The Student's Satisfaction Influential Factors at Cihan University

Manaf Basil Raewf[1], Thabit Hassan Thabit[2]

[1]*Assist. Lecturer , Finance Department , Collage of Finance and Administration Sciences , Cihan University*
[2]*Assist. Lecturer , Accounting Department , Collage of Finance and Administration Sciences , Cihan University*

ABSTRACT *:* Universities are increasingly operating in Erbil. There is fierce competition among these universities to attract students. Students' satisfaction has become increasingly important for university to survive. The purpose of this study is to find the perception status of students' satisfaction and the factors that affect it at Cihan University in Erbil. The relationship between the dependent variable of this study which is customer satisfaction and the independent variables which are service quality physical environment; and study fees, is investigated in this study. The study uses adopted questionnaire to collect the data from respondents. Respondents are students at Cihan University. Three departments are selected to be the place for data collection. The findings of the research shows that the perception status of students' satisfaction is 3.39 with moderate agreement of almost all the items of statement. The overall mean score value of service quality by the respondents is found to be 3.53 with agreement of all the items of statement , of physical environment is found to be 3.22 with moderate agreement on all items of statement, and of study fees by respondents is 3.08 with moderate agreement on all items of statement. The hypotheses testing shows that there is positive and significant relationship between customer satisfaction and other variable such as service quality and physical environment with correlation of 0.312, and 0.290 respectively. The relationship between study fees and customer satisfaction is found to be negative and insignificant with correlation of -0.093.

Keywords : Satisfaction , perception status, service quality , physical environment , study fees

I. INTRODUCTION

Universities are striving to develop a satisfying students due to the great impact of such act on the universities' future revenue streams. In a service based industry such as university, the quality of the service is the main indicator for the success of the business. Providing good service grants the universities the opportunity to have more students and ultimately more profits. The role of service quality in university business cannot be denied. It is vital for universities to have good understanding on what the students want. However, the key challenges for universities are how to manage service quality to create the required level of satisfaction.

There are many advantages that can be gained through creating acceptable level of students' satisfaction. The main advantage is the profitability. Having good service quality will increase the level of satisfaction and that will lead ultimately to more students and more profits [1]. Other advantages are such as the ability to price premium price [2] and to attract specific niche of students [3]. Service quality plays vital role in creating the required satisfaction level [4]. The satisfaction is also affected by the fees that the universities charged [5]. Many other factors might affect the students' satisfaction such as the layout and the physical environment of the universities [6].

In this study, the investigations of the factors that affect the students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil, are conducted. The respondents of the study were the students of Cihan University and they were selected randomly based on their willing to cooperate. Three departments were selected to be the place where the study took place.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The last five years has witnessed a great increase in the number of private universities in Erbil. Students have a wide range of options to choose among the universities. There are different universities such as Ishik University, Lebanese French University, and SABIS University.

All these universities offer to some extent identical services. The competition among these universities has increased due to the increasing in number of universities. Universities have to create competitive advantage; Service quality is a source of enhancing the competitiveness of universities. Besides the Service quality,

Physical environment of the university also estimated to play a major role in the students' satisfaction. Physical environment is such as the location of the university, the layout of tables, facilities and parking space. For middle income people, fees of the study has a major role in the process of choosing particular university. The first question that the people ask is "how much is the level of study fees in this particular university?" Therefore, study fees might affect the applying behaviour of students and their level of satisfaction.

Knowing the most influence factors leads to focus more and pay more attention to these factors so being able to achieve the intended level of students' satisfaction and increase their profits.

III.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the time when the number of university increases and the number of the students still the same, universities will have more competition in attracting students. The level of competition is continuously increasing and universities have to find a mechanism to stay competitive and in other word to survive. Many universities have shut down their operations due to shortage of students and revenues, which was a result of failure to understand the students' wants and needs. The same scenario might happen to existed universities. Only the one who can understand the wants and needs of students and fulfil these wants and needs will survive in this very competitive environment.

