



The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education

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DECLARATION

I, Liana Venter, declare that this research dissertation titled **The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education** and the work presented therein are my own, and generated by me as a result of my own original research. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Business School of North-West University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, no material has been previously published or written by another person except where due references are made in this mini-dissertation.



Liana Venter

9 December 2019

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise to God almighty, for blessing me with this opportunity to study and develop into the person He has created me to be. Throughout my life, and again with this journey of knowledge creation and development, He bestowed love and mercy upon me and kept me strong in difficult times.

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ABSTRACT

Higher education forms part of the service sector of the economy and service quality is seen as a differentiating factor and contributor to competitive advantage for private higher education institutions. Limited research exists regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of service quality in private higher education to ultimately result in customer satisfaction. The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of whether service quality and total quality management principles are used in a private higher education institution to gain a competitive advantage.

A qualitative research methodology is used in this research study and the framework through which data was collected was an exploratory case study. The data was collected from multiple sources of evidence and analysed and developed into themes and subcategories via in vivo coding and ATLAS.ti software.

In terms of the expected contribution of the study, the higher education industry was specifically chosen as one important for knowledge creation and economic growth in South Africa. The biggest contribution of the research will be to the management team of Akademia on how it can use quality of delivery in the form of total quality management processes. This will allow the private higher education institution to gain a competitive advantage through the distinguished service it can provide. Total quality management and the regulatory framework are to be used as moderators in ensuring that student satisfaction is achieved.

Keywords: higher education, private higher education, total quality management, business-driven, value proposition, competitive advantage

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
LMS	Learning Management System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TQM	Total Quality Management

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Higher education: Higher education is defined as “all learning programmes which lead to qualifications that meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualifications Subframework” (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2007).

Higher education institutions: The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 refers to a higher education institution as:

“any institution that provides higher education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis and which is-

(a) established or deemed to be established as a public higher education institution under the Act;

(b) declared as a public higher education institution under the Act; or

(c) registered or conditionally registered as a private higher education institution under this Act.

Total quality management: Total quality management is achieved when an organisation manages all areas within the organisation in such a way that all departments deliver a quality service to customers (Heizer *et al.*, 2017:257).

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, higher education (HE) has experienced major changes over the last decade due to technological developments, critical political and economic challenges experienced, changing student needs and an increase in the demand for education overall. In South Africa, the need for quality HE also exists, with an increase in the number of learners that are seeking post-school education. The challenge for higher education institutions (HEIs) in this service sector is to attract students to their institutions through relying on their competitive advantage and market positioning. Van Schalkwyk (2018:3) highlights the growth experienced in this service sector globally and its contribution to the gross domestic product of countries. This results in service quality becoming a key driver for competitiveness and improving market positioning.

There have been several studies done in the past decade on service quality, exploring various aspects and dimensions of service quality (Goetsch & Davis, 2014:159; Khan *et al.*, 2018:182; Manatos *et al.*, 2017:159). However, very few studies have been done on service quality as a competitive advantage in HE, and the specifically in South Africa.

This study will look into service quality in HE as a differentiating factor and contributor to competitive advantage for private HEIs within a regulated and competitive environment. The focus was on Akademia as private HEI that offers all programmes through a distance mode of delivery with the support of technology and scheduled contact sessions throughout 12 study centres in South Africa and one in Namibia. The South African HE sector is highly regulated, especially for private HEIs, and both the registration of these institutions and the accreditation of programmes offered by the institutions are mandatory for the institutions to be able to operate within the sector. Through the registration and accreditation process that is followed minimum standards in terms of programme offerings are adhered to by all private providers as envisioned by the regulators.

The goal of this chapter is to provide background information on the HE sector and the rationale for the study. The problem statement and objectives of the study are provided together with the methodology and research design that was used to achieve its

objectives. The limitations of the study and chapter outline of the thesis will also be provided.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The South African post-school education and training sector includes all HEIs (public and private), technical and vocational colleges and public adult learning centres (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013:1). All HEIs operate within the university sector, with public HEIs being known as “universities” and private institutions only allowed to be called “higher education institutions” and not universities.

1.2.1 Higher education context

HE has a long history – from beginning as elite institutions for only the selected few to becoming more accessible to a wider population over time (CHE, 2004a:15). Globally, the HE landscape is still undergoing major changes (Lichy & Birch, 2015:1) and the sector is facing various challenges, which is the case for the South African HE sector as well. In the South African context, HE can be further divided into public and private HE, operating within the same regulatory environment, but with the distinguishing factors being found in how they secure funding, how they are structured and how they operate. There are currently 102 fully registered private HEIs and 26 provisionally registered private HEIs in South Africa (DHET, 2018).

1.2.2 Private higher education in South Africa

Private HE plays an important role in the HE landscape, especially in South Africa where the demand for HE education is greater than what public HE can provide and where greater access to HE is needed (DHET, 2013:22). This creates the opportunity for private HEIs to fill the gap.

Private HEIs are part of a highly regulated environment, which poses challenges for these institutions to fully function as businesses (CHE, 2007:174). Where a business can adapt to the changing needs of customers, private HEIs cannot necessarily react faster to market and consumer changes than public HE institutions, as the accreditation process is lengthy and requires the same rigour for private and public HE institutions. Private HEIs

thus have to find alternative ways of ensuring they are the preferred choice when students enrol for their journey in knowledge creation.

From the perspective of private HEIs, service quality should be a key focus area in their core business for them to become customer-driven institutions (Goetsch & Davis, 2014:13), as well as to gain a competitive advantage over other institutions and improve their market positioning (Van Schalkwyk, 2018:3). For private HEIs that are business-driven, the students are important stakeholders that in effect become their business partners as they move from just being seen as students, to being seen by the institution as customers. This entails ensuring that the institution offers what their customers demand and therefore know what the needs of their customers are and what they value.

