

## **Extended GAPs Model to Assess the Quality of Education for Higher Educational Institutions in Bangladesh**

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***Abstract:** In the globalized world of the current century, higher education is becoming more and more competitive and the leading universities must promote their own institutions not only locally but internationally as well. Higher education is one of the most significant parts of the education system of a country. The main objective of higher education is to develop the new knowledge, explore research works on different social and development issues, anticipate the needs of the economy and prepare highly skilled workers. In these contexts, higher education should be standard, welfare and sustainable development oriented. The report intends to analyze the marketing strategies deployed by higher educational institutions in Bangladesh. The main objective of this study is to explore the quality of higher education of higher educational institutions in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, the paper emphasizes on the students perception and expectations about the present education system of public and private universities, existing problems and challenges faced by the higher education institutions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used for analyzing data. The findings of the study show the different branches of higher education, its quality and the present opportunity of accessibility of the students as well as their perceived benefits from higher education. It is expected that the findings of the study would be able to represent the overall scenario of higher education system of Bangladesh. This paper also emphasizes the implications of extended GAPs model to assess the quality of education (EduQual). Two more GAPs are added with the traditional Five GAPs of service GAPs model. It was found that the two additional GAPs are associated with the administration of higher educational institutions. Students' satisfactions on the service provided by the instructions have significant effect on the word of mouth communication of the students. It was found from the study that there two main group of factors influence the decision of the students namely; personal factors and institutional factors. This study also indicates the impact of 8Ps on educational institution marketing. The*

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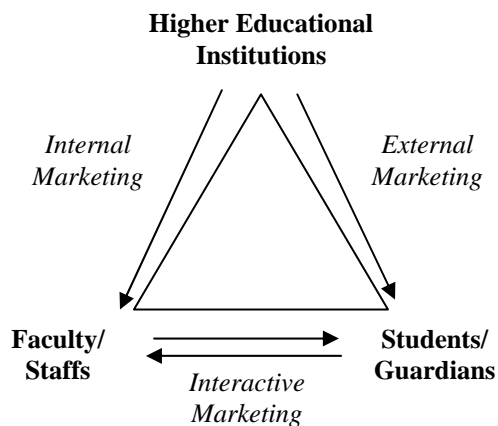
*factor impacts of the 8Ps components are radical in ensuring student satisfaction all around. Institutions in the higher education try to provide best quality services because they need to compete for their students. Measuring quality of their services is therefore an important task of those institutions that give feedback on the dimensions of quality that need to be taken care of and offers institutions the possibility to gain significant competitive advantage in knowledge market. In theory we found five most used dimensions of service quality.*

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Marketing Strategy, GAPs Model, EduQual

## 1. Introduction

In the context of higher education in Bangladesh, a noticeable trend is the increasing competition among universities and higher education institutes to attract students. The competitive pressure and growing number of education providers have forced the higher educational institutions to look for more competitive marketing strategies in order to compete for students in their respective recruitment markets. Competition amongst higher education institutions is largely due to an oversupply of student places and slowing demand from suitably qualified students. As a result, the management of higher education sector are seeking to restructuring their strategic positions. Theories and practices in business strategy development, as used in the for-profit business domain provide a basis for innovative approaches; to strategy development, however they do not address the comprehensive planning needs of the higher education sector.

Educational institutions face marketing problems. Many face changing student needs and societal expectations, increasing competitions for scarce client and funding resources, and unlimited financial pressures. One result is that educators are often forced to take a hard look at marketing to see what this discipline might offer to keep their institutions viable and relevant. At the same time, many educators are approaching marketing with caution. Although educational administrators have readily adopted such business functions as finance, accounting,



**Figure-1: Services Marketing Triangle for higher Educational Institutions**

planning, and public relations, they have been more skeptical about marketing. The service marketing triangle may be applied in order to understand the marketing dimensions of higher educational institutions. The service marketing triangle demonstrates the inter-relationships between the three groups in terms of marketing, which is shown in the figure-1.

