IMPROVING UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENT SATISFACTION IN A BRANCH OF LEBANESE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: CASE OF UNIVERSITY X

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ABSTRACT:

The service marketing literature reveals that universities are becoming more aware of the importance of student satisfaction. Many studies have shown that student motivation, student retention and loyalty are important outcomes of student satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential for universities to constantly measure this latter as part of the marketing higher education strategies in order to stay competitive.

The fundamental purpose of this paper is to improve student satisfaction for undergraduate business students, in a Branch of Lebanese private Higher Education University.

This study consists in an intervention research problem in order to gain a better knowledge of the influential factors determining student dissatisfaction through socio-economic diagnosis. The main areas for improving the Business School performance will be identified through SEAM project. Solutions and recommendations will be suggested.

The main goal is to come up with a comprehensive, well integrated management system, where students' needs and expectations are better addressed and aligned with the overall strategy of the Business School.

Finally, this study focuses on qualimetrics intervention-research that involves qualitative, quantitative and financial impacts.

Keywords: Service Quality, Student Expectations, Student satisfaction, Lebanese Higher Education Sector.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Universities of today find themselves in the class of service industry and in need to respond to students' desires *(Hill, 1995)*. They are facing many pressures in implementing effective measures and finding their way in a changing market.

The evolution of the entire higher education system rendered the educational environment very competitive. As a result of this mobility, universities are forced to reposition themselves to face long term challenges of maintaining and improving high standards in order to retain existing students and attract new ones (Jurkowitsch *et al.,* 2006). In the centre of TQM philosophy in higher education is student satisfaction. Satisfying student's needs are the overall focus and the cause of existence for all higher education institutions (HEI).

Student satisfaction has been positioned as a central issue in the literature. It is considered to be an important educational outcome. Striving to deliver high quality service standards would assist the universities to create a favorable environment for its students with minimum dissatisfaction and complaints on one hand and to build and maintain reputation, and achieve students' satisfaction on the other hand. Students are perceived as primary customers or service recipients of HEI (Hill, 1995; Qureshi *et al.*, 2010).

Seeking to maximize student satisfaction should be pivotal. It forms the cornerstone of the marketing concept (Qureshi *et al.*, 2010). There is a strong link between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Anderson and Mittel 2000).

Firms with a higher level of customer satisfaction are engaged in lower costs of attracting customers (Fomell 1992). Positive word of mouth is more likely to take place (Anderson 1994). To be successful in the competitive environment, universities should steer towards students' centered strategies with main focus on student satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to improve the undergraduate student satisfaction level within the School of Business in a private Lebanese institution of higher education. Hence, this paper will focus on examining the root causes of dissatisfaction and will suggest socio-economic innovation solutions, which present a basis for further research in the project phase.

The aim is to diagnose the extent to which students' requirements are being addressed. In this context, it is imperative to understand how students experience the overall service and quality, so as to identify the essential factors that can serve as an instrument of detecting dysfunctions.

II.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

University X is a Private University in Lebanon. It has 9 Campuses at different locations (Bekaa, Beirut, Saida, Tyre, Nabatieh, Mount Lebanon, Tripoli, Rayak and Halba-Akkar). A lack of consistency of services across different campuses has been depicted. It is believed that the Business School at Akkar campus which will be the key focus of our study is less fortunate than the other campuses.

The Human structure has not been completed yet. This campus suffers from limited training, lack of expertise, the non constant presence of full timers and

the vacancy of some crucial managerial positions; hence, creating inefficiency and performance issues resulting from organizational and demographic causes.

As a result, students' expectations are not being met. There are obviously compelling reasons for giving attention to the quality of service to head off the potential for dissatisfaction and report greater increases in satisfaction .

