DO CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY MEDIATE THE EFFECT OF GRADUATE'S PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY ON GRADUATE'S PERCEIVED JOB PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract:

The study investigated the mediating role of customer satisfaction and loyalty on the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance. Based on a sample size of 571, a cross-sectional survey was conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe. Hypothesised relationships were tested using structural equation modelling. Results show that perceived service quality positively influences perceived job performance, customer satisfaction and loyalty. The influence of perceived service quality on perceived job performance was found to be partially mediated by both customer satisfaction and loyalty. Results have theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords: *customer satisfaction; loyalty; perceived job performance; perceived service quality; Zimbabwe*

1. INTRODUCTION

In all economies around the world, service quality plays an important role (Machado, 2019). Service companies that do not take service quality calls seriously have since struggled with business (Gupta, 2016). Organisations within the service industry gain a competitive advantage through service quality improvement (Tseane-Gumbi, 2019). Furthermore, Choudhury (2015) coined that competitive advantage within the service industry is determined by the way service providers meet customer expectations and this is one way to develop business. Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017) urged service-based organisations to pay heed to demands for service quality because the success of a business depends on delivering a superior quality of service.

The quality of service in the higher education sector is crucial for a country because colleges train experts who should be effective and productive (Belwal et al., 2017). Higher job performance is what employers expect from university graduates (LeMahieu et al., 2017). It is therefore the duty of universities to raise the level of service delivery in order to produce highly qualified graduates who perform well in the workplace (Rahman et al., 2020).

The survival of service organisations is dependent on the management of programmes that satisfy customers (Borgogni et al., 2017). Improvement of service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction (Kaura et al., 2015; Uddin et al., 2018). For universities to satisfy customers, they should ensure that the level of service delivery meets

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or exceeds customer expectations (Kunanusorn & Puttawong, 2015). Graduates become satisfied and perform well at the workplace after having acquired relevant skills. Thus, improvement in university service quality results in increased satisfaction and also influences job performance (Borgogni et al., 2017; Guilbault, 2016). As such, customer satisfaction is often considered a mediator of the relationship between perceived quality of service and perceived job performance (Kunanusorn & Puttawong, 2015).

Improving service quality results in improved customer loyalty (Monica, 2017). In the higher education sector, universities are urged to raise service delivery levels, so as to improve customer loyalty (Guilbault, 2016). Monica (2017) proclaimed that if universities are to retain loyal customers, they need to monitor service performance within all departments. Thus, service quality influences customer loyalty and job performance (Chikazhe et al., 2020; Akinci et al., 2015) Graduates loyal to their training institutions are those that are performing well in the workplace. Therefore, customer loyalty indirectly influences the relationship between service quality and job performance (Choudhury, 2015; Chikazhe et al., 2020; Zaini et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe's higher education sector is not spared from the service quality call since graduates coming out of universities fail to meet employers' expectations (Muchemwa, 2017). Employers are concerned with the quality of graduates coming out of universities (Jawaad et al., 2019). The declining level of service quality within universities is alleged to be contributing to graduates' performance challenges (Martin & Parikh, 2017). Massive enrolment of students which has seen an upsurge in the lecturer-student ratio has been attributed to poor service delivery within the higher education sector (Espinoza et al., 2019). Additionally, university education is now regarded as a profit-making business with some institutions enrolling large numbers at the expense of quality (Shea & Parayitam, 2019).

In an attempt to overcome the challenge of service quality impacting the higher education sector, several studies have been carried out worldwide (Belwal, et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2019; Ushantha & Kumara, 2016). None of these studies attempted to incorporate customer satisfaction and customer loyalty as mediators in the relationship pitting perceived service quality and perceived job performance. Therefore, by exploring the mediating role of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the relationship between perceived service quality and perceived job efficiency, the current study aims to close this gap and further contribute to the services marketing body of knowledge.

