





# “Experience and satisfaction: Exploring students’ perceptions of private and public higher education services”

<b>AUTHORS</b>	Krishna Govender   Estelle David 
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Krishna Govender, Ph.D., Head of  
Doctoral Programmes, Graduate  
School of Business and Leadership,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South  
Africa. (Corresponding author)

Estelle David, Ph.D., School of  
Management, IT and Governance,  
Department of Marketing, University of  
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Krishna Govender (South Africa), Estelle David (South Africa)

# EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION: EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES

## Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEIs) operate in a dynamic environment driven by increasing competition, reduced funding and the deteriorating South African economy. Understanding the needs of students as customers puts pressure on HEIs to provide a unique customer experience to gain a competitive advantage, as both private and public HEIs compete not only for funding but also for prospective students. This study takes a business perspective of higher education by examining how students relate higher education service providers' (academic and administrative staff) attitudes towards them, to their perceptions of service experience and satisfaction using a sample of 411 students and 428 employees from private and public HEIs in SA. Convenience random sampling was used to identify and select research participants. SPSS Version 22 was used to perform descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, and structural equation modelling was used to test seven (7) hypotheses. The study results highlighted important issues relating to customer-oriented behaviour in the HE industry. Students are more likely to have positive higher education experiences and be satisfied with services when higher education service providers are customer-focused and have a positive attitude towards students. This study recommends that HEIs ensure that their frontline employees (academics and administrators) are customer-focused and empowered to drive continuous improvement activities to enhance the overall customer experience and student satisfaction while maintaining academic integrity.

## Keywords

higher education, marketing of higher education, customer experience, attitudes, students, services experience, academic services

**JEL Classification** I21, M31

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the higher education sector has seen massive competitive influences, and South Africa is no exception. The higher education world evolved to be what it is today, and it will continue to grow to adapt to changes (Kretovics & Eckert, 2019). Furthermore, HEIs have been trying to adapt to the changing business activities and have made different efforts to influence the student experience (Bunce et al., 2016). Higher education providers "have recently gone through a significant restructuring process to enhance their competitiveness and hierarchical positioning within their own countries and in the global marketplace" (Ushantha & Kumara, 2016, p. 98).

Currently, South Africa's higher education system faces increasing pressure on its resources, competition from new providers of private higher education services, and significantly reduced state support for the higher education sector (Milojevi & Radosavljevi, 2019). Recent research has challenged the conventional notion of "students as custom-



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ers” and has highlighted the need for HEIs to prioritize student satisfaction and experience (Guilbault, 2018; Ma, 2020). The need to cater to the needs of students as customers have placed HEIs under pressure to provide a unique customer experience to gain a competitive advantage, as both public and private HEIs face competition not only in terms of funding but also in terms of potential students (de Jager & Wulandari 2018).

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

HEIs are increasingly recognized as service industries as a result of their increased commitment to meeting the requirements of their customers (Chui & Ahmad, 2016). Extant literature has shown that treating students as customers leads to them having a better experience, and Guilbault (2016) emphasizes that students should be recognized as customers to provide them with an excellent educational experience.

The educational service experience of students is intricate and distinct from the experience of customers in any other service company (Ushantha & Kumara, 2016), since HE services have unique characteristics, such as high levels of active participation required of those who use the service, a long-term service relationship, and a wide range of service types (Chalcraft et al., 2015).

Academics are vital to offering higher educational services, and in the hands of skilled lecturers, students can be equipped to become intelligent human beings who contribute to the improvement of human resource quality (Sulistiowati et al., 2018). HE administrators who are responsible for ensuring that all stakeholders, both internal and external to the institution, work collaboratively to achieve organizational success experience a considerable degree of strain, since they wear multiple hats and interface with a diverse range of individuals on a daily basis (Bruns, 2018).

Employee-to-customer interaction is important for a business as the employees are in a position to add value to businesses as they connect with consumers in a central position to ensure consumer loyalty and promote continued transactions, and they (employees) are enabled to drive positive experiences and customer commitment (Kandampully et al., 2018). The student may interact with the service provider over an extended duration and have several contacts with per-

sonnel who might affect their experience, customer satisfaction, and loyalty depending on the duration of their higher education qualification (Kandampully et al., 2018).