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Expectations, Service Quality, Students' Satisfaction and Perceived Service Quality

In order to study service quality and student satisfaction, an understanding of the gap between expectation and perception about a service should be established (Mittal & Lasser, 1996). "Expectations" are defined as the limited sense of beliefs about the future performance of a product or service; the beliefs about the future sacrifices one will make during the purchase and use of a product or service (Spreng et al., 1993). "Perceived Service Quality" is what the consumer expects from a service provider in terms of quality delivered; whereas "Satisfaction" is the result of comparing expected performance with actual performance (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009).

a. Alternative Student Satisfaction Models

It is to note that a number of models in the literature review attempting to relate student satisfaction with its antecedents and outcomes have been presented. Those models vary greatly in terms of the number of variables. Consequently, alternative students' satisfaction models have been proposed.

a.1. Antecedents of Students' Satisfaction: GAP # 1

There is a gap on whether both "Expectations" and "Service Quality" are antecedents of "Student Satisfaction" or whether only "Service Quality" is considered to be an antecedent of "Satisfaction".

a.1.1. Theories Disregarding the Expectation Construct from the Student Satisfaction Models

Many researchers suggested a total elimination of the "Expectations" construct when managing service quality (Abdullah, 2006; Cronin &Taylor,1992;), stating that people do not remember the past properly because an occurrence of biased expectations is possible (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). According to Getty and Getty (2003), no matter how much effort is placed into delivering quality service, it is the customers' perception that matters at the end. Customers' expectations are formed during the service production process and have no impact on satisfaction.

a.1.2. Theories Linking Students' Expectations, Service Quality and Students' Satisfaction

Other researchers presumed that customers have well-formed performance expectations. Satisfaction is more than a reaction to the actual performance of quality service. It is influenced as well by prior expectations regarding the level of quality. Expectations are formed based on various sources of information related to the past performance of a product. The different factors that contribute to the shaping of the expectation include: past experiences generated by previous exposures to services, word of mouth, publicity, prior exposures to competitive services, price and communication controlled and derived from the companies' end, under the form of personal selling and advertising (Zeithaml & Parasuraman,1993; Zeithaml,1996).

Although many prior researches have acknowledged the importance that expectation occupies in term of its effects, different opinions have been presented on the nature of the relationship that exists between expectations and satisfaction. Is the correlation direct or indirect?

In fact, the role of expectations in satisfaction framework has been modeled in different ways, thus creating another gap in the literature review.

a.1..2.1.. Different Modelings of the Role of Expectation in the Student Satisfaction Framework

> The Role of Expectations as Anticipation

Some researchers suggested that expectation has a direct influence on the satisfaction level. Each of performance and expectation is modeled as a separate predictor of satisfaction. The majority of literature reviews support a positive correlation between expectations and satisfaction (Oliver& Linda, 1981; Swan &Trawick,1981).

> The Role of Expectations as Comparative Referents: Disconfirmation Model

The satisfaction results from a comparison between expectations and actual performance. Hence, a positive disconfirmation takes place when the actual performance exceeds the consumer's expectations. Finally, satisfaction arises when expectations of service quality match the outcome represented by the actual delivered performance (Oliver, 1981; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988).

> Expectations-Artifact Model

This model posits a lack of direct relationship between prior expectations and satisfaction. They stated that this relationship is fully mediated by the "Perceived Performance" variable (Johnson *et al.,* 1996).

a.2. Causal Ordering of Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: Gap # 2

Another unresolved issue in the research of service quality is whether student satisfaction leads to service quality, or vice versa. Controversial views arguing the causal directional relationship between those two variables have been presented leaving a room for further clarifications

a.2.1. The Antecedent: Service Quality

Cronin &Taylor (1992) stated that service quality is an antecedent to satisfaction and that satisfaction is an outcome of service quality. However, the gap revolving around the causal directional relationship between satisfaction and service quality still needs to be submitted to further studies (Cronin &Taylor, 1994). Spreng & MacKoy (1996) also studied the relationship between service quality and satisfaction and came up with the hypothesis that service quality has an impact on satisfaction.

a.2.2. The Antecedent: Satisfaction

While a wide range of research works suggests that service quality is a an antecedent to customer satisfaction, some authors such as Bitner (1990) and Athiyaman (et al., 1997) suggested that satisfaction may be an antecedent to service quality . According to them, perceived quality is a function of student satisfaction (Bitner, 1990; Athiyaman et al., 1997).

