that the rules should be the same for everyone to follow.

Moving now to the network of learning situation network in the model and the category of *grading*, many authors touch upon the topic to a greater or lesser extent (see e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Emery et al., 2001; Franz, 1998; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002; Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Scott, 1999). Literature claims that students feel they are entitled to receive good grades because they are the customers (Helms & Key, 1994) and believe that assessment should be easy and generous (Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2001). Our survey shows that students remain rather indifferent in this category ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = .63$ ) and the research neither confirmed nor refuted the claims in existing literature. Therefore this category should be investigated further in the future.

Concerning the category of *classroom behaviour* in the model, review of literature indicates that teachers feel they have had to reduce academic standards (Eagle & Brennan, 2007), have turned from teachers into salespeople who cater to their customers' needs and wants (Hussey & Smith, 2010) and that the I-pay-your-salary-so give-me-what-I-want attitude among students towards their teachers is occasionally detected (see, e.g. Clayson & Haley, 2005; Emery et al., 2001; Helms & Key, 1994). Nevertheless, our survey indicates that students do not share this sentiment ( $M = 4.4$ ;  $SD = .94$ ). They expect teachers to establish certain rules in the beginning of the course and follow the rules throughout the course. They would

rather expect the teachers to frown upon students when they come late to classes, ignore deadlines, cheat and engage in activities unrelated to classroom studies. Students are also of the opinion that those who hand in assignments after deadline should either be refused acceptance or graded more strictly than those who presented assignments on time.

Regarding the category of *classroom studies*, the results of the study are rather in line with what the literature suggests. According to Eagle and Brennan (2007), students want new material to be presented in a concise and pre-processed form for the ease of studying. This was also supported by the survey ( $M = 5.5$ ;  $SD = .69$ ) and demonstrates that in terms of classroom studies, students do expect the material to be presented in a concise form, by way of processed PowerPoint presentations and, additionally, uploaded to an internet environment for their access. They also expect the material presented to be of practical rather than theoretical nature, thus having an immediate bearing on real-life business decisions.

Concerning *individual studies*, existing literature is primarily pessimistic towards students' willingness to make efforts outside class hours (see e.g. Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000; Emery et al., 2001; Holbrook, 2005; Sword, 2009). Students tend to frown upon tasks that require an effort outside the classroom ( see e.g. Sword, 2009). Our survey rather confirms this and demonstrates that students would rather not work individually outside class hours ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .92$ ). Thus, even though studying is a journey where many things are discovered, rather than pointed at (Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004; Starkey & Tempest, 2009), this is not how the students feel.

Concerning the category of *course design*, Emery et al. (2001) depict a customer driven course as one where students compile their own syllabi, decide on the course objectives, texts, assignments and assignments weights, the amount spent on various topics and guest speakers. Muncy (2008) claims that the teacher, having the proper credentials to teach the class, is in best position to decide which topics should be covered within a course. He also adds 'the fact that students are taking a class from a professor indicates that they are not as informed on the subject as the professor is' (p. 19). Our survey results indicate an agreement with Muncy as the students rather admit to their illiteracy in this respect. Nevertheless, students are also rather voicing their support for classes which are practical as opposed to theoretical ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = .86$ ). They are additionally of the opinion that teachers should also be active in their field of knowledge outside the school (i.e. be practitioners rather than theorists), and that while designing a course, the amount of practical should be increased at the expense of theoretical.

The category of *teaching methods* has received a lot of attention in existing literature (see e.g. Chonko et al., 2002; Holbrook, 2004; Koris, 2012). The prevailing attitude is that students want learning to be fun and based on as much interactive methods as possible. Our survey also supports this ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ) – students rather expect teachers to employ methods which are interactive and entertaining. The survey results are in agreement with Chonko, Tanner and Davis



(2002), who states that teachers should strive to discover which teaching methods constitute effective teaching and create a facilitating learning environment.

Table 3 summarizes the research findings and presents the students' expectations concerning whether or not they expect a HEI to be student-customer oriented by the 11 categories of educational experience.

Table 3. Do students expect HEIs to be student-customer oriented? (business students' perspective).

