

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SERVICE QUALITY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATORS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

By

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Abstract

Service quality is an important aspect of developing a better services for the university, because it deals with satisfaction of users emotional needs while emotional intelligence is the approach needed to be taking by professional administrator of the university to enable them deliver better and quality services without affecting both themselves and others emotion. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and quality of service rendered in private universities in Nigeria. The intension is to establish if there is any importance emotional intelligent pose on service quality. The data were collected from professional administrators in five Nigerian private universities through questionnaires. The total number of respondents in the sample for the study was 320. Convenience sampling was used to collect the data from the respondents. The hypothesis tested for was adapted from a similar research to check the relationship between EI and QS in the Nigerian private university. The results showed that emotional intelligence is a positive predictor of quality service. The study also reveals that those organizations that are using emotional intelligence offer far better services than those that do not use emotional intelligence skills in the work place

Keywords – Emotional intelligence, Service quality, Quality management, Professional Administrator

University education remains the greatest benefit to a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making the education sector one of the most significant to any economy (Orji & Job, 2013). Anya (2013); and Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) argued that the development of government policies on university education is historically linked to the development of a highly skilled labour force and national economic growth in Nigeria. Jonathan (2010) added that a university education generates a positive and sustainable economic impact that requires maximum government involvement and investment. As a result, it is very important that universities remain successful in order to keep creating, developing, and supporting an economic advantage, which supports the production of quality labour that will drive national development (Gupta, 2010). Institutions are providing competitive services by catering for customers' smallest needs. In the education sector, service quality is the key driver of profitability. Hence, improving service quality in the higher education sector should be focused on customer loyalty (Mazhar & Masood, 2018). Although, Adetunji (2014) clearly stated that, as it may be easy to identify who a genuine customer is in other sector, the higher education does not lead itself to such assumption especially in the Nigerian universities context where students are not the paying customers.

Another debate put forward in Adetunji's (2014) work clearly states that education is a multi-faceted industry; unlike the manufacturing sector, where products and services can be offered, in the education sector, services are almost identical, and it becomes difficult to make any differentiation. Hence, the organization needs to become successful by providing a higher quality service considering the uniqueness of the individuals involved if the sector is to survive in the long run. Initially, it was the higher level of service quality that was required by the education sector in order to compete and then eventually become the market leader, but now it has gone beyond the aspect of benchmarking or standards to assume or ensure quality. The management of the emotions of both paying customers (parent/guardians) and participating customers (students), as the case may be in terms of Nigerian universities, is now a crucial factor in determining quality.

As a result, many variables are now determinants of quality service. Of these, emotional intelligence is one of the most crucial (Moore, 2007). The study of emotional intelligence has surfaced as a valuable discipline in the modern era of those businesses that aim to produce or deliver quality services. As the service providers are required to be responsive and adaptive towards the demands and behaviors of the customers, it is basically emotional intelligence that helps managers respond effectively towards the customers and, at the same time, provide a quality service.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of the research are to:

1. study the role of emotional intelligence as a clairvoyant of higher quality service in the education sector

2. analysis how service quality is inclined by emotional intelligence
3. examine how the use of emotional intelligence translates to higher quality service

Research

In a seminar presentation, Ogunleye (2017; pg.4) postulated that EI is “the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotion and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth”. Ogunleye also commented on Turner’s (2003) view of EI as “the ability to allow an individual to deal successfully with other people, to manage oneself, motivate others, understand one’s own feelings, and appropriately respond to the everyday environment”. Thus, EI is all about interpersonal relationships.

In Ogunleye’s presentation on the need for professional administrators to possess a high level of EI to perform better in the fast moving economy, he pointed out that Gardner, as quoted by Goleman (2000) saw EI as being in two parts: *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal*. *Interpersonal* intelligence is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, and how to work cooperatively with them. Successful people, politicians, teachers, clinicians, and religious leaders are all likely to be individuals with a high degree of interpersonal intelligence (Vijayalakshmi, 2017). *Intrapersonal* intelligence is a correlative ability, turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate, veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life (Habeeb, & Fatema, 2016).

In a previous study by Slaski and Bardzil (2003), they suggested further areas of research within their study and focused their discussion on how to implement emotional intelligence skills in the service sector. The author of this research identified a need to develop this more in this study (EI) and fill the gap established by Slaski and Bardzil (2003) regarding how EI needs to be implemented in service-oriented sectors. Service sectors include hospitals, prisons, telecommunications, banks, education etc., but for the purposes of this study, attention is centered only on education which is further refined to focus on university education. According to Vijayalakshmi (2017), EI is essential in creating and maintaining the climate of service in an institution.

