The Identification of Components of Customer Orientation Culture in Iranian Educational System

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify components of customer orientation culture in the educational system of Iran. The method of research was qualitative. The scope of study included all articles submitted to reputable databases and websites from 2000 to 2015, regarding the customer orientation culture, which were indexed therein. The complete research scope consisted of 52 articles from databases and websites as follows: thirty-nine articles, nine theses, and four books. All resources were examined through a survey method. Data collection was carried out by making use of thematic analysis, and 608 themes were identified. Research reliability of 0.99 was obtained by making use of Holsti's method. Finally, two comprehensive themes of parameters were identified: first, optimization Strategy with such organizing themes such as strategic approach to customers, developing organizational knowledge, improving customer service, employee recruitment and enhancement, management attitude, adopting proper procedures and addressing complaints; and second, customer intimacy strategy with such organizing themes such as valuing customers, creating the sense of reliance in customers, considering moral issues, encouragement and persuasion, cooperation culture, and tangible factors were identified. A total of 57 basic themes and 13 organizing themes were derived.

Keywords: Customer orientation culture, optimization strategy, customer intimacy strategy, Educational system.

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Introduction

With no doubt in today's competition environment, only institutions and organizations can carry on and keep developing which their principle activities are based on the premium quality, appropriate services and customer-appealing products (Mohabbati, Ramazani, Hedayati, Hatam & Firuz Jahantighi, 2010). The users' requirement of organizations' services is one of the effective factors in profitability of every organization. Studying the performance of successful organizations' directors have proved that clients or customers' satisfaction from the quality of the organizations services has noticeable effects on whole parts of the organization (Saatchi 2001). One of the today's marketing principles is "Customer-Orientation" and all organizations are considering the customers as their first priority in order to increase the number of their loyal customers, their benefit and income, and for their existence. It could be explained in this way that customers as persons in the society and prominent elements of the organization influence on the upward developing route of the organization (Madani, 2015). "Customer-Orientation" means to listen to the customers and take them seriously into consideration which reduces the negative performance of the organization to the least level itself (Christensen, Cook & Hall 2005). Developing a firm relationship and interaction with customers can improve the intellectual relationship of the

organization, just like customers knowledge which lets the organization forecast and predict the business and respond in a more proper way in accordance with changes in the environment and in customer groups or in software foundation (Racela 2014, p18). Relationship with customer indicates the organization's ability to keep and develop the firm relationship with customer and reinforces an open organization in order to share information about customers all around the organization, in the way that it could be transformed into a sort of knowledge (Day, 2003). Finally, customer-orientation is a policy and strategy for improving the quality of the relationship with customers and attracting them for making the organization assured for long term (Badea 2014, p76). Customer-orienting organizations are those ones that their objective is just customer' request on issues which have the most values to the organization and they consider customers' satisfaction as its asset. The real measure for value of an organization is just customers' satisfaction from viewpoint of people and the society and without that, no enterprises can carry on and there will be no more job-creation and the career of those who had been working on that field of business and providing services to others will be endangered. A customer-orienting organization cannot get success without establishing a proper firm relationship with its customers and in today's world that its customer-oriented, customers are the

objective and customer-orientation is the foundation of the organization performance (Tavallaei, Salehnejad & Hammidzadeh, 2008, p84).

In this way, education organization is one of the most important institutes in education, development and providing human resources and is the main column in development and growth of the country. Considering this position, the trend of changes in structure of the education system has started since a few decades ago. The raise of population, expansion of public education for primary and secondary level as well as growth of middle class has increased the demands for attending educational centers (Shams,Yar Mohammadian, Hassanzadeh & Ayati Abbarik, 2011). In this system, the students are the most important elements and addressees. The students make an appropriate judgment when they receive educational services in accordance with their requirements and expectations. Performance based on the expectations and requirements will lead to satisfaction. Therefore, the only measure of success for educational system is satisfaction of those who receive educational services. Despite severe competition which has casted shadow on the today's worldwide business and economy, providing more services to the customers and increasing the quality of the services are not considered as the added value, rather an undeniable necessity. Today, due to the additional requests and demands, various

requests and demands for education and private profit beside government schools, other sectors such as private institutes have started to provide educational services (Nafisi, 2001). In this trend, the system will be winner which is informed about its customers' needs and requirements and tries to fulfill them and become so-called "Customer-Oriented". As a result, they must measure the important outcome in connection with their customers and determine what they gained in connection with them (Izadi, Salehi & Qara-Baghi, 2008).