Private HE was mostly unregulated until 1997 when the Higher Education Act was published, which, through Section 53, regulates private HE to ensure academic offerings by private HEIs adhere to standards of quality (Ellis, 2012:17). Armstrong (2014:5) argues that due to the lack of tools to measure the quality of outcomes in HE, the regulation of the resources and processes used to create quality need to be rigorously monitored externally. Ellis and Steyn (2014:445) also share the view that the decision to regulate private HEIs in South Africa was to ensure quality in HE, whereas Sallis (2014:7) argues that compliance to regulations are important for quality control, but that quality improvement is more important and should be developed in HEIs – it cannot be merely imposed through external regulations.

1.2.3 Value propositions in higher education

The traditional HE landscape is experiencing major changes due to an increase in the demand for education, environmental changes in the industry, technological and economic changes, globalisation, borderless HE, as well as changes in labour market requirements (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:1).

HEIs are therefore required to re-examine their value propositions continuously to ensure they stay relevant and are sustainable, as well as satisfy the needs of customers in HE (Ibrahim & Dahlan, 2016:600). Business models provide an overview of how HEIs do business, guide the effective and innovative delivery of services and assist private HEIs in identifying and focusing on what their core value propositions are (Edralin *et al.*, 2018:79).

1.2.4 Service quality in education

According to Sallis (2014:1), private HEIs are service providers which should focus on improving the quality of the service the institution provides. Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:578) refer to the management and improvement of service quality as being a critical aspect in improving private HE and that it can be seen as the differentiating factor for success between private HEIs, but also between public and private HEIs. In this regard, total quality management (TQM) was found to play an important role in education and assist institutions to successfully deal with changes in the industry (Khan *et al.*, 2018:182). Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:578) also determined that TQM will assist institutions in achieving internal and external customer satisfaction. This is possible when looking at TQM as defined by Soheli-Uz-Zaman and Anjalin (2016:209) as a planned and systematic process that is used to ensure quality exist in the service delivery and that the service is continuously improved.

In addition to the above factors, Sutin (2016:18) mentions that it is important for organisations to adapt to changes that occur in the environment to ensure they meet the changing needs of customers and provide relevant value propositions. As private HEIs are private sector companies, “their survival relies upon knowing what business they are in and how it is changing”, taking into account “performance excellence, self-reliance, service quality and reliability, awareness of customer needs and customer satisfaction” (Sutin, 2016:21).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Although there is literature available on business models for HEIs, TQM in HE and the regulation of the HE landscape to ensure quality, there is a gap in current research regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of TQM and service quality in private HEIs. There is a need to determine whether the implementation of TQM in private HEIs supports these institutions in adapting their value proposition to satisfy the changing needs of students. Competition in the private HE sector is on the increase, and these institutions need to compete in new ways to ensure sustainability in the competitive environment that exists.

This study emanated from the researcher’s involvement at a private HEI, Akademia, and exposure to the private higher education sector, including involvement in the regulatory

framework for the past 12 years. Akademia is a registered, non-profit private higher education institution, offering qualifications in Afrikaans. It is funded by private sponsors and student tuition fees. Akademia is instrumental in the unlocking and developing students' ability and potential through the unravelling of new knowledge and skills through the medium of technology.

Programmes are taught through distance education, using the provision of comprehensive guidance on the Learning Management System (LMS) platform, which forms the core of the students' digital workspace for distance learning. In addition to the independent teaching and learning interaction facilitated by purpose-designed interactive study guides, individual asynchronous online support is continuously provided to every student.

Akademia uses video conferencing technology as a secondary mode of delivery of teaching and learning, supporting and enhancing student participation in the teaching and learning situation. These video conferencing contact sessions are predominantly used to establish more personal contact between students and lecturers, and students amongst themselves. The contact sessions are used to explain and discuss more complex content issues and to allow students to participate interactively with the subject content.

This model allows Akademia to have the main campus with academic staff in Centurion and 13 other study centres across South Africa and Namibia. These study centres are facilities that are used during the videoconferencing interactive sessions, as well as during tests and examinations. The study centres are facilities equipped with appropriate videoconferencing electronic equipment and WiFi internet connectivity to facilitate full real-time interaction between the lecturer (in a studio at the main campus) and the student (at the study centre) during the contact session.

The focus of this study is to determine the influence of TQM on service delivery in a private HEI, and whether it provides the private HEI with a competitive advantage.

Developed from the background and problem statement, the research questions raised are:

- **Research question 1:** To what extent was the delivery of quality services in private HE ensured through the regulatory environment externally, and TQM internally, in Akademia at the time of the research?
- **Research question 2:** Can TQM assist Akademia in providing a quality service to students and guide the institution in staying relevant in the sector through being able to adjust the value proposition in time?

When considering the above, the research aims and objectives of the study will be addressed in the next section.

1.4 AIMS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding on whether service quality and TQM principles are used in a private HEI to guide the institution in changes that are needed in the value proposition to students, and gaining a competitive advantage through ensuring student satisfaction. This will be achieved through the following objectives.

- **Research objective 1:** To explore the quality mechanisms used by a private HEI and determine if adherence to an external regulatory framework supports the delivery of service quality.
- **Research objective 2:** To determine if TQM implementation assists a private HEI in adjusting the value proposition to gain a competitive advantage.

These research objectives informs the scope of this study as will be discussed in the next section.