According to Bitner (1990), the customer's reaction results from a comparison between actual performance of service quality and expectations. We can conclude that mixed findings exist regarding the causal direction between the two constructs of "Service Quality" and "Satisfaction". Therefore, to clarify the causal direction between those two variables, a review of definitions of each of those constructs is required.

b. Interchangeability and Wide Variance in the Definitions of Service Quality and Satisfaction: GAP#3

In addition to the gap revolving around the direction of causality between service quality and satisfaction, it is often difficult and confusing when attempting to distinguish as well as define each one of those terms. It is to note that those theoretical concepts are sometimes used in an interchangeable manner (Palmer, 2011) and are both treated together as functions of a customer's perceptions and expectations **(Table 1)**.

	AUTHORS	DEFINITIONS
SERVICE QUALITY	Parasuraman *et al*. ,1988	The result of a comparison between customer's expectation, and his/her real-life experiences with the services.
	O'Neill & Palmer, 2003	The difference between what a student expects to receive and his/her perceptions of actual delivery.

	Lewis & Booms, 1983	Service quality is a measure of how well the service
		level delivered matches customers expectations.
	Athiyaman , 1997	Perceived service quality is an overall evaluation of the goodness or badness
		of a product or service.
	Zeithaml *et al.,* 1990;. Parasuraman et al., 1988	Perceived service quality which results from the comparison of
		customer service expectations with their perceptions of actual performance,
		and is seen as global judgment of the service.

	AUTHORS	DEFINITIONS
DEFINITIONS OF SATISFACTION	Parasuraman *et al.,* 1985, 1988	Satisfaction occurs when perceived performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations and dissatisfaction results when there is a negative gap between performance and expectations.
	Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 1990	The extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions.
	Anderson, 1973; Oliver, 1993	Is the difference between perceived performance and customer expectations.
	Kotler *et al.* ,2009	Is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations.
	Turel *et al*., 2006	Student satisfaction reflects the extent to which the programme has met student expectations. It is

		formed based on overall student experience with the programme and is determined by the difference between what students initially expected from the programme and what they actually experienced after being enrolled.
	Anderson, 1973; Oliver, 1993	Is the difference between perceived performance and customer expectations

b.1. Interchangeability of Terms: Service Quality and Satisfaction

Despite the difficulties in clarifying and distinguishing those two variables, Anderson *et al*. (1994) have drawn a clear distinction where the current customer perceptions are nothing but the basics for the quality while satisfaction is based on past, present and anticipated experiences or outcomes. According to Zeithaml *et al*. (2009), satisfaction has a broader nature than service quality; this latest is nothing but an element of satisfaction.

b.2. Lack of a Clear Consensus on the Conceptual Basis of Service Quality

Abdullah (2006) stated that there are still many areas of disagreement in the measurement of service quality that require further analysis and studies. Due to the problems involved in measuring this construct, Parasuraman *et al*., (1985) highlighted that many researchers have termed service quality as an "elusive" and "indistinct" which is difficult to define, measure and model (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman *et al*., 1988).The intangible nature of the services, explains this complexity (Palmer, 2011). As opposed to goods quality, Baron *et al*. (2009) stated that service quality is a highly abstract construct.
In spite of the efforts undertaken by the researchers, no single model of service quality has been adopted universally (Clewes, 2003). This illustrates the lack of consensus between researchers on definitive definition for service quality. A generally accepted measurement scale does not exist (Marzo-Navarro *et al*., 2005). Measuring service quality and understanding its antecedents and consequences are a mean to establish methods and implement strategies enabling organizations to come up with a better service quality level. Reaching a competitive advantage and building a solid customer base are the resulted outcomes that explain the eagerness of the practitioners as well as the one of the academics to accurately measure the service quality (Abdullah, 2006).

b.3. Lack of Clear Consensus on the Conceptual Basis of Satisfaction

Similarly to service quality, ambiguity and abstractness characterize the concept of customer and student satisfaction (Munteanu *et al*., 2010). The existing literature indicates a wide variance in the definitions of satisfaction. There is no

clear consensus among researchers on the definition of satisfaction **(Table 2)**. Attempting to developing a consensus definition for this construct was the subject of attention of many academics such as Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Tse &Wilton 1988; Westbrook,1980, Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Fornell ,1992; (Giese &Cote, 2000). According to Michell *et al*., (1998), satisfaction is a foundation of trust.