2. THEORY UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

A theory by Singh (2016) that examined the effect of service quality on job performance underpins this study. Singh (2016) developed a model, known as the Influence of Internal Service Quality on Job Performance Model, used to study the relationship between service quality and job performance within the public sector of Malaysia. Service quality was treated as a second-order construct and its dimensions (tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness) were used to test the relationship against job performance. The model only tested direct relationships among the study constructs. The study by Singh (2016) did not consider any mediators or moderators to improve the results. The current study was meant to improve Singh's (2016) model by integrating customer satisfaction and loyalty within the study to add new knowledge to the services marketing body of knowledge. Thus, the current study enhances Singh's (2016) model by examining the mediation role of customer satisfaction and loyalty on the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance, within the higher education sector.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Perceived job performance

Perceived job performance is described as the employee's own assessment of the capability to carry out assigned tasks (Jawaad et al., 2019). Qureshi et al. (2019) settled that job performance refers to behaviour or activities performed by an individual aimed at achieving organisational goals. Quality and quantity expected from a specific job determine job performance (Akoto & Akoto, 2019). Various researchers (Abas & Imam, 2016; Mukucha et al., 2020) agree with the view that job performance has much to do with employee behaviour and task accomplishment. Similarly, Zaini et al. (2020) stressed that job performance is better explained by the evaluation of whether an employee is performing his or her duties as expected by the employer. Employees make their own assessments to find out if their performance is what the employer expects. Additionally, employers assess university service quality through graduates' performance (Plantilla, 2017). This study understands perceived job performance as their own assessment of job performance by university graduates.

Espinoza et al. (2019) describe job performance as the ultimate reliant variable of service quality within universities. Plantilla (2017) is of the opinion that individual skills play a pivotal role in enhancing employee job performance. In support, Abas and Imam (2016) indicate that better-skilled employees have the ability to perform well, and they carry

out assigned tasks with fewer challenges and minimum supervision. Likewise, Chaudhuri and Oba (2016) added that service quality elements like efficiency, effectiveness and productivity are well-thought-out when measuring an employee's job efficiency. Job performance is also influenced by the organisation's service delivery, environment, and as well as the organisational set-up (Al Ali, et al., 2016; Hodgman, 2018).

3.2 Perceived service quality

Since 1980, the concept of perceived service quality has been extensively discussed without any agreement reached to date. Previous scholars have agreed that the quality of service is the difference between the expectations and perceptions of customers (Hattingh, de Waal & Parsons, 2018; Rajicet al., 2019; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). Likewise, Peng and Moghavvemi (2015) delineate service quality as evaluations by customers between perceptions and expectations. The study considers perceived service quality as an appraisal by graduates of the university service provision system in relation to the achievement of their educational goals.

Competition intensity in the global market is driving organisations to encompass the service quality notion within their tactical planning decisions (Gwinji et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015). Moreover, customers use service quality as a measuring tool to differentiate products or services on offer (Kim et al., 2015; Mwiya et al., 2019). For service quality to be acceptable, it must exceed customer expectation levels (Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). Services are difficult to manage due to characteristics, which include: heterogeneity, perishability, inseparability and intangibility (Kim et al., 2015; Mukucha et al., 2020). Firms that offer superior service quality are guaranteed of satisfied and loyal customers (Akoto & Akoto, 2019; Ramde, 2020). Thus, service quality is considered a better yardstick to use in measuring job performance (Plantilla, 2017).

3.3 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as how satisfied customers are with a company's service or goods (Plantilla, 2017; Zaini et al., 2020). Similarly, customer satisfaction was described by Zeithaml and Bitner (2013) as the decision by customers as to whether a service provider can fulfil customer expectations. Additionally, Shea and Parayitam (2019) and Katrodia et al. (2018) link customer satisfaction to the assessment of decisive and actual results, desire, need satisfaction and valuation of consumption experiences. Satisfied customers are likely to continue with the business and consume an assortment of products and services offered by a firm (De Matos et al., 2018; Machado, 2019). Kim et al. (2015) indicated that satisfied customers purchase additional services or products and stay longer with a business. Businesses work toward improving the quality of service to guarantee that consumers are contented (Peng & Moghavvemi, 2015; Uddin et al., 2018).