1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY

The study will focus on principles of operations management and the value proposition aspects of business models. It will primarily investigate the private HE part of the HE landscape and how institutions in this part of the sector can differentiate themselves through service quality by focussing specifically on Akademia as a private HEI. The research method used for the study is outlined below.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology that was used in the research and which consists of two phases:

- Phase 1: Literature review
- Phase 2: Case study

1.6.1 Phase 1: Literature review

The literature review was conducted through studying relevant documents that included prior research studies, relevant scientific journals, articles, policies, procedures and other documents that are relevant to private HE.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Case study

A qualitative research design methodology was deemed appropriate for the study and was used to understand the social phenomena being studied, by using evidence from in-depth interviews, document review and literature (Henning, 2018:3). The specific qualitative method used was an exploratory case study. The case study method allowed the researcher an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied, namely private HE in the relevant context, as the contextual conditions were one of the reasons the subject was chosen for the study (Yin, 2009:18). When there are identifiable boundaries to the phenomena being studied, the case study as a genre is favoured for a research method (Henning, 2018:41). This is the case with private HEIs and the reason the case study method was chosen. The identifiable boundaries were that the institution had to be a private HEI, must have been registered with the DHET and meet all criteria regarding the registration as private HE institution.

Through the case study, as an alternative interpretative approach, the research contributes to creating rich and holistic explanations of the subject matter and areas of enquiry as multiple methods of data collection that include document review, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:112). Data was analysed through pattern matching and identifying themes and subcategories. The data analysis was supported by using ATLAS.ti software.

The case study was cross-sectional, as data was collected from the unit of analysis at one point in time and not over a period of time and thus provided information about the current functioning of the institution. Cross-sectional data refers to data that is collected at a given point in time from the unit of analysis, where longitudinal research collects the data from the same unit of analysis at different points in time (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:107).

1.6.3 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for the research was a private HEI (Akademia), which is a real-life case study and relevant to the research questions that have been defined (Yin, 2009:30).

The sample was heterogeneous and four managers across the top and middle management structure, as well as ten registered senior students, were included in the research study. All the participants were briefed about the research and the reasons they were chosen to form part of the study.

1.6.4 Data collection

Multiple data sources were used in the data collection process, which consisted of studying local and international academic sources to establish what has been published on TQM and service quality in the HE sector. Local content on these topics was very limited. Information was further collected on research themes that included an explanation of what the value proposition of HE was thought to be. Attention was also given to establishing the regulatory requirements for the South African HE sector and specifically private HEIs.

The single case study method, combined with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used for cross-checking and supplementing the data obtained from the literature and document review. The data was triangulated to ensure control over the factors that might influence the validity of the research conducted, and to provide a valid and reliable way in understanding the phenomena being studied (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:45).

Triangulation is defined by Cohen *et al.* (2000:112) as the use of multiple methods of data collection to strengthen research findings. The important component of validity in research was addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data collected, triangulation, and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:105).

1.6.5 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis was to establish the relationship between the research problem and objectives and to reduce the data to interpretable formats that will assist in drawing valid conclusions from the interviews and focus group discussions. All interviews and focus group discussion were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

Reliability refers to the demonstration that different researchers will be able to replicate the outcome of the research conducted through using the same methodologies (Riege, 2003:81). Through establishing the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees and focus group members, reliability was ensured as the objective of the research, and the role of the sample group was established.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to adhere to ethical issues, the treatment of participants was and important aspect of the research (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014:127). The ethical principles that were maintained throughout the research included (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:120):

- obtaining informed consent from all participants;
- ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participants and respecting their privacy; and
- ensuring no deception involved in the research process.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This is a case study and limited to a specific private HEI, namely Akademia. The empirical study was also limited to information that could be gathered from the institution and its registered students. Further research should be conducted at other institutions nationally and internationally. Furthermore, a comparative study of research results would add value to understanding the HE environment in South Africa.

1.9 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The study will be divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 provides the contextualisation of the study. The chapter deals with the introduction, background of the study, the problem statement, the research questions and research objectives, the research methods and design, keyword used in the case study, and chapter layout.

Chapter 2 comprises a focussed literature study, a review of previous research and opinions, as well as an interpretive summary of the current body of knowledge in terms of private HE, business models, core value propositions, total quality management, quality of design and student satisfaction and needs.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to conduct the research and achieve the objectives of the research project. The chapter covers the research design, the population being studied for the research and its data collection methods.

Chapter 4 focuses on the results of the research. The analysed data is discussed based on the in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Chapter 5 concludes with a summary and conclusion of the results of the case study. The limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for the future research addressed.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 provided the background and context of the research, including the problem statement and objectives of the study. The literature review has been discussed and the chapter further explains the research design and data analysis techniques that were used, and concludes with a layout of the study.

Chapter 2 will reflect on the literature that is relevant to the research conducted.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the literature review is to examine the current research and information available that is relevant to service quality and TQM in HE and its effect on Akademia. The purpose of the literature review is to serve as a point of departure in understanding the HE sector, and specifically the context of the private HE sector. It will also attempt to conceptualise terms such as “quality” and “quality assurance”.

The HE landscape in South Africa and how it has evolved over the last few years in regards to ensuring the quality of service delivery was identified as an important theme in the literature review. It also investigates the massification of HE and includes the concept of TQM and importance thereof in the service sector. As a result, the study will focus on the development of TQM in the service sector with reference to the HE sector specifically. These topics will be analysed and relevant conclusions drawn.

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Within the South African education sector, the post-school sector consists of vocational and training colleges as well as HEIs. HEIs refer to both public universities and privately-owned higher education institutions where mainly academic qualifications – including higher certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, degrees – and research are the focus of the institution’s offering.