Higher Education is becoming more competitive from a variety of perspectives. Internally, institutions must manage costs, while at the same time there's a growing need to specialize and communicate a unique message to an expanding marketplace. From the applicant's vantage, student prospects are faced with more education options than ever before. A solid marketing strategy can, therefore, directly affect the bottom line of a college, university, or continuing education institution through measurement and understanding of its position in the marketplace and by eliminating weaknesses and building upon strengths.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study include the followings:

- To identify services marketing mix for higher education.
- Analyze the specific implication of GAPs model for assessing service quality for Education.
- Explain the identifying issues which can help them to provide effective CRM and Word of Mouth Communication for higher educational institutions.

## **3. Methodology and Sources of Information**

To be specific, the qualitative methodology of research is used for this study. This is a kind of descriptive research aimed to determining the factors affecting the quality of education by using the service GAPs model. Though questionnaire survey was not conducted to collect the primary data, we used the expert interview that is found to be well suited for the purpose. For this study purpose the data are collected from following source:

Primary sources:-

- Expert opinion: About 25 experts form both academic and administrative section of educational institutions were considered for this study.

- Interview with the different scholars and professors of different universities are another source of our data. About 20 academic and research scholars from the related field were interviewed in this regard.

Secondary sources: - Some secondary data was collected to make the report more concrete.

This are-

- Publish Report
- Official Website of Bangladesh Ministry of Education
- Relevant books, journals
- The Websites of relevant institutions.

#### **4. Literature Review**

Marketing provides tools for comparing what the institution is actually doing with its stated mission and goals. Marketing helps identify problems and plan response that will help the institution fulfill its mission. Marketing, in stressing the importance of measuring and satisfying consumer needs, tends to produce an improved level of client services and satisfaction. It provides a disciplined approach to improving the attraction of the students, employees, volunteers, donations, and grants' needed resources. Marketing emphasizes the rational management and coordination of program development, pricing, communications, and distribution (Kotler & Fox, 1985).

Marketing has the image of being primarily a function for profit making enterprises. Educational administrators worry that marketing is manipulative and expensive, and that their boards will feel uncomfortable. Some administrators approach marketing with a "show me" attitude. The burden of proof of the relevance of marketing falls to be marketer (Kotler & Fox, 1985).

Educational institutions worldwide are undergoing fundamental shifts in how they operate and interact with their "customers": students, alumni, donors, faculty members, and staff members. Kotler and Fox (1995) state that "the best organization in the world will be ineffective if the focus on 'customers' is lost. Marketing of higher education institutions is moving toward student orientation. As competition among universities intensifies, a need for thorough understanding of the student perception is becoming more vital. Thus, the marketing of higher educational institutions is gaining more prominence among university administrators. In order to survive, these administrators need to understand how various student segments differ in their decision-making behavior

(Coccarri and Javalgi 1995). They also need to develop some degree of understanding on international students, and what these students will expect once they arrive in the Malaysian campus (Shank et al 1996).

Cheng (cited in Cheng and Tam, 1997, p.23) defines education quality as “the character of the set of elements in the input, process, and output of the education system that provides services that completely satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations”. The seven models of education quality proposed by Cheng and Tam (1997) to evaluate the concept of education quality are: (1) goal and specification model; (2) resource-input model; (3) process model; (4) satisfaction model; (5) legitimacy model; (6) absence of problems model; and (7) organizational learning model. Each of the education quality models has its own particular characteristics, strengths and limitations that describe the aspects of the education quality in its own respective ways and yet they are interlinked with one another (Tam and Cheng, 1996). These models allow the administrators of the tertiary institution to assess their own education quality (Tam and Cheng, 1996).