Caricati et al. (2016) suggest that the overall business success pivots on improved customer satisfaction. At universities, customer satisfaction is considered to be a critical strategy which can be achieved through providing service delivery that is above expectations, fulfilling promises and offering excellent programmes (Bahadur et al., 2018). If the standard of service delivery meets their needs, university customers become happy. Customer satisfaction within universities is determined by the provision of superior service quality and it further influences job performance. Thus, customer satisfaction is an important aspect of the higher education sector because it results from superior service quality and it further enunciates improved job performance (Koris et al., 2015; Nauffal & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2018).

3.4 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty, as a construct, has been extensively studied in services marketing with various definitions proposed (Iskhakova et al., 2020; Zaini et al., 2020). Other researchers (Kandampully et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Makanyeza, 2015; Makanyeza & Chikazhe, 2017) claim that customer loyalty has much to do with both attitudinal and behavioural aspects than those concentrating only on the behavioural component of the concept. Kim et al. (2015) are of the idea that customer loyalty is the commitment to rebuy and repatronise products and services frequently, notwithstanding marketing efforts and situational influences. Rostami et al. (2019) agree with Kim et al. (2015) that retaining customers leads to improved business performance since loyal customers do not shift to competitors' offerings. Additionally, customer loyalty results from superior service quality (Caricati, 2016). Customer loyalty can be measured through customers talking positive things about an organisation, encouraging others to conduct business with certain institutions and patronising an organisation (Ali et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015).

As regards to universities, customers (graduates) become loyal to their former training institutions only after they are equipped with relevant skills and are performing well in the workplace (De Matos et al., 2018). Additionally, graduates are loyal to their former universities only when the level of service delivery is above what they expect

(Ushantha & Kumara, 2016). Customer loyalty promotes the relationship between the perceived quality of service and perceived job efficiency (Kunanusorn & Puttawong, 2016; Zaini et al., 2020).

4. DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH MODEL

The relationship between service quality, perceived job performance, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been tested and confirmed in earlier studies (Ali et al., 2016; Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Chikazhe et al., 2020; Makanyeza & Chikazhe, 2017; Machado, 2019; Plantilla, 2017; Ushantha & Kumara, 2016; Zaini et al., 2020).

Previous studies have also proved that service quality has a positive influence on job performance (Jung & Lee, 2016; Bhatti et el., 2017; Borgogni et al., 2017; Hodgman, 2018; Chikazhe et al., 2020). Bhatti et al. (2017) settled that service quality positively influences workers' job performance. Similar results were established in a study by Kyoon and Park (2007) that service quality positively impacts job performance. Also, Bhatti et al. (2017) proved that service quality has a positive influence on satisfaction. Moreover, Gupta (2016) established that service quality has a positive effect on satisfaction. A study by Kaura et al. (2015) concluded that service quality positively influences employees' job performance. The results of a study by Kaura et al. (2015) concur with those by Ali et al. (2016) who settled that service quality has a positive effect on workers' job performance. Furthermore, Kassim and Abdullah (2010) established that customer satisfaction influences job performance. None of the previous studies has paid attention to customer satisfaction as a mediator of the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance. Therefore, it makes sense to predict that customer satisfaction plays a mediating role in the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Customer satisfaction mediates the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance.

Literature has confirmed a positive relationship between service quality and job performance (Jung & Lee, 2016; Bhatti et el., 2017; Borgogni et al., 2017; Hodgman, 2018; Chikazhe et al., 2020). Moreover, Kim et al. (2015) approved that service quality has a positive effect on customer loyalty. Additionally, Ali et al. (2016) and Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017) also settled that service quality influences customer loyalty. Likewise, studies by Encinas Orozco and Cavazos Arroyo (2017), Chikazhe et al. (2020) and Iskhakova et al. (2020) concluded that customer loyalty has a positive effect on employee performance. It is clear from this discussion that the literature did not consider the mediating customer loyalty as a mediator of the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Customer loyalty mediates the effect of perceived service quality on perceived job performance.