	Yes	Rather yes	Rather no	No	Comment
<b>Institutional level</b>					
Student feedback	X				Expect a HEI to collect and act on students' feedback
Graduation				X	Expect graduation to require hard work
Curriculum design			X		Students rather admit to their illiteracy in partly designing the curriculum; expect curriculum to be practical and based on the expertise of several stakeholders, not just the HEI
Communication with service staff		X			Rather consider it the service staff's responsibility to inform students of changes, to work out their study calendar in a way that suits the students best and help them solve problems related to deadlines
Rigor			X		Expect a HEI to be rather uncompromising in having the students follow HEI's rules and regulations
<b>Classroom level</b>					
Grading					Remain rather indifferent in terms of this category
Classroom behaviour			X		Expect teachers to rather frown upon students' in-class misbehaviour
Classroom studies	X				Expect material to be presented in a concise and processed form, available to download in the internet and as practical as possible
Individual studies		X			Rather consider classroom studying to be sufficient
Course design		X			Rather admit that they are incompetent to dictate the content of a course, but expect a course to be practical

Teaching methods		X			Rather expect teachers to employ methods which are interactive and entertaining
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Note: Category *grading* in the table remains empty because students indicate indecisiveness ( $M=3.0$ ;  $SD=0.63$ ). The authors suggest that this category should be investigated further.

## Conclusions

The aim of the study was to find out whether, in which categories and to what extent students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented. Compared to research conducted so far which studied the phenomenon at the level of the HEI as such and revealed that students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented, this study explores the phenomenon of student-customer orientation more deeply, i.e. at the level of different categories of educational experiences offered by an HEI (Koris and Nokelainen, 2014) and shows that students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented in some, but not all of the educational experiences that an HEI offers.

Based on the categories in the model of educational experiences (Koris & Nokelainen, 2014), students expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented in the categories of collecting and acting on *student feedback* as well as *classroom studies*. To some extent, students also expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented in terms of *communication with service staff*, *individual studies*, *course design* and *teaching methods*.

However, students do not expect an HEI to be student-customer oriented in the category of *graduation*. Students also rather do not prefer an HEI to be student-customer oriented in the categories of *grading*, *curriculum design*, and *rigor* and *classroom behaviour*.

Therefore, extrapolating from this primary research, it appears that existing literature may have misrepresented, misinterpreted or overgeneralized student's views in several specific areas: when it states that students have forsaken responsibility for studying and blame their inadequate results on teachers; when it suggests that students want to dictate not only what an HEI should teach, but also on which texts to read or assignments to do and grade; when it posits that students are looking for the easy way out with minimum effort and maximum gains; and when it claims that student behaviour has turned teachers into salespeople who cater to their every wish. It must also be mentioned, that even though students admit to being inadequate to be consulted on the issues of curriculum and course design, they expect the content to be practical rather than theoretical.

The most important practical implication of the research concerns implementing customer oriented practices in HEIs. Even though existing literature often suggests that students expect an HEI to treat them as customers by catering to their whims and wishes, this study showed that it would be short-sighted to assume that students expect their studies to be merely an enjoyable consumption experience with no serious input from themselves. Hence, the reputation of the "curling-generation" as lazy might be over-exaggerated. University students do not expect to be "served grades on silver plates" as is not a too seldom assumption among scholars. The

findings of our study can be used as a strong argument against those who tend to take the student-customer orientation too far, and in support of those who believe that even today's students are non-lazy human beings that would both enjoy and grow from taking more responsibility over their studies.

In terms of socio-demographic and category-level correlations, the only *statistically significant differences* appeared to be between those students who pay and those who do not pay for their education. The differences were identified in the following categories: communication with service staff, institutional rigor, classroom behaviour, individual studies and grading. Correlational analyses showed that paying students ( $M=3.9$ ;  $SD=1.13$ ) expect the service staff to accommodate their wishes more than non-paying students ( $M=3.5$ ;  $SD=1.09$ ),  $r_s=-.123$ ,  $p=.013$ . Paying students ( $M=4.1$ ;  $SD=.82$ ) expect the HEI to be less strict in following the established rules and regulations than non-paying students do ( $M=4.3$ ;  $SD=.75$ ),  $r_s=.117$ ,  $p=.018$ . They also expect teachers to be more tolerant towards their (mis)behaviour in class ( $M=4.1$ ;  $SD=.88$ ) than non-paying students ( $M=4.3$ ;  $SD=.83$ ),  $r_s=-.139$ ,  $p=.005$ . Further, paying students expect individual studies to be more convenient and easy ( $M=3.5$ ;  $SD=.91$ ) than non-paying students do ( $M=3.1$ ;  $SD=.88$ ),  $r_s=-.103$ ,  $p=.039$ . However, compared to non-paying students, paying students expect teachers to be more strict in grading ( $M=4.2$ ;  $SD=.68$  vs.  $M=4.4$ ;  $SD=.72$ ,  $r_s=-.135$ ,  $p=.006$ ). It must be noted, however, that the effect sizes of these correlations were small according to Cohen (1988).