American Marketing Association states that marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives (Berkowitz, Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius, 1997). To serve both buyers and sellers, marketing seeks to discover the needs and wants of prospective customers and to satisfy them. Marketing is design to produce four principal benefits:

1. Greater success is fulfilling the institution’s missions.
2. Improved satisfaction of the institution’s public.
3. Improved attraction of marketing resources
4. Improved efficiency in marketing activities

The concept of quality is not well defined in higher education (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Pounder, 1999). According to Mukhopadhyay (cited in Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2004, p.149), the term ‘quality in education’ has been defined by various scholars, such as “excellence in education” (Peters and Waterman, 1982), “value addition in education” (Feigenbaum, 1951), “fitness of educational outcome and experience for use” (Juran and Gryna, 1988), “specifications and requirements” (Gilmore, 1974; Crosby, 1979), “defect avoidance in education process” (Crosby, 1979) and “meeting or exceeding customer’s expectations of education” (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

### 5. Service Marketing Mix for Educational Institutions

The GAP analysis of quality, developed by Zithmal and Hinter can be devoted as a basic understanding of the reasons for what the higher educational institutions suffers from the lack of marketing initiatives and failed to determine the syndromes that best explain the facts of higher educational Institutions in Bangladesh.

But before that, first let us explain the impact of the 8P's components applicable for service providers. Here we attempted to show the impact of 8P's in educational institutions with specific outcomes as shown in the figure-2.

