Student Satisfaction as a Precursor to Institutional Commitment: A Reflection of Educational Quality through Graduate Exit Surveys

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Abstract

Graduate exit surveys in higher education institutions are a pivotal feedback mechanism with regard to the quality of educational services that are offered in an institution. Through graduate exit surveys, there is an assurance that the educational experiences proffered by the institution are able to meet the mission and vision of an academic programme on one hand and the societal requirements on the other. This study reflected on the quality of education and the satisfaction levels of exiting students of Laikipia University during the 7th graduation cycle. Anchored on the SERVIQUAL model, the disconfirmation paradigm and the expectancy value theories, the study sought to address three specific objectives; namely, to find out the views of the 2019 graduation cohort regarding the quality of education offered at Laikipia University; to examine the satisfaction levels of the 2019 graduation cohort with regard to support services i.e. library, ICT, hospitality and environment within and outside the University; and to find out the level of commitment of the 2019 cohort of graduates to the University. The findings were descriptively analyzed using the mean indices to measure impression on quality and student satisfaction. The study findings revealed that the cohort graduates of 2019 had a positive impression on the quality of education offered at the university with a mean rating of 3.19. They were also satisfied with support services; library facilities (mean = 2.94), ICT infrastructure (mean =2.78), hospitality services (mean = 3.05) and the general environment within and outside the university (mean =3.11). Based on the levels of satisfaction, the graduates expressed a commitment and willingness to recommend other prospective students to pursue courses at the University. In the spirit of continual improvement in quality, the study recommends among others that the University should continue to expand the existing capacity of laboratories and studios to accommodate more students as a way of increasing access to these facilities; continuously provide adequate and up-to-date study materials; sensitize students on the existing e-resources and allow internet access within the library for ease of referencing the e-resource; expand the ICT infrastructure by having more computer labs to increase accessibility; increase the internet bandwidth for stronger internet connectivity; and increase availability of recreational services.

Keywords: Commitment, educational quality, exit survey, graduate, satisfaction

Introduction

The diminishing levels of funds from the public coffers has made it necessary for public sector institutions to be more accountable for the use of public funds to justify continued public support (Morra & Rist, 2009). Most public sector institutions have developed various strategies which are benchmarked from the private sector, to enable them meet the ever-changing societal demands. Indeed, there is a paradigm shift in accountability of the public sector institutions to the wider

society nowadays more than ever before. The focus nowadays in most institutions including government funded organizations is on customer satisfaction. There is the realization that customer satisfaction is the key towards the institutions' continued existence in this era of cut-throat competition (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). With this realization, majority of public sector institutions have employed ingenious strategies to enable them ascertain the levels of satisfaction of their customers as a way of being accountable to the wider public. Understanding and satisfying customers remain a key strategic focus for modern day institutions which would like to keep afloat in today's competitive business environment.

Higher education institutions have taken cue from the private sector by employing a variety of methods that can help them better understand the level of satisfaction of their customers and improve their curricula by adapting it to the needs of the society. Improving university performance, therefore, has become an undisputable issue in today's increasingly open and competitive environment. According to Rezić et al. (2014), universities have to justify their existence by being publicly accountable in order to attract resources and even potential students. Therefore, regulators of higher education quality stress on the need for universities to establish mechanisms of receiving feedback from their stakeholders including students. Maintaining and improving students' satisfaction is therefore considered an important goal of education in general and universities in particular (Orpen, 1990).

The Inter University Council for East Africa (2010) recommends that an institution must have a structured method to obtain feedback from all stakeholders as a way of measuring their satisfaction. In Kenya, the Commission for University Education (CUE) (2014) requires universities to ensure regular evaluation and review of programmes and courses in addition to putting in place a mechanism for receiving feedback from stakeholders on their programmes in order to ascertain the levels of satisfaction. Knowing about student's satisfaction helps the institution understand whether students are receiving the academic and social benefits they expect when they enrol and point out if their institutional choice is fit for purpose or not (Mwebi, 2020). Therefore, satisfaction surveys provide insights as to how institutional quality and reputation is perceived by various audiences (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004).

The level of students' satisfaction with an institution can be measured using various ways. One of the ways that universities measure student satisfaction is through the administration of graduate exit surveys. The concept of exit interviews or surveys is borrowed from industry as a human resource management practice. In industry, the purpose of an exit interview is to assess the overall employee experience within an organization and identify opportunities to improve retention and engagement (Muller, 2020). Information collected in an exit interview can give an organization a unique perspective on its performance and client satisfaction. It is believed that people who are leaving/exiting an organization may be honest about their experiences without fear of immediate repercussions (Blunt, 2004). This is therefore the philosophy underlying the institutionalization of graduate exit surveys within the higher education sector.