Public institutions are known as “universities” and private providers as “private HE institutions” according to legislation. Different private HEIs exist within the sector, including for-profit and non-profit institutions, institutions offering face-to-face contact and institutions offering programmes in the distance mode of delivery. Due to the massification of HE this sector also experienced significant growth, with an increase in the number of registered private HEIs currently competing in the sector providing HE access for students that are not accommodated by the limited capacity of the public sector (DHET, 2018; Stander, 2017:4; Van Schalkwyk, 2017:24; Thaver, 2006:860).

2.2.1 Private higher education in South Africa

Private HE has been part of the education sector in South Africa since 1829 (Ellis, 2012:4). With the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996 becoming law, HE was transformed with certain ground rules being determined for the whole education sector. Private HE was mostly unregulated until 1997 when the Higher Education Act was published, which through Section 53, regulates private HE to ensure academic offerings by private HEIs adhere to HE standards of quality (Ellis, 2012:17). There was a concern regarding the quality of education that was offered by private institutions in the sector prior to the publication of this act. Lockett (2007:98) highlights the following problems that existed in the HE sector when it was an unregulated sector:

- unequal standards of provision;
- irrelevance of curriculum;
- curriculums being offered that were not aligned to the needs of the economy;
- high failure and drop-out rates under students; and
- poor management of HEIs.

To assure quality throughout the education sector, external quality measures in the form of national policies and frameworks were introduced for both private and public HEIs.

Private institutions that want to offer learning programmes that result in formal qualifications have to register as private institutions with the DHET and the purpose of the registration of these private institutions are (DHET, 2016):

- ensuring an acceptable quality of education is offered by the institution;
- protection of students through ensuring that the institutions have the necessary resources, capacity and expertise to deliver quality programmes before commencing with teaching and learning;
- ensuring the offering of qualifications are aligned to the national framework; and
- working towards the transformation of the education sector as envisioned by the government.

Private HEIs receive no funding from the government and are responsible for their own funding. According to Ellis and Steyn (2017:445), these institutions are predominately run as businesses and have to adapt to practices like accountability and efficiency in their

operations due to changing needs of the market and students if they want to remain profitable and competitive.

The HE sector, like most other sectors within various economies, are facing major changes (Lichy & Birch, 2015:1). These changes include environmental shifts, changing economic situations, an increased demand for education and increasing real-cost of HE, technological changes and changes in stakeholder expectations to name but a few (Armstrong, 2014:1). Stander (2017:34) argues that private HEIs play a complementary role to public institutions due to the increase in demand for education. The strength of private HEIs are to be found in their ability to respond to specific market demands, not being bound by bureaucratic restrictions, and the flexibility to make changes to their business models. In the South African HE sector, there is a growing need for more post-school education and private HE can assist in satisfying the growing demand and work alongside public institutions, as the public HEIs alone cannot cater to the demand that exists (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:23). This increased demand and the changes experienced are creating the opportunity for private HEIs to relook their value propositions (Lichy & Birch, 2015:1) and ensure they stay relevant to their customers (Ibrahim & Dahlan, 2016:600).

2.3 QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.3.1 Background to external quality measures in higher education

There are varying definitions of quality, and in HE the distinction between the terms “quality” and “quality assurance” is also of importance. Stander (2017:1) argues that quality in HE refers to the quality of the learning that the student experiences, while quality assurance focuses on the assurance to stakeholders that the process of learning is adequate and credible compared to other institutions. Thaver (2006:862) notes differing views on what quality assurance means in HE, namely:

- adhering to a set of minimum standards which are critical to ensure quality in the institution;
- the establishment of uniform processes and structures that will ensure quality in the institution;
- ensuring transformation in HE; and
- value for money is embedded in HE as a key determinant of quality.

The quality assurance in the South African HE sector is the responsibility of the Council for Higher Education (CHE) as per the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008. The NQF is a statutory body that was established in 1998 through the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. The CHE, through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), is responsible for all aspects of quality assurance. Accreditation is one of the external quality assurance frameworks that the CHE developed and implemented to sustain the quality of HE. External quality assurance is therefore a mechanism used by the government to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in the HE sector (Luckett, 2007:98).

The HEQC is one of the main stakeholders (see Figure 1) in HE and responsible to externally promote quality assurance, audit the quality assurance mechanism, accredit institutions and develop quality-related capacity within the HE sector (CHE, 2004b:4). The development of quality-related capacity is an important function of the HEQC and is derived from the key strategy of the committee to work towards building the necessary capacity within HEIs to be able to move the framework towards institutions being adept at quality assurance so that self-regulation and self-accreditation by HEIs can be realised in the future (CHE, 2004b:7).

Figure 1 indicates the highly regulated environment in which HEIs – and specifically private institutions – have to function, and is an indication of the increased control government is exhibiting towards private HE. Almost all decision that are made by HEIs with regards to programmes that are offered and their mode of delivery are determined by set policies that HEIs have to adhere to (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:21). The primary responsibility to ensure quality should ultimately be the task of each HEI, as compliance to regulations are only a quality control measure, and the improvement of quality is driven from within HEIs (Sallis, 2014:7). Therefore the development, implementation and improvement of quality should be an internal process in HEIs, and supporting these institutions must be the focus of the CHE as the regulatory body responsible for quality assurance requirements in the sector (Stander, 2017:16).