	AUTHORS	DESCRIPTIONS
SATISFACTION	Anderson, 1973; Oliver, 1993	Is the difference between perceived performance and customer expectations
	Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985, 1988	Satisfaction occurs when perceived performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations and dissatisfaction results when there is a negative gap between performance and expectations.
	Zeithaml& Parasuraman, 1990	"the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions".
	Rust & Oliver, 1994; Giese & Cote, 2000	Satisfaction is as a summary of emotional and cognitive responses that pertained to a particular focus (expectations, product/service, or consumption experience) and occurred at a particular time (after consumption, after choice, or accumulative expeliences)
	Kotler *et al.* ,2009	Is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations".
	Oliver, 1999	Satisfaction has been defined as the perception of pleasurable fulfilment of a service .
	Athiyaman ,1997	Satisfaction is the result of the evaluation of a specific transaction or consumption experience.
	Rowley, 1997	Is the difference between perceived performance and customer expectations

	Oliver , 1989	Student satisfaction refers to the favorability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education."
	Elliott & Healy, 2001	Student satisfaction is generally accepted as a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's educational experience, and results when actual performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations.
	Elliot & Shin, 2002	Student satisfaction is being shaped continually by repeated experiences in campus life. Moreover, the campus environment is seemingly a web of interconnected experiences that overlap and influence students' overall satisfaction.
	Turel *et al*., 2006	Student satisfaction reflects the extent to which the programme has met student expectations. It is formed based on overall student experience with the programme and is determined by the difference between what students initially expected from the programme and what they actually experienced after being enrolled.
	Westbrook & Reilly 1983	An emotional response to the experiences provided by and associated with particular products or services purchased, retail outlets, or even molar patterns of behavior such as shopping and buyer behavior, as well as the overall marketplace . An emotional response triggered by a cognitive evaluative process in which the perceptions of (or beliefs about) an object, action, or condition are compared to one's values (or needs, wants, desires).

	Churchill &Surprenant, 1982	An outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer's comparison of therewards and costs of the purchase relative to anticipated consequences.
	Oliver, 1981	An evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience. In essence, the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience
	Westbrook, 1980	Refers to the favorability of the individual's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with using or consuming it (product)
	Tse &Wilton, 1988	The consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption
	Westbrook, 1987	Global evaluative judgment about product usage/consumption
	LaBarbera & Mazursky, 1983	An evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience

IV.   AIM

The intention to develop and improve one's professional career has always been the concern of every professional and degree-holder, but "Rome was not built in one day". Striving for self realization has become much harder, where only the persistent and the ambitious can bear the heavy burdens that come with it. A wise man said:" One may start small, but is only to build the right and form platform to rocket himself up to the stars". I cannot but agree more. To reach the stars, one will need the right tools: ambition is the incentive but education is the tool.

New developments are required to better adapt to the changing and constantly evolving environment of the education sector. In view of the fact that I have been teaching marketing for the last 6 years, I believe that that the DBA program will

improve my academic qualifications and enhance my performance as a reflective practitioner. It will provide me with a firm foundation needed for further career development and a major career move. This program will be of particular benefit to develop my personal, research and communication skills. Furthermore, the investigation of the research problem will help me enhance my business skills as well as managerial and consultancy competences.

My passion about the educational field pushed me to carry out the intervention in my own organization and to make my thesis closely related to the career path I am planning on. Showing such interest and initiative will only be appreciated by the current or prospective employer.

V.   HYPOTHESES

a.   Central Hypothesis

Undergraduate business students' satisfaction has to be continuously improved. Partial solutions are not sufficient. A comprehensive, well integrated management system, where students' needs and expectations are better addressed and aligned with the overall strategy of the Business School should be created for the sake of sustainable organizational development.

b.   Body of Hypotheses

The body of hypotheses is a tool for structuring the tough of the researcher and a validation tool of the problematic and the central hypothesis. It is the decomposition of the core hypothesis into sub-hypotheses: descriptive, explicative and prescriptive that will be structured at a later stage according to different thematic.

