DETERMINANTS OF STUDENTS SATISFACTION IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES: A CASE OF PAKISTAN

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Currently, Pakistan is facing serious challenges. Education is one of these. Education plays significant role in the development of any country. Pakistan's economic survey (2016-2017) reveals that its literacy rate has decreased from 60% to 58% which is alarming. No doubt this situation has prevailed due to insufficient educational institutions but the students' dissatisfaction in the existing educational institutions is also the reason for this downfall. This study addressed this issue by utilizing primary data collected from five private sector universities in particular. The results showed that higher education not only focusses on the academic aspect (measured through sixteen items) for the students but on the social aspect (measured through seventeen items) also as the later contributes towards the student satisfaction levels.

KEYWORDS: Students Satisfaction, Social Aspect and Academic Aspect

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INTRODUCTION

In higher education, institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the teaching quality, research programmes and student support services. This kind of awareness is a result of increasing numbers of students entering into the education system and increased funding from government is subject to the assessment of the quality teaching and research-based programmes at educational institutions (Shago, 2005). For higher education institutions, recruiting students has always been an important activity. However, the rapid growth in colleges and universities numbers, significant increases in higher educational expenses along with demographic changes in the population may require the attention of higher education institutions toward student's satisfaction for their survival. In order to find out the needs of students for improving the quality of teaching and learning processes in many European higher education institutions, several evaluation methods have been used (Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker, & Grgaard, 2002). In philosophical world views, the continuous improvement of quality itself is a philosophy. This philosophy can be explained further that a set of broad principles and values that guide an organization to restructure and improve its quality (Frazier, 1997). To achieve a continuous quality improvement, it is required for an organization to meet or exceed the quality expectation of customers (Frazier, 1997).

In developing countries these days, education sector has become an industry. The educational institutions are run with a more business minded approach. These institutions give more attention to student satisfaction in order to retain them, like any other profit-oriented business organization which gives more attention to customer satisfaction. It usually happens that a dissatisfied student either cuts down his/her enrolment in offered course or completely drops out of the institution. Hence, it is an important area in the higher education institutions to study and explore the link between student satisfaction-intention and retention and should be managed very carefully as stated by Kara and DeShields, 2004.

The literature provides an extensive debate on the meaning of academic quality (Green, 1994). Some authors have argued that the term 'academic quality' is a non-measurable, ambiguous, or amorphous term, seeming to be inappropriate for public intervention (Dill, 2007). However, Harvey and Green (1993) showed a number of ways of viewing quality in their research. Firstly, they argue that traditionally the quality is viewed as the idea of exceptionally high standards. Secondly, consistent focus on processes and set specification to meet a certain objective is seen as a quality. Thirdly, it also relates to relevance to its purpose, fourthly it is equated with value for money at the heart of which is

the notion of accountability. Fifthly quality is considered as transformative process because education is not only a service to the customer, but it is an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. It therefore follows two notions of transformative quality in education i.e. empowering and enhancing consumers.

This study is about students' satisfaction with higher education institutions of Pakistan, particularly private sector universities of the region. Private sector universities in Pakistan have recently emerged. The performance of these universities is not only comparable with well-established public sector universities but also students now prefer private sector universities for higher education in Pakistan. This fact motivated us to examine the satisfaction of students who are studying in these universities. Therefore, we have chosen this topic for the study. Students with different demographic and academic backgrounds come into the higher education institutions with certain expectations. It would be interesting to unfold whether student's expectations are fulfilled after getting an admission in the private university or not. Are students satisfied with the private university in which they are studying? What factors account for student's satisfaction with private sector universities in Pakistan? Our research work will contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding student satisfaction with private sector universities in developing countries. Further, it will determine the factors which help in achieving student satisfaction in higher education institutions.