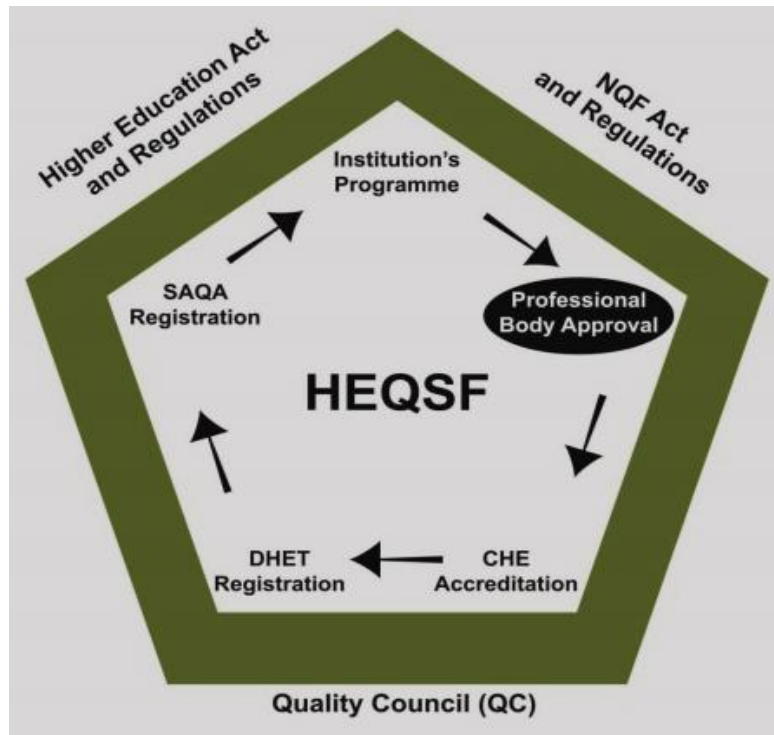


Figure 1: Legislative framework for private higher education institutions (Stander, 2017)

The following forms of external quality assurance are identified by Stander (2017:19): accreditation, audits, institutional reviews, standard setting and ranking. Stander (2019:20) state that standards are not all the same and that standards that are set are dependent on their contribution to an institution's quality assurance. Standards are therefore not rigorous indicators of quality. Ranking as an external quality assurance form is linked to standards where strict assessment tools are used to quantify evaluations and decisions on institutional rankings (Stander, 2017:20). Further focus will be limited to accreditation as a form of external quality assurance as it is an effective form of professional control that relates to meeting minimum standards, accountability and transparency in processes of the institution and aims to enhance quality.

2.3.2 Accreditation as an external quality assurance measure

Accreditation as a quality measure has at the core the rationale of accountability and improvement of the quality that is offered in the HE sector (Stander, 2017:19). General accreditation criteria have been developed through a quality assurance framework, which specifies minimum standards that all programmes offered at the HEI have to adhere to.

The purpose of the accreditation process is to ensure accountability and improvement in quality (CHE, 2004b:1).

The following table summarises the criteria that is used for accreditation and what the criteria requires of HEIs to meet minimum standards.

Table 1: Accreditation criteria (CHE, 2004c:6)

Minimum standards that have to be met for accreditation
<p>Minimum standards for activities and processes which have an impact on the programme input and resources that are needed to offer the programme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme design • Student recruitment, admission and selection • Staffing • Teaching and learning strategy • Student assessment policies and procedures • Infrastructure and library resources • Programme administrative services • Postgraduate policies, regulations and procedures
<p>Activities and processes which have an impact on the delivery of the programme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme coordination • Academic development for student success • Teaching and learning interactions • Student assessment practices • Coordination of work-based learning • Monitoring of programme output and effectiveness
<p>Activities and processes which have an impact on the monitoring of the programme output and effectiveness include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student retention and throughput rates • Employability of graduates • Acknowledgement of programmes

- Programme reviews

Stander (2017:4) determined that with the implementation of a programme accreditation framework in 2004, as well as the DHET regulating private HEIs more closely since 2002, the external focus on quality in HE has received more attention than in the past. Armstrong (2014:5) defines accreditation as

an industry-wide process defined and enforced by people who believe strongly in the definitions of excellence contained in the set of existing value propositions; the goal of the process is to assure that business model changes in HE are sustainable and serve to increase performance along the existing definitions of excellence.

Through accreditation, the market is assured that the qualifications offered by the private HEI are on standard. This is an external measure implemented to ensure the quality of the service provided by private HEIs to the broader public and society (Thaver, 2006:861).

Luckett (2007:100) argues that there are four approaches to quality assurance in the HE sector (Figure 2) and that these approaches differ according to stakeholder views. The views of stakeholders differ in terms of 1) what the definition of quality is and who determines this definition, 2) by whom the criteria of evaluation are set and what their focus is in setting the criteria, and 3) what the envisioned result is in the setting of the quality standards. Figure 2 shows the tension between the power and control relationship of internal owners and external bodies (horizontal axis) and the purpose of assurance (vertical axis) that are present in the quality assurance process (Luckett, 2007:99). This viewpoint was confirmed in a study by Stander (2017:138) which concluded that different private HEIs have different views and definitions of the term quality and that the definition used by an HEI has an impact on how quality is assured in the institution.