▪ **Descriptive Hypothesis:**

A profound organizational gap has been depicted in the university's structure creating inconsistent services across campuses. There is a lack of a proper common training across different campuses affecting the uniformity of administrative procedures (**work organization/Integrated training**).

Student affairs staffs are not well equipped with the adequate skills; hence, the delegated responsibilities do not always fall within their scope of competency **(work organization/integrated training).** It is to note that there is no such division at Akkar campus **(Work organization)**.

Furthermore, the established career management offices are limited to Beirut and Bekaa; they are not replicated at other campuses **(work organization)**.

No student council body exists in the whole university **(strategic implementation).**

When it comes to foreign languages, most of the enrolled students find themselves in remedial English classes because high schools left them

unprepared. However, the remedial courses are not strong enough to assist those students in achieving expected competencies and developing their foreign language skills **(work organization).**

Being not well equipped with soft and communication skills required to face the outside world is another challenge that the students face. Hence, practical courses need to be introduced **(work organization).** Besides, students are not being provided with an internship program which is essential for gaining experience from one hand and developing skills and perspective on the other hand **(work organization).**

Students' needs and expectations are not being deeply analyzed; there is no student satisfaction survey tool. Relying solely on the instructor course evaluation is not enough to conduct a comprehensive and exhaustive study regarding students' needs **(work organization).**

Moreover, there is no follow-up on employers' feedback regarding graduates students in the market. Gathering such information is fundamental to assesses whether there is a gap between the learned and the actually needed skills and qualifications. Furthermore, the market feedback evaluates whether the curriculum goals are being met **(work organization).**

Finally, the human structure at Akkar campus has not been completed yet. The lack of the presence of an Academic Director for cultural sensitivity reasons makes this campus less fortunate, system and organization wise, leaving the Administrative Director with no choice but to interfere in the academic zone **(work organization/political decisions)**. Also, the non constant presence of an Assistant Dean is creating dissatisfaction with the advising and orientation among students **(work organization)**. Hence, no proper academic follow-up exits. As a final point, this campus has no proper outside classroom facilities. Cafeteria, library **(working conditions)**, and sports activities are cases in point **(work organization)**.

- ▪ **Explicative Hypothesis:**

- • Lack of cleaning up, mostly related to the improvement process axis of SEAM: students' dissatisfaction is not always taken into consideration. The University X needs to come up with proper tools such as student satisfaction survey, interviews, fieldnote quotes, mirror effects, focus groups, along with qualitative, quantitative and financial impacts.

- • Lack of synchronization, mostly related to management tools axis: gap between students' expectations and university's service provision is leading to strategic misalignment.

- • Lack of sensitization, mostly related to political and strategic decisions axis: students are not well equipped with soft skills for the labor market. There are neither internship programs nor a proper follow up on the market feedback. The other expenses resulting from the poor equipment

will be costly because of the hidden costs. The managers of the program are not aware of the hidden costs resulting from not investing money in the action plan in order to enhance student's satisfaction.

- **Prescriptive Hypothesis**

The School of Business has to design its strategies and activities to be better coherent and aligned with its mission on one hand and to better respond to students 'satisfaction on the other. Striving to reach high quality service standards in higher education through sensitization, cleaning up the dysfunctions and, synchronization is significant.

Creating a favorable environment with minimum dissatisfaction and complaints would enhance students' perception. Steering towards students' centered strategies with main focus on student satisfaction is pivotal to the organizational sustainability.

VI. RESEARCH FIELD

According to the statistics, there are 43 nationally Lebanese accredited universities, many of which are internationally recognized. Among these universities, there is one public university, the Lebanese University while the rest belong to the private education sector. Both public and private universities operate in French or English noting that those foreign languages are the mostly used in Lebanon. The private sector is governed by the law of 1960. It operates under the supervision of the Directorate General for Higher Education. In the academic year 2014-2015, the student body reaches a number of around 190,157 students (69,994 students in the Lebanese University and 120,163 in 42 private universities).