The case of Private Universities of Pakistan will be used for this survey. The research instrument is a self-completion questionnaire that will be conducted by face-to-face interviews, in order to do an in-depth study of student satisfaction. Pakistan is the 7th largest populated country in the world. More than 60% of its population is youth. According to the official statistics of Pakistan, approximately 50 million people fall in the age group of 19-28 years. In Pakistan, this very age group has been acquiring a higher education in different fields of study. Considering the above-mentioned statistics, one can imagine the demand of higher education in Pakistan. Previously, Pakistan had only the public sector institutions for providing higher education in the country. These institutions were less in numbers and offered very limited number of seats in all disciplines. Few students could get admission in these universities on merit basis. Higher education in Pakistan was subsidized in that era, therefore, government could not afford to facilitate a large number of students in public sector institutions. Therefore, a large number of students could not get an opportunity to acquire higher education in Pakistan. Lately, it was decided to involve private sector in higher education to share the burden of the government. For that purpose, law making agencies permitted private

sector to start universities or degree awarding institutions (DAI's) by getting either a federal or provisional charter (Table 1). In this regard, the first private university was established in 1983, namely, the Agha Khan university and then in 1985, the Lahore university of management sciences (LUMS) got the charter from the Punjab Provincial Assembly.

Table 1

List of Degree Awarding Institutes (DAI) and Universities Chartered by Provincial and Federal Government of Pakistan.

Name	Public	Private	Total
Chartered by Government of Pakistan	25	8	33
Chartered by Government of Punjab	27	24	51
Chartered by Government of Sindh	20	30	50
Chartered by Government of KPK	20	10	30
Chartered by Government of Baluchistan	7	1	8
Chartered by Government of AJK	5	2	7
Total Number of Institutes	104	75	179

Source: Higher Education Commission (HEC) official website

Later on, a number of private higher education institutions were established after the year 2000. These private sector institutions have played a very significant role in the higher education sector of Pakistan. In very short period of time, these institutions have become the major stakeholder in the higher education field. These institutions have accommodated more than 50% of the student who are acquiring higher education in different field of studies in Pakistan. These private sector institutions offer number of degree programs in all fields of studies. Table1 presents a list of degree awarding institutions which are having either a federal or provincial charter. Punjab province leads in the table by having the highest number of chartered institutions in the country. The reason behind this fact is that Punjab is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of population. Punjab's population is approximately more than 52% of the country's overall population. So, it is the need of this province to have maximum number of universities or DAI's to accommodate a large number of students in higher education. On the other hand, AJK has few chartered institutions. In total, Pakistan has around 180 universities or DAI's both public and private (Figure 1).
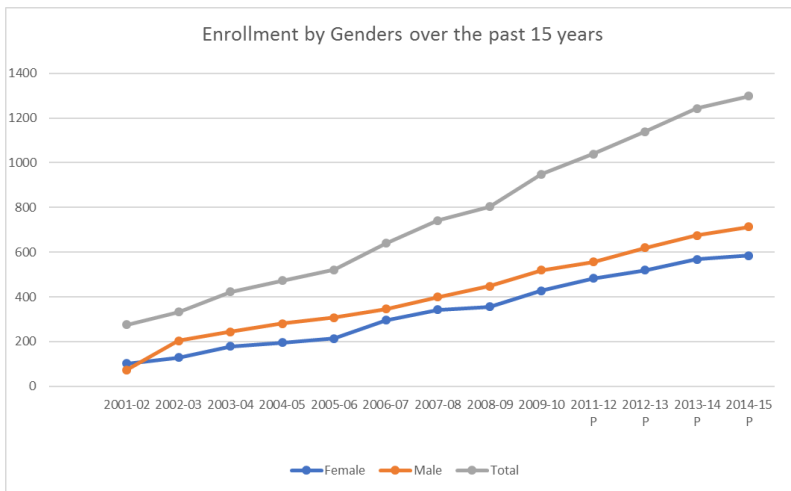
Figure 1. Enrolment Trend in Higher Education.

Source: Higher Education Commission (HEC) official website

Apart from this, every chartered institute has its affiliated and sub-campuses at different locations. Now there are several opportunities available for students who want to acquire higher education in Pakistan. However, the latest statistics show that only 6% of the country's population is enrolled in higher education. This number is very low if compared with other parts of the world. This also shows that there is still a huge demand of higher education in Pakistan. It is also very important for the existing institutions to attract more students by providing not only quality education but also good student support services and other related aspects.

There has been a significant increase in the student enrolment in higher educational institutions since 2001. Figure 1 shows an upward trend in total and gender wise enrolments in higher education over the period of last 15 years. This is a very encouraging trend for the country. The current growth of student enrolment in higher education is even higher than the country's population growth.

