

## **University Staff, Image and Students' Satisfaction in Selected Regional Universities in Sri Lanka**

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**Abstract:** *A university is one of the best place for higher education where students get lot of opportunities to develop their career skills unlocking their personal potentials. Not like in the past, higher education system is now witnessing dramatic change with the opening of private universities. Resulting Sri Lankan state universities are threaten by private universities in and around the world. To gain competitive advantage it is essential to change existing university system considering stakeholder requirements. Students are a key strategic customer of a university, then satisfying students' needs and expectation are vital for a university to be success in a competitive environment. Hence, this study is focusing to identify the impact of quality of academic staff, non-academic staff and university image on students' satisfaction at Rajarata, Wayamba, Ruhuna and Sabaragamuwa universities. Population of the study was all management undergraduates of above four universities and 532 respondents were selected as sample based on stratified sampling technique. Data was collected on self-administrated questionnaires and were analyzed through AMOS statistical software. The findings of the study indicated that quality of academic staff has both direct and indirect impact on students' satisfaction through university image. However, only direct impact of non-academic staff on students' satisfaction was significant in Sri Lankan context. University image works as mediating variable and improve the impact of quality of academic staff on students' satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Staff, Non-academic Staff, University Image, Students' Satisfaction*

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### **I. Introduction**

Higher education is the education at a college or university level, is perceived as one of most important instruments for social and economic development of a nation. At present, there are 15 state universities and three campuses functioning in Sri Lankan higher education industry which produce around 22,000 graduates annually to the economy (National Education Commission of Sri Lanka, 2009). All Sri Lankan state universities are functioning under preview of UGC aligning to Sri Lankan Qualification Framework and the academic programs are reviewed to maintain the consistency of university system. UGC selects students for state universities on the basis of student's performance and their preferences. However, all the students who are in regional state universities disappoint with the placement they received and conditions prevailing at the universities. As per the pilot survey, more than 80% of management students who are studying in regional universities had given their first priority for well-established reputed universities like Sri Jayewardenepura, Colombo and Kelaniya. As well as the number of students' appeals in regional universities significantly increased within last few years. Based on the discussion research had with few heads of Management Faculties of Rajarata, Ruhuna and Wayamba universities, found that none undergraduate of those universities maintain over 80% attendance for all subjects in a semester and at least 10% students sit repeat exams continuously and out of them about 3% left university without getting a degree. Not only that in a university, students behave as rebels and they discard good rapport with the staff members in the university. This is mainly happen due to dissatisfaction of students about the university system because satisfied students never behave like that and they are less likely to drop out from the university, more likely to achieve higher grade, maintain long term collaboration with university (Alves & Raposo, 2010), (Kwun, Ellyn, & Choi, 2013) and work as a source of gaining competitive advantages (Elliot & Shin, 2002). That statistics indicates a problem of students' satisfaction in regional state universities. However in Sri Lankan context, the problem has been received less attention from the researchers and problem is still remaining at large in regional state universities. Hence, the study focused to investigate the students' satisfaction in regional state universities in Sri Lanka.

This is the first study which investigates the direct and indirect impact of university staff quality on students' satisfaction through university image in regional state universities in Sri Lanka. More ever, study findings will help policy makers to develop suitable policy packages for regional universities to enhance the level of their students' satisfaction by increasing university image and quality of university staffs. Further, the study will help university academic and non-academic staffs to identify the impact of their behavior, activities and contribution in enhancing university image and students' satisfaction in regional state universities.

## II. Literature Review

Students' satisfaction can be defined as a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students' educational experiences, services and facilities (Elliott & Healy, 2001). Students' satisfaction in higher education is a multidimensional process which is influenced by different factors. University staff, university image are two main factors that influence on students' satisfaction. The university staff is grouped into two separate parties as academics and non-academics on the basis of activities they engage. The academic staff of the universities can be defined as professional and administrative personnel with duties and types of appointments that are primarily associated with higher education institutions (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). The quality of teaching and learning are paramount important for academics and it determines overall quality and image of institute in long run (Douglas, 2006). Lecturer's performance in and outside classes is significant for students' loyalty, motivation and satisfaction (Abdullah, 2006). According to the Hill, et al (2003), Douglas, et al (2006), Garcl a-Aracil (2009), teaching quality has a statistically significant impact on students' satisfaction. Non-academic staffs can be defined as persons who are engaging in general administrative activities of education institute such as student registration, exams, student services (Pop, Bacila, Moisescu, & Tirca, 2008). University administrators and their services are critical to university for smooth functioning (Alan & Dorothy, 1992). According to the Malik, et al (2010) the cooperation, kindness, responsiveness of non-academic staffs play a vital role in determining students' satisfaction. Image is a process originating from ideas, feeling and previous experiences of the organization that are recalled and transformed into a mental picture, Micnnih & Price (1987). University image is influenced by multiple constitutes such as infrastructures, academic programs, academic staff, administrative procedure, university location and even university surrounding (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnaska, 2003). In the context of higher education, university image work as one of key determinant of student's satisfaction (Alvis & Rapaso, 2006).