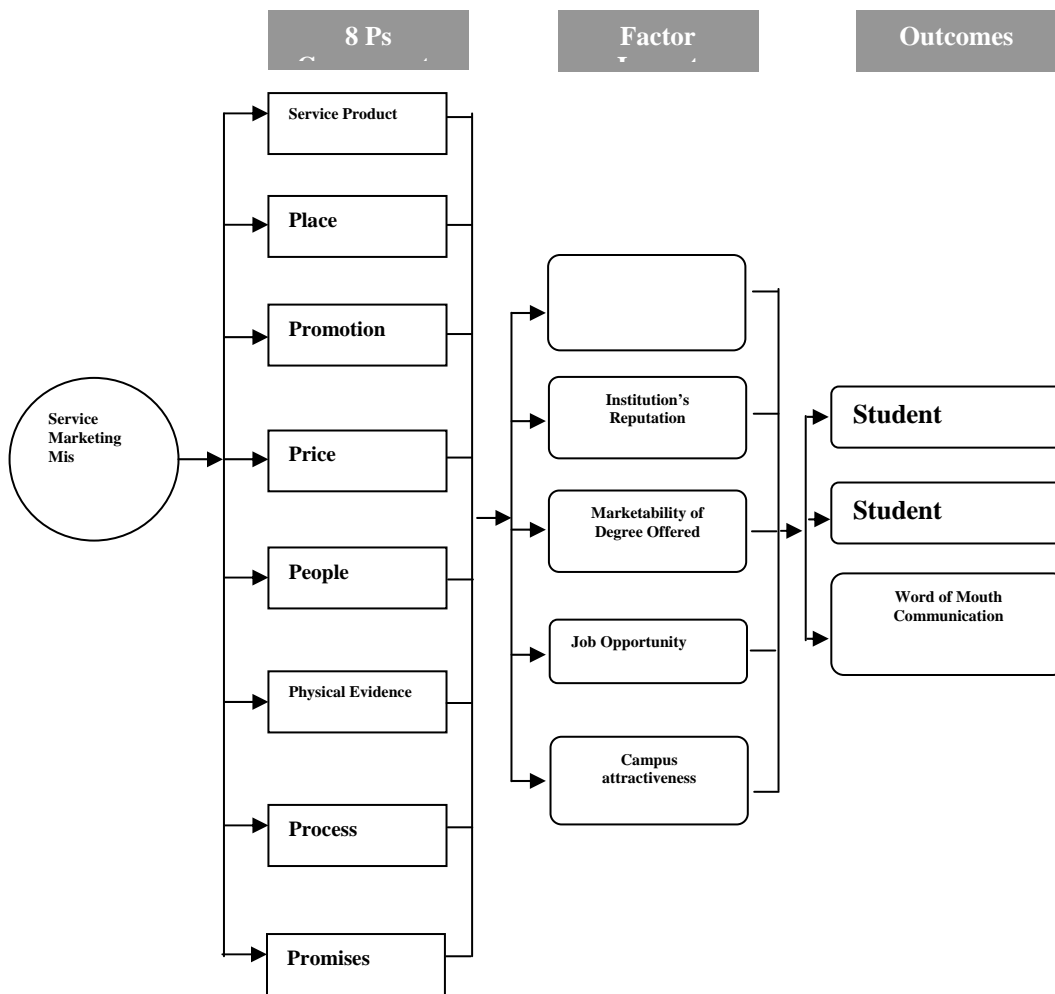


Figure-2: A Conceptual Model of the Service Marketing Mix and its outcomes for Educational Institutions

The student perceptions and their assessment regarding the quality of education are truly subjective and depend on the basis of understanding in related grounds. But the perceived quality of educational institutions have largely effected the word of mouth communication of the students. In case of private educational institutions sometimes the students act as the first service encounter. In such cases the word of mouth communication becomes vital for the institutional reputation and the acquisition of students thereof. In order to encounter such threats of institutional reputation the understanding and consideration of the 8P's in core-service designing is a significant issue. Brief descriptions of the 8P's components are given below:

**1. Service Product:** It includes

- Degrees Offered- range and variety of degree offered
- Quality Level- the quality of course content and faculty credential
- Brand Name- the recognition and acceptance of the institution and degree offered
- Post Transactional Service- the service of issuing related certificate and other paper works supporting to the student

**2. Place:** It includes

- Location- the location of the institution and the transportation infrastructure and convenience and availability of transportation
- Accessibility- accessibility of the students and their parents for information search
- Distribution Channels- branches of the institution to covers a wide area of distribution and service extension
- Distribution Coverage- the coverage of distance learning and degree of area

**3. Promotion:** It includes

- Advertising- advertising of the institution in variety of media for creating awareness of the degrees offered and service rendered
- Direct Marketing- communication over SMS and e-mail and social media networks
- Promotion- arranging national and international conferences, seminars, competitions, job fairs and cultural events on different national days

- Public relations- maintaining efficient service encounter points for better public relation and maintaining media communication executive for the purpose

**4. Price:** It includes

- Cost of Education- the total of completion of the degree.
- Discounts/Scholarships- discounts and available scholarship provided by the institution that reduce the total cost of education
- Commissions- extra benefits for serving the institution with word of mouth communication
- Payment Terms- the terms and conditions of the payment and the flexibility thereof
- Student's perceived value- the value a student perceived from the service
- Quality/price relationship- the relationship between the values received from the institution and the amount they paid for this.

**5. People:** It includes

- Faculty- the educational qualification and research credibility of the faculty members of the institution
- Teachers Training- the training and development of the faculty member by sponsoring different training session for faculty improvement
- Administrative Staff- the efficiency and sincerity and the supporting administrative staffs and their attitude toward the student
- Degree of involvement- the degree of involvement of the teachers in policy making of teaching procedure and faculty training
- Contact Encounter- the efficiency of the contact encounter to build the image of the institution before the searchers i.e. parents, students etc.

**6. Physical evidence:** It includes

- Environment- the environment and learning atmosphere, the level of noise, the space and scope of relaxation etc.
- Furnishings- the furnishing facilities, the classroom facilities etc.
- Layout- the overall layout of the institution and the attractiveness of the campus



- Laboratory Infrastructure- the facilities for practical study, the infrastructure of scientific lab, computer lab, access to internet facilities etc.