Responding to this social need, increase of education expenses, variety of methods and educational centers and institutes and consequently increase of competition between such centers and necessity to conform with new information and modern knowledge in order to concentrate on students as main customers are of competition challenges for educational centers and institutes. Educational centers are considered as places for developing and showing conformity with requirements and new needs. Educational organizations in the country, especially Education Organization, shall consider the quality development in their processes, their performance for increasing their liability and competency in educational environment in order to develop their qualitative and quantitative level of students' education – those who are going to be futures directors of the society. One of the most effective approaches in this

way is to step toward quality and improving development models, especially customer-orientation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is just to identifying cultural parameters of customer-orientation in education system of the country.

Results of Samavi, Rezaeei Moghadam and Baradaran's research (2008) indicated the lack of customer-orientation or level of members of faculty and customers' satisfaction from the quality of educational services at universities under investigation of the current study. Such lack of customers' satisfaction covers both technical and functional quality, which is both the things that customers gain and the method that provides such services. Whereas the main needs and requirements for any customer-groups in majors (such as technical majors, humanity majors, scientific majors and etc.) in various higher-education academies is the same, the difference in needs and priorities can be mentioned for each specific major. Therefore, if each higher-education system admits this structure, designs and then creates a system based on fulfilling them, customer satisfaction higher-education academies' customers will be increased as well as customer-orientation system. Also Ebrahiminejad, Zeynali and Shahriary Kootak (2013) in their research investigated the relationship between customer orientation and customers' satisfaction in higher-education system. Their findings highlighted that dimensions of customer-orientation effects on beneficiaries'

satisfaction. Besides, the methods of providing services in customer-orientation dimensions have the most effects; tangibles have the least effects on the beneficiaries' satisfaction. Vauterin, Linnanen & Marttila (2011) claimed that universities can provide their international higher-education services to a premium business by making use of relationship and marketing models, customer-orientation mentality and creating strategic relationship with industries, also can make more efforts on developing the advantages of competition and adopting foreign students. Kim (2015) in a research titled "relationship between personal specification and quality, emotional intelligence, domestic marketing, service management and customer-orientation in nurses at out-patients in Korea" defined that: complexity of medical tests and surgery methods and increase in number of them require that nurses of this ward have customer-orientation mentality toward customers. The purpose of this study is to identify factors in connection with customer-orientation among nurses in outpatients ward at four public hospitals in Seoul and its suburbs. The data from 138 nurses at outpatients wards were collected and variables of the study were: emotional intelligence, domestic marketing, service management and customer-orientation. The findings showed that the directors of hospitals shall support those nurses to up-bring their emotional intelligence and personal – social

and honest specifications and consider the personnel as the domestic customers in order to raise the level of their satisfaction and improve patient-centered services.

Methodology

The research method was qualitative. And from analysis point of view, it was thematic analysis. It is one of the methods of literature researching which based on that, the data of the text is reduced, portioned, categorized and then summarized. Then it was re-structured in the way that definitions could be derived in the form of data. Thematic analysis is basically a descriptive method which makes it easy to search for available models in the texts. The result of thematic analysis is to describe the available models in the text and to present them in the form of an integrated plan. Thematic coding technique is used in order to categorize the data in thematic analysis. It is a method to reduce data that contrary to open and axis coding techniques, makes the data enriched and complicated by making use of correct queries and intuition (Ayres 2010).

The current study is temporary. The scope of study included all articles submitted to reputable databases and websites from 2000 to 2015, regarding the customer orientation culture, which were indexed therein. The complete research scope consisted of 52 articles from databases and websites as follows: thirty-nine articles, nine theses, and four books. Investigating literatures was carried out by census and deliberating whole contents of dissertations. On the other hand, the area of the study and the samples were equal.

It is necessary to mention that the themes in the literature were identified in induction way and the parameters in connection with customer-orientation were derived from the text then categorized. Thematic analysis was generally considered inductive that tried to pluralize data by referring directly to them. Then they were summarized, after that, similar and repeated themes which were in connection with the subject of the research were modulated and the abundance was gained.

In order to measure validity and reliability of the research, survey method was used by an expert that takes action for how to derive themes and how to make decision in order to increase the validity of the research results. In the current study, it was carried out by two professors from University of Shiraz. Research reliability of 0.99 was attained by making use of Holsti's method.

