

A STUDY ON DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT LOYALTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

Students are the primary stakeholders in higher education institutions (HEIs), and ensuring the quality of education and meeting their requirements and expectations is crucial for HEIs to remain competitive in the education market. This study aimed to identify the determinants of student loyalty in higher education. A descriptive and analytical study was conducted, randomly selecting 250 undergraduate students from Kannur University in Kerala. Statistical tools such as one-sample t-test and multiple regression were employed to analyze the data. The study results revealed that HEIs in Kerala place significant importance on various aspects of the academic program, including the quality of teaching, experience and qualifications of faculties, innovative teaching methods, curriculum relevance, and quality of academic facilities. Additionally, HEIs in Kerala have a positive reputation in the educational market, and students expressed satisfaction with higher education in the region. Students also exhibited a sense of belongingness and trust towards higher education institutions. The study also found that student satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, and perceived quality significantly influenced students' loyalty towards higher education institutions. However, the sense of belongingness did not demonstrate a significant impact on student loyalty. The study highlights the importance of addressing student requirements and expectations, as well as ensuring the quality of education in HEIs.

Keywords: Loyalty, Satisfaction, Perceived Quality, Trust.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector is experiencing a growing demand for quality education, driven by competition among institutions, the advancement of quality standards, and the increasing expectations of students. Factors such as globalization and digitalization have further intensified the need for high-quality education. In this highly competitive environment, every institution strives to foster student loyalty by offering excellent campus facilities, a wide range of student support services, and by employing qualified and experienced faculty members. Recognizing the significance of quality in higher education, the government has introduced various measures to ensure its maintenance. The University Grants Commission (UGC) in India, for instance, considers student satisfaction surveys as a key factor in assessing the quality initiatives undertaken by higher education institutions across the country. Consequently, modern-day HEIs place a strong emphasis on cultivating student loyalty through the fulfilment of student needs and expectations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies have been performed to determine the student's loyalty and satisfaction. (Babar & Rehman, 2010) concentrated on several factors including the courses offered, teachers' expertise, classroom facilities, and learning environment to understand. Among these factors, the study found that teachers' expertise had the most significant influence on student satisfaction. Student loyalty has a positive influence on student satisfaction, while student satisfaction also shows a positive influence on loyalty. Additionally, factors such as image, services, and perceived values have only an indirect effect on student loyalty (Kumudini, 2019) has been observed that the financial support and services provided by the university have a positive and direct impact on satisfaction. Loyalty also positively influences student satisfaction, and conversely, satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty. These observations are based on the constructs of services, image, financial support, and perceived values. (Helena & Raposo, 2006) mentioned that Student satisfaction in higher education is primarily influenced by the institution's image, followed by its value, and then the perceived quality. Student loyalty is mainly built through word-of-mouth recommendations from student to student (Māris & Zaksas, 2012) pointed out that constructs such as study content, academic staff, readiness for the labour market, and acquired skills were correlated with students' perceived quality. These constructs have also been found to influence student loyalty. (Sepideh, Minavand, & Afshardost, 2013) observed that university facilities, advisory services, curriculum, tuition costs, and financial assistance positively influence the level of student satisfaction. (Jacqueline, McClelland, & Davies, 2008) mentioned that education managers should focus on important areas such as responsiveness, communication, and access. (Steluta Todea, Adriana AnaMaria Davidescu, Nicolae Al. Pop, & Tanase Stamule, 2022) Identified commitment was the crucial factor that directly affected student loyalty. (Wan & Chapman, 2023) focused on student satisfaction through different types of interactions among students. These interactions include formal student-student interactions, informal student-student interactions, and student-instructor interactions. The study examined several variables, including satisfaction with the program, teaching quality of lecturers, institution reputation, campus facilities, student support services, personal learning experiences, overall university experience, and the overall student life within the university. The aforementioned studies highlight the factors in higher education that have an influence on subsequent loyalty to the institution. Hence, the aim of this research is to investigate

student loyalty in higher education within the specific context of Kerala, which is recognised as the most literate state in India.

III. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

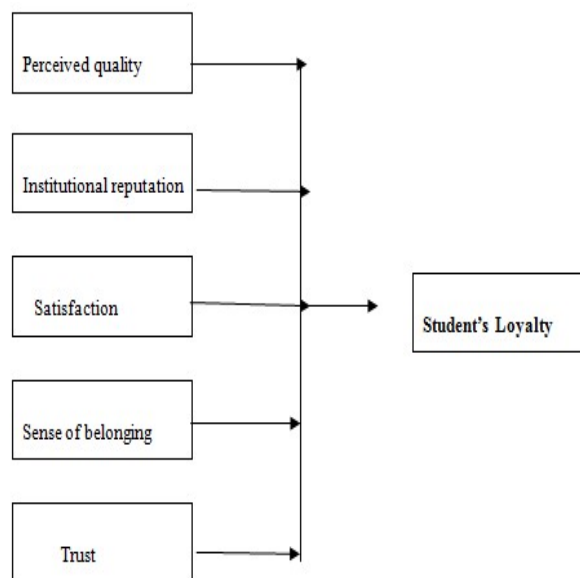
1. To determine the level of student loyalty towards higher education institution.
2. To identify the factors influencing student loyalty, including satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self-belongingness, towards higher education institution.
3. To analyze the impact of satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self-belongingness on students' loyalty towards higher education institution.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the determinants of student loyalty towards HEIs. A sample size of 250 undergraduate students from various colleges under Kannur University in Kerala is selected using a simple random sampling method. The primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire. The reliability of the scaled questions is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and all the scaled questions exhibit acceptable reliability with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7. Multiple regression analysis is employed to analyze the impact of satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self-belongingness on students' loyalty towards higher education institutions.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study has observed several important variables such as the perceived quality of the academic program, student satisfaction, institutional reputation, self-belonging, and trust. These variables are identified through a literature review as factors that can influence student loyalty. The conceptual framework of student loyalty is presented here.



VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Profile of the Data

		Frequency	Percentages
Name of Discipline	Arts	72	29
	Commerce	79	32
	Management	48	19
	Science	51	20
Gender	Male	80	32
	Female	170	78

Source: Primary data

Table 1 reveals that there were 80(32%) male and 170(78%) female students, with 72(29%) from arts, 79(32%) from commerce discipline, 48(19%) from management and 51(20%) from science discipline.

Table 2: Student's Loyalty towards Higher Education Institution (HEI)

Variables		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	S. D	t	Sig.
I have an intention to continue studying at the institution	N	20	16	84	86	44	3.47	1.10	6.77	0.000
	%	8.0	6.4	33.6	34.4	17.6				
I am willing to recommend the institution to others	N	20	20	73	104	33	3.44	1.07	6.47	0.000
	%	8.0	8.0	29.2	41.6	13.2				
I am ready to participate in the activities that promote the institution.	N	20	14	73	94	49	3.55	1.11	7.85	0.000
	%	8.0	5.6	29.2	37.6	19.6				

Source: Primary data

The results of the one-sample t-test indicate that the mean value of student loyalty, specifically regarding the statement "I am ready to participate in the activities that promote the institution," was significantly higher than the mean of the response scale three. The mean score for this loyalty variable was (M=3.55, S.D=1.11) and t value was (t (249) = 7.85, p=0.000). This indicates a strong willingness among students to actively engage in activities that contribute to the development of the institution. Furthermore, additional loyalty variables such as the intention to continue studying at the institution (M = 3.47) and willingness to recommend the institution to others (M = 3.44) also exhibited significantly higher scores compared to the mean of the response scale three. These findings indicate the students' loyalty and positive attitudes towards the institution.