**7. Process:** It includes

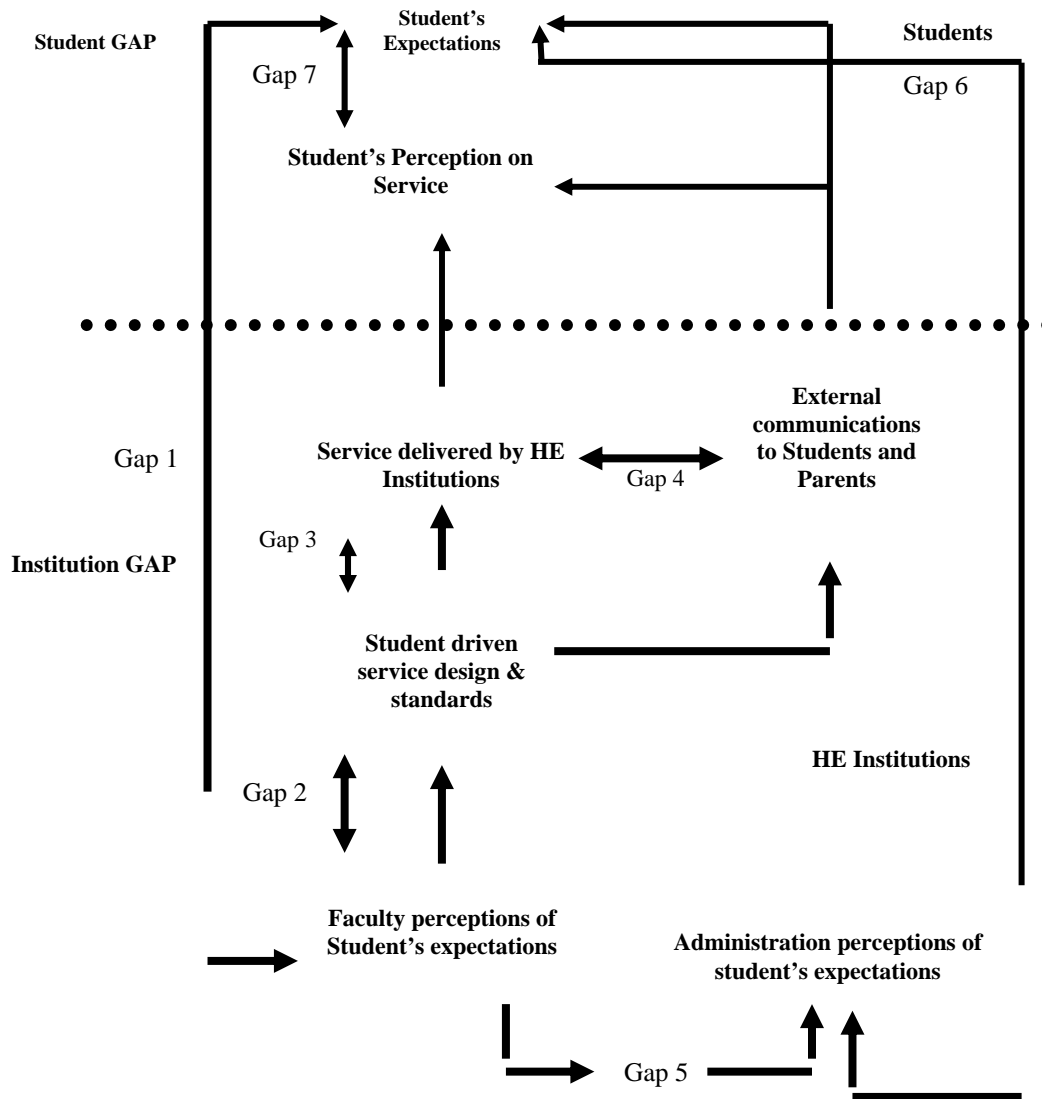
- Student Coordination- the level of coordination of the students, access to the teachers and administrative body
- Mechanism of Teaching- teaching mechanism, influencing to learn form self test, multimedia lecture and on the class learning
- Employee discretion- employee discretion and the relative engagement of the students in the process of learning
- Student Involvement- involvement of the students in different events and organizing activities to build the organizing capabilities of the students
- Systematic flow of activities- the activities there off having a systematic flow and sequence for better understanding of the activities