IV.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:
- To identify the perception status of students satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.
- To identify the relationship between service quality, physical environment and fees, and students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.
- To identify the perception status of service quality, physical environment and fees at Cihan University in Erbil.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Bearing in mind that the competition is increasing in daily basis and despite the failure of some universities in conducting business, the easier way to invest in Erbil is the service investments. This study will extend the literature regarding the service sector in Erbil and the customers' satisfaction database. This study is significant because it provides the universities management with deep understanding of the students' satisfaction and will give them sufficient knowledge about the factors that influence this level of satisfaction so that they can make their decision accordingly.

VI.   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is devoted to review the previous studies pertaining to the customer satisfaction and the related factors. The section reviews as well, the factors that affect customer satisfaction in the university environment. These factors for this study are education quality, teaching quality, physical location and fees.

A. Students Satisfaction

In university environment, the students' satisfaction carries vital importance for the generation of revenues of the university through registration and spreading positive word of mouth. Students' satisfaction plays a vital role in developing the universities' long-term economic success since a dissatisfied student is unlikely to recommend it to friends and relatives. According to [7] Bitner and Hubbert (1994), there are two ways of viewing customer satisfaction: service-encounter; and overall satisfaction. Service-encounter satisfaction occurs when customers are satisfied with a specific service encounter while overall satisfaction is an evaluation based on multiple encounters. In this study, the concept of satisfaction is operationalized as an overall satisfaction because overall, rather than specific service-encounter, satisfaction is found to be a determinant of customer loyalty [8].

The following sub-sections review the definitions of the customer satisfaction, importance, antecedents and the consequence of customer satisfaction.

1) Definition of Customer Satisfaction

Reviewing the literature, there are varieties of alterative definitions of customer satisfaction. [9] Hoffman and Bateson (2010) have one of the most cited definitions. They defined customer satisfaction as "a comparison of customer expectations with perceptions regarding the actual service encounter". [10] Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) pointed that after students have applied and experienced the service, they can evaluate the outcomes of their choice. If their evaluations are positive they feel satisfied. When consumers have a negative evaluation of

an outcome, they feel dissatisfied. According to the authors, satisfaction evaluation concentrates more on fulfilling a need, whereas service quality is based on the perception of superiority. Finally, there are more cognitive aspects involved in evaluating service quality while satisfaction is rather related to emotional and affective reactions.

In this study, the definition of [9] Hoffman and Bateson (2010) is adopted. The comparison of customers' expectations with perception regarding the actual service encounter is applicable to the universities environment and fit the subject of this research.

2) Importance of Customer Satisfaction

Previous studies have shown that customer satisfaction is important to educational service managements because it leads to brand loyalty, and new students through word-of-mouth promotion [11].

In the university context, for example, satisfied students are found to be more loyal to the university than those with less satisfaction. Therefore, university students who are satisfied with the services are more willing to spread a positive word-of-mouth to others [11]. Customer satisfaction plays a vital role in developing the universities' long-term economic success since a dissatisfied student is unlikely to recommend it to friends and relatives.

Internally, improving customer satisfaction reduces costs associated with defective goods and services, re-working and replacing, and managing and handling complaints [12]. Word of mouth from satisfied customers lowers the cost of attracting new customers and enhances the firm's overall reputation, while that of dissatisfied customers naturally has the opposite effect [13].

3) Antecedents of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as an emotional state resulting from the evaluation of a service [14]. Oliver (1997) views satisfaction as 'the consumer's fulfilment response', the degree to which the level of fulfilment is pleasant or unpleasant [15]. The emotions elicited during and after consumption are transient, and are integrated into an attitude towards the purchase.

Future purchases may largely depend on the extent to which customers feel satisfied with the consumption experience. A satisfying experience can reinforce customers' decisions that they have made the right choice. On the other hand, a dissatisfying experience may lead to customers regretting the purchase, and lowering the likelihood of repurchase.

A review of the literature suggests that multiple expectations exist. Researchers have classified these into two types: normative expectations and predictive expectations [16]. Normative expectations are generally conceptualized as consumers' ideal levels of service, whereas predictive expectations are generally viewed as consumers' predictions about what is likely to happen during an impending transaction [17].

Researchers have reported that normative expectations data are generally rated at the top end of the scale [18]. In view of the fact that predictive expectations are more likely to be subject to change with experience and thus play an important role in consumer purchase decisions. These expectations not only influence purchase decisions but also provide a frame of reference against which satisfaction judgments are made [19].