Based on the foregoing hypotheses, the following research model is proposed: -
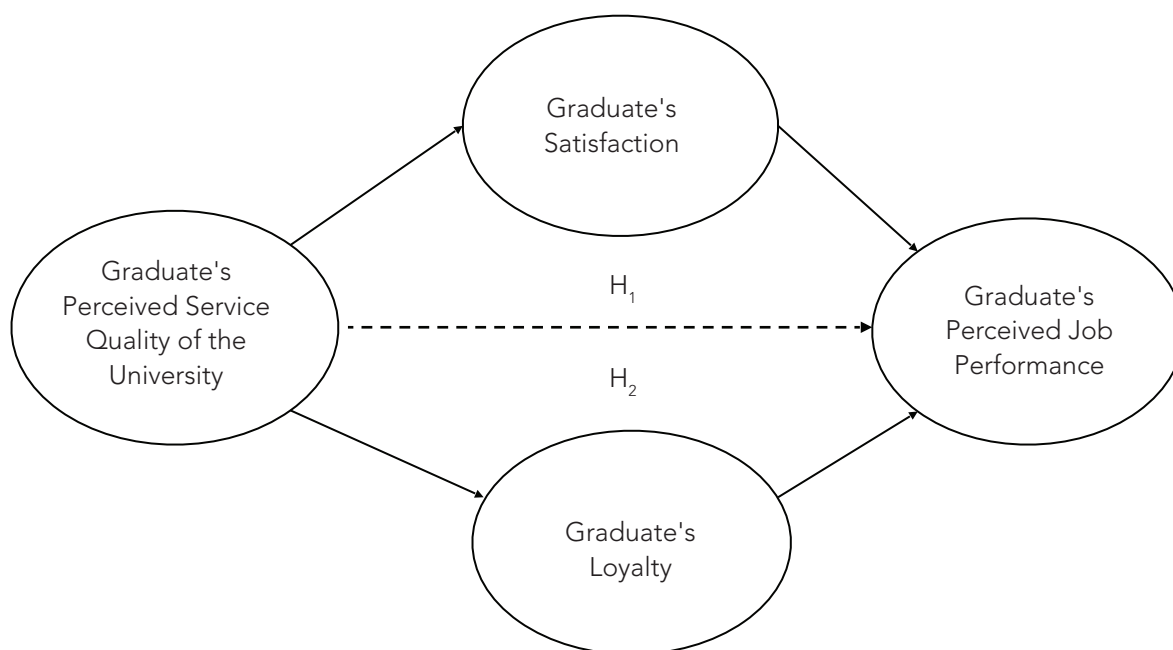

Figure 1: Research model

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
5.1 Questionnaire design and measures
A structured questionnaire was designed with five sections, i.e., perceived service quality (PSQ), customer satisfaction (SAT), customer loyalty (LOY), perceived job performance (PJP) and demographics were used to collect data. A Likert scale that ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) was used in measuring items under each construct. Items under each construct were borrowed from previous studies and they were modified to suit the requirements of the current study. The items for PSQ, PJP, SAT and LOY focused on perceptions of university graduates.

Reliability encompassed items like the university's ability to provide service right the first time, provision of error-free statements, responding to clients as promised and offering uniform service at all times. Assurance focussed on the academic area and covered academic aspects such as staff possessing required knowledge and experience, and the university's provision of up to date and appropriate learning materials. Assessment of tangibles measured the availability of modern learning materials at the university, state of the environment, staff appearance and the university's infrastructure. On empathy, the instrument evaluated courtesy of managerial employees, considering customer needs, delivery of dependable service and the ability of staff to address customer problems. Items measured under responsiveness were: the universities' ability to respond to customer queries, how easy it is to access university staff, the convenience of the university's service points and prompt service offered by university staff. Customer satisfaction was measured using customer expectations, promise fulfilment, provision of adequate service and availability of excellent programmes (Plantilla, 2017). Loyalty measurement items comprised repeated purchases of service, preaching a positive image of the institution, encouraging others to enrol with the university and patronising the institution (Encinas Orozco & Cavazos Arroyo , 2017; Makanyeza & Chikazhe, 2017). Perceived job output was assessed by the graduates' own evaluation of the ability to put expertise into practice, to work with or without minimal supervision, to understand the field of specialisation and to be a source of knowledge within the organisation (Abas & Imam 2016; Plantilla, 2017).