The extant literature also indicates that positive attitudes of customers toward the brand or service tend to lead to desirable outcomes, such as behavioral intentions or behavior (Khaleeli & Jawabri, 2021). Research has found that having a pleasant attitude toward consumers predicts a favorable experience (Priyo et al., 2019). In the context of this study, it is postulated that the attitude of academic and administrative staff towards students will depend on how they perceive the students, and this may eventually lead to the students viewing themselves as customers of the HEIs.

According to Chen and Tsai (2007), a positive customer attitude toward a certain product is a strong predictor of customers’ experience perceptions. Previous research in a variety of circumstances has consistently found a link between satisfaction and behavioral intention (Brown et al., 2017). Students who perceive themselves as being treated as university customers are likely to be gratified and eventually satisfied with the institution (Guilbault, 2018; Ma, 2020). The literature confirms the existence of a positive effect of consumer experience on consumer satisfaction in different contexts and situations (Rather, 2018). In education circles, students can also have higher satisfaction levels when their experience as customers of institutions of higher education is higher than their expectations (Bates et al., 2019). Drawing from the extant literature, it can be argued that positive perceptions by customers are likely to have a positive bearing on their experiential behavior (Clark et al., 2019). Thus, when applied in the academic sector, one can deduce that when students perceive themselves as being regarded customers’ higher education institutions, this is likely lead to a desirable experiential behavior or customer experience.

This study seeks to explore how students perceive the attitude of academic and administrative staff at both private and public higher education institutions towards them, and the effect this has on their overall service experience and overall satisfaction with the services offered by the HEIs. The current literature on the perception of students of selective private and public higher education institutions in South Africa leads to the following hypotheses:

*H1a: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of the academic staff of private HEIs towards them (students) and their perception of themselves as customers of the HEI.*

*H1b: There is a positive relationship between students' perceived attitude of the academic staff of public HEIs towards them (students) and their perception of themselves as customers of the HEI.*

*H2a: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of academic staff towards them and their experience of the private HEI.*

*H2b: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of academic staff towards them and their experience at the public HEI.*

*H3a: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of the private HEI administrative staff towards them (students) and their perception of themselves as customers of the HEI.*

*H3b: There is a positive relationship between students' perceived attitude of the public HEI administrative staff towards them (students) and their perception of themselves as customers of the HEI.*

*H4a: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of the private HEI administrative staff towards them and their experience at the private HEIs.*

*H4b: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the attitude of the pub-*

*lic HEI administrative staff towards them and their experience at the public HEIs.*

*H5a: There is a positive relationship between students of private HEIs who perceive themselves as being customers of the HEI and their education experience at the HEIs.*

*H5b: There is a positive relationship between students of public HEIs who perceive themselves as being customers of the HEI and their education experience at the HEIs.*

*H6a: There is a positive relationship between the students who perceive themselves as customers of HE and their overall satisfaction with the education service provided by private HEIs.*

*H6b: There is a positive relationship between the students who perceive themselves as customers of HE and their overall satisfaction with the education service provided by public HEIs.*

*H7a: There is a positive relationship between the students' experience as HE customers and their overall satisfaction at public HEIs.*

*H7b: There is a positive relationship between the students' experience as HE customers and their overall satisfaction at private HEIs.*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional design was adopted as it allowed a snapshot of the real situation when variables of concern were tested only once to establish their relationships (Singh, 2007). A survey was conducted among students, and academic and administrative staff at select public and private HEIs in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

The target population comprised currently employed academic and administrative staff and registered students at the select public and private HEIs. With a confidence level of 95 per cent confidence interval of 5, the sample size was calculated using an online sample calculator, from a target population of 10,072 students at private and public

HEIs in KwaZulu Natal Province. The study settled for a sample size of 411, which will have been rounded up to 331 for public institutions of higher education and the remainder from private institutions. In addition to convenience sampling, random probability sampling was employed to find and select all participants to the study.