Graduate exit surveys in higher education institutions are a pivotal feedback mechanism with regard to the quality of educational services that are offered in an institution. Through graduate exit surveys, one gets an assurance that the educational experiences proffered by the institution are able to meet the mission and vision of an academic programme on one hand and the societal requirements on the other (Biggs, 2001). This is the only way of ensuring that universities, being on the supply side of the economy, are meeting the requirements of the industry which is on the demand side of the economy (Mwebi & Nzioki, 2020). Exit surveys, as a feedback mechanism, can be used to improve the quality of academic programmes and help an institution plan for the

future. Findings from exit surveys are often a critical input variable in the process of programme review and development besides enabling members of faculty to improve their students' experiences in teaching, socialization, and preparation for their respective careers (Anderson & Swazey, 1998). Through the surveys, an institution can better understand its strengths and challenges students go through during their course of study. This enables policy makers to prioritize goals, allocate resources, increase student satisfaction, influence change, and improve retention among others (Kacius et al., 2015).

Collecting information from students after graduation helps the University to gain useful insights that enables it to pinpoint areas in need of improvement. Kacius et al. (2015) point out that feedback from the exit interview process is used to continually improve educational experiences and outcomes. This also enables members of the academic faculty to respond to the needs of students as they move through the academic ladder (Polson, 2003). College administrators, therefore, use satisfaction surveys to measure student perceptions of the campus experience in order to identify those areas where the institution is performing well. Conversely, colleges also use survey findings to target areas for improvement or to identify a need for new programmes. Strengthening academic and co-curricular programs forms the basis for exit surveys especially for high-achieving institutions thus contributing to institutional effectiveness and ensuring student success (Bryant, 2006).

Extant literature shows that dissatisfied students often become drop-outs (Billups, 2008) leading to lowering of enrolment, hindering institutional reputation and reducing institutional vitality (Miller, 2003). According to Miller, institutions with higher satisfaction levels enjoy higher retention and graduation rates, lower loan default rates and increased alumni support (Miller, 2003). Thus, successful institutions realize that it is better to invest at the onset to retain their students by identifying what enhances student satisfaction (Elliott, 2002). Developing a more cogent understanding of what keeps a student satisfied limits student attrition and creates a more sustainable campus environment (Elliott, 2002). Therefore, student survey results aid in strategic planning and institutional goalsetting, providing important direction for operational objectives and program planning. Institutions that use survey data to guide decision making develop an in-depth understanding of students as critical consumers and meet their needs more effectively.

Laikipia University as a higher education institution in Kenya, has institutionalized the use of graduate exit survey as part of institutional quality assurance mechanism. In every graduation cycle, the University undertakes to collect views from graduating cohorts on various aspects of the university based on experiences the students went through while undertaking their studies at the University. It is envisaged that after staying at a university for four years, students would have interacted with most of its functional areas, and therefore have a rich experience that can enable them make an informed judgement regarding services offered at the university. The aspects which are mainly of focus in the Laikipia University's graduate exit questionnaire include satisfaction with the quality of education service, quality of learning environment, and support services.

The current study therefore sought to find out views of the 2019 graduation cohort regarding the quality of education, the level of satisfaction with support services such as library, ICT, and hospitality facilities including the general study environment within and outside the University. Moreover, the study delved to find out the level of commitment the potential alumni had to the University in view of their interactive study experiences during their four-year stay at the University. The study was therefore guided by three objectives, which were to find out the views of the 2019 graduation cohort regarding the quality of education offered at Laikipia University; to examine the satisfaction levels of the 2019 graduation cohort with regard to: library, ICT,

Hospitality and environment within and outside the University; and to find out the level of commitment of the 2019 cohort of graduates to the University.

Theoretical Framework
This study was anchored on two theories of satisfaction; namely, the disconfirmation paradigm theory and the expectancy-value theory. The SERVQUAL model was also used to emphasize the importance of service quality in a university setting. A brief description of these theories, model and their relevance to the current study is explicated.