Disconfirmation arises from the discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance. However, the effect of disconfirmation on customer satisfaction may differ depending on the type of good or service investigated [20].

Perceived performance is defined as customers' subjective evaluation of the performance of a service. It plays an important role in the formation of customer satisfaction because it is the feature of a service that creates the consumption experience [21]. Several studies have provided support for the effect of perceived performance on customer satisfaction [22].

4) Customer Satisfaction Formation Process

The expectancy-disconfirmation model provides the theoretical basis for understanding the formation of customer satisfaction. This model was based on adaptation theory [23], and has been used extensively in consumer satisfaction research [24]. It suggests that customer satisfaction is a function of expectations and the extent to which perceived service performance meets the expectations. If the perceived service performance exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, which in turn determines the level of satisfaction. On the other hand, when the perceived service performance falls short of expectations, this leads to negative disconfirmation, and may result in dissatisfaction. Confirmation occurs when performance matches expectations [20].

B. Factors Affect Customer Satisfaction

Several researchers have attempted to test the SERVQUAL framework in measuring students' satisfaction in the service industry. Bojanic and Rosen (1994) used the SERVQUAL instrument with a diverse clientele in

Columbia, South Carolina and a varied menu that included international items[25]. Six dimensions were used as "Empathy" was divided into two dimensions: knowing the customer and access to services. The results identified dimensions similar to SERVQUAL instrument, "Knowing the customer", "Reliability", and "Assurance" were the most significant in predicting overall quality; the other three dimensions were not important predictors of overall quality.

Lee and Hing (1995) assessed the usefulness and applicability of the SERVQUAL instrument to measure and compare customers' perceived service quality. The results revealed that the customers' highest expectations of service quality involved "Assurance" and "Reliability", while their lowest expectations were related to "Tangibles" [26].

Kim, Ng and Kim, (2009) conducted a study to validate five dimensions of the DINESERV and explored any possible differences in perceived service quality[27]. Other studies on customer satisfaction have revealed certain important attributes, such as low price, value for money, service, location, brand name, and image [28].

In their investigation, Han and Ryu (2009) findings suggest that a firm should carefully design the physical environment to improve the customer's perceived reasonableness of the price[29]. The authors further indicated that creative use of physical design would be essential in enhancing specific marketing objectives such as positive customer perception of quality, positive evaluation of experience, and positive attitudes.

Based on the review of the literature, the factors that are investigated and expected to affect the students' satisfaction in Cihan University in Erbil are seen as follows:

1) Service Quality

An important factor driving satisfaction in the service environment is service quality. However, there have been mixed findings about the causal direction between service quality and customer satisfaction. The most common explanation for the difference is that perceived service quality is described as a form of attitude, a long-run overall evaluation of a product or service, whereas satisfaction is a transaction-specific evaluation [3]. Based on these conceptualizations, incidents of satisfaction over time lead to perceptions of service quality. For instance, [30] Cronin and Taylor (1992) examined the conceptualization and measurement of service quality and the relationships among service quality, consumer satisfaction, and purchase intentions. The findings suggested that service quality was an antecedent of consumer satisfaction while consumer satisfaction was not a significant predictor of service quality.

With regard to the lack of consensus, Parasuraman et al. (1994) posited that "the conflicting perspectives could be owing to the global judgment focus in most service quality research in contrast to the transaction-specific focus in most satisfaction research" [31]. They suggested that perceived service quality and customer satisfaction could be investigated from both transaction-specific and global perspectives. The perceived service quality, expectations, and disconfirmation lead to satisfaction / dissatisfaction.

2) Physical Environment

From the perspective of physical design, environmental psychologists suggest that individuals react to places with two general, and opposite, forms of behaviour: approach or avoidance [6]. It has been suggested that in addition to the physical dimensions of a business attracting or deterring selection, the physical design of a business can also influence the degree of success consumers attain once inside [21].

This involves research on the "SERVICESCAPE" [32] which is the "built man-made environment" and how it affects both customers and employees in the service process.