The students' questionnaire was structured as a six-part questionnaire. In section A, background information was sought from participants, while sections B, C, D, E and F looked at the attitude of academic staff and administrative staff towards students, the student's perceptions of themselves as customers, the higher education service experience, and their overall satisfaction.

The questionnaire for academic and administrative staff consisted of two sections; Section A requested background information, and Section B focused on the perceptions of students as customers and service provision. Both questionnaires were adapted from previously developed instruments. All items in the survey were scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree" and 5 meaning "strongly agree" (Taherdoost, 2019).

Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS statistics (v27). The validity and reliability of the measurement instruments were established, and thereafter structural equation modelling was performed using AMOS, to assess the model fit and path analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The proposed model was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The test was divided into two phases. The first phase involved testing the Measurement Model and verifying the validity and reliability of the measurement model. The

second phase involved testing the Structural Path Model. At each of these two stages, the Model Fit Indices were determined to determine the suitability of the Models (measurement and structural).

### 3. RESULTS

As a rule of thumb, the criteria for reliability and validity are attained "when composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.7, and all factor loadings are above 0.5" (Alalwan et al., 2018, p. 130). Convergent validity is attained when "the composite reliability is greater than the average variance extracted (AVE) and or when the AVE is greater than 0.5" (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010, p. 34). On the other hand, discriminant validity is attained when AVE is greater than maximum shared square variance (MSV). As shown in Table 1, all four of the constructs that were retained in the measurement model had values that were higher than the suggested value, indicating strong reliability and acceptable convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2 indicates that the model has a good fit, which suggests that the model is acceptable.

The second step in the data analysis process was to convert the measurement model (MM) model to a path model, which indicates the relationship between latent variables. The path model is subsequently used to test the impact of independent variables (IVs) on dependents (DVs). Figure 1 depicts the structural model (SM), showing the directional paths between the latent variables/constructs.

Table 3 reflects that the path between ASA and SPC was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ), and the path

**Table 1.** Reliability and validity of the measurement model

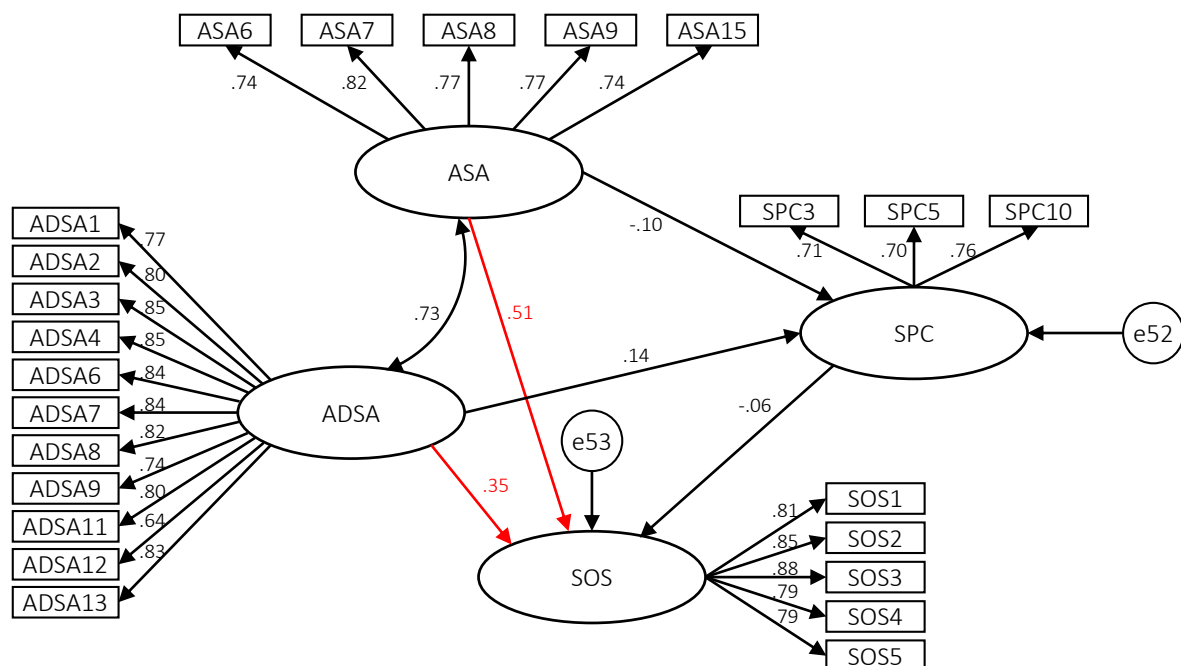
Source: Primary data.