Table 2 shows that how many students have been enrolled in the different degree programs from 2001 to 2015. Further, the student enrolment number in 2015 has increased to five times as compared in 2001. It shows an exponential growth in this sector. In this era, students are getting enrolled in higher level degrees more frequently as compared to past decades.

Table 2

Degree Wise Enrolment of the Last 15 Years.

Year	Bachelor's (16Yrs)	Bachelor's (17Yrs)	Master (16 Yrs)	MS/MPhil	Ph.D	P.G.D	Total
2001-02	186481		78529	3871	3124	4269	276274
2002-03	224290		94524	4842	4138	3951	331745
2003-04	295712		108667	7454	6472	4931	423236
2004-05	329933		124896	8356	4443	4336	471964
2005-06	359683		140917	10430	5139	5304	521473
2006-07	442547		172886	12824	5345	6459	640061
2007-08	511317		200138	14859	7322	7456	741092
2013-14	844461	57025	209617	111440	12784	7713	1243040
2014-15	869378	63142	219280	124017	14374	8319	1298600

Data source is Higher Education Commission (HEC) official website

PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENTS' SATISFACTION

Literature regarding students' satisfaction and their perception of the educational experience is very extensive and complex. Numerous authors have published articles on the concept of students' satisfaction and their conclusions are varying. Each author has his/her own viewpoint regarding the needs of students in the university. Few authors support the so called "managerial dimension" of the student's satisfaction: the university is firm, and the students are the customers. Therefore, in order to satisfy students, the customer method should be applied in the universities. The most debated point is that of students being a customer of the university, due to the fact that universities are becoming more professional. As Elliott and Shin (2002) stated that globalized competition has hassled the strategic importance of satisfaction and quality in the battle for winning consumer's liking and sustainable competitive advantages. Hill (1995) argued that the primary customers of the universities are the students, and Higher Education is gradually recognizing that it is a service industry and is placing greater importance on meeting the expectations and needs of the students. Seymour (1993) argued that developing many happy satisfied students, whether they are alumni, or

industry employer, should be a primary goal of higher education. Therefore, focusing on customer satisfaction at universities is vital in developing customer value as stated by Kara and DeShields (2004). The Objective of this research is to find out potential factors that enhance student's satisfaction within the private sector universities of Pakistan by using a structured questionnaire.

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' SATISFACTION

It is important for the university to focus on its customers, and to meet their prospects by providing quality education. Mamun (2000) concluded that some factors that would attract students, included laboratory facilities, library facilities, and internship assistance as some of the key factors for student satisfaction. Higher education institutions can charm students by designing world class classrooms, libraries, computer laboratories, and other facilities. Students spend a significant amount of their time using these university facilities, thus providing possible opportunities to impact student satisfaction. Haque et al., (2011) identified independent determinants that can influence student satisfaction based on services offered by universities, these include quality of teaching, library book collections and services, student research facilities, space for group discussions, campus infrastructure, canteen facilities, sport programs and ICT (PC and Internet) facilities etc.

Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky (1996) stated that previous authors have not include performance as a direct factor for satisfaction (Bearden & Teel, 1983) and (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). Service performance has become an essential construct in marketing research, particularly in combination with service quality. In the framework of higher education, service performance which includes contained service quality is especially affected by two factors: professors and course content. In the service context, quality is a subjective measurement and depends on tangible and intangible characteristics argued by Mont and Plepys (2003) and Pariseau and McDaniel (1997). The intangible nature for higher education makes it difficult for students to effectively assess determinants such as the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the quality of student servicing. The tangible factors associated with the education service include educational classrooms, technology and computers and library facilities. Research in Italian universities by Sigala et al. (2006) concluded that university's students' satisfaction should be a centric approach and they selected very common factors such as: library, dining hall, lecture halls, equipment, laboratories, dormitories, leisure activities, internet access, exam booking, language courses, scholarships, contacts with teachers, tutoring, counselling, administrative services, internship, placement and international relationship. Guolla (1999) argued that student's satisfaction is impacted by

poor classroom facilities of which a teacher has limited resources to change. Consequently, the campus environment could be seen as a web of connected happenings that effect student's satisfaction highlighted by Elliott and Shin (2002). Hence, it is essential to enhance the perceived value by providing service characteristics not provided by the competition as concluded by Claycomb and Martin (2013). Some authors have argued that comparatively smaller institutions have more satisfied students than larger institutions; moreover it depends on how institutions environment influences students as stated by Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002).