The importance of physical surroundings to create an image and to influence customer behaviour is particularly pertinent in the service industry [33]. Since service is generally produced and consumed simultaneously, the consumer is "in the factory," often experiencing the total service within the property's physical facility [32]. While the service should be of acceptable quality, pleasing physical surroundings (e.g., music) may determine to a large extent the degree of overall satisfaction and subsequent behaviour in the service industry. Since services are mainly intangible and often require the customer to be present during the process, the physical environment can have a significant impact on perceptions of the overall quality of the service encounter, which in turn affects customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry [32],[33].

Research suggests a direct link between physical environment and outcomes such as customer satisfaction [34]. For instance, Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) examined the effects of layout accessibility, facility aesthetics, electronic equipment, seating comfort, and cleanliness on the perceived quality of the SERVICESCAPE [35]. The findings revealed that perceived quality of physical environment significantly affected a customer's satisfaction in the leisure service setting.

3) Fees

The study fees can greatly influence students because price has the capability of attracting or repelling them [36], especially since fees in the higher education industry functions as an indicator of quality [37]. The pricing of university service also varies according to the type of university. If the fees are high, customers are likely to expect high quality, or it can induce a sense of being "ripped off." Likewise, if the fees are low, customers may question the ability of the university to deliver product and service quality. Moreover, due to the competitiveness of the higher education industry, customers are able to establish internal reference fees. When establishing fees for a university, an internal reference fees is defined as a fee (or price scale) in buyers' memory that serves as a basis for judging or comparing actual fees [36]. This indicates that the fees offering for the university needs to be in accord with what the market expects to pay by avoiding negative deviation (i.e. when actual price is higher than the expected price).

Price has been considered a significant component in explaining consumer behaviours. Perceived price can be described as the customer's judgment about a service's average price in comparison to its competitors [38]. The concept of perceived price is based on the nature of the competitive-oriented pricing approach. This approach focuses on customers concerns about whether they are being charged more than or about the same as charged by competitors. Although many researchers have agreed that perceived price is an important determinant of customers post-purchase behaviours and emphasized the importance of perceived value, which is highly related to perceived price, in explaining customer behaviours, little empirical research has investigated the influence of perceived price on consumer behaviours in the service industry.

As Han and Ryu (2009) mention, the role of price in increasing customer satisfaction, remains unclear empirically and theoretically'[29]. Due to high uncertainty in the service consumption process, the role of the price as an indicator is immense.

Wong et al. (2009) argue, that the price' increases the perceptions of expected service quality and financial risk and decreases the perception of performance risk and purchase intention'. Such a relationship between price and service quality is, however, not always confirmed [40].

Two types of prices are distinguished: the objective price, or the one that the service actually costs and which customers often do not memorize, and the perceived price which is different for every person and is the outcome of the objective price after the evaluation of a person. The perceived price is then encoded by customers and usually gets a non-numerical value. Usually the objective price is remembered for more expensive items. Furthermore, the researchers insist that several studies have found a relationship between price and service quality as perceived by the customer: higher price delivers higher service quality.

C. *Theories of Customer Satisfaction*

There are many theories have investigated the customers satisfaction. In this research the theory of disconfirmation and Adaptation-level Theory is reviewed.

1) *Disconfirmation Theory*

Disconfirmation theory argues that 'satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience that occurs as a result of comparing service performance against expectations'. Szymanski and Henard (2001) found in the meta-analysis that the disconfirmation paradigm is the best predictor of customer satisfaction [39]. Basically, satisfaction is the result of direct experiences with products or services, and it occurs by comparing perceptions against a standard (e.g. expectations). Research also indicates that how the service was delivered is more important than the outcome of the service process, and dissatisfaction towards the service often simply occurs when guest's perceptions do not meet their expectations.
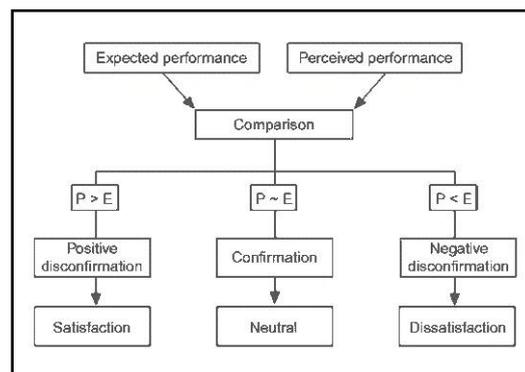