Construct	Measured variables	Loadings Final
ASA	ASA6 Academic staff show me empathy	0.736
	ASA7 Academic staff do their best to satisfy me	0.82
	ASAS Academic staff consider my point of view when they make decisions that could affect me	0.769
	ASAP Academic staff always give good value	0.771
	ASA15 Academic staff treat my problems as important	0.742
Composite reliability (CR)		0.878
Average variance extracted (AVT)		0.590
Maximum shared square variance (MSV)		0.588



**Table 1 (cont.).** Reliability and validity of the measurement model

Construct	Measured variables	Loadings Final	
ADSA	ADSA1	Administrative staff always provide the best service possible	0.771
	ADSA2	Administrative staff do their best to assist me with my administrative needs/requests	0.804
	ADSA3	Administrative staff have my best interest in mind	0.851
	ADSA4	Administrative staff show me empathy	0.851
	ADSA6	I always get good value from administrative staff	0.844
	ADSA7	Administrative staff always try to satisfy me	0.844
	ADSA8	Administrative staff try to understand my needs	0.819
	ADSA9	Administrative staff use a problem-solving approach with me	0.739
	ADSA11	Administrative staff are cheerful positive in their dealings with me	0.798
	ADSA12	Administrative staff make me feel like I am the only student	0.642
	ADSA13	I get the feeling that administrative staff view my problems as important	0.83
	Composite reliability (CR)		0.952
	Average variance extracted (AVT)		0.643
Maximum shared square variance (MSV)		0.540	
SPC	SPC3	I think of myself primarily as a paying customer of the university	0.708
	SPC5	I think of my university degree as a product I am purchasing	0.697
	SPC10	Generally, I perceive myself as a customer of this higher education institution	0.758
Composite reliability (CR)		0.765	
Average variance extracted (AVT)		0.521	
Maximum shared square variance (MSV)		0.005	
SOS	SOS1	This HEI has met my expectations	0.808
	SOS2	Overall, I am satisfied with this HEI	0.848
	SOS3	I am satisfied with the service I receive from the university	0.878
	SOS4	My choice to use this university was a wise one	0.787
	SOS5	I think I did the right thing when I decided to use this university	0.789
Composite reliability (CR)		0.913	
Average variance extracted (AVT)		0.677	
Maximum shared square variance (MSV)		0.588	



**Figure 1.** Path analysis showing the relationships in the latent constructs

**Table 2.** Model fitness indices for the CFA model

Source: Primary data.

Fit Indices	Fit values	Criteria
$\chi^2/df$ (p-value)	1.656 (<.001)	< 5
IFI	0.978	>.9
CFI	0.978	>.95
RMSEA	0.040	<.08

**Table 3.** Path regression estimate

Source: Primary data.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Standardized Regression coefficient	p-value
ASA	SPC	-.095	.325
ADSA	SPC	.144	.124
SPC	SOS	-.065	.114
ASA	SOS	.510	<.001*
ADSA	SOS	.351	<.001*

Note: \* indicates significance at 95% level.

between SPC and SOS was not also significant ( $P>0.05$ ). The path from ASA and ADSA to SOS are both significant ( $p<0.001$ ), which implies that ASA and ADSA are significant predictors of SOS.

Table 4 illustrates Cronbach’s alpha values for each of the constructs are higher than 0.7. This is considered an acceptable composite reliability value.