5.2 Sampling and data collection
The target population comprised university graduates working in Harare Metropolitan Province. Harare was selected because of the high number of businesses employing many university graduates (Zimstats, 2018). A positivist research philosophy was adopted. A deductive approach was also used because it creates hypotheses based on an existing theory and then builds a research strategy to test it (Saunders et al., 2009). A non-random sampling technique was employed, with a purposive sampling method being used to select university graduates who participated in the study. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data and 580 self-administered structured questionnaires were distributed to respondents with the help of managerial staff and human resource personnel from selected companies. Respondents were given up to five working days to respond, upon which the questionnaires were collected. Out of a total of 580 distributed questionnaires, 571 questionnaires were returned and usable. This gives a response rate of 98.4%. This response rate was deemed acceptable (Silverman, 2013).

The sample profile shows that respondents who were aged between 40 and 49 years constituted 47%. The study had more male participants (62%) than females (38%). Among university graduates who were selected to participate in the study, 58% studied as conventional students, 29% were block release and part-timers constituted 13%. Graduates who completed studies between 2011 and 2015 formed a greater part (49%) of respondents. Graduates engaged as permanent employees constituted the majority (75%) of participants. In terms of the period of employment, the study had 39% of total graduates employed for a period between 5 to 10 years. University graduates with up to a bachelor's degree qualification constituted 61% of participants followed by a master's degree with 33% and lastly doctoral graduates with 6%.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
6.1 Scale validation
Data validation was conducted using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), convergent validity and discriminant validity prior to performing structural equation modelling. SPSS® version 22 and AMOS® version 21 were the two packages used to analyse data. Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to decide sample adequacy. Results from exploratory factor analysis indicated that the sample was enough (KMO = .944, Approx. Chi-Square = 16607.166, Degree of Freedom = 595, p<0.001). The results satisfied minimum conditions as recommended by Field (2009) that Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be significant at p<0.05. Factor analysis was conducted by means of Varimax Rotation and the Rotation converged in 23 iterations with 70.590% being the total variance explained by the data. As expected, the solution gave 8 components, i.e. responsiveness (RESP),

reliability (REL), assurance (ASS), tangibility (TAN), empathy (EMP), satisfaction (SAT), loyalty (LOY) and perceived job performance (PJP). Items REL3, RES3 and RES4 were deleted as a result of factor loadings below 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

As regards the estimation of the measurement model, the study adopted Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) (Field, 2009). In determining convergent validity, model fit indices, standardised factor loadings, reliability, critical ratios and average variance extracted (AVE) were considered. Measurement model fit indices measured were CMIN/DF ($\chi2$/DF), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted GFI (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The values of GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI and CFI specify a good fit if they are nearer to 1, and RMSEA must be less than .08 for it to be acceptable (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). Results obtained from the analysis suggest that convergent validity conditions were fulfilled. The measurement model showed a good fit (CMIN/DF 2.606; GFI .95; AGFI .924; NFI .948; TLI .946; CFI .952; RMSEA .046). Hooper et al. (2008) recommend that a good model must show a $\chi2$/DF that falls within the scale of 0-5 with minor values indicating a better fit.

All constructs showed Cronbach's alpha (α)'s and composite reliabilities with a cut-off point of above 0.6. All items indicated standardised factor loadings (λ) beyond the cut-off point of 0.6 as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Critical ratios (CRs) were appropriately big and significant at $p<0.001$. All constructs satisfied minimum necessity conditions since they had AVEs greater than 0.5 as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988).

6.2 Discriminant validity
Discriminant validity was measured by matching average variance extracted (AVEs) against squared inter-construct correlations (SICCs). Conditions vital for discriminant validity were fulfilled as all AVEs were larger than matching SICCs (McQuitty & Wolf, 2013). Edward (2013) maintains that relationships between concepts have to be less than 0.9 so that they are different from each other.