Butcher and McGrath (2004) highlighted the needs of international students in New Zealand in three categories: 1) Social needs of international students (including health and safety) 2) Academic needs of international students and 3) Financial needs of international students. Alongside the factors that are often examined in literature, there are also some other factors that are revealed in the literature. It would be clearer if these factors are divided into two perspectives: first perspective is academic factors and second perspective is social factors. There is confusion in these perspectives because most of factors are overlapping; for example, retention is a factor that can be influenced by the academic quality, and at the same time, service facilities of the university. Social perspectives can be campus services and facilities but can also be attributed to the academic one for example, reading rooms and so on.

Table 3

Commonly Mentioned Perspectives.

Perspectives	Academic	Social
	Retention	Social Integration
	Academic Advising Services	Campus Services and Facilities
	Academic Experie nces	Campus Infrastructure
	Quality of Instruction	Social Activities
	Intellectual Growth	Classroom Facilities
	Preparation for Lifelong Learning	Library Services and Collection
	Academic Performance	Campus Canteen Facilities

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

This study is empirical in nature. It explores the different factors which can influence the student satisfaction of private sector universities in Pakistan. These factors are derived from the existing literature. The following conceptual model (Figure 2) explains the scope of this study and presents a relation

between student satisfaction and different factors which may influence the overall satisfaction of the students with higher education institutions.
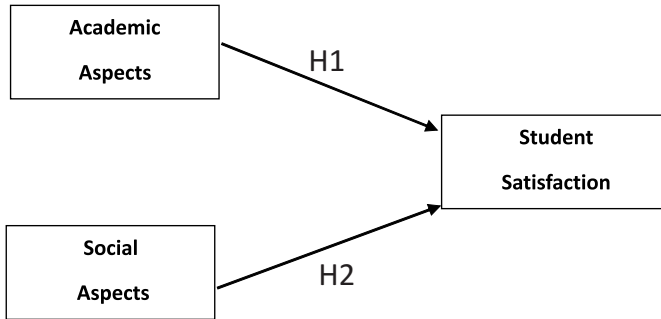

FIGURE 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Hypothesis 1

There is a positive association between academic aspects of private sector universities of Pakistan with student satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2

There is a positive association between social aspects of private sector universities of Pakistan with student satisfaction.

TOOLS USED

A structured questionnaire is used for this study. The questions of the questionnaire are set by taking guidance from the surveys on student satisfaction and student engagement established by Australasian survey of student engagement (2010). The Australasian survey of student satisfaction (2010) has been used extensively by the authors for conducting student satisfaction surveys. The questionnaire consists of 23 main questions with related sub-questions. On an average, it took the respondents thirty minutes to complete responses on each questionnaire. There are two main dimensions of the questionnaire. One is academic aspect and other is social aspect. There are total sixteen items for academic aspect and seventeen items are included in the social aspect. The later part of the questionnaire consists of general information related to gender, subject area, faculty and year of study in the institution. There is no question related to identification disclosure of the respondent. Each item of the respective aspect is measured on 4 points scale (poor/fair/good/excellent).

A self-administered approach is used for collecting the data from the respondents. The questionnaires were first distributed among the selected students by using personal contacts and references, but the response rate was not satisfactory. Further the reliability of the responses was also doubtful. It was then decided to administer the questionnaire personally and get the responses from the respondents by face to face inquiry. There are three ways to administrata a questionnaire i.e. face to face interview, telephonic or via email, or self-administered (Corbetta, 2003). In this study the first option was adopted. It was then decided to visit each sampled university personally, and target at least fifty students from each sampled university, preferably belonging to different degree programmes and disciplines. Therefore, questionnaires were filled in a face to face interaction session.