Table 3: Perceived Quality of the Academic Program

Variables		Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Mean	S.D	t	Sig.
Relevance of the curriculum	N	10	16	72	126	26	3.57	0.908	9.89	0.000
	%	4.0	6.4	28.8	50.4	10.4				
Quality of teaching	N	2	10	44	110	84	4.06	0.862	19.4	0.000
	%	.8	4.0	17.6	44.0	33.6				
Quality of academic facilities	N	14	14	81	111	30	3.52	0.97	8.41	0.000
	%	5.6	5.6	32.4	44.4	12.0				
Innovative teaching methods	N	8	14	76	129	23	3.58	0.857	10.7	0.000
	%	3.2	5.6	30.4	51.6	9.2				
Experience and qualification of the faculties	N	8	8	52	115	67	3.9	0.941	15.1	0.000
	%	3.2	3.2	20.8	46.0	26.8				

Source: Primary data

The analysis of the table revealed that the statement "Quality of teaching" had the highest mean for the perceived quality of the academic program, with a significantly higher mean than the response scale mean of three ($M = 4.06$, $S.D = 0.862$), ($t(249) = 19.4$, $p = 0.000$) indicates that the higher education institution (HEI) effectively ensured the quality of teaching.

The results indicate that the institution has successfully prioritized and maintained high standards in teaching, which may contribute to students' satisfaction and ultimately their loyalty to the institution. The analysis further revealed that the statement "Experience and qualification of the faculties" obtained the second highest mean score for perceived quality of the academic program, with a mean of 3.9 ($S.D = 0.941$). The t-value of ($t(249) = 15.1$, $p = 0.000$) indicated that this difference was statistically significant. Other statements such as 'Innovative teaching methods' ($M=3.58$), 'Relevance of the curriculum' ($M=3.57$) and 'Quality of academic facilities' ($M=3.52$) were also significantly higher than mean score of three.

The findings indicate that the higher education institution has successfully prioritized various aspects of the academic program, such as quality of teaching, experience and qualification of faculties, innovative teaching methods, curriculum relevance, and quality of academic facilities. These factors play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of the institution's quality, enhancing their satisfaction, and potentially fostering loyalty towards the HEI.

Table 4: Student's Opinion towards Institutional Reputation

Variables		Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Mean	S.D	t	Sig.
Academic excellence	N	4	10	88	124	24	3.62	0.78	12.50	0.000
	%	1.6	4.0	35.2	49.6	9.6				
Status of HEI in the education market	N	4	26	68	117	35	3.61	0.91	10.66	0.000
	%	1.6	10.4	27.2	46.8	14.0				
Student support services provided by HEI	N	8	14	76	113	39	3.64	0.92	11.05	0.000
	%	3.2	5.6	30.4	45.2	15.6				
Participation of HEI in co-curricular activities	N	10	26	78	107	29	3.48	0.97	7.79	0.000
	%	4.0	10.4	31.2	42.8	11.6				

Source: Primary data

The analysis revealed that the mean of the institutional reputation statement "Student support services provided by HEI" (M=3.64, SD=0.92) was significantly higher than the mean of three. The t-value was (t(249)=11.05, p=0.000), indicating a significant difference. This suggests that the student support services provided by the higher education institution (HEI) were significantly good.

Additionally, other variables related to institutional reputation, such as Academic excellence (M=3.62), Status of HEI in the education market (M=3.61), and Participation of HEI in co-curricular activities (M=3.48), also exhibited significantly higher scores compared to the mean of three.

Table 5: Student's Satisfaction towards Higher Education

Variables		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Mean	S.D	t	Sig.
Teaching and learning	N	12	8	56	112	62	3.82	1.00	12.89	0.000
	%	4.8	3.2	22.4	44.8	24.8				
Campus facilities	N	16	26	83	103	22	3.36	1.00	5.63	0.000
	%	6.4	10.4	33.2	41.2	8.8				
Student support activities	N	12	28	69	109	32	3.48	1.01	7.57	0.000
	%	4.8	11.2	27.6	43.6	12.8				
Career guidance and placement	N	14	10	88	102	36	3.54	0.98	8.80	0.000
	%	5.6	4.0	35.2	40.8	14.4				
Affordability of education	N	8	12	56	125	49	3.78	0.92	13.34	0.000
	%	3.2	4.8	22.4	50.0	19.6				

Source: Primary data

From Table 5, the results indicate that students' satisfaction with the teaching-learning process had the highest mean (M=3.82, SD=1.00) (t=12.89, p=0.000). Additionally, their satisfaction with the affordability of education had the second-highest mean (M=3.78, SD=0.92) (t=13.34, p=0.000). Both results are statistically significant. These findings indicate that students expressed higher levels of satisfaction with the teaching-learning process and the affordability of education.