## III. Methodology

The study used Structural Equation Model with quantitative data to address the research questions. Unit of analysis of the study was individual undergraduates. The study collected data from November 2016 to December 2016. All management undergraduates of University of Ruhuna, Rajarata, Wayamba and Sabaragamuwa were the population of the study (5331). Stratified sampling techniques was used and 532 respondents (about 10% of population) were selected as sample. The study excluded both first and final year students from the population. Self-administrated close ended questionnaire with 34 items, were used to answer the research problem. Collected data were analyzed using AMOS Statistical Package. Based on extensive literature survey, the study developed a Structural Equation Model for explaining students' satisfaction in regional state universities as follows. The equation model explains direct relationships among variables through dash arrows and indirect relationships by normal arrows.

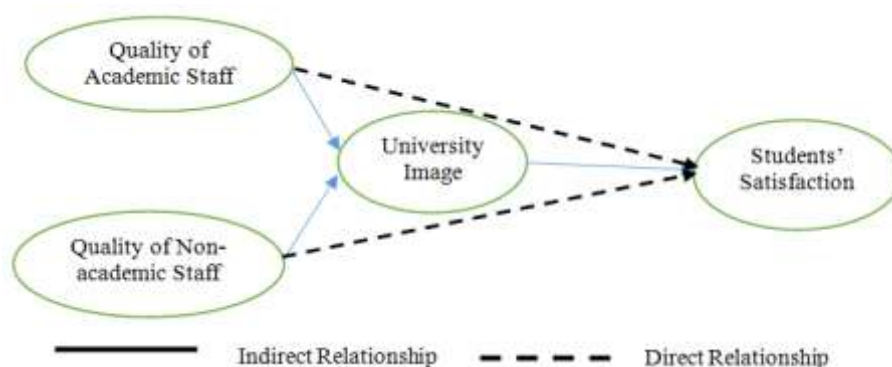


Figure 1: Structural Model for Explaining Students' Satisfaction

### Hypotheses

- H1: Quality of Academic Staff has a direct impact on Students' Satisfaction in regional state universities.
- H2: Quality of Academic Staff has an indirect impact on Students' Satisfaction in regional state universities.
- H3: Quality of Academic Staff has an impact on university image in regional state universities.
- H4: Quality of Non-academic Staff has a direct impact on Students' Satisfaction in regional state universities.
- H5: Quality of Non-academic Staff has an indirect impact on Students' Satisfaction in regional state universities.
- H6: Quality of Non-academic Staff has an impact on university image in regional state universities.

H7: University Image has an impact on Students' Satisfaction in regional state universities