Likewise, Cartwright and Pappas (2008) associated EI with a high patentability of increased performance within the service sector. According to Cartwright and Pappas, EI has many implications for the selection and development of employees and for enhancing service quality. Researchers in the field (Kannaiah & Shanthi, 2015; Habeeb, & Fatema, 2016; Vijayalakshmi, 2017) have concluded that if employees use the skills of EI effectively, there is a high probability that employees will deliver their best and, in turn, will enhance the development of the organization.

In a study carried out within the service sector on the role of service providers in service delivery, Muhammad and Naintara (2013) explores a study by Kiely (2005), where she expressed the relationship between emotional intelligence and service quality

through examining cargo services in the United Kingdom. The results disclosed that potential for problems and unexpected happening is high because the activities within cargo services are complex. Hence, through mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation the service providers see the need to build up and maintain relationships with customers. This will create a wide network of relationships with all users and enhance the quality of services rendered.

Zahid, Wasim, and Raziq (2008) also reported on impact of emotional intelligence on quality of service in software industry of Pakistan, the research intension is study the link between organizational EI and their quality of service. In Muhammad and Naintara (2013) study, they pointed that Varca (2004) also conducted research on service organizations and established that service workers can learn service skills with the help of emotional intelligence. He concluded that learning skills were based on emotional intelligence and were considered essential for job success. Likewise, a study by Langhorn (2008) focused on the hospitality industry and similarly concluded that the practice of emotional intelligence skills by general managers has a constructive impact on team performance that ultimately results in better services being offered to the customers as the interaction between frontline employees and the customers is at its maximum. Kernbach and Schutte's (2005) report suggested that the higher emotional intelligence revealed by the service provider in a video clip presentation as evidence in customer feedback report led to better customer satisfaction when transacting services. Likewise, Modassir and Singh (2008) discovered that many organizations are trying to improve the level of their services by understanding the emotions of others and exhibiting the necessary emotional responses. Muhammad and Naintara (2013) completed a study on emotional intelligence and service quality: an empirical study of Pakistani telecommunication sector, the result showed that the emotional intelligence is the positive predictor of the service quality.

It is clear that in this competitive era, the education industry has the best source of human capital to utilize emotional intelligence, leading to customer satisfaction. While the easiest translation of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and technical skills into knowledge is the main reason why the education industry will continue to see emotional intelligence as a crucial element and the most important ingredient of their services, it is possible that the education sector, which deals with and produces intangible products, will have mixed feelings on whether high standards are met in the delivery of their services; hence, ensuring customer satisfaction is vital. However, in today's business world, it is important for every business to be customer-oriented; that is, businesses have to put all their efforts into ensuring their customers are satisfied. Nonetheless, several definitions of quality have been used when defining quality in universities. The main ones encompass fitness for purpose, meeting or exceeding customer needs, value for money, or conformance to specifications (Harvey & William, 2010; Ndirangu & Udoto, 2011).

The importance of quality to universities arises from the importance to them of

students; as Schwantz (2012) described, the definition of quality is derived from meeting or exceeding customers' requirements and needs, which positively affects their satisfaction with the product or service offered (Iacovidou et al., 2009). In this study, customers can be paying customers (parent/guardians), user customers (employers), and participating customers (students). However, since it is difficult to rightly identify students as customers in the Nigerian context, students, parents, and employers of graduates are referred to as service users in this study. It involves dealing with human beings and the definition of emotional intelligence states that it deals with the emotions of human beings (Vijayalakshmi, 2017).

It is this involvement of the human perspective element that makes this research very important to the development of higher education and professional administrators in particular, if universities are to be able to realize the purpose for which they were created. As Eagle and Brennan (2007; 48) argued, even if both students and employers considered that the role of the university was to support the economy by preparing graduates for jobs, this would not be the only legitimate purpose of a university. They wrote that the community, which contributes to higher education through general taxation, may reasonably suppose that it is the purpose of a university to produce well-rounded citizens who are sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups and who may be prepared to sacrifice some self-interest for the common good (Akinola, 2013).

In the services industry, offering better services to customers is of paramount importance. Likewise, in the education sector, students, who can be classified as the customers of the university, are human beings with different views, beliefs and perceptions about issues and how they relate to their study. Besides making relevant processes and standard operations, the quality of service rendered is taken into account. Hence, using emotional intelligence, which will further enhance universities' ability to recognize and regulate the users' needs, can increase the knowledge regarding customer behaviour and knowledge of the organization.

Thus, this research studied emotional intelligence in providing quality services and the resulting impact on customer satisfaction. This is because if the firms provide better quality services to the customer, then their revenues will certainly increase. The researchers aim is to investigate if companies' use of emotional intelligence in the services they provide gives importance to customer satisfaction. The assumption of who these customers are is open to debate, but for the purposes of this study, attention will focus on the university service users as customers.