### **Limitations and future research**

Even though the study was conducted at four different HEIs, one of its major limitations is that the results rely on a single country and the demographic make-up of the respondents represented local students only. It would be most interesting to replicate a similar study in various regions of the world with a more heterogeneous population of students.

Another limitation of our study is what Krosnick and Presser (2010) call 'the social desirability response bias', where respondent feel the inclination to be associated with socially desirable answers (see also Fowler, 2009; Nardi, 2003). In the context of this study students might have felt tempted to provide socially desirable answers within a number of categories of educational experiences. To minimize the tendency of students to provide socially desirable answers, we employed a self-administered survey questionnaire which, according to Fowler (2009) is useful when dealing with a sensitive topic or socially undesirable or negatively valued attitude and which greatly helps to minimize such bias (p. 74). Also, it is hoped that anonymity further helped to reduce social desirability bias since the questionnaire required no identifying information (name, address, e-mail address, etc).

Additionally, we strongly recommend researchers to conduct further empirical studies. For example, it would be of great interest to compare the results and findings across students majoring in different disciplines (e.g. medicine, arts, etc),

those at different levels of education (e.g. bachelor vs. master students) and different stakeholder groups (e.g. parents, the labour market, etc) among other possible settings and populations.

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# ELULOOKORJELDUS

## 1. Isikuandmed

Ees- ja perekonnanimi Riina Koris  
Sünniaeg ja -koht 27.07.1972  
Kodakondsus Eesti  
E-posti aadress [riina.koris@ebs.ee](mailto:riina.koris@ebs.ee)

## 2. Hariduskäik

Õppeasutus (nimetus lõpetamise ajal)	Lõpetamise aeg	Haridus (eriala/kraad)
Estonian Business School	2006	ärikorralduse magister / MBA
Tallinna Pedagoogikainstituut	1996	inglise ja saksa filoloogia

## 4. Keelteoskus (alg-, kesk- või kõrgtase)

Keel	Tase
eesti	kõrgtase
inglise	kõrgtase
vene	kõrgtase
saksa	kesktase
rootsi	kesktase

## 5. Täiendusõpe

Õppimise aeg	Täiendusõppe korraldaja nimetus
08/2012	Seminar “õppejõu sotsiaalsed oskused”, Estonian Business School
11/2011	Seminar “Road to Teaching Excellence“, International School of Management, Vilnius, Leedu
05/2007 – 06/2007	Rahvusvaheline õppejõu arenguprogramm: kaasuste kirjutamine ja kasutamine ülikoolis. IESE Business School, University of Navarra
06/2002	Õpetamismetoodika koolitus, The British Council



## 6. Teenistuskäik

Töötamise aeg	Tööandja nimetus	Ametikoht
06/2008 – ...	Estonian Business School	Turunduse ja kommunikatsiooni õppetooli lektor
09/1999 – 05/2008.	Estonian Business School	Võõrkeelte Instituudi õppejõud ja lektoraadi juhataja

## 7. Teadustegevus

Koris, R., Örtenblad, A., Kerem, K., & Ojala, T. (2015). Student-Customer Orientation at a Higher Educational Institution: the Perspective of Undergraduate Business Students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. (ilmumas).

Koris, R. & Nokelainen, P. (2015). The Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ): Application of Customer Metaphor to Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(2), (ilmumas).

Örtenblad, A., & Koris, R. (2014). Is the learning organization idea relevant to higher educational institutions? A literature review and a „multi-stakeholder contingency approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2), 173–214.

Örtenblad, A., Koris, R. Farquharson, M., & Hsu, S-W. (2013). Business School Output: A conceptualization of business school graduates. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 11(2), 85–92.

Koris, R. (2012). Customer Orientation Model for a Higher Education Institution: When is Student-Customer Orientation Appropriate? *International Scientific Publications: Educational Alternatives*, 19(1), 261–277.

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## 8. Juhendatud magistritööd (2012-2014)

- Erinevate reklaamivormide kaudu edastatud turundussõnumite usaldamine Eesti mobiilsideturul
- Bioresonantsdiagnostika kui innovaatilise terviseteenuse integreeritud turunduskommunikatsiooni strateegia väljatöötamine

- Turuliidri positsiooni saavutamise potentsiaal ja võimalused: Nespresso Finland
- Hiiumaa turismipotentsiaal Eesti venekeelse elanikkonna seas
- Brändi väärtuspakkumise tajumine sihtrühmas: Monster Energy näitel
- Kiilto Airi kodupuhastusvahendite integreeritud turunduskommunikatsiooni strateegia loomine
- Toote päritoluma mõju ostja ostuotsusele viinade näitel
- Arvamusliidrid kui turunduskommunikatsiooni sihtrühm: Johnson&Johnson brändi Listerine näide
- Tarbija reageerimine hinnapõhiste sooduspakkumistele: kahe kampaania uuring Selver AS näitel
- AS Katomsk kliendirahulolu mõõtmine SERVQUAL ja IPA mudelite abil