As for the major fields of study, Business Administration and Law are being the first choice of students, accounting for around 26.2% of their total number followed by Literature and Arts. To be noted that those fields represent the second choice of students and account around 19.3% of their total.

Field Description

University X is a Private Lebanese University. Its mission is "to provide accessible and affordable higher education in excellence and quality of first order. University X will drive its students to be responsible citizens and life-long self-actuated learners. It will empower students to develop awareness and engage in cultural and environmental sustainability through maximized resources. University X disseminates diverse learning experiences and skills in an environment that e-enable the dynamic interplay of teaching and research. University X endeavours to align its values and commitments to student support and communication, and continually review curricula for innovative outcomes".

It has 9 Campuses at different locations: Bekaa, Beirut, Saida, Tyre, Nabatieh, Mount Lebanon, Tripoli, Rayak , Halba-Akkar. It has five faculties: School of Arts and Science, School of Engineering, School of Business and Management,

School of Pharmacy, School of Education. It is ranked as being the 9th among nation's private universities. The Number of its students reaches around 30 000.

The following competitors to University X have been identified:

- Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon (AUL)

- Lebanese French University (ULF)

- American University of Technology

- Lebanese German University

- Lebanese Canadian University

- AUST

VII.   REASEARCH METHOD AND REASEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focuses on qualimetrics intervention-research that involves qualitative, quantitative and financial impacts. Interviews will be conducted over a period of six months from January 2017 till July 2017. Data will be collected and used to gain a better understanding and insight into the research problem and the underlying root causes.

An intervention comprised of two simultaneous actions horizontal and vertical will be carried out. The aim is to ensure a better integration of socio-economic intervention in the organization strategy, and solve operational and strategic dysfunctions which are often interconnected.

At the horizontal intervention, general dysfunctions of the whole organization will be revealed. Interviews will involve the top managers of the entire Bushiness School. The diagnostic will draw an inventory of dysfunctions in the form of key ideas. General overall solutions will be represented.

As for the vertical stage, the intervention will take place on a smaller scale. It will involve all the categories of actors at the Business School of Akkar: students, instructors, Assistant Dean, Administrative Director in addition to some of the Top Managers.

Based on the above, the interviewed actors will be divided as follows:
Horizontal Process:
- President
- Vice-President
- Dean
- 2 Academic Directors
- Career Management

Vertical Process
- Vice-president
- 2 Academic Directors
- Administrative Director
- Assistant Dean
- Chairmen of Marketing, Management, Economics, Finance and Accounting
- One third of the instructors
- 10 focus groups of 4 to 5 students

We can conclude that certain managers are directly involved in both actions horizontal and vertical. Furthermore, data for this research will be elicited from focus group techniques in addition to the interviews.

Our population is defined as following:

- The Administrative Director of Akkar campus is responsible for all the administrative operations from accounting, finance, maintenance, public relations to legal issues. However, his responsibility extends beyond the administrative zone to cover the academic part as well. Such overlapping is due to the lack of presence of an Academic Director at this campus while the show is run by both directors in the rest of the campuses.

- The chairpersons are entitled to represent the academic management of their departments, to oversee the research progress, to provide the Dean with class schedules and to monitor the academic behavior of the instructors. Furthermore, they design the curriculum in a way to better equip the students in their academic and professional life.

- The Assistant Dean of Akkar is responsible to represent the Dean on campus. She acts as an intermediary between the student body and the office of the Dean. She works closely with students, taking into account their expectations and concerns. Nevertheless, her non constant presence is creating gaps at Akkar campus.

- The role of the instructors is totally academic.

- The students are undergraduate from business school both males and females aged between 18 and 23 years old.

When it comes to the interviews techniques, face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted at the interviewees' offices with no one else present. They will be lasting an average of 30 to 45 minutes, with a few as long as one hour. The selected interview questions will be revolving around how to improve students' satisfaction at Akkar Banch of University X. Questions will be designed in a way to encourage the participants to talk about the main topic of

interest leading to what is called "*Interactive Cognitivity*". Sometimes, other questions will be developed during the course of the interview.