Each hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the inde-

pendent variables (IVs) impact on the dependent variables (DVs) in each hypothesis. The necessary checks for normality of the residuals, linearity and homoscedasticity were made to ensure that it was not violated.

Table 5 shows a summary result of hypotheses postulated with respect to the private HEIs.

Table 6 shows a summary of hypotheses postulated with respect to the public HEIs.

**Table 4.** Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient

Source: Primary data.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Public Institution		Private institution		Chi-square analysis		
		Standardized Regression coefficient	p-value	Standardized Regression coefficient	p-value	df	CMIN	p-value
ASA	SPC	-.058	.542	.119	.758	1	.330	.566
ADSA	SPC	.257	.006*	-.452	.239	1	2.143	.143
SPC	SOS	-.047	.365	-.067	.304	1	.072	.788
ASA	SOS	.453	<.001*	.873	<.001*	1	4.513	.032*
ADSA	SOS	.363	<.001*	.040	.832	1	1.370	.242

**Table 5.** Summary of decisions on the hypotheses for private HEIs

Source: Primary data.

Hypothesis	DV	IV	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1; df2	P-value	B (regression coefficient)	T	P-value	Decision
H1a	SPC	ASA	.057	4.456	1; 74	.038	-.238	-2.111	.038	Rejected
H2a	SEC	ASA	.829	357.752	1; 74	.000	.936	18.914	.000	Accepted
H3a	SPC	ADSA	.089	7.224	1; 74	.009	-.261	12.219	.009	Rejected
H4a	SEC	ADSA	.815	325.424	1; 74	.000	.814	18.040	.000	Accepted
H5a	SEC	SPC	.069	5.482	1; 74	.022	-.271	-2.341	.022	Rejected
H6a	SOS	SPC	.090	7.338	1; 74	.008	-.361	-2.709	.008	Rejected
H7a	SOS	SEC	.818	331.895	1; 74	.000	.904	18.218	.000	Accepted

**Table 6.** Summary of decisions on the hypotheses for public HEIs

Source: Primary data.

Hypothesis	DV	IV	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1; df2	P-value	B (regression coefficient)	T	P- value	Decision
H1b	SPC	ASA	.013	4.489	1; 333	.035	.154	2.199	.035	Accepted
H2b	SEC	ASA	.471	295.969	1; 333	.000	.710	17.204	.000	Accepted
H3b	SPC	ADSA	.036	12.345	1; 333	.001	.217	3.514	.001	Accepted
H4b	SEC	ADSA	.522	362.937	1; 333	.000	.642	19.051	.000	Accepted
H5b	SEC	SPC	.034	11.647	1; 333	.001	.142	3.413	.001	Accepted
H6b	SOS	SPC	.005	1.808	1; 333	.180	.064	3.413	.180	Rejected
H7b	SOS	SEC	.556	417.161	1; 333	.000	.746	20.425	.000	Accepted

## 4. DISCUSSION

Contrary to previous findings (Khaleeli & Jawabri, 2021), in this study, no significant positive relationship was ascertained between the attitude of the academic staff towards students and the students' perceptions of themselves as the private HEI customers. It is speculated that this might be due to the fact that at private HEIs, classes are smaller, and academics are more interactive with students (Educonnect, 2016). Private HEIs have also been recognized as being commercialized or market-friendly, which establishes a conducive climate for engagement between students and staff. However, this has not been the case in public universities, due to the reason that private HEIs charge higher fees than public HEIs (Tamrat, 2017). Hence, in agreeing with Grönroos (2017), there is a critical need for a strong service culture that focuses on an employee's behavior and attitude toward the needs of a customer, since such strong service culture would allow staff of the HEIs to do the correct things from a customer-centered perspective.

The benefits of this can be extrapolated from the work of Madhani (2020, p. 6), who argued that customer-oriented companies recognize that customers are the business, and without customers, there are no sales, and without sales, there is no profit. Moreover, research has shown that having a customer-orientation enables organizations to enjoy a competitive advantage (Feng et al., 2019). For this reason, Iuliana and Cristina (2019) advised that HEIs should apply various organizational principles, focusing on customers and their individual needs so as to prevent students from switching to their competitors.