Disconfirmation Paradigm Theory
Disconfirmation theory indicates that customers compare a new service experience with a standard they have developed (Barsky, 1992). Their belief about the service is determined by how well it measures up to this standard. The theory presumes that customers make purchases based on their expectations, attitudes, and intentions (Oliver, 1980). Later, during or after consumption, a perception of performance occurs as customers evaluate the experience. The process is completed when customers compare the actual service performance with their pre-experience standard (Oliver, 1980) or expectation. The result is confirmation, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction.

The current study therefore envisions that students have a certain set of standards regarding a university which they will compare with when they have been exposed to actual performance measures. These standards constitute the factors that influence them to choose a university for study. The factors include among others, quality faculty, modern teaching and research facilities as well as impressive and functional collaborations with industry (Mwebi, 2020). How well these factors measure to the expected standard lead to students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the university. Exit surveys therefore provides an opportunity to gauge whether the university was able to meet the expectations of the students after the completion of a programme of study.

Expectancy-Value Theory
According to expectancy-value theory, customers often make some judgment about a product, its benefits, and the likely outcomes of using the product. People will learn to perform behaviour that they expect will lead to positive outcomes (Tolman, 1932). Their overall attitude is a function of beliefs about an object's attributes and the strength of these beliefs. In this case, students will be making judgement about the value of the degree they have obtained from a university. The benefits of the degree in terms of graduate employability and attendant benefits are critical in judging satisfaction levels of the students. Therefore, students' satisfaction level will be judged from the value addition perspective as a result of the qualification acquired in respect of a programme. For example, students who perceive themselves as likely to get a job easily are likely to express a lot of satisfaction than those who do not perceive themselves as such.

The SERVQUAL Model
The SERVQUAL model is perhaps the most widely used model to translate theories of customer satisfaction into management practice (Soutar, 2001). In this model, service quality is defined as the difference between customer expectations and customer perception of service received. The gap in service quality occurs when the perception of service received is less than what is expected (Zeithaml et al.,1990). While at the university, students are exposed to different service offerings which are comparable to others in the wider organizational spectrum. They therefore compare service delivery at the university and try to compare with other similar services in the same

industry. If the service offered at the university is better than in other institutions, then the gap is favourable, thus causing satisfaction. On the other hand, when the service is lower compared to that in a similar industry, then the gap is unfavourable leading to dissatisfaction. Students will judge every aspect of the university service delivery and indicate their levels of satisfaction based on the gaps they normally see in service delivery relative to similar service offering in equivalent institutions.

Methodology
This study relied on the descriptive research methodology. An exit survey was conducted for the 2019 graduating cohort of students during the 7th graduation ceremony at Laikipia University. Data was collected by the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards in the month of February, 2020 which was earmarked in the university calendar as the certificate collection period. The population of interest were students who joined university in 2015 and graduated in 2019 having completed their four (4) year course of study. A survey targeting all students (N = 2169) who graduated during the 7th graduation ceremony held on the 6th day of December, 2019 was administered to a random sample size (n= 500) of graduates selected based on Yamane (1967) formula for determining sample size at 95 percent level of confidence. This questionnaire was designed to collect data on various aspects of quality education, satisfaction with support services and the general study environment in line with the specific objectives of the study. A total of 388 questionnaires were dully filled in and returned thus representing a return rate of about 78 percent.

Results
The findings of this study were descriptively analysed using percentage frequencies and mean values and then presented in tables as discussed hereafter under the sub-topics of impression of the quality of education services, satisfaction with university services and environment, and commitment to the alma mater. In addition, analysis of Likert-type data was analysed analogously and interpreted using the weighting criteria advocated by Carifio and Rocco (2007) which indicates strongly disagree to be in the range of (SD) $1 < SD < 1.75$; Disagree (D) $1.75 < D < 2.5$; Agree (A) $2.5 < A < 3.25$ and Strongly Agree (A) $3.25 < SA < 4.0$. The scale gives an equidistance of 0.75 based on the four response categories.

Impression of the Quality of Education Services
The graduates were expected to indicate their impression on quality of education in respect of the various parameters that were designed to measure education quality. These parametric aspects were measured on a four-point Likert type of scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Thereafter, the impression on quality was interpreted to be either positive or negative. In view of this, any mean rating of 2.5 points and below implied negative impression on quality of education while any mean ratings above 2.5 implied a positive rating on quality of education offered.