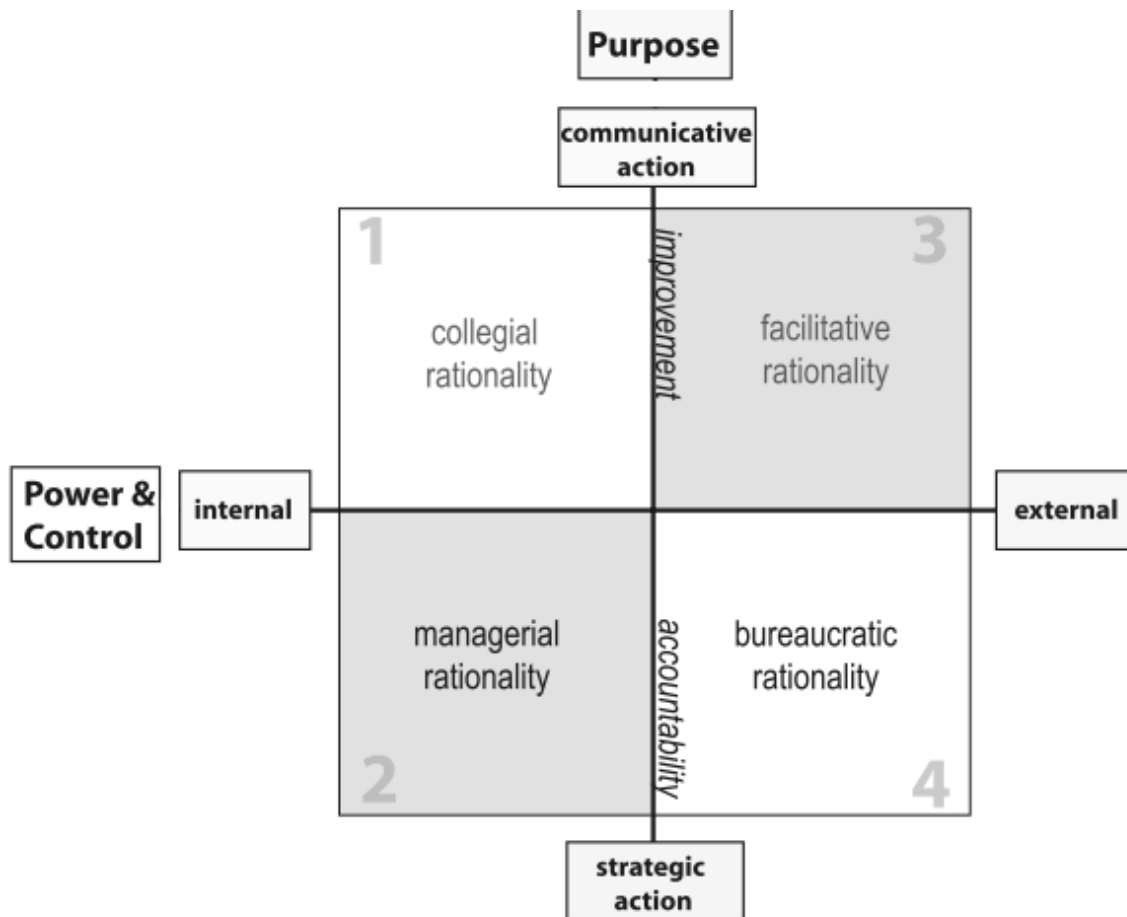


Figure 2: A conceptual framework to approaches in quality assurance (Lockett, 2007:98)

In quadrant 1, quality is defined as academic excellence and is based on peer reviews being conducted between institutions. The quality emphasis is therefore on the disciplinary excellence as opposed to good teaching of the discipline.

In quadrant 2, quality is defined through using the institution as the criteria, and good management through a central control approach is seen as the solution to achieving organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, management's goals and objectives are the criteria used to measure the performance of the institution.

In quadrant 3, quality is measured through evaluation criteria that are generated by the external evaluators involved in the institutional evaluation process. The main viewpoint in this approach is that self-regulation is the correct approach to ensure quality and that HEIs can ensure quality offerings within the institution through benchmarking and involving the support of external peer reviewers.

In quadrant 4, quality assurance is achieved through strong government interventions, with the purpose of quality assurance being accountability and control. This approach involves an external evaluation in which the criteria set are based on the government's purpose and goals for HE. With this approach to quality assurance the same criteria and treatment are applied to all institutions in the sector and no allowance is made for differences in context between institutions.

This bureaucratic rationality quadrant is especially relevant to private HE in South Africa. Lockett (2007:98) argues that it is only an assumption that is made that external quality assurance in the HE sector will in effect lead to the improvement of the quality in the sector. Sallis (2014) confirms that although these external measures do have a place in ensuring quality, they are more quality controls and that quality improvement is more important and difficult to achieve. External quality assurance systems assist with the control of quality, but cannot affect improvement as external quality assurance only enforces compliance with the set criteria (Lockett, 2007:111). Quality improvement can only be effective if internally adopted by the institution and becomes a management approach which focuses on delivering service quality; ensuring quality in the sector will be determined by the development of capacity within institutions to implement quality in all area of their operations (Alani *et al.*, 2014:232).

Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:578) refer to the management and improvement of service quality as being a critical aspect in improving private HE and one that can be seen as the differentiating factor for success between private HEIs, but also between public and private HEIs.

2.3.2.1 Massification of higher education

According to Hornsby and Osman (2014:712) "massification of HE" is the phrase used to describe the rapid increase in student enrolments since 2010. Massification of HE affects the quality of HE (Thaver, 2006:861), and challenges the traditional view of universities being centres of so-called elite education that are only available to a select few (Hornsby & Osman, 2014:712) with institutions that now have to accommodate massive student enrolments (Thaver, 2006:861).

According to Hornsby and Osman (2014:712), the massification of HE can be contributed to governments using HE to:

- address and resolve social and economic inequalities that exist in countries;
- drive the government's social justice agenda; and
- contribute to the public benefit through the assumption that graduates will earn higher salaries and therefore there will be an increased contribution in the form of tax revenues.

Thaver (2006:861) argues that with the massification of HE, the question is raised regarding the quality of teaching and learning that is offered at institutions. This is an aspect that Hornsby and Osman (2014:712) reiterate with a view that the drive for massification of public HE is not supported by a proportionate increase in human, financial and physical resources to these HEIs, which directly affects quality. Through the National Development Plan as proposed by the National Planning Commission (2013:59), the government is driving further increases in student enrolments with a vision to increase university enrolments by at least 70% by 2030. This massification challenges the quality of the learning environment and teaching and learning practices in public HEIs.