The results also showed a positive relationship between academic staff's attitude of students and

student's perception of themselves as consumers of public HEIs. These findings are consistent with the research of Khaleeli and Jawabri (2021), who reported that a positive attitude of customers towards the brand or service tends to lead to desirable outcomes or behavioural intentions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the more positive an individual's attitude is, the more probable it is that it will influence their behavior. This implies that students who have perceived academic staff to have a positive attitude towards them and who treat them like customers, are more likely to perceive themselves as customers of the HEI.

Although the relationship between the attitude of the administrative staff towards students and the student's perception of themselves as customers was significant, the finding in this study revealed that this relationship was negative. This is contrary to the findings of other scholars (Bashir & Madhavaiah, 2015; Chiou & Shen, 2012; Kashif et al., 2018; Hasan et al., 2019; Hamilton & Terblanche-Smit, 2018), who concluded attitude has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions. While students at private HEIs were judged to be better than those at public HEIs owing to the availability of student counselling, the helpfulness of administrators, the level of academics, clean and comfortable facilities, and the availability of student counselling were all major drivers (Chandra et al., 2018), it is however, unclear why there is a negative relationship between the attitude of administrative towards students and the student's perception of themselves as customers. A plausible explanation one could conjure is that administrative staff in private HEIs campuses may be already better equipped and trained than those at public HEIs, hence one should expect staff to go out of their way to solve their problems and have a positive attitude towards them.



The findings also demonstrate a positive correlation between the attitude of academic staff towards students and their customer experience at public and private HEIs. Overall, these findings are in accordance with findings reported by some other scholars (Vahdat et al., 2020), who also concluded that perceived positive attitude by organizations has a positive experiential impact on customers. This may be due to the fact that frontline employees play an essential role in customizing their services to meet the needs of various customers in order to enhance the overall customer experience (Motamarri, 2017; Akter, 2017; Yanamandram, 2017).

Since in a competitive HE education market, better experiences contribute to retention, the education service experience must be exceptional to retain current students and attract new ones (Campbell-Perry & Williamson, 2017). In HE, lectures offered by academics are a core service, making the academics' ability to educate as a possible indicator of the service quality (Hsu et al., 2016). Academic experience is the most important indicator of student retention (Carter & Yeo, 2016) and customer satisfaction and loyalty (Dikmen & Bozdalar, 2017). Frontline staff play a critical role in adapting their service to the needs of various customers in order to improve the overall customer experience (Motamarri et al., 2017). Bates et al. (2019) discovered that of the various themes comprising a student experience, excellent interactions with higher education staff were perceived by students as being the most significant. Thus, treating students as customers results in a better experience (Guilbault, 2016).

The positive relationship between the student's perceptions of the attitude of administrative staff and their (students') experience as public and private HEI customers in South Africa can be corroborated by several other studies (Saayman et al., 2018; Priyo et al., 2019). Administrative services are one of the most frequently used direct contact services in HE; thus, student administration is becoming a determining factor in assuring satisfaction when evaluating service provision (Fathurrochman et al., 2020). Hence, higher education administrators are becoming increasingly aligned to focus on providing positive experiences to students (Gillespie, 2018).

The positive relationship postulated between students who perceive themselves as customers of HEIs

and their education experience at private HEIs in South Africa, was not supported by the findings of this study. Although the relationship between students who perceive themselves as customers and their education experience was significant, the relationship was negative. This is contrary to the views of other scholars (Scott & Lohmann, 2019), who assert that positive perceptions by customers are likely to have a positive bearing on their experiential behavior. Hence, it is expedient that the management of private HEIs pay urgent attention to the quality of students recruited, as this could positively enhance their (students) experiences. In achieving this, a customer-centric approach is required for institutions to deliver excellent services to students in order to compete in the market (Guilbault, 2018). This is highly important, given the fact that students who have pleasant experiences are more likely to become long-term devoted consumers as a result of excellent customer service (Dickerson et al., 2016).