Moreover, the responses regarding satisfaction with career guidance and placement had a mean of ($M=3.54$), satisfaction with student support activities had a mean of ($M=3.48$), and satisfaction with campus facilities had a mean of ($M=3.36$), all of which were significantly higher than the population mean. These results illustrate that the students were satisfied with the opportunities for guidance and placement, student support activities, and infrastructure facilities provided by their HEIs.

Table 6: Student's Self-Belonging Towards Higher Education

Variables		Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Mean	S.D	T	Sig.
Relationship with the institution	N	16	16	76	109	33	3.51	1.01	7.91	0.000
	%	6.4	6.4	30.4	43.6	13.2				
Relationship with peers	N	6	6	52	114	72	3.96	0.90	16.87	0.000
	%	2.4	2.4	20.8	45.6	28.8				
Relationship with Faculties	N	12	12	60	119	47	3.71	0.99	11.36	0.000
	%	4.8	4.8	24.0	47.6	18.8				
Relationship with administrative staff	N	8	14	85	111	32	3.58	0.90	10.21	0.000
	%	3.2	5.6	34.0	44.4	12.8				

Source: Primary data

From the table above, it is depicted that the relationship with peers has the highest mean ($M=3.96$, $S.D=0.90$) ($t=16.87$, $p=0.000$), which is statistically significant. Additionally, the responses regarding the relationship with faculties had a mean of ($M=3.71$), the relationship with administrative staff had a mean value of ($M=3.58$), and the relationship with the institution had a mean of ($M=3.51$), all of which were significantly higher than the mean value of three. These results highlight the fact that the students felt a strong sense of belonging towards higher education based on their relationships with peers, faculties, administrative staff, and the institution.

Table 7: Student's Trust towards Higher Education

Variables		Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Mean	S.D	t	Sig.
My institution is a reliable institution	N	4	10	64	133	39	3.77	0.82	14.95	0.000
	%	1.6	4.0	25.6	53.2	15.6				
My institution always keeps its promise	N	6	18	80	118	28	3.58	0.87	10.45	0.000
	%	2.4	7.2	32.0	47.2	11.2				
My institution always does the right things	N	6	12	68	125	39	3.72	0.87	13.00	0.000
	%	2.4	4.8	27.2	50.0	15.6				

Source: Primary data

The results indicated that the students had a good level of trust towards higher education. The results showed that the reliability of the institution had the highest mean ($M=3.77$, $S.D=0.82$) ($t=14.95$, $p=0.000$), which was significantly higher than the mean of three. Their responses to the statement 'My institution always does the right things' had a

mean value of (M=3.72, S.D=0.87) (t=13, p=0.000), and their responses to the statement 'my institution always keeps its promise' had a mean value of (M=3.58, S.D=0.87) (t=10.45, p=0.000), both of which were also significantly higher than the population mean. In conclusion, the results indicated that the students had a good level of trust towards their institution in terms of reliability, doing the right things, and keeping promises.

Table 8: Impact of Satisfaction, Institutional Reputation, Trust, Perceived Quality, and Self-Belongingness on Students' Loyalty towards Higher Education Institution.