Analysis and interpretation of these educational quality aspects reveal that about 96 percent of the graduates agreed with a mean rating of 3.44, that the courses offered were useful as they pursued their studies at the university. About 92 percent of the graduates also agreed that the courses offered were well taught (mean = 3.29). In addition, about 95 percent of the graduates agreed that the field attachment component of their respective courses was useful in linking theory and practice (mean =3.43). Further, 76 percent of the graduates agreed that they had access to the

facilities needed to complete their degree although one- third disagreed with the statement. These findings are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Impression of Quality of Education Services

	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
The courses offered were useful to me as I pursued my degree	2.9	0.8	45.9	50.4	3.44	Positive
The courses offered were well taught	2.7	4.8	53.7	38.8	3.29	Positive
The field attachment component in my course was useful in linking theory and practice	3.4	1.9	43.1	51.6	3.43	Positive
I had access to the facilities/equipment I needed to complete my degree	7.3	16.2	54.7	21.8	2.91	Positive
The equipment/facilities I used were well maintained	4.3	12.5	56.6	26.6	3.05	Positive
Equipment/facilities I used were safe	3.0	10.2	59.3	27.5	3.11	Positive
Lecture rooms were adequate	5.7	16.9	55.6	21.8	2.93	Positive
I received the mentorship I needed to successfully complete my degree (Academic Advising)	3.0	7.0	53.7	36.3	3.23	Positive
Overall, my interactions with academic staff at Laikipia University were positive	3.0	5.1	51.3	40.6	3.30	Positive
Overall impression (Mean index)					**3.19**	Positive

From the findings, it is also noted that majority (83%) of the graduates agreed that the equipment they used while at the university were safe (mean =3.11). Furthermore, 77 percent of the graduates agreed that the lecture rooms were adequate and about 90 percent of the graduates agreed that they received mentoring (academic advising) that they needed in order to successfully complete their studies. Further still, over 90 percent of the graduates generally agreed that their interactions with the members of staff at the university were positive.

Overall, the mean rating for all the parametric aspects of quality was 3.19, implying that the students' impression regarding the quality of education services offered at the university was positive. Therefore, it can be said that the 2019 cohort of graduates had a positive impression of the general quality of education that is offered at the university. This is very important considering that Mwebi (2020) found that quality of education was one of the fundamental factors most students considered in choosing a university of study. Therefore, improvement in quality of educational service can positively contribute to the level of student satisfaction. A study by Kammur (2017) in Alrifaq private University in Libya also revealed a statistically indicative effect of quality of educational service on the level of student satisfaction.

Satisfaction with University Services and Environment
The study sought to establish the satisfaction level with regard to library, ICT, hospitality services and environment within and outside the university. Satisfaction levels were measured on a four-

point Likert type of scale with not satisfied at all=1, not satisfied = 2, satisfied = 3 and very satisfied = 4.

For purposes of interpretation of the findings, the responses were dichotomously grouped into 'not satisfied and satisfied'. Therefore, any mean rating of 2.5 points and below implied no satisfaction while mean ratings above 2.5 implied satisfaction. Similarly, percentage ratings for not satisfied at all and not satisfied were added (SD+D) to give an overall, percent score for no satisfaction while the overall percentage score for satisfaction was obtained by adding individual percentage rating for satisfied and very satisfied (A+SA). The findings regarding satisfaction levels for library, ICT, hospitality and general university environment and the interpretation thereof are as presented in tables 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 2: Satisfaction with Library Facilities

	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
Adequacy of study materials	4.6	22.6	56.2	16.7	2.85	Satisfied
Up-to-date study materials	4.3	24.3	57.1	14.3	2.81	Satisfied
Relevance of the study materials	3.3	12.3	61.4	23.0	3.04	Satisfied
Availability of e-resources	5.7	21.9	54.6	17.8	2.84	Satisfied
Internet access within the library	6.5	16.6	56.7	20.2	2.90	Satisfied
Digital Library (computer in the library)	11.0	27.5	45.2	16.3	2.67	Satisfied
Library time (opening and closing)	1.9	6.2	56.4	35.5	3.25	Satisfied
Interaction with library staff	3.0	9.2	58.2	29.6	3.15	Satisfied
Overall satisfaction with library facilities					**2.94**	**Satisfied**

Regarding satisfaction level with the library facilities as shown in table 2, the study established that about 72 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the adequacy of study materials at the university library while one third were not satisfied with a mean rating of 2.85 implying that they were satisfied. Similarly, it was found that 71 percent of the graduates were satisfied that the library materials were up to date (mean =2.81). Majority (84%) of the graduates was satisfied with the relevance of the study materials and about 71 percent of the graduates were also satisfied with the availability of e-resources (mean = 2.84). Regarding digital library, about 61 percent of the graduates were satisfied while nearly 40 percent were not satisfied. The levels of satisfaction regarding this aspect were however high considering the mean rating of 2.67. In addition, 92 percent of the graduates were satisfied with library opening and closing time and about 88 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the interactions they had with library staff.