Fig. 1 : Disconfirmation Theory Framework

1) *Adaptation-level Theory*

The adaptation level theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how consumers form product quality expectations, suggesting that the perceptual judgment of a person to incoming information depends on the individual's current expectation level. The work of Helson (1964) on adaptation level theory proposes that stimuli, resulting in a displacement of the adaptation level may also change an individual's perception of other information [40]. Adaptation-level theory is consistent with expectation and disconfirmation effects on satisfaction. This theory was originated by Helsen in 1964 and applied to customer satisfaction by Oliver (1991). Helson (1964) simply put his theory as follows [40]:

"It posits that one perceives stimuli only in relation to an adapted standard. The standard is a function of perceptions of the stimulus itself, the context, and psychological and physiological characteristics of the organism. Once created, the 'adaptation level' serves to sustain subsequent evaluations in that positive and negative deviations will remain in the general vicinity of one's original position. Only large impacts on the adaptation level will change the final tone of the subject's evaluation".

VII.   RESEARCH THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
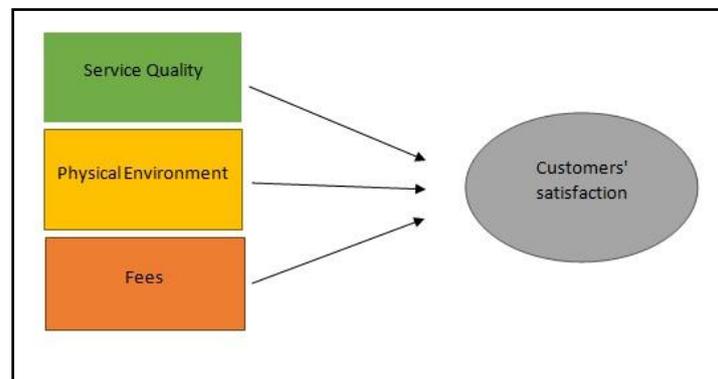
The research model can be drawn as:

Fig. **2** : Theoretical Framework

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses can be developed:
- H1: there is positive relationship between service quality and customers' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.
- H2: there is positive relationship between physical environment and customers' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.
- H3: there is positive relationship between fees and customers' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

VIII.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research is using quantitative approach. A questionnaire adopted from other researchers is used to collect the data. Three selected Departments in Cihan University were the target place of this research. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, is used to analyze the data of this research. Descriptive analysis is used to present the background information of respondents and the perception status of the scales. Measuring the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire is conducted through the use of Cronbach's Alpha. Testing the hypotheses is conducted through Pearson correlation.

The population of this study is the students of Cihan University in Erbil. However due to time and cost constraints, snowball non-probability sampling technique is adopted and three selected Departments are chosen to be the target place of this study. The distribution of the questionnaires was on basis of the students' willing to participate in the study. The researcher asked the respondents if they are willing to answer the questionnaire before the distribution. 119 valid questionnaires were collected for the purpose of this research.

IX. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis showed that about 56.3 percent or (67) of the respondents are males. 43.7 percent or (52) of the respondents are females. The analysis of the data is conducted through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Descriptive analysis is used to present characteristic of the respondents. Reliability analysis is used to find the internal consistency between the items of the scales based on Cronbach's Alpha. Pearson correlation is used to test the hypotheses of the research and to identify the direction of the relationship between the variable and the significance of the relationship

A. Reliability Test

In order to measure the internal consistency of the items of the scales, the researcher conducted reliability test to find the suitability of the measurements. Cronbach's Alpha was used as a benchmark for the test. The more Cronbach's Alpha close to 1, the more reliable is the measurements. The value of Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.6, the internal consistency is weak. 0.7 or greater is considered acceptable. 0.8 or greater is considered good. Table 1 shows the reliability test of the measurements.