**8. Promises:** It includes

- Adaptation of technological advancement in core education process e.g. enabling online learning systems, mobile learning applications and others forms of multimedia for teaching.
- More flexibility in the distribution of materials, while ensuring that courses are as accessible to participants as possible.
- Allowing students to reflect on their participation; providing a legacy based on which the module itself can evolve, ensuring modules remain current and appropriate for the students.
- The course itself grew out of the shared viewpoints and delivered in a collaborative environment to drive standards forward and encourage innovation.

**6. The Extended GAPs Model for Educational Institutions**

The basic GAP model as proposed by Zeithaml, Bitner and Parasuraman of USA (1988) had 5 GAPs applicable for all service quality analysis. But an extended GAP model can also be developed applicable for higher educational institutions. The additional two GAPs also have significant influence on the analysis of education quality. By keeping the fundamentals of the service GAP model, the extended GAP model for higher educational institutions are designed as shown in the figure-3.



**Figure-3: The Extended GAP Model for Higher Educational Institutions**  
 Source: Compiled by the Authors

SERVQUAL applied to measure the service quality of the teaching process slightly changes the gaps defined in the traditional model. The new set of quality gaps, which will determine the overall service quality, would be as follows:

**Learning Side GAP (Student GAP):**

- GAP-7: the differences between the Student's Expectations of Service and Student's Perception of Service

**Causes of GAP-7:**

- The first impression a student gets while interacting with the faculty members and administrative staffs over telephone or face to face at the time admission.
- Response the first encounters (administrative staffs) and from the faculty members on student's query, to problematic students, to student's request.
- Over promising by the institutions about the service (both academic and support services) to attract the students on the institutions.
- Dimensions students used to assess the service quality. This make a significant gap in this area.

**Teaching Side GAP (Institution GAP)**

- Gap 1: Difference between student expectations and Faculty perceptions of Student's expectations.

**Causes of GAP-1:**

- Lack of the knowledge about the students opinion on the education curricula and their diversifications;
  - Lack of research on students' perception and dimensions about education quality.
  - Lack of adequate interaction and proper communication between the faculty members and the students.
  - Excess number of procedural layers between front-end employees and the upper level faculty.
- Gap 2: Difference between Faculty perceptions of Student's expectations and Student driven service design & standards (teaching) specifications.

**Causes of GAP-2:**

- Lack of students driven educational standards.
- Undefined set of standard designed to be provided to students by the faculty members and administrative staffs.

- Absence of service delivery (process management) monitoring system to focus on students' requirements.
  - Lack of commitment for better service to be provided.
  - Lack of systematic process to design new courses that may connect the students and faculty members in a better way.
- Gap 3: Difference between Student driven service design & standards (teaching) specifications and the service actually delivered.

**Causes of GAP-3:**

- Ineffective recruitment and selection of faculty members and administrative staffs.
  - Ambiguity and conflict among the faculty members and administrative staffs over their role to be performed.
  - Inappropriate evaluation and compensation of the faculty members.
  - Lack of empowerments, team-work and collaborative research among the employees of the institution to find the better way of service delivery.
  - Failure to educate the students about their role and responsibilities to get better educational service from the institution.
- Gap 4: Difference between service delivery and External communications to Students and Parents (promised teaching outcomes).

**Causes of GAP-4:**

- Ineffective CRM to manage students' expectation about service from the institution.
  - Over or under promising about the quality of education and other related factors like, job placement, industry attachment etc.
  - Insufficient communication between the teaching and non-teaching staffs of the institutions.
  - Differences in the policies, procedures, course curriculum among the various affiliated colleges, institutions, regular and other courses.
  - Lack of promotion and inadequate external communication through various media to reach the target audiences.
- Gap 5: Difference between Faculty perceptions of Student's expectations and Administration perceptions of student's expectations.