Overall, the 2019 graduates were satisfied with library facilities considering the overall satisfaction index was 2.94. In the university's tracer study survey conducted in 2013, the graduates were not satisfied with library facilities particularly the relevance of study materials and availability of e-resources (Mwebi & Nzioki, 2020). These positive findings therefore, imply that the university has made significant progress towards addressing students concern regarding library facilities hence increased levels of satisfaction. In a study on students' satisfaction in public universities in Kenya, Kara et al. (2016) established that quality of teaching facilities, availability of textbooks, and quality of library service were positively and significantly related to student' satisfaction.

Regarding satisfaction levels with ICT infrastructure, the study found that about 68 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the adequacy of ICT infrastructure (mean =2.71) and about 66 percent of them were satisfied with accessibility to computer labs (mean 2.73). It is also notable that 73 percent of the graduates were satisfied with internet connectivity (mean =2.86) and about 70 percent of them were satisfied with the integration of ICT in teaching (mean=2.80). Overall, it can be observed that the 2019 cohort of graduates were highly satisfied with the ICT infrastructure in place (mean =2.78) as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Satisfaction with ICT Infrastructure

	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
Adequacy of ICT infrastructure	9.2	22.3	56.3	12.2	2.71	Satisfied
Accessibility to computer labs	8.4	25.0	51.4	15.2	2.73	Satisfied
Internet connectivity	6.5	19.5	55.7	18.4	2.86	Satisfied
Integration of ICT in teaching	6.3	23.8	53.8	16.1	2.80	Satisfied
Overall satisfaction with ICT infrastructure					**2.78**	**Satisfied**

The findings of tracer studies for the 2013 cohort of graduates established that at that time, more than half of the 2013 graduates did not have access to ICT infrastructure (Mwebi & Nzioki, 2020). This therefore shows that the university has made tremendous progress in improving the ICT infrastructure to the current state as already seen in table 3. Erdil (2013) in a study on student support services and satisfaction in online education established a strong positive correlation between quality attributes of ICT support services and overall level of student satisfaction.

With regard to satisfaction with hospitality services, the findings discussed are also presented in table 4.

Table 4: Satisfaction with Hospitality Services

	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
Adequacy of recreational facilities inform of games or sports facilities/equipment	9.8	20.1	56.5	13.6	2.74	Satisfied
Adequacy of accommodation facilities (hostels)	6.8	20.5	52.2	20.5	2.86	Satisfied
Maintenance of accommodation facilities	5.8	16.2	58.8	19.2	2.91	Satisfied
Adequacy of suitable sanitary amenities	4.7	16.1	56.7	22.5	2.97	Satisfied
Maintenance of sanitary amenities	3.9	16.6	57.2	22.3	2.98	Satisfied
Adequacy of dining facilities	4.7	16.7	56.9	21.7	2.96	Satisfied
Maintenance of dining facilities	3.4	13.8	55.1	27.8	3.07	Satisfied
Provision of space of worship	2.5	7.0	55.3	35.2	3.23	Satisfied
Provision of service at the medical department	2.5	10.1	60.1	27.4	3.12	Satisfied
Provision of counselling services	4.7	11.4	60.0	23.9	3.03	Satisfied
Support of student clubs' associations	4.5	13.6	57.6	24.3	3.02	Satisfied
Involvement of students in university outreach activities such as Marathon, Health Week, Gender Week, Mentorship programs, etc.	3.3	7.2	56.0	33.5	3.20	Satisfied
Overall interaction of non-teaching staff with students	2.5	6.4	61.1	30.0	3.18	Satisfied
Overall satisfaction with hospitality services					**3.05**	**Satisfied**

As can be observed from table 4, nearly 70 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the adequacy of recreational facilities in form of games or sport facilities. About 73 percent of the graduates were also satisfied with the adequacy of hostel facilities and about two thirds of the graduates were satisfied with the maintenance of accommodation facilities. It is also important to note that nearly 80 percent were satisfied with the adequacy and maintenance of sanitary amenities. Additionally, majority of the graduates were satisfied with the adequacy and maintenance of dining facilities and about 90 percent were satisfied with the provision of space for worship as well as the provision of services at the medical department. Further, it was established that nearly 84 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the provision of counselling services. Similarly, about 82 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the support given to student clubs and associations.