Findings

Data collection was carried out by making use of thematic analysis, and 608 themes were identified. Then by summarizing the data, similar and repeated themes which were in connection with the subject of the research were modulated and the abundance was gained, then a themes framework was gained. Themes framework is a proper analyzing method in thematic analysis. The

key specification of this method is its themes hierarchy scheduling for grouping lower level themes and creating higher level themes (King, 2004, p 236).

As follows, the findings are shown in a systematic way with their level of abundance in a form of themes framework as shown in Table No. 1 and No. 2.

Table No. 1: Themes Related to Optimization and Improvement Strategy

comprehensive themes	organizing themes	Basic Themes
Optimization Strategy	Strategic attitude to customers	Considering customer-orientation as the strategic objective of the organization (15)
		Formulizing organizational strategies, prospect and approaches for providing better services (7)
		Prioritizing students' benefits than other parties benefits (2)
	Developing Organizational Knowledge	Collecting datum from students and environment then analyzing them (15)
		Giving correct information to the personnel and students (13)
		Altering datum to knowledge (5)
	Improving Customer Service	Changing performance indexes (3)
		Identifying possible and probable errors (1)
		Preventing errors in educational processes (2)
		Emphasizing on improvement and modification of the methods (14)
		Investigating and assessing previous processes and methods in practice (3)
		Assessing the quality of provided services (10)
		Assessing the learners' learning (4)
	Employees Recruitment and Enhancement	Recruiting customer-oriented employees (10)
		Assessing personnel's competency (6)
		Personnel's education (18)
		Presenting feedback for performance of the personnel (1)
	Management Attitude	Directors' commitment to customer-orientation (11)
		Easy and quick contact with directors (4)
		Inspiration leadership (4)
		Devolution and delegation to the personnel (3)
		Admitting criticism (3)
	adopting proper Procedures	Considering proper method and tool to reply students' requirement (5)
		Creating variation in learning opportunities (3)
		Selecting and choosing proper contents (9)
		Making use of modern technologies (10)
	addressing complaints	Showing readiness in admitting students' claims and suggestions (5)
		Selecting a person to handle the complaints and claims (1)
		Following the students' complaints and claims(8)

Table No. 2: Themes Related to Customer Intimacy Strategy

comprehensive themes	organizing themes	Basic Themes
Customer intimacy Strategy	valuing customers	Creating customer-orientation attitude (4)
		Considering students' standpoints and needs (33)
		Creating self-esteem in students (10)
		Defining and determining the student requirements (11)
		Considering students feelings and emotion (3)
		Good advice and consultancy (7)
		Providing good experience in students (1)
		Students education and support (4)
	Creating Sense of Reliance in Customers	All-sided commitments to the business (8)
		Creating sustainable commitment in students (2)
		Providing quick service without waste of time (5)
		Availability of personnel for providing services on time (2)
		Being responsible (6)
	Considering Moral Issues	Being fair in dealing with students (2)
		Having patience, honesty and modesty in dealing with students (8)
		Developing the sense of self-control (4)
		Appropriate manner and behavior toward students (22)
		Empathizing (4)
		Considering righteousness and justice (7)
		Having communication skill in making relationship (5)
	encouragement and persuasion	Recognition and appreciation (5)
		Appreciating people (7)
		Creating conditions to promote personnel (6)
	cooperation culture	Personnel and students participation (10)
		Students' parents participation (1)
		Team-work (4)
	Tangible Factors	Personnel appearance titivation (7)
		Providing facilities and tools (18)

Discussion and Conclusions

On one hand, the economical – social changes, rapid extension of data and technological changes and economy globalization, and on the other hand, lack of appropriateness between education plan content and society requirements and needs and also weakness of students' knowledge and gained skills at schools which are the most important customers in this system, have made the educational organization face with a new era that customer-orientation is one of its most important specifications. Therefore, the current competition condition requires that education system puts away its traditional viewpoints and attitudes and selects a premium strategy in order to win such completion. Considering the current changes like environment and customers'

expectations and requirements, this organization is obliged to improve and develop its quality level by taking customer-orientation strategies despite having financial challenges and raise of quantitative crisis. In this way, educational quality service assessment is considered as one of the fundamental steps toward formulizing programs and plans for developing quality and providing better services. Therefore, this research was conducted to investigate the importance of customer-orientation strategy in educational system and to identify components of customer orientation culture in the educational system of Iran. By reviewing the literature of other research conducted before, two themes have been derived:

1- Optimization strategy with organizing theme; strategic approach to customers, developing organizational knowledge, improving customer service, recruiting employees and developing them, management attitude, adopting proper procedures and addressing complaints.