# CURRICULUM VITAE

## 1. Personal data

Name	Riina Koris
Date and place of birth	27.07.1972
Citizenship	Estonian
E-mail address	<a href="mailto:riina.koris@ebs.ee">riina.koris@ebs.ee</a>

## 2. Education

Educational institution	Graduation year	Education (field of study/degree)
Estonian Business School	2006	Master of Business Administration
University of Tallinn	1996	English and German studies

## 3. Language competence/skills (fluent, average, basic skills)

Language	Level
Estonian	fluent
English	fluent
Russian	fluent
German	average
Swedish	average

## 4. Special courses

Period	Educational or other organization
08/2012	Seminar “social skills of lecturers”, Estonian Business School, Tallinn, Estonia
11/2011	Seminar “Road to Teaching Excellence“, International School of Management, Vilnius, Lithuania
05/2007 – 06/2007	International Faculty development Programme: writing and using case studies, IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Barcelona, Spain
06/2002	Further training in methodology of teaching, The British Council, Tallinn, Estonia

## 5. Professional employment

Period	Organization	Position
06/2008 – ...	Estonian Business School	Lecturer with the Department of Marketing and Communication
09/1999 – 05/2008.	Estonian Business School	Lecturer and Head of Department with the Institute of Foreign Languages

## 6. Research activity

Koris, R., Örtenblad, A., Kerem, K., & Ojala, T. (2014). Student-Customer Orientation at a Higher Educational Institution: the Perspective of Undergraduate Business Students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. (forthcoming).

Koris, R. & Nokelainen, P. (2015). The Student-Customer Orientation Questionnaire (SCOQ): Application of Customer Metaphor to Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(2), (forthcoming).

Örtenblad, A., & Koris, R. (2014). Is the learning organization idea relevant to higher educational institutions? A literature review and a „multi-stakeholder contingency approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2), 173–214.

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## 7. Master thesis supervision (2012–2014)

- Consumers' trust in marketing messages delivered through different forms of advertising on the Estonian telecommunications market

- Customer relationship and retention management, Case Oral Hammaslääkäri PLC.
- Students' expectations for overseas studying – how to develop the Chinese educational market for Estonia
- Creating integrated marketing communications strategy for an innovative health service – bioresonance diagnostics
- The potential for achievement of the leadership position for Nespresso Finland
- The touristic potential of Hiiumaa among Russian-speaking population
- The perception of brand's value proposition among the target audience: the case of Monster Energy brand.
- Creating an integrated marketing communication strategy for line *Air* of Kiilto.
- The influence of product's origin on the buyer's decision: the example of vodka
- Opinion leaders as a target group for marketing communication: the case of Listerine brand by Johnson&Johnson
- Consumer reaction to detail promotions: the case of two campaigns at Selver AS
- Measuring AS Katomsk customer satisfaction using SERVQUAL and IPA model
- Positioning a brand: The example of Perma-Patch.
- Implementation of Internal Marketing based on the examples of reputable companies in Estonia

**DISSERTATIONS DEFENDED AT  
TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY ON  
*ECONOMICS***

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2. **Enn Listra.** The Development and Structure of Banking Sector: Retail Banking in Estonia. 2001.
3. **Tatyana Põlajeva.** The Comparative Analysis of Market's Attractiveness. 2001.
4. **Tuuli Tammeraid.** Modeling Flow of Funds for Estonia. 2002.
5. **Ivo Karilaid.** The Choice in General Method for Investment and Performance Evaluation. 2002.
6. **Hele Hammer.** Strategic Investment Decisions: Evidence from Survey and Field Research in Estonia. 2003.
7. **Viljar Jaamu.** The Methods and Instruments for Solving the Banking Crisis and Development of the Banking Sector in Estonia. 2003.
8. **Katri Kerem.** From Adoption to Relationships: Internet Banking in Estonia. 2003.
9. **Ly Kirikal.** Productivity, the Malmquist Index and the Empirical Study of Banks in Estonia. 2005.
10. **Jaanus Raim.** The PPP Deviations between Estonia and Non-Transitional Countries. 2006.
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12. **Enno Lend.** Transpordiühenduse ja logistikasüsteemi interaktsioon (Saaremaa ja Hiiumaa näitel). 2007.
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