Regarding involvement of students in university outreach activities such as marathon, health and gender, about 89 percent of the graduates were satisfied while 11 percent were not satisfied. With respect to the interaction of non-teaching staff with students, over two thirds of the graduates were satisfied while about one-third were not satisfied with the interactions. In general, the students were satisfied with the hospitality services that were provided at the university. These findings however are contrary to those of Mwebi and Nzioki (2020) who in the tracer study survey of 2013 cohort established that accommodation, lecture halls, recreation facilities and cafeteria were rated as very unsatisfactory by the graduates. This therefore depicts an improvement in the hospitality services offered by the university over time. A study by Njuguna (2017) on students' satisfaction in public primary teacher training colleges revealed that there was a significant

relationship between support services (for instance, Library, accommodation and medical services) and students' satisfaction.

Finally, table 5 presents the findings with regard to the graduates' satisfaction with the environment outside and within the university.

Table 5: Satisfaction Levels with the Environment

	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Interpretation
Security within the university	3.8	9.3	67.3	19.6	3.03	Satisfied
Security in the surrounding environment of the University	4.1	13.4	61.9	20.5	2.99	Satisfied
Adequacy of fire safety measures and equipment	4.4	10.8	61.9	22.9	3.03	Satisfied
Cleanliness of the learning environment (lecture rooms and hostels)	2.7	9.0	59.3	29.0	3.14	Satisfied
Adequacy of water for use by students	1.9	5.6	59.3	33.1	3.24	Satisfied
Conducive learning environment (far from noise and other distraction to learning)	2.7	7.4	53.7	36.2	3.23	Satisfied
Conducive lecture rooms that are well-lit and ventilated	6.1	14.6	48.9	30.4	3.04	Satisfied
Overall satisfaction with environment					**3.11**	**Satisfied**

From table 5, it can be observed that most graduates (87%) were satisfied with the security within the university and about 82 percent of them were satisfied with the security in the environment surrounding the university. In addition, the study found that 84 percent of the graduates were satisfied with the adequacy of fire safety measures and equipment and about 88 percent of them were satisfied with the cleanliness of the learning environment including lecture rooms and hostels. Furthermore, 93 percent of the graduates were satisfied with adequacy of water for use by students and about 90 percent of them were also satisfied with the conducive environment for learning which in their view is far from learning distractions. Finally, majority (79%) of the graduates were satisfied with the conducive lecture rooms that are well lit and ventilated.

A study by Mwebi (2020) established that quality of education services and a conducive study environment were the main factors that influenced students in selecting Laikipia University. Kara et al. (2016) also found that the learning environment was positively and significantly related to student' satisfaction. The conducive learning environment is therefore an opportunity which the university can tap into in order to attract more students.

Commitment to the Alma Mater

Similar to organizational commitment, commitment to the *alma mater* is the students' psychological attachment to the university. Usually, commitment to an institution and satisfaction levels are closely correlated together with lower levels of intention to leave the organization (Yousef, 2017). The study therefore sought to establish whether the students had developed a sense of belongingness and commitment to the university based on their satisfaction with the university services. According to Miller (2003), when graduates are satisfied, they tend to develop a strong sense of commitment to the institution and there are lower levels of attrition. It can be argued that

when graduates develop a strong level of attachment there is an implied sense of belongingness with the *alma mater* which spans a long time after they have left the institution thus helping in establishing strong alumni associations. In view of this, the following questions were posed to the graduates;

1. If you were to begin your graduate or professional studies again, how likely would you: Choose the same field of study at Laikipia University? Choose the same field of study at another university?
2. Based on your experience at Laikipia University, how likely would you: Recommend your field of study to a prospective student; Recommend Laikipia University to a prospective student