SAMPLE

In this study, students from five major private sector universities of Pakistan were selected as respondents. The selected Universities were renowned and well-established private sector universities of Pakistan. A total of 300 questionnaires were used in this survey to get the response of the students. Initially sixty students were selected from each of the above-listed universities and their responses were obtained through the self-administered questionnaire. The students were selected by using the non-probability sampling technique. The respondents were approached directly by the investigator and the questionnaire was filled by taking a face to face interview. Among the 300 questionnaires, 250 were retained for analysis. Therefore, the response rate of this survey was 83%. Students from different social and academic backgrounds participated in this study. The participation of male and female students was also considerable.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

There are mainly two types of students studying at private universities. One category of students are day scholars, who reside in Lahore and have obtained their entire education from Lahore and seek admissions for further studies in the same city. The other category of students is those who belong to different cities and villages from all over Pakistan and have acquired their primary and secondary education from different regions with different education systems, and then seek admission in universities in Lahore. Therefore, it may be possible that some students are satisfied with one aspect of the educational system, and others may be satisfied with other aspects. The respondents of this study are full time enrolled students in the sampled universities. The ratio of male and female student is 109:141. Fifty students have been taken as respondents from

each of the five private sector universities. The respondents belong to different degree programs (undergraduate and graduate), disciplines (medical, engineering, social sciences, business administration, and natural sciences) and educational years (first, second, third and fourth).

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the survey. Initially, 300 questionnaires were used to get the responses from the five major private sector universities of the country. The final number of responses were 250. The descriptive results show the minimum, maximum, average and standard deviation of the responses score against academic, social and overall student satisfaction. There are two factors that have been included in academic aspects, one is quality and assessment (QA) and other is academic experience (AE). The results show that the average response against QA is 3.18, which is very close to the excellent parameter. This suggests that students are, on average, satisfied with the quality and assessment of the private universities. Further, the average score against AE factor is 2.53. this is also above the normal response. It means students are also satisfied with the academic experience of the teaching staff at private universities. The social aspect has five factors which includes, student support service (SSS), library facilities (LF), computer facilities (CF), social integration (SI) and campus infrastructure (CI). The average response score of all five factors of social aspect is greater than 3, which shows that social aspects are very relevant to students' satisfaction in private universities. Among social aspects, students are more concerned with student support services of the private universities which has an average score of 3.29, as a satisfaction measure.

Table 4

Results of Descriptive Statistics.

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Student Satisfaction (Ss)	250	1.00	4.00	2.38	0.74
Quality and Assessment (QA)	250	2.00	4.00	3.18	0.44
Academic Experiences (AE)	250	1.00	4.00	2.53	0.60
Students Support Service (SSS)	250	2.57	4.00	3.29	0.28
Library Facilities (LF)	250	2.33	4.00	3.20	0.45
Computer Facilities (CF)	250	2.00	4.00	3.24	0.47
Social Integration (Si)	250	1.50	4.00	3.22	0.60
Campus Infrastructure (Ci)	250	1.00	4.00	3.05	0.76

COMPARISON OF UNIVERSITIES

This study involved five different private sector universities which were considered as the mainstream private sector universities of Pakistan. Students from different backgrounds and cultures come to study in these universities. It would be more interesting if we compared the average responses of students belongs to different universities for overall student satisfaction on academic and social aspects. For this purpose, an ANOVA test was employed to compare the mean responses of the five different private universities. Table 5 shows the results of ANOVA test. For overall student satisfaction, the average responses of five different universities were significantly different from each other. This means the students of different universities are not equally satisfied. Further, for academic aspects, both QA and AE, the average responses of students from different universities were significantly different from each other. It is reflected in F value and significance value of QA and AE. This result suggests that the student of different universities think differently about the academic aspect as a factor of student satisfaction. Some universities students think that the academic aspect is a factor of student satisfaction, whereas opinions of other universities' students is contrary to this. The same is the case with all social aspect factors except SSS. The results show that the average responses for LF, CF SI and CI, of different universities students were significantly different from each other except for SSS. There was a consensus among the students of all universities that SSS is one of the factors of student satisfaction. However, for other social aspect factors, there is a significant difference in opinion of students from different universities.

Table 5

Results of ANOVA.