Massification and the inability of the public HE sector to effectively absorb the increased demand is contributing to growth in the private HE sector (Stander, 2016:24). Private HEIs are using this to their advantage, as these institutions can now differentiate themselves from public institutions by “providing higher education products and services to students that the public higher education sector is mostly unable to do” (Stander, 2016:139). Private HEIs can allocate the necessary resources to student support due to the business model they follow and their business and entrepreneurial approach (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266). Van Schalkwyk (2017:25) argues that a shift is needed in HE legislation to accommodate private higher education institutions that have the capacity, infrastructure and expertise to alleviate some of the pressures on public higher education, without the over-regulation that is currently applied.

2.3.3 Internal quality measures in private higher education institutions

Internal quality measures refer to the implementation of internal strategies and processes by organisations that lead to the achievement of the organisation's objectives and goals (Stander, 2017:16). Stander (2017:18) highlights the following as practices that form part of internal quality assurance in private HEIs:

- development of quality assurance policies;
- the setting of standards within HEIs that guide decisions and actions; and
- development of performance indicators and benchmarks that are used in internal evaluations of an HEI in achieving its goals.

Van Schalkwyk (2017:280) argues that generic service quality models are not adequate and that HE, and specifically private HE, needs to use industry-specific service quality dimensions to ensure private institutions can deliver services that satisfy student expectations and needs.

The expectation from stakeholders (Figure 3) in the HE sector has moved towards expecting more quality in the form of improved performances, institutional effectiveness in operations, improved stakeholders' satisfaction and market competitiveness, and that quality assurance in private HEIs is focussed on the student (as customer) and their satisfaction (Stander, 2017:22,139).



Figure 3: Stakeholders in the higher education landscape (Stander, 2017:71)

Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:3, 578) argue that service quality will ensure brand building and credibility of the organisation in the minds of consumers, but also note the value of service quality to institutions in laying the foundation for customer loyalty. This is confirmed by Sallis (2014:5), who notes that consistent quality of service builds confidence with customers. Hwang and Choi (2019:1) found that service quality is essential in HE. Sallis (2014:1) further lists various important sources of quality in education, but states that quality can only be developed and achieved if students' needs as customers are put first and satisfied. Private HEIs should therefore focus on student satisfaction and ensure they adopt a consumer-oriented approach (Hwang & Choi, 2019:3). Stander (2017:139) found that private HEIs define quality differently to how public HEIs, and that quality assurance practices and processes in private HEIs are predominately focused on customers – and therefore student satisfaction. Due to private HEIs being operated as corporate businesses, fundamental business management aspects like total quality management form part of their day-to-day operations (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:29).

Van Schalkwyk (2018:7) defines service quality as “meeting and exceeding students' expectations and perceptions by constantly rendering a reliable service that conforms to pre-determined requirements for which the student is willing to pay, resulting in tangible and intangible benefits”, a description seen as relevant to this study.

Total quality management as a management model has a place in HE, as quality increasingly makes the difference between success and failure and can be the differentiating factor amongst institutions in a competitive HE sector (Sallis, 2014:1).

2.3.4 Total quality management principles

Total quality management is defined by Heizer *et al.* (2017) as the “management of an entire organization so that it excels in all aspects of services that are important to customers”. Goetsch and Davis (2014) define TQM as the approach organisations adopt to do business by attempting to maximise the organisation' competitiveness through continuously improving the quality of their service and processes. Therefore, with the implementation of TQM in an organisation, the organisation commits to continuously work towards excellence in all areas of the organisation to ensure customer satisfaction through offering quality service. Stander (2017:23) argues that quality control and quality

assessment are systematic evaluations used to measure the service against a pre-determined standard and forms part of the operational working of the institution, where appropriate actions will be taken if the service does not comply with the specified quality standards (Al-Shafei *et al.*, 2015:1).

HEIs have started to realise the importance of quality and are constantly improving thereon to stay competitive (Alani *et al.*, 2014:231). Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:578) state that the management of service quality, if based on TQM, will result in internal and external customer satisfaction in private HE. Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:579) narrow this down further to not just quality, but to service quality specifically, and emphasise that private HEIs can create value by offering a service of high quality.

2.3.5 Total quality management in private higher education

Manatos *et al.* (2017:161) found that literature on HE indicates that there are three levels of quality management integration within institutions. The first is on the process level, secondly on the organisation level, and thirdly the existence of quality management principles within the institution. Al-Shafei *et al.* (2015:2) identified three dimensions of quality (Figure 4) in HE, namely that institutions perform their core functions (dimension 1) and through the process (dimension 2) followed in the performance of these HE functions, the output (dimension 3) of satisfied graduates is achieved.