**Causes of GAP-5:**

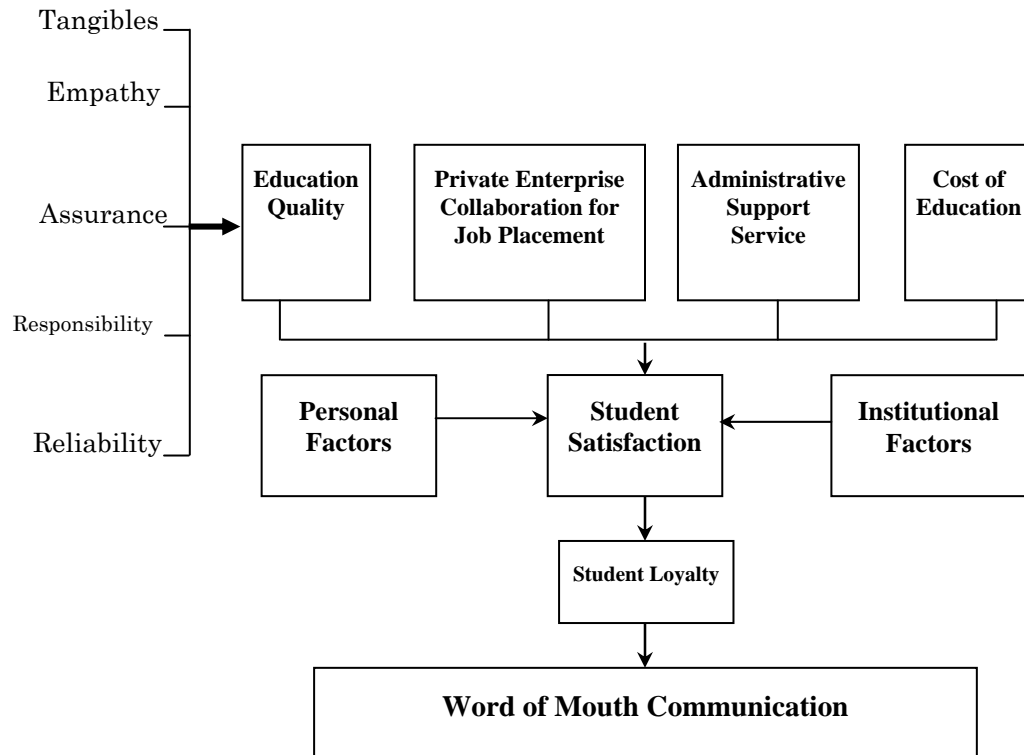
- Lack of proper interaction (interactive marketing) between the faculty staffs and administrative staffs.
  - Improper communication between the faculty and administration over the students' expectation.
  - Ambiguity and conflict among the faculty members and administrative staffs over their role to be performed.
- Gap 6: Difference between Student's Expectations and Administration perceptions of student's expectations

**Causes of GAP-6:**

- Lack of proper interaction (interactive marketing) between the administration and students.
- Failure to response the students' demand promptly and provide encounter in case of service failure.
- Lack of training of administrative staffs to meet the requirements of students.
- Failure to educate the administrative staffs about the students'

**7. Student Perception of Education Quality (EduQUAL) and Student Satisfaction**

The student perceptions are mostly subjective assessment of actually what they receive as service. In the language of service marketing the students expectations are the standards or the references points against which the quality of education the students will receive. Students will tend to compare the actual service they receive with those references points in order to formulate the perception of service received. The dimensions used to assess the education quality and the subsequent event that lead student satisfaction and word of mouth communication thereof may shown by the following figure:



**Figure-4: A Moderated Framework on Student Perception of Education Quality (EduQUAL) and Student Satisfaction**

Source: Compiled by the Authors

Aligning the model to the universities' needs also changes the meaning of the service quality perceptual dimensions. These five dimensions are:

- Assurance – i.e. to earn the student's confidence by performing services in a knowledgeable and professional manner.
- Empathy – the ability to communicate care and understanding through the interpersonal skills of the teaching staff and student-friendly policies and procedures (mainly those affecting the teaching process).
- Reliability – the accuracy and dependability with which the teaching service is provided
- Responsiveness – the demonstration of an eagerness to provide quality service and a commitment to act in the best interest of students.
- Tangibles – the more physical aspects affecting the teaching process such as technology availability etc.

The model shown in figure-4 represents that dimensions of service quality affect the quality of education. The quality of education factor along with other factors, identified as personal and institutional factors determine the level of student loyalty. A satisfied student serves as the advocate for the institutional performance on this regard. The student loyalty for the institution is ultimately used to develop the word of mouth communication for the same. The student satisfaction factors specified in this model is considered as the inputs of the institutional service process. The process finally produces the outcomes of the word of mouth and developed as a reference point for the marketing of the educational institution.

## **8. Recommendations**

Thus, several marketing strategies for the higher learning institutions in Bangladesh are recommended:

1. Marketers need to first identify their target markets correctly and identify the needs and wants of particular segments of that target market.
2. To serve the students' needs, the quality of teaching, institutions' image and campus surroundings must be considered by college operators in order to attract students.
3. Holistic exposure - offer unique experience to students. This includes a chance to meet a wider spectrum of students, especially those from other faculties and to take part in a whole range of college activities. This is especially lacking in private institutions.
4. Image and reputation - promotion should be targeted to relevant groups such as the students, and their friends and families.
5. Information dissemination - TV, radio, education fairs, nationwide tours by institution representatives, etc.
6. Facilities - the increasing use of multimedia technology and/or information communication technology in all aspects of education service delivery.
7. Academic staff - emphasis on recruiting and training high caliber staff with extensive background in research, and business experience.
8. Future studies should use focus group or in-depth study to probe into the 'marketing thinking' of the institutions. Researchers could also consider looking into other aspects of a student's decision making process, such as personal factors, family background, academic achievements, etc. Another issue that is worth exploring is the relationship between college choice and post purchase behaviour, academic achievements, and satisfaction levels.

9. Marketers should develop a promotional mix that fits the needs and wants of their target market whilst still aligning it with the overall strategy of the institution.
10. Public relations, such as testimonials from past and present students as well as the use of representatives and agents should form a part of the promotional mix used, particularly in Bangladesh.

## **9. Conclusion**

Higher education indicates the prime privilege for a citizen of a country. This sector can easily meet the basic needs of an economy. This sector influences the overall development of a society, in terms of some highly correlated factors such as social, economic, technological, human resources development etc. The development of higher education plays an important role in facilitating these changes and producing adequately trained manpower. The effectiveness of higher education institutions contributes to development both internally and externally. So, higher education needs sustenance and quality with time and space. For sustaining and improving quality in the higher education it is needed to reorient of curriculum and introduce vocational and job oriented courses.

Due to the lack of quality of training, lack of combination of knowledge and practice, poor capacity and quality of graduates, the existing education system of public university of Bangladesh is in vulnerable position. It is losing its articulation and reputation that making it weak in the present competitive market economy. As a result, the public university is going to fail to keep the tradition as well as quality of training, research and the social accountability that it had previously.

On the other hand, the higher education of Bangladesh has the lackings of long-term vision, incomplete education commissions and policies, traditional teaching methods, inadequate library and laboratory facilities, nasty students and teacher's politics, weak financial base and shortage of qualified teachers. There is need to introduce proper policy in order to minimize the problems that are prevailing in the higher education system. For this, it is required to the joint efforts of the government, civil society and university authority in collaboratively.



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