6.3 Testing research hypotheses
Hypothesised relationships (H_1 and H_2) were established using structural equation modelling in SPSS 22 using the MLE method. Structural equation modelling was an ideal technique as it allows the determination of associations and establishment of whether or not there is a general fit between observed data and the research model (Segars, 1997). The structural model fit indices indicate satisfactory results i.e. (CMIN/DF 2.208; GFI .951; AGFI. 934; NFI .958; TLI .956; CFI .959; RMSEA .044) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). The results of the hypotheses tests are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Hypothesis test results

HYPOTHESIS	PATH	PATH COEFFICIENT	DESCRIPTION	COMMENT
H1	PSQ → SAT → PJP	0.353***	SAT partially mediates the effect of PSQ on PJP	H_1 is supported
H2	PSQ → LOY → PJP	0.364***	LOY partially mediates the effect of PSQ on PJP	H_2 is supported
Note: ***Significant at p<0.001				

Results in Table 1 indicate that both customer satisfaction and loyalty partially mediate the relationship between the relationship perceived service quality and perceived job performance. Therefore, H_1 and H_2 were both supported.

7.   DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
The results of the study have effects on practice, theory and future research.

7.1 Theoretical implications
In the higher education sector, studies focusing on the mediating function of consumer satisfaction and loyalty to the relationship between perceived quality of service and perceived job performance are scarce. Therefore, the study aimed to add to the body of knowledge of marketing services and organizational behaviour by exploring

the mediating role of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the relationship between perceived quality of service and perceived job performance.

The study showed that a major correlation existed between the perceived quality of service and the perceived performance of the work. The study finding is supported by previous studies that established direct relationships between service quality and work performance (Abdullah et al., 2021; Nauffal & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2018; Rahman et al., 2020). Thus, the work performance of university graduates is influenced by the superior service offered by universities. This implies that highly qualified graduates who perform well at work are produced by universities providing superior service. Highly qualified graduates are those who, as the employer needs, are fitted with modern skills. They also satisfy the needs of employers, while putting theory into effect, becoming self-directed and displaying the skills required for the roles they command. Superior service quality demands universities to raise service delivery and produce graduates without employability and performance challenges. It is therefore the duty of university authorities to guarantee that service quality dimensions like assurance, responsiveness, reliability and empathy are improved. The findings of the study add to the services marketing of knowledge as there are no studies in the public domain addressing this phenomenon.

The study settled that the relationship between perceived service quality and perceived job performance is mediated by customer satisfaction. Prior studies also confirmed direct relationships between customer satisfaction, perceived service quality and job performance (Abdullah et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2016; Hodgman, 2018; Kyoon & Ah Park, 2007). The findings suggest that customer satisfaction plays an important role in the relationship between the perceived quality of service and the perceived job performance. The findings also indicate that the influence of perceived service quality on perceived job performance is partly mediated by consumer loyalty. Results suggest that consumer loyalty plays a key role in the relationship between perceived service quality and perceived job performance. This means that if universities improve the delivery of services, the loyalty of graduates is increased and this contributes to improved perceived job results. These findings add to the existing body of services marketing and organizational behaviour literature.

7.2 Practical implications
In order to improve the job performance of their graduates, it is recommended that universities pay special attention to improving service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, universities are recommended to raise service delivery levels through revision of admission qualifications for first-year students, enrolling manageable numbers to improve the student-lecturer ratio, reviewing attachment period for students and facilitating attachment of students to reputable firms. Universities are also advised to increase the satisfaction of customers by continuous review of degrees on offer to respond to the changing demand of the market, continuous training of academic staff, training and the provision of secure internet services for students (Encinas, 2017; Peng & Moghavvemi, 2015). It is also proposed that universities introduce loyalty schemes through the exemption of similar courses for graduates planning to pursue further studies at the same universities, and the elimination of tuition fees for graduates opting to pursue further studies at the same university. Improving alumni associations and maintaining a graduate database to stay in touch with former students are some of the steps that universities should take to boost customer loyalty.

7.3 Future research implications
The study sample was confined to Harare metropolitan province only. Thus, the generalisation of results may be difficult. Future research could be improved by extending related studies to other cities within and outside Zimbabwe.

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