ANOVA TABLE		
Factors	F	Sig.
Student Satisfaction***	9.296	0.000
Quality and Assessment***	3.78	0.005
Academic Experiences***	13.003	0.000
Students Support Se rvice	1.216	0.305
Library Facilities**	3.159	0.015
Computer Facilities***	6.185	0.000
Social Integration**	3.019	0.019
Campus Infrastructure***	8.314	0.000

***, ** and *: Significance at 10%,5% and 1% respectively.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

In this section of analysis, regression model was built and analysed to assess the influence of different factors on student satisfaction. The model was formulated on the basis of conceptual framework of this study. In Model 1, both academic and social aspects were combined and added in the equation. There were seven independent variables, two for academic aspects quality assurance (QA) and academic experience (AE) and five for social aspects, student support service (SSS), library facilities (LF), computer facilities (CF), social integration (SI) and campus infrastructure (CI). The dependent variable was student satisfaction (SS). In classical multiple linear regression model, ε represent the residual and assumes to follow the normal distribution with zero mean and unit variance, $\beta's$ represent the effect of respective explanatory variables.

$$SS = \alpha + \beta_1 QA + \beta_2 AE + \beta_3 SSS + \beta_4 LF + \beta_5 CF + \beta_6 SI + \beta_7 CI + \varepsilon \ ----------(1)$$

The results of model 1 are presented in Table 6. In this table, both academic and social aspect factors are added in the model and the regression model is applied. The overall sample results show that the model is significant at 1 % level of significance with 13% explanatory power. The coefficient of academic experience among academic aspect is found to be positive and significant at 1% level of significance. Among social aspects factor, the coefficients of library facilities and campus infrastructure were positive and significant at 5% level of significance. This shows that for overall sample, one: academic aspect factor i.e., academic experience and two: social aspect factors, library facilities and campus infrastructure determines the student satisfaction in private universities of Pakistan. The same model was run for male and female sample. The overall model was significant at 1% level of significance for male sample with 19% explanatory power. On the other hand, the overall model was significant at 10% level of significance for females with only 6% explanatory power. In the male sample, one factor of academic aspects, which is academic experience and one factor of social aspect which is campus infrastructure are significant at 1% level of significance. However, for female sample, all academic and social factors are found to be insignificant.

Table 6

Regression Results for Academic and Social Aspects.

	Overall			Male			Female		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.267	0.332	0.74	-0.515	-0.442	0.66	1.148	1.012	0.31
Quality and Assessment (QA)	0.032	0.312	0.76	0.021	0.158	0.88	0.147	0.851	0.4
Academic Experiences (AE)	0.33***	4.386	0.00	0.39***	4.123	0.00	0.207	1.572	0.12
Students Support Service (SSS)	-0.043	-0.269	0.79	0.11	0.54	0.59	-0.193	-0.745	0.46
Library Facilities (LF)	0.20**	2.021	0.04	0.071	0.545	0.59	0.234	1.401	0.16
Computer Facilities (CF)	0.094	0.976	0.33	0.128	0.982	0.33	0.184	1.233	0.22
Social Integration (SI)	-0.028	-0.374	0.71	0.001	0.006	1	-0.145	-1.072	0.29
Campus Infrastructure (CI)	0.14**	2.374	0.02	0.23***	2.946	0.00	0.042	0.438	0.66
Model -Significance									
F/Sig.	6.259/0.000			5.806/ 0.000			1.953/0.069		
Explanatory Power									
Adjusted R square	0.13			0.194			0.06		
No. of Observations	250			141			109		

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research suggest that private universities students in Pakistan, more or less, have same opinion about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with higher educational institution. The dimensions which are identified in this study for student satisfaction are useful for both public and private sector universities in Pakistan. Both academic and social aspects cover several factors, and most of them are explored in this study. It is important for higher educational institutions either public or private to have awareness about these factors in determining the student satisfaction in order to achieve growth in higher education and research around the globe as stated by Marginson and Van der Wende (2007). If private universities presume that student can be satisfied only with the academic aspect of the institutions, then

these institutions may not get the desired level of student satisfaction. It is important to understand that in university life, student consider several aspects other than the academics. The results of this study also show that the two factors of academic aspects, quality and assessment (QA) and academic experience (AE), do not become significant factors for the determination of student satisfaction at one time. However, one factor at one time is significant in most of the cases. The results indicate that academic experience is most influential factor for student satisfaction among academic aspect. Similarly, among seven factors of social aspects, not all factors become significant at one time. Only library facilities, campus infrastructure and student support service became significant at one time in some cases. This study concludes that both academic and social aspects are important in determining the student satisfaction with private universities of Pakistan. Further, both academic and social aspects are interlinked. It is important to understand that if universities provide good social conditions to the students, then the academic performance of student can also be improved.

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