All the conducted interviews will be tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. Afterward, transcripts will be analyzed; field note quotes will be highlighted using a coding-categorizing technique. Accordingly, data will be been arranged into categories sorted by six domains and more specifically under the six social performance. Then, 10 focus groups of 4 to 5 students will be conducted.

To identify the dysfunctions in a deeper way, in addition to the diagnosis tool, time management and competency grid will be created at the vertical action. Subsequently, the vertical diagnostic mirror-effect will be presented to the managers. As a result, the findings will make all the participants more aware of the need to prevent dysfunctions, instead of repairing them once they occur.

As we progress with the project, hypotheses will be built and primary data will be generated. The qualitative data will be quantified to hidden costs. Consecutively, data will be converted to a numerical form by counting the frequency of occurrence of hidden costs. Proper solutions and recommendations will be suggested for improving the implementation of the organization strategy.

It is to note that the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the areas to be improved that impact student satisfaction among undergraduate business students in a branch of University X?

 RQ2: How can we improve the students' satisfaction and meet their expectations in a branch of University X?

VIII.   OBJECTIVES

An informal research contract has been concluded with the University X. As part of this process, a letter of acceptance has been delivered from the Vice - President's end.

Our objective is to qualify students' learning experience, development and process. Hence, possible degrees of students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction should be acknowledged. Such inquiry is essential for the consequent improvement of institutional services and programs oriented toward students. Accordingly, synchronized actions will be developed so as to reduce a possible discrepancy between students' expectations and what the organization actually delivers.

An intervention research will be conducted in order to gain a better insight into the root causes of students' dissatisfaction. Main areas for improvement will be identified; enabling to move the project one step ahead toward the prescriptive part.

Socio-economic innovation solutions and baskets will be suggested as a way of reducing the dysfunctions faced by the organization. Socio-economic balance in the 6 domains will be proposed. The intangible investment will be recalculated. Potential return on investment will be calculated through converting the hidden costs into value added creation. Some management tools of the socio-economic intervention will be incorporated as a mean to improve the overall Business School performance; time management and competency grid are cases in point.

IX.   TIMELINE OF THE INTERVENTION

Competency grid and time management tools	Start Date	Duration (days)	End Date	Task Details
Getting approval for SEAM intervention	Jan-17	30	Jan-17	Getting approval for SEAM intervention
Doc A	Jan-17	57	Feb-17	Submitting doc. A
Doc B	Feb-17	60	Mar-17	Submitting initial research proposal / Doc. B
Diagnosis + HoriVert (inteviews and Focus Groups)	Jan-17	180	Jul-17	Conducting in-depth diagnostic interviews and focus groups to identify the main dysfunctions during the Horivert Intervention
Competency grid and time management tools	May-17	60	Jul-17	Preparing competency grid and time management tools
Hidden costs estimation	May-17	60	Jul-17	Conducting meetings for hidden costs estimation
Baskets and Solutions	Jul-17	270	Apr-18	Formulating baskets of solutions based on the identified dysfunctions and root causes
Writing of dissertation	May-18	380	Jun-19	Writing of dissertation