The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between students who perceive themselves as customers of HEIs and their education experience at public HEIs in South Africa. These results build on existing evidence (Scott & Lohmann, 2019). These researchers assert that positive perceptions by customers are likely to have a positive bearing on their experiential behavior. In this study, the usefulness of the qualification to their future, and the financial cost of the degree among others, were the main reasons students perceived themselves as customers.

A positive relationship postulated between students who perceive themselves as customers of HE and their overall satisfaction with the education service at private higher and public HEIs in South Africa, were not supported by the findings of this study. The relationship between the students' perception of themselves as customers and their overall satisfaction in the private HEIs was significant. However, it was negative, suggesting that although private HEI students believe that the more they perceive themselves as customers, the lower their overall satisfaction. The finding is contrary to that reported in other studies (Ali et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017), where a positive relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intention was reported.

The above finding may be attributed to low customer-oriented behaviors in South African HEIs, which

assumption may be corroborated by Guilbault (2018), who linked low customer-oriented behaviors to low levels of customer satisfaction. Hence, in line with Guilbault's (2018) findings, HEIs are encouraged to support consumer-oriented behavior. Higher education performance is primarily judged by the consistency and quality of the services provided, with customer satisfaction serving as a criterion for the quality-of-service provision (Fathurrochman et al., 2020).

The findings also confirm that there is a positive relationship between the students' experience as customers and their overall satisfaction with the service at both private and public HEIs in South Africa. This finding is corroborated by other researchers such as Maklan and Klaus (2011) and Rose and Espelage (2012), who argued that the students' experience as customers could be anticipated to have a positive effect on their overall satisfaction with a HEI.

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## CONCLUSION

This paper examined students' perceptions of the attitude of private and public HEI academic and administrative staff towards them, as well as the impact this has on their service experience and satisfaction with the services provided by the respective HEIs. The findings revealed that the positive attitude of academic and administrative staff towards students has a positive experiential impact on students (customers) at both public and private HEIs. Furthermore, academic and administrative staff are in constant contact with students and will be able to better understand how their attitude and behavior affect students' experiences, allowing them to improve opportunities to engage with, attract, retain, and resolve issues with students amicably at both public and private higher education institutions. Besides, a student's customer experience influences their overall satisfaction, and student satisfaction is a significant indicator of a higher education institution's performance and effectiveness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Public HEIs are advised to implement strategies and approaches to design and differentiate consumer experiences constantly to ensure that they align with the students' current needs of higher education services. In addition, public HEIs must continue to identify the requirements of students with regard to the different services and provide hassle-free academic and administrative processes by re-structuring the HEIs to increase their competitiveness and position within their respective countries. Since it emerged that the students' experience as higher education customers positively influences their overall satisfaction at public HEIs, it is suggested that public HEIs tailor their interactions with students (both online and offline) to provide timely, relevant, and personal customer service experiences.

It is also recommended that private HEIs focus on the services they provide and the attitude of the staff towards students during the service encounter. Staff should be customer-focused, and institutions should develop the student (customer) experiences. It is further recommended that HEIs continue to improve the services to students by correcting any inefficiencies in the services they currently provide to students.

HEIs are encouraged to ensure that their frontline personnel (academics and administrators) are customer-focused and empowered to drive continuous improvement activities to enhance the overall student customer experience and satisfaction while maintaining academic integrity. To ensure that HE is more than just a commodity, it is recommended that HEIs focus on creating tailored student experiences throughout the educational process.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Krishna Govender.

Data curation: Estelle David.

Formal analysis: Estelle David.

Investigation: Estelle David.

Methodology: Krishna Govender.

Project administration: Estelle David.

Resources: Krishna Govender.

Software: Estelle David.

Supervision: Krishna Govender.

Validation: Estelle David.

Writing – original draft: Krishna Govender.

Writing – review & editing: Krishna Govender, Estelle David.

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