Analysis of the findings in relation to the two questions herein above is presented in figures 1 and 2 respectively.
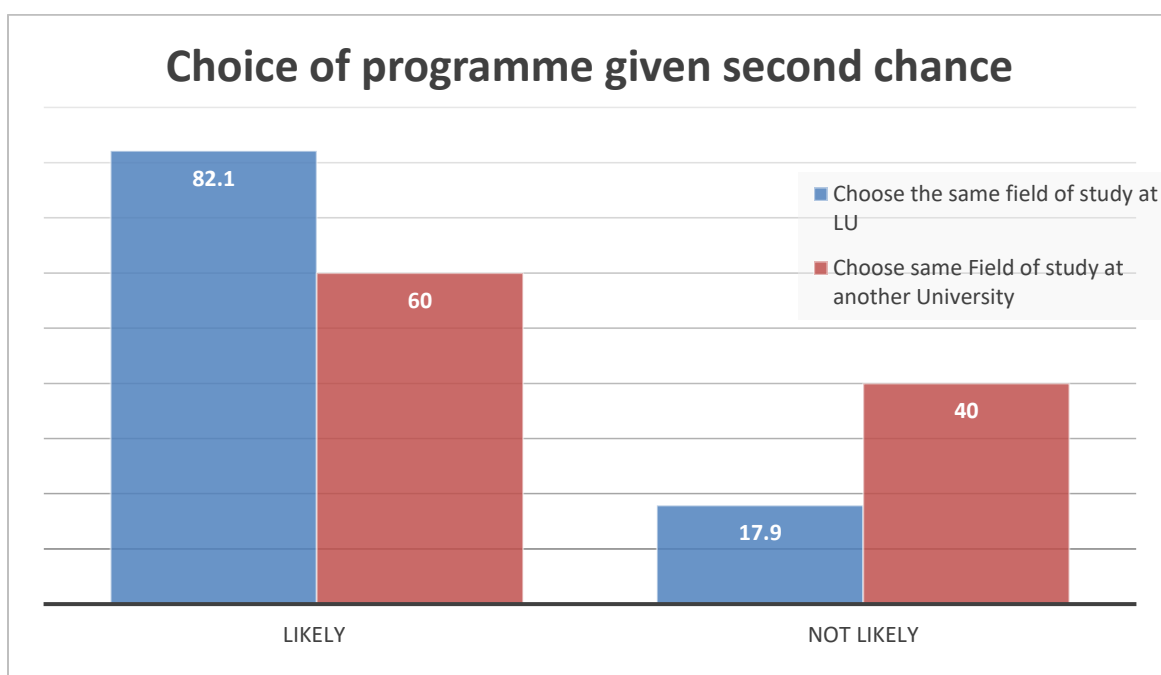

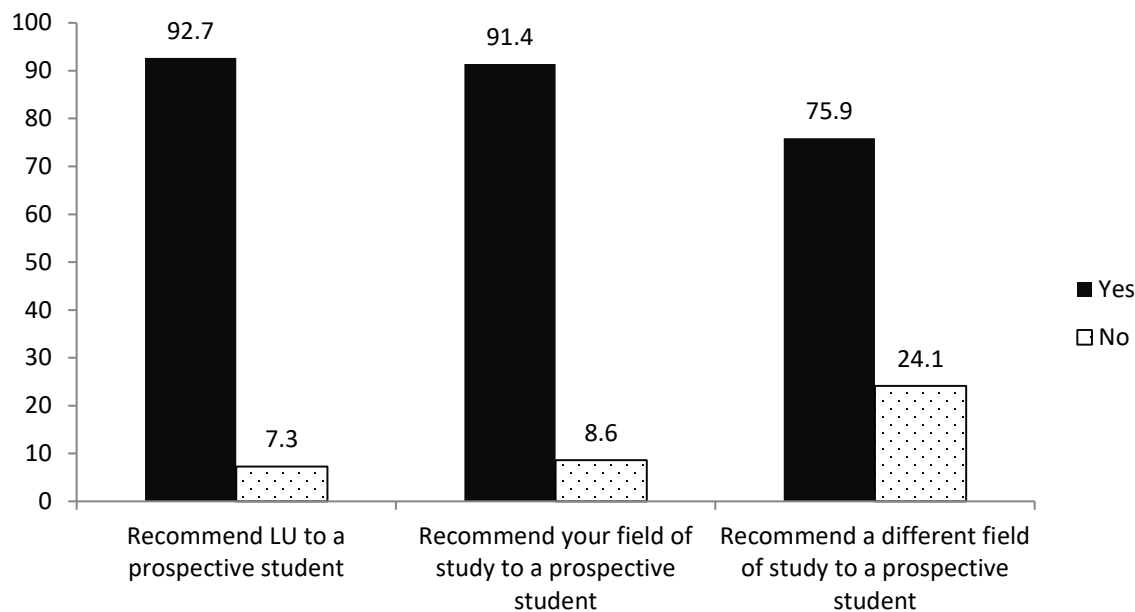**Fig. 1: Choice of Programme Given an Opportunity**

Fig. 2: Recommendations about the University

Regarding whether they could choose the same field of study at the university, 82 percent of the graduates were of the view that given an opportunity, they were likely to choose a similar programme of study at the University while 18 percent were not likely to choose a similar programme at the University. Similarly, nearly 60 percent of the graduates were likely to choose the same field of study at another university while 40 percent of the graduates were not likely to choose the same field of study at another university.