2- Customer intimacy strategy with organizing theme; valuing customers, creating sense of reliance in customers, considering moral issues, encouragement and persuasion, Cooperation culture and tangible factors.

In total, 57 basic themes and 13 organizing themes were derived. According to these themes, the customer-orientation philosophy at schools defines the culture or strategic behavior of the organization and requires an evolution in directors' mind in order to believe it and commitment to such philosophy. The customer-orientation philosophy emphasizes on students' needs which mean "what students ask for" and then it looks for an instrument to fulfill them. Customer-orientation is an attitude to obtain data on students and use them in formulating the strategy in order to fulfill their needs and requirements, and performing the strategies by responding their expectations in a positive way. Therefore, success of each system is the result of appointing appropriate persons for key works. In practice, good students can be trained by recruiting proper personnel and good teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to take proper action to recruit qualified teachers and satisfy them, because as far as they are unsatisfied, there will never be customer-orientation thinking within the organization.

Customer-orientation is generally tied up with students' welfare, and it could be done by listening to their needs and fulfilling them. Valuing students' needs and requirements shall be done on every aspect all over the schools, like promoting teachers and school personnel to respect students and deal with them decently and politely, paying attention to them, replying their question and having sympathy for them. Interaction with students heals the relationship among them. In this way we obtain valuable information that can be used in order to fulfill students' needs and

may reinforce the relationship among students. In this process, the school officials take the students' requests and needs into consideration besides the changes in their requirements, they will find how to plan for resources in order to respond their requirements and needs. A high level of satisfaction in students can be created by developing the relationship with them and in this way they have commitment to the school. Students' first priority is to respect them. A student as a person and human has got independent reputation and identity that they would like others to respect it and be considered and dealt with in a polite manner. In dealing with students, the extreme serenity – rooted from interest and respect – shall be taken into consideration, with such manner not only their reputation will be respected but also their proper response toward school authorities will be guaranteed and they will be confirmed. Students who are dealt with and treated in a polite manner way will enthusiastically respond more politely. Therefore, there shall be an environment for students where they feel security and peace. On the other hand, students evaluate the appearance of school officials and the more they are stylish and tidy, the more peaceful feelings will be created between students and them and the less anxiety will be. Students will have a proper performance in the environment where there is peace of mind and obviously honesty of the school authorities and teachers and their efforts to maintain such

environment will make the students more serious and ambitious to perform.

Quality of services is the most prominent factor for students. Directors and principals would be called successful who could provide it for their students. Students expect to be served in the least and shortest period of time and are worried about prolongation of service time. Therefore, students require an appropriate work-cycle which can reduce waste of time. In this cycle, accuracy and quickness of providing services are very essential. Making promises to the students and all-sided commitment in business in order to create sense of reliance are very effective. Moreover, creating various learning opportunities by evaluating their needs and requirements, choosing proper and suitable contents regarding their specifications and making use of modern techniques and technologies in education are those factors which are effective in creating the sense and attitude of customer-orientation.

Additionally, school officials must create an environment at school that personnel, students and their parents participate in decision-making and trouble-shooting, and in this process other recommendation, suggestion, innovation, creation, points of view and ideas and technical capacities as well as their skills and specialties can be used for continuous improvement and development of the school. Partnership creates a motive in personnel and students for more

improving cooperation and through partnership not only the students will be respected and valued but also the school objectives will be fulfilled.

Another school principals' responsibility is to create sense of motivation at school which means that creating or reinforcing an internal force in personnel and students which leads to development of a continual specific behavior. In education and upbringing, giving bonus, encouraging and perking are very considerable motives and factors. In the shadow of encouragement and promotion we can make others do suitable work and boost their volitions. The important point is that, due to specification and complication of students and personnel status, regulation and rules shall be observed otherwise there will be negative consequent instead.

As mentioned above; components in current research have got strong scientific proves and supports, and they can be considered as a theoretical guiding framework for continual developing quality of educational and research services in order to fulfill the needs of beneficiaries, and due to the fact that educational system is a model for other organizations, their successful conventional customer-orientation and way of interaction between students and personnel can be a suitable and proper method in other organization or even in the society in more expanded formations.

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