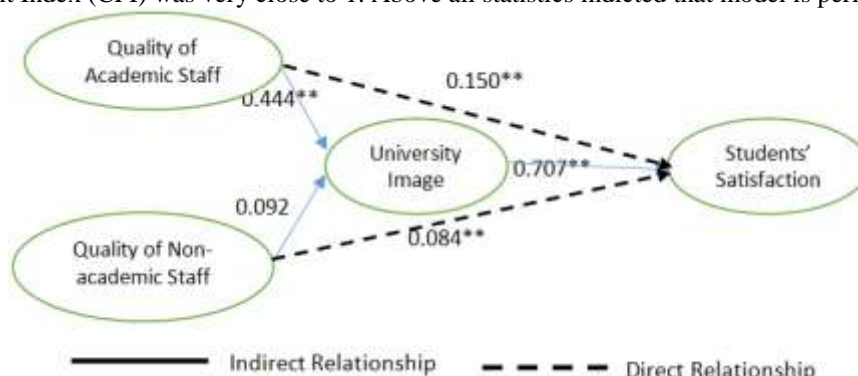
#### IV. Data Analysis

The study analyzed variables at two stages as first order measurement level and second order measurement level. At first order measurement model, each construct was individually tested and checked. According to the first order measurement model, all factor loadings (Estimates) were greater than the standard (0.5), the lowest value is 0.593 (EQ) there are only four items below 0.7 (QD1, QD3, ES1, EQ1 & EQ2). The Average Variance Extracted of all variables were above 0.5. That indicated adequate convergent validity of the model. As well as, all construct average variance extracted (AVE) estimates were larger than the corresponding squared inter-construct correlation estimates which indicates each construct is truly distinct from other constructs. Accordingly, study ensured the convergent and discriminant validity of the model. The construct reliability of each of these constructs exceeded the minimum reliability level of 0.7 recommended by Hair et al, (2009) except "Quality of Evaluation" (0.686). That also in between 0.6 and 0.7 and can be acceptable. Secondly, refined variables were feed into second order measurement model.

As per the model, correlation coefficient of quality of academic staff, non-academic staff and university image were 0.533, 0.363 and 0.781 respectively and sig values were less than 0.05. It indicated that quality of academic staff, non-academic staff and university image have significant association with students' satisfaction in regional state universities in Sri Lanka.

According to the

**Table 1** with respect to second order measurement model, CMIN/DF is less than standard level (3) recommended by Hair (2009). The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is about 88%. The RMSEA and RMR was 0.059 and 0.158 respectively, however RMSEA is in an acceptable range but RMR exceeded the range. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was very close to 1. Above all statistics indicted that model is perfectly good one.



**Figure 2: Direct effect of variables on Students' Satisfaction**

**Table 1: Regression Information**

| CMIN/DF: 2.822     |               | RMR: 0.158      |  | GFI: 0.885   |  | CFI: 0.933 |  | RMSEA: 0.059 |  |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|--|--------------|--|------------|--|--------------|--|
| Variable           | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect |  | Total Effect |  |            |  |              |  |
| Academic Staff     | 0.150**       | 0.314**         |  | 0.464        |  |            |  |              |  |
| Non-academic Staff | 0.084**       | 0.065           |  | 0.084**      |  |            |  |              |  |
| University Image   | 0.707**       | -               |  | 0.707**      |  |            |  |              |  |

The figure 02, presents the structural equations and determination coefficient ( $R^2$ ) for each equation. According to the figure 02, the determination coefficient of quality of academic staff, non-academic staff, university image were 0.150, 0.084 and 0.707 respectively. All were significant at 0.05 percent level, then study accepted the hypothesis one, four and seven. Accordingly, quality of academic staff explains 15% variance of students' satisfaction directly in regional state universities. As well as 8.4% and 70% variances of students' satisfaction are explained by quality of non-academic staff and university image respectively. Accordingly, both academic and non-academic staff and university image have direct impacts on students' satisfaction in Sri Lankan context. The findings were supported by many previous literatures such as Elliot & Shin (2002), Hill et al (2003), Douglas et al (2006), Garci Aracil (2009), (Malik, Danish, & Usman, 2010), Pathmini, et al. (2014), Yousoff et al (2015) and (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair, & Ragavan, 2016). As per the figure 02, the determination coefficients of quality of academic staff with university image are 0.444 and significant at 0.05 percent level but the impact of non-academic staff on university image is statistically insignificant at 0.5 percent level. Resulting hypothesis three is accepted and six is rejected.

According to the table 01, indirect effect of academic staff on students' satisfaction through university image is 0.314. It was significant at 0.05 percent level. Hence study accepted hypothesis two, accordingly, 31% of students' satisfaction is explained by quality of academic staff through university image. However, the indirect effect of non-academic staff on students' satisfaction through university image is not statistically significant at 0.05 percent level. Hence study reject hypothesis five.

## V. Conclusion

The main objectives of the study were to identify the impact of quality of university staffs and university image on students' satisfaction with special reference to University of Ruhuna, Wayamba, Rajarata and Sabaragamuwa. The findings of the study indicated that quality of academic staff has small direct impact and big indirect impact through university image on students' satisfaction. However, only direct impact of non-academic staff on students' satisfaction was significant in Sri Lankan context. University image works as mediating variable and improve the impact of quality of academic staff on students' satisfaction. That findings were positively aligned with many previous studies. As per the findings, the study recommends that university should improve the quality of academic staff, then it will enhance the university image and then by students' satisfaction.

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