With regard to whether they could recommend other prospective students to join Laikipia University for their studies, about 93 percent of the graduates affirmed that they could recommend a prospective student to join Laikipia University. Similarly, about 92 percent confirmed that they could recommend a student to join the same field of study as theirs while about 76 percent indicated that they could recommend a different field of study to a prospective student. Bryant (2006) in a study on assessing expectations and perceptions of campus students in San Francisco found that satisfied students were able to be effective public relations agents who can market the university and enhance its reputation. Similarly, Mwebi (2020) established that students' choice of a university was influenced by referrals more than newspaper and TV advertisements.

Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings herein show that the graduates of 2019 had a positive impression on the quality of education offered at the university and were generally satisfied with the library, ICT infrastructure, hospitality services and the environments within and outside the university. According to Kara et al (2016), quality of teaching facilities, availability of textbooks, and quality of library service environment were positively and significantly related to student' satisfaction. Besides, they were satisfied with the quality of support services which complemented their stay at the university. Ntabathia (2013) contends that some of the most important aspects of an institution

that students like most include the reputation of the university and the nature of the programmes offered as critical aspects of educational quality.

According to Ntabathia (2013), service quality is positively related to student satisfaction. A study by Erdil (2013) revealed a strong positive correlation between quality attributes of support services and overall level of student satisfaction with the support services. The study also found that an increase in quality level of services would yield high satisfaction. Similarly, Njuguna (2017) established that that there was a significant relationship between support services (for instance, library, accommodation and medical services) and students' satisfaction. Based on their overall satisfaction with the university, the graduates expressed a commitment and willingness to recommend other prospective students to pursue courses at the university.

Mwebi (2020) found that students' choice of a university was influenced by referrals from the significant others (teachers, parents, guardians, and peers/friends). According to Bryant (2006), satisfied students can make effective public relations agents who can market the university and enhance its reputation. On the contrary, however, dissatisfied students often become drop-outs (Billups, 2008) thus lowering student enrolment and institutional reputation consequently reducing institutional vitality (Miller, 2003). High student satisfaction helps in attracting and retaining high achievers who in turn increase the reputation and standing of the university. Student satisfaction plays a critical role in selection of their preferred destination of study.

In a survey conducted among 600 students in the United States, it was established that satisfied students may have a strong influence on a university's ability to connect with and attract quality applicants (Visipoint, n.d.). This gives credence to the importance of student satisfaction as an integral component of marketing the institution. Considering that admission to universities in Kenya is currently pegged on the students' preferences, it is important as Mwebi (2020) points out that universities need to devise a client centred approach towards their programme offering in order to attract students. Universities therefore ought to continually strengthen and improve the quality of services that they offer.

Notwithstanding the findings herein, it is imperative to note that in all the parameters measured, there was no one hundred percent satisfaction level. This, therefore, calls upon the university decision making organs to explore possible strategies and mechanisms for improvement of all the aspects in order to have complete student satisfaction

In view of the discussions and conclusions arrived at in this study, recommendations are hereby suggested for improvement in education and service quality at the University. Regarding the impression on quality services, this study recommends that the University looks for ways of expanding the existing capacity of laboratories and workspaces to accommodate more students as a way of increasing access to these facilities. Also, the current construction of lecture halls should be expedited to allow adequate space for lecturing purposes. As for the library, the study recommends the need for the University to continually work on modalities to stock adequate and up-to-date study materials and sensitize students on the existing e-resources besides allowing internet access within the library for ease of referencing.

When it comes to ICT, the study recommends that the University continually works towards improving the ICT infrastructure by having more computer labs in order to increase accessibility but also increase the internet bandwidth for stronger internet connectivity. The University should also explore ways of encouraging lecturers to integrate ICT in teaching. Additionally, the ICT infrastructure should be expanded to allow online education through blended teaching methodologies. As for the hospitality services, the study recommends that the University increases availability of recreational services such as games, sport facilities and equipment in addition to

providing adequate accommodation facilities and ensuring that they are well maintained. Further, the University should provide adequate sanitary amenities and ensure they are well maintained in addition to providing adequate dining facilities.

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