Influence on each other Emotional Intelligence and Quality Service

From the practical evidence, it was established that to develop a successful business, it is essential to construct a climate of quality service (Harvey & Willams 2010; Adetunji, 2016). Thus, this sense of service, which supports achieving and enhancing quality in the services, is of great importance. Hence, the complex process of quality service can be achieved. The environment of service at the individual (employee)

level is manifested by the practice, concerns, and behaviors towards users as expected by the management. The quality of services can be accomplished in an organization by strengthening and implementing appropriate behaviours and attitudes by the employee. These conditions are further increased by employee empowerment, and through overcoming hurdles such as unsuitable HR policies and a preventive management style, etc.

Employees in the university can be classified into two major groups: the teaching staff and the non-teaching staff. However, the non-teaching staff, can be further divided into the senior administrators (they are usually considered as the professional administrators) and junior administrators. Likewise, within the junior administrators, there are casual workers and the clerical staff, who serve the senior staff. Nonetheless for the purpose of this study, our attention focused only on the professional administrators. That this study did not focus on either the teaching staff or the junior administrative staff does not mean that teaching staff are excluded from issues relating to emotional intelligence, but rather is simply a strategy to give the study a focus.

Muhammad and Naintara (2013) claimed that the perception of emotional intelligence can be used in organizations that contain key experiences for generating and maintaining the quality of services in organizations. Vijayalakshmi (2017) commented that emotional intelligence involves the relationship between thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, feelings, views, and perceptions. Emotional intelligence can be determined to be a yardstick for or indication of the degree to which a person can perceive, understand, and regulate the emotions of other people and combine their thoughts and actions to achieve a specific result. This skill in coordinating the thoughts and actions of others and oneself has been described as emotional intelligence. Stefano and Wasylshyn (2005) postulated that emotional intelligence assists managers in maintaining staff morale and the quality of work life, in achieving greater self-understanding, in demonstrating the balance better health, and self confidence in developing closer working relationships with and among individuals in the organization. It is important that the significance of emotionally intelligent behavior is recognized by organizational leaders and that they actively reward it. An argument put forward by Vijayalakshmi (2017), he established that the effectiveness of service-oriented organizations (such as universities) will be enhanced if the environment is positively reinforced with emotionally intelligent individuals, therefore resulting in the provision of better quality services to the users.

Vijayalakshmi (2017) analyzed that education is a service; services are described as activities or processes that are differentiated from physical goods by four basic characteristics, namely, the intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability, and inseparability of their production and consumption. Likewise, Mazhar and Masood (2018) claimed that one distinct feature of service is that they are interactive, rather than substantial entities. This feature is particularly relevant to universities, which have been described by Mattick and Knight (2007) as comprising a process of transformation

involving the systematic and critical development of the student to a competent mind. It is worth mentioning that the definitions of quality in universities with regard to students use two distinct analogies: as customers who buy a service in expectation of career benefits, and as raw materials that by the process of being at university will be transformed into individuals with added skills (Adebayo, 2014).

Furthermore, Iacovidou, Gibbs and Zopiatis (2009); and Schwantz (2012) advocated that universities engage in highly subjective and intangible products, which are the aftermath of a complex multifaceted service delivery of post-purchase knowledge with the addition of both tangible and intangible offerings (Orji & Job, 2013). This includes students, faculties, employers, university employees, and the community, thus constructing an entity that is very difficult to assess. Mazhar and Masood (2018) acknowledged that the quality of a multi-dimensional learning experience, such as university education, is influenced by numerous factors and variables, at the end of which the student completes a profile of experience and talents, which the world in general will recognise as the quality of the learning provision. Although to some people, universities may be defined by the quality of their educational delivery or provision, Harvey argued that the measurement and evaluation of quality is subject to many different understandings and difficulties.

Thus, it can be argued that to attain quality services, emotional intelligence can enrich positive results from the professional administrators within the university education sector. Given that Nigerian universities are faced with many difficult challenges (among which are funding-related issues, the management of resource, etc.), the need to investigate whether emotional intelligence affects the quality of services is important.

Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory research design because the paper is not interested in solving the professional administrators problem of emotional intelligence and service quality in private universities, rather take a new approach to understand the need for Professional Administrators to make use of emotional intelligence in order to improve service quality delivery of private universities. This paper purposively selected five private universities within Osun State, namely, Bowen University, Redeemers University, Kings University, Oduduwa University, and Fountain University. The study area is limited to the study of emotional intelligence skills as practiced by administrators and the impact of these skills on delivering quality services to the students. Thus, the researcher is interested in investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and service quality.

Hypothesis

Following the above debate, the hypothesis for the study was developed based on the variables identified in the study: emotional intelligence and service quality.

H1: Emotional intelligence has a relationship with service quality.
Ho: Emotional intelligence has no relationship with service quality.