	Jan-17	Jan-17	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
Getting approval for SEAM intervention																									
Doc A																									
Doc B																									
Diagnosis + HoriVert (inteviews and Focus Groups)																									
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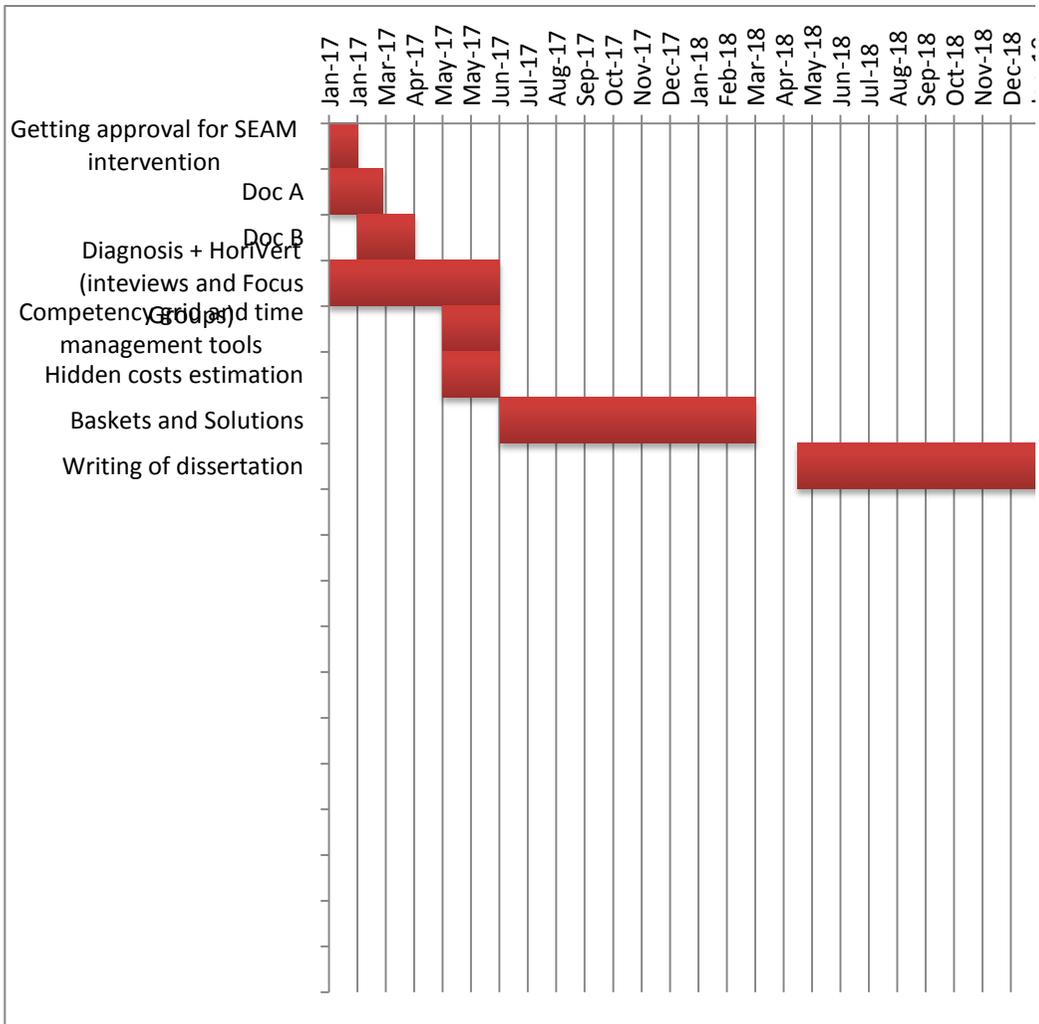
As the time frame matrix shows, getting an approval from the Vice-President's end at University X constitutes a prior condition to start the intervention process. The next step would be the preparation of Doc B. This latter is an expanded version of Doc A. It represents the Initial Research Proposal of our thesis and the basis for further research. In-depth diagnostic interviews and focus groups will be conducted during the HoriVert Intervention. Accordingly, main dysfunctions which are shaped by the qualitative character of information will be gathered. To examine dysfunctions in more depth and construct better and more adequate analysis, competency grid and time management tools will be prepared.

Afterward, meetings for Hidden Costs estimation will be carried out. Baskets of solutions will be formulated.

To be noted that the implementation will be subjected to the approval of the top manager; hence, requiring a negotiation process between the intervener and the Vice -President of the University.

If the results were successful enough to generate positive outcomes, the implementation will be carried out in the first quarter of 2018. Selecting actions, implementing decisions, and allocating resources to the project will be undertaken. An evaluation of results will be based on a preliminary opinion that will take place in the second round; it will consist in analyzing the generated effects based on comparing visible and hidden costs and performance before and after implementation of the project.

X.   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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