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SCHOOLS' EVALUATIONS AND THE ADVOCACY ROLES OF STUDENTS (AN ABSTRACT)

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of the evaluation for universities is fully recognized. Measuring students' satisfaction with their higher education institutions is not new. In several countries, some of those data are even mandatory and transversal to institutions for the accreditation of their courses. They contribute then as indicators to compare and validate their classifications. However, this validity is, for some time, challenged. In this study, we focus on the influence of the advocacy roles of the students on schools' evaluations. As a starting hypothesis, we supposed that depending on the intent to promote his school, the perceived quality should differ significantly.

BACKGROUND

It's very important to understand the relationship between professor and students and the relationship among students in the classroom. For Peltier, Hay, and Drago (2005), this relations can exert a positive impact on the overall perceived quality. The quality perceived by students is a result from value. Relational quality in education is a criterion of satisfaction (VOSS; GRUBER; SZMIGIN, 2007; HOUSTON; BETTENCOURT, 1999). Educational experience is also relevant for perceived quality. The experience criteria integrates aspects like space for suggestions provided by the University, campus space, support services for students (such as a library and laboratories), the relationship of education where there is attention to student learning (NADIRI, 2006). Institutional structure and teaching excellence are crucial for the perception of quality, and an important factor is the professor's attitude. Qualified faculty impacts the perception of quality (VOSS; GRUBER; SZMIGIN, 2007). This element reinforces the importance of the professor in the teaching-learning relationship. It is the teacher competence to make the link between theory and practice in the content of the subject and his methodological ability is a facilitator to develop the student with learning needs and also difficulties (PASWAN; YOUNG, 2002).

It's a fact that the increase in customer orientation results in more meaningful marketing programs (IM; WORKMAN Jr., 2004), also in the educational scenario. Only the firms that build a strong and positive relationship with clients will be able to develop sustainable competitive advantage and achieve a higher performance, and this reality fits well for the educational context as well. Sheth and Parvatiyar (2002) mention that

relationship actions result from the understanding of consumers' needs. Athanasiou (2007) focus on performance in education, about the development of collaborative learning, where the student action is included in the educational process by exercising some autonomy. Collaborative learning is associated with raising learner autonomy, which improves learning.

The notion of consumer satisfaction has been expanded, highlighting the increase of points of contact with consumers (WINER, 2001), and also applied for educational institutions. Bendapudi and Leone (2003, p.22) found that "the link between quality and satisfaction with the firm is affected by the participation of the consumer", the student. Satisfaction comes from the consumer evaluation of the product or service, having as a parameter expectations and needs (ZEITHAML; BITNER, 2003), and depends on the individual perceptions of value, performance and quality. According to Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006), satisfaction is a construct of post-decision that takes place after the co-creation. For these authors, satisfaction is a two-dimensional construct, which highlights the specific meeting (individual and unic transaction) and overall satisfaction (accumulated). Grace and O'Cass (2005) understand satisfaction as a result of the expected performance, or value, obtained as service response. Consumers expect the firm service in the resolution of desires and needs, which generates satisfaction (DeSHIELDS Jr.; KARA; KAYNAK, 2005). In this investigation, the direct stakeholders are the students, but they are not the only ones. The entire educational context makes the definition related to perceived quality and satisfaction in education.

Court and Molesworth (2003, p.676) highlight private higher education as a service, in which "pressures for the increase in the number of students, ample opportunities for access and change in the perception of students (they consider themselves clients) generate the imperative need to enhance learning experiences". The teaching methods to promote the teaching-learning relationship, the management of the University, the enrollment procedures and the general structure of the institution exert some level of impact on student satisfaction (NAVARRO; IGLESIAS; TORRES, 2005).

In private higher education, loyalty can strengthen the relationship of the institution with the students, which is supposed to be an inhibitor of school evasion (LIN TSAI, 2006; HENNING-THURAU; LANGER; HANSEN, 2001). Loyalty, through relationship with students, can promote some kind of competitive advantage for the University. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) point out that an important concept is that of reputation resulting from past actions. At the institutional level, reputation is related to the image, a combination of factors that lead to reach some level of loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

Since three academic years, in a higher school in Portugal, a team of teachers and researchers has set up the collection of data (as opinions for school evaluation) via one online survey distributed by email in each May, to their final year students of bachelor degrees. Until now, more than three hundred students freely participated. Among other information, this survey help to collect students' opinion and judgment about their school by measuring the Net Promoter Score (NPS, known as the metrics of advocacy, by Kotler et al., 2016) and also the SERVQUAL (known as the instrument to measure service quality, adapted to this specific context; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

This procedure allows capturing students' perception of their school following 22 items with 7 points Likert-scales, along five dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy). The dimension labeled Tangibles is related to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. The Reliability dimension concerns the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The Responsiveness is linked to the willingness to help students and to provide prompt service. The Assurance dimension depends on the knowledge and courtesy of teachers and their ability to convey trust and confidence. The Empathy is the provision of caring and the individualized attention to student.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This communication does not intend to be a showcase of the scores obtained but, above all, awareness to the differences obtained when comparing the results by the profile of NPS (Grisaffe, 2007, Keiningham et al., 2007). Indeed, all the dimensions of SERVQUAL show significant differences according to the profile of the student (as detractor, as neutral person or as promoter). Globally, in average, students have rated the Tangibles dimension weaker (M=3,76) and evaluated better the Assurance dimension (M=4,84). However, comparing the results obtained last three years, we found a pattern of trend of fluctuating opinions and evaluations. The detractors evaluate weaker the Tangibles (M=3,35) but evaluate the Responsiveness highest (M=4,45). The promoters evaluate too weaker the Tangibles (M=4,61) and evaluate the Assurance dimension as the highest (M=5,23). The most interesting result is that each one of five dimensions is directly and positively influenced by the NPS profile itself. The promoters rate positively each dimensions of SERVQUAL than detractors.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

These findings confirm that it is really important and useful to compare all the results in more details, and for that, according to the type of NPS beyond the traditional distinction of genders. Indeed, it is possible to understand where the variations are more important between the detractors and the promoters. This allows identifying what is really the most important in the eyes of school management to improve in the next academic year. As main goal of this communication, we expect to generate debate on the fact that the averages may hide differences while the distinction by advocacy roles may expose new insights and understandings. For future researches, the question is: Who do we trust and believe? Promoters or detractors?

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