Hypotheses	Regression weights	B	t	P value	Results	VIF
H1	PQ → LY	0.306	4.696	0.000	Supported	3.974
H2	IR → LY	0.337	5.672	0.000	Supported	3.137
H3	SF → LY	0.118	3.378	0.001	Supported	1.626
H4	SB → LY	0.049	0.889	0.375	Not supported	2.778
H5	TS → LY	0.246	5.181	0.000	Supported	2.170
R	0.768					
F(5,244)	161.399, P = 0.000					

Note: P<0.05, LY-Loyalty, PQ-Perceived Quality, IR-Institution Reputation, SF-Satisfaction, SB-Sense of Belonging, TS-Trust

The study aimed to examine the impact of satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self-belongingness on students' loyalty towards higher education institution. The following hypotheses were tested-

- H1: Perceived quality of the academic programme is positively related to students' loyalty
- H2: Institutional reputation is positively related to students' loyalty
- H3: Students satisfaction is positively related to students' loyalty
- H4: Sense of belonging towards the HEI is positively related to students' loyalty
- H5: Trust towards the HEI is positively related to students' loyalty

To test these hypotheses, the dependent variable, student loyalty, was regressed on the independent variables of satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self-belongingness. The results indicated that the regression model satisfied the assumptions of normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and the absence of serial correlation, as demonstrated by a Durbin-Watson value of 1.91, which is approximately equal to the threshold value of 2, suggesting the absence of significant serial correlation. Additionally, the VIF values were less than 10, indicating the absence of multicollinearity.

The study found that the variables such as student satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, perceived quality, and self belongingness significantly predict student loyalty, with F(5,244)=161.399 and P=0.000. Moreover, the R²=0.768 indicates that the model explains 76.8 percent of the variance in loyalty.

The coefficients for each independent variable were examined to determine their influence on students' loyalty. The results confirmed that the perceived quality of the academic programme (H1) has a significant positive impact on student loyalty (B = 0.306, t =

4.696, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, institutional reputation (H2) was found to have a significant positive influence on student loyalty ($B = .337$, $t = 5.672$, $p = 0.000$).

Furthermore, student satisfaction (H3) was found to significantly and positively influence student loyalty ($B = 0.118$, $t = 3.378$, $p = 0.001$). However, the hypothesis regarding the impact of sense of belonging (H4) on student loyalty was not supported by the results, suggesting that it does not have a significant effect ($B = 0.049$, $t = 0.889$, $p = 0.375$). Finally, the analysis supported the hypothesis (H5) that trust towards the HEI has a significant positive influence on student loyalty ($B = 0.246$, $t = 5.181$, $p = 0.000$).

In short, the study demonstrates that satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, and perceived quality significantly influence students' loyalty towards a higher education institution. However, the sense of belongingness did not show a significant effect on student loyalty in this particular analysis. These findings emphasize the importance of these factors in fostering loyalty among students in the context of higher education.

VII. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

HEIs in Kerala have a responsibility to provide quality services that cater to the needs and expectations of students, ensuring the overall quality of higher education. According to the regulations of the University Grants Commission, student satisfaction is a main factor in measuring the enhancement of quality in higher education institutions (HEIs). In this context, HEIs in Kerala are highly focused on creating satisfied and loyal students.

This study aimed to identify the determinants of student loyalty to HEIs. The findings revealed that HEIs in Kerala place significant importance on various aspects of the academic program, including the quality of teaching, experience and qualifications of faculties, innovative teaching methods, curriculum relevance, and quality of academic facilities. Furthermore, HEIs in Kerala have a good reputation in the educational market, and the study found that students expressed satisfaction with higher education in Kerala. Students also possess a sense of belongingness and trust towards higher education institutions in the region. Additionally, the study observed that satisfaction, institutional reputation, trust, and perceived quality significantly influence students' loyalty towards HEIs. However, the sense of belongingness did not show a significant impact on student loyalty.

In conclusion, it is essential for HEIs in Kerala to prioritize the quality of teaching, faculty qualifications, innovative teaching methods, curriculum relevance, and academic facilities to enhance student satisfaction and foster loyalty. Maintaining a good reputation in the educational market and nurturing a sense of belongingness and trust among students are also crucial. HEIs should continuously strive to meet students' needs and expectations, as student satisfaction plays a key role in assessing the quality enhancement of HEIs.

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