In this paper, the total sample size considered was estimated at 80 administrative staff from each university who are involved in rendering one service or the other to the university users. 400 respondents were estimate as the total population for the study. In order to collect data from these institutions, a quantitative approach was adopted with the use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two separate parts, and each part was based on two variables: the first variable represents the service quality, that is, the independent variable depending on emotional intelligence. The SERVQUAL model developed from the theory of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) was used to form the bases upon which the first part of the question was developed, while the second variable that is emotional intelligence questions were developed from Hay group (2002) theories. 50 questionnaires were used for pilot study, 350 were latter administered, a total number of 250 questionnaires was retrieved.

The aim of the research was to empirically study emotional intelligence and quality management issues as they relate to professional administrators in private universities in Nigeria. The two variables studied were emotional intelligence and service quality. For emotional intelligence, an emotional intelligence inventory based on 16 questions was used, and hence emotional intelligence was measured from the perspective of the professional administrators' involvement. The data were collected through a primary source, that is, questionnaire, which consisted a of 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' (1 – 5).

Regression and Correlation

The data collected were analyzed by using regression analysis and correlation. Tables were used to examine the findings of the data collected.

Findings

The result of the findings was presented using the two tables below:

Table 1: Regression Analysis

Private Universities	R	R Square	Adjusted Squared R	F Statistics	P Value
Bowen University	0.822	0.653	0.647	25.351	0.000
Redeemers University	0.652	0.551	0.543	13.352	0.000
Kings University	0.321	0.581	0.573	9.254	0.001
Oduduwa University	0.452	0.098	0.081	11.698	0.000

Fountain University	0.214	0.059	0.043	3.842	0.001
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R-value:

The R-value explains the coefficient of correlation between emotional intelligence and service quality rendered by the professional administrators in private universities. In the case of Bowen University and Redeemers University, $R=0.822$ and 0.652 respectively, which indicates that there is a strong relation between these variables. However, if we look at Kings University, Oduduwa University, and Fountain University, where $R=0.321$, 0.452 and 0.214 respectively, we can see that there is a weak relationship between these variables.

R^2 : R^2 is the coefficient of determination; in the case of Bowen University, Redeemers University, Kings University, Oduduwa University, and Fountain University, it indicates that there is a 0.65.3%, 0.551%, 0.518%, 0.098% and 0.059% variation respectively in the service quality because of emotional intelligence and only 35.7%, 0.994%, 0.944%, 0.999% and 0.999% is explained by the residuals. Nonetheless, the adjusted R squared value of Bowen University, Redeemers University, Kings University, Oduduwa University, and Fountain University is 0.647, 0.543, 0.573, 0.081, and 0.043 respectively indicating the adjustment in R^2 to reveal the reality.

F Statistics: F statistics show the extent to which the model is fit and accurate; the results show that the model's fit is fairly accurate.

P Value: The p value in the case of all the universities is $0.000 < 0.05$, showing that the null hypothesis for all the private universities has been rejected.

Correlation: To check the correlation between the emotional intelligence of the employees of Bowen University, Redeemers University, Kings University, Oduduwa University, and Fountain University with the dimensions of service quality, the following results were gathered:

Table 2: Correlation Dimensions of Service Quality

Private Universities	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Empathy	Assurance
Bowen University	0.720	0.720	0.720	0.720	0.776
Redeemers University	0.632	0.632	0.685	0.632	0.612
Kings University	0.235	0.458	0.552	0.245	0.336
Oduduwa University	0.523	0.521	0.523	0.245	0.254
Fountain University	0.305	0.221	0.124	0.708	0.708

The result shows that all the institutions are interconnected with each other in respect of emotional intelligence and service quality. This might be because they share the same ideology on how best to provide quality education to the community given that university education in the country is not properly funded. Private universities came into being with the hope that they would solve the problems and challenges faced by the public universities. However, the issue of whether emotional intelligence will have a significant impact on the quality of service rendered at the public universities or even if public universities will possess a similar relationship to that observed in the private university is unknown.

Conclusion

From the above discussion and empirical evidence, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence is the positive predictor of whether high quality services will be provided by the administrator. Based on the result of the study, there is an indication that the H1 hypothesis is not rejected, which means that emotional intelligence is a positive predictor of good service quality, meaning the institutions are using emotional intelligence at the workplace and offer better quality services to students rather than focusing on bureaucracy. The performance of such institutions will be enhanced and overall will offer an improved image and quality and greater unity. Empirically, it is concluded that those organizations that are using emotional intelligence offer far better services than those that do not use emotional intelligence skills in the work place.

Further Study

This study focused attention only on the surveys of the discussion by using desk research to discuss the context as it relates to private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. This was not to underestimate other higher institutions nor to assume that similar theories and practices cannot be investigated. However, there is a need for a similar study to investigate the public universities in Nigeria to ascertain the linkage and corroborate this findings.

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