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Status
Customer satisfaction	9	0.939	Good
Service quality	7	0.910	Good
Physical environment	8	0.851	Good
Fees	5	0.898	Good

TABLE 1: RELIABILITY TEST

All the scales are having good internal consistency.

B. Hypotheses Testing

Three research questions were meant to find the relationship between the customer satisfaction (dependent variable) and service quality, physical environment and fees (independent variables). The following subsections tested the hypotheses by using Pearson correlation.

2) Pearson Correlation

The value of Pearson correlation is range between -1 and +1. + 1 represents perfect positive relationship between the variables. -1 represents perfect negative relationship. Table 2 shows the correlation between the variables.

Variables		Customer satisfaction
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	.312**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	119
Physical Environment	Pearson Correlation	.290**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	119
Price	Pearson Correlation	-.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.319
	N	119
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

TABLE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES

The relationship between service quality and customers satisfaction is positive at correlation of 0.312. The relationship between physical environment and customer satisfaction is positive at correlation of 0.290. The relationship between price and customers satisfaction is negative at correlation of -.093.

3) Results of Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses testing are based on the finding of Table 2. Table 2 shows the correlation between the variables. Therefore, the hypotheses testing can be presented as follows:

- **First Hypotheses**

The first hypothesis of this research was:

H1: there is positive relationship between service quality and customers' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

Based on Table 2, the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is positive and it is significant. The relationship is positive due to the positive sign in front of the coefficient and it is significant at correlation of 0.312 and this correlation is significant at the level 0.01 while the 2 tailed value of the relationship is 0.000. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this research is accepted. The positive correlation indicates that any increase in service quality will lead to increase in students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

This result is in agreement with Cronin and Taylor (1992) [30] who found direct relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

- **Second Hypothesis**

The second hypothesis of this research was meant to find the relationship between physical environment and customer satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil. It was stated as follows:

H2: there is positive relationship between physical environment and students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

Based on Table 2, the relationship is positive due to the positive sign in front of the coefficient. The relationship is also significant because the correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 and the 2 tailed value of this relationship is 0.000. Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted. The correlation of 0.290 implies that any increase in physical environment leads to increase in students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

The result of this study is in agreement with researchers who investigated the relationship between the two variables. Chebat and Michon (2003) found in their study that the outcome of good physical environment is customer satisfaction which confirmed that the relationship between the two variables is significant [34].

- **Third Hypothesis**

The third hypothesis of this research was meant to find the relationship between fees and students' satisfaction. The related hypothesis was stated as follows:

H3: there is positive relationship between study fees and students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

Based on Table 2, the relationship between study fees and students' satisfaction is negative due to the negative sign in front of the coefficient. The relationship is insignificant because the correlation of -0.093 is significant at the 0.01 level. However, the 2 tailed value of the relationship is 0.319. Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected. The correlation of -0.093 indicate that the decrease of fees lead to increase of students' satisfaction at Cihan University in Erbil.

Price is big issue for customers and they associate high prices with superior services. Monroe (1989) found that the price has great influence on customer and it has the capability of attracting or repelling them.

X. RESULTS

This study was conducted in Erbil at Cihan University to find the perception of students' satisfaction and the factors that can affect it. The study employed quantitative approach. A questionnaire adopted from other researchers was used as the instrument of this research. The sample was selected randomly and it was snowballing. 119 respondents were the sample of this study.

The respondents are students of Cihan University and they are males (56.3%) and females (43.7%). Descriptive analysis was used to find the mean score value of the variables. The overall mean score value of customer satisfaction was 3.39 with moderate agreement of almost all the items of statement. The overall mean score value of service quality by the respondents was found to be 3.53 with agreement of all the items of

statement. The overall mean score value of physical environment was found to be 3.22 with moderate agreement on items of statement. The overall mean score value of study fees by respondents was 3.08 with moderate agreement on all items of statement.

The hypotheses testing showed that there is positive and significant relationship between customer satisfaction and other variable such as service quality, and physical environment with correlation of 0.312, and 0.290 respectively. The increase in this variables lead to increase in students' satisfaction. The relationship between study fees and students' satisfaction was found to be negative and insignificant with correlation of -0.093. The decrease in study fees leads to increase in students' satisfaction.

XI.   REFERENCES

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