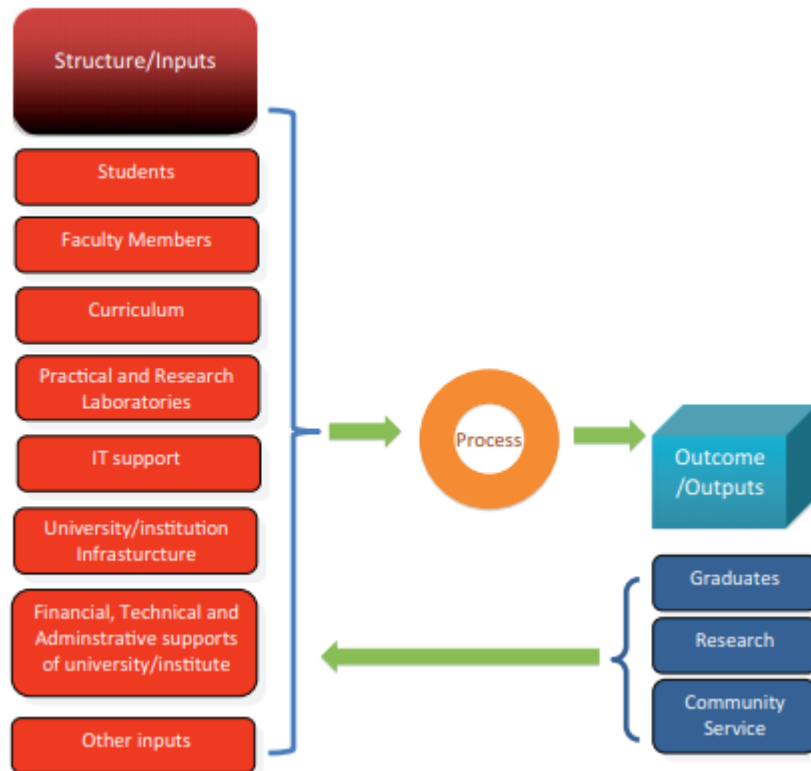


Figure 4: Dimensions of quality in higher education (Al-Shafei *et al.*, 2015:2)

Where Al-Shafei *et al.* (2015) identify three dimensions in the service quality, Van Schalkwyk (2018) identified 30 dimensions of service quality and contributed to the development of a service quality framework that consist of five pillars that support service quality and are specifically focused on private HE in South Africa. The identified dimensions and pillars from the study are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Service quality dimensions relevant to private higher education (Van Schalkwyk, 2018:199)

Quality input	Customer emphasis	Productivity and systems approach	Reputational service leadership	Quality output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality teaching • Application and registration • Accreditation • Continuous improvement • Benchmarking • Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student support • Customer-centred approach • Communication • Personal attention • Internal customer focus • Managing expectations • Administrative capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Technology • Operations management • Information management • Service quality standards • On-time performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty expertise and senior academics • Reputation • Leadership and top management commitment • Culture • Trust • Loyalty • Ethical practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability • Practical application • Unique product offering • Contribution to society • Assessment, measurement and feedback

Customer satisfaction will be achieved if institutions continuously improve their performance through the use of quality management processes (Manatos *et al.*, 2017:161) and the adaptation of the dimension of service quality in HE (Van Schalkwyk, 2014:199).

Private HEIs are part of a growing and rapidly changing environment with various challenges as well as opportunities. With HEIs offering a service, the quality of the service can distinguish institutions from competitors and provide a competitive advantage. Van Schalkwyk (2017:49) argues that through ensuring efficiency and being service-oriented, private HEIs will be able to survive in the highly competitive HE environment. Through the improvement of service quality by applying TQM principles, institutions can employ a service strategy that fosters a total commitment to the improvement of their service, which could lead to an increased market share (Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2016:581).

For private HEIs to be able to take advantage of such a competitive advantage, it is important that they know their students and ensures their value proposition to the market satisfies the changing needs of students. It is therefore relevant to look into the value proposition of private HE.

2.4 VALUE PROPOSITION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Various definitions of the term “business model” exist, with Newman (2015:8) concluding that a business model refers to how an organisation captures and develops the specific way in which they have designed their processes to create value for their customers. Edralin *et al.* (2018:79) reiterate this view with defining a business model as the understanding of an organisation’s unique value-creation logic that is observed through the business processes implemented to create value for stakeholders, which is a broader concept than just customers. Armstrong (2014:2) further identifies the four important components of a viable business model as:

- the value proposition of the organisation;
- the resources of the organisation;
- the processes within the organisation; and
- the profit formula of the organisation.

A business model provides a strong and shared holistic view to the organisation and all stakeholders, which allows for the analysis and combination of possible opportunities and insights with regards to how certain business model elements can be manipulated and changed to form new alternatives or enhance the value proposition of the organisation, ultimately leading to satisfying the needs of customers and stakeholders (Newman, 2015:8). Tian and Martin (2014:932) argue that the business model is not just focused on ensuring the profitability of HEIs, but also ensures ethical, transparent and sustainable activities are taking place within the institution.

For private HEIs, this means that they can align their institutional business models with their priority of transferring knowledge (Sutin, 2016:18). Van Schalkwyk (2017:155) further indicates that, due to private HEIs being business-driven, these institutions have the freedom to be creative, innovative and profitable through the business models they employ. This freedom must be seen in the context of the study from Miller *et al.* (2014:265) that discuss the environment in which private HEIs operate, and the importance of how

various stakeholders are also continuously shaping these HEIs' business models. This is due to each stakeholder group having different objectives and needs that must be satisfied by the institution.

The major stakeholders involved in the HE sector (Figure 3) are all external to the institution, but these external stakeholders are also the main drivers of business model changes within a private HEI. It is therefore important that HEIs understand the various stakeholder needs. These institutions are not operating in insolation, and although private HEIs have the freedom to be innovative in their business models, they are also limited through the regulatory environment they operate in, as well as also being influenced and shaped by various external stakeholders' needs.

The business model of a HEI is determined by the following three elements (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266):

- the activities performed by the institutions;
- how these activities correlate to form the structure of the institution; and
- the actors involved in the various activities within the institution.

An example of a business model tool that can be used to provide a holistic view of institutions is Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas (BMC). The BMC provides an overview of the four pillars which form the structure of the institution's business model, namely product innovation, customer relationship, infrastructure management and financial viability (Newman, 2015:11). These four pillars support the four components of a viable business model, namely the value proposition, resources, internal processes, and profit formula of the institution as previously highlighted by Armstrong (2014).

The product innovation pillar of the business model focuses on the sub-elements of the value proposition and targeted customer segments. This pillar can be utilised by private HEIs to ensure a competitive advantage as they can differentiate themselves through the value proposition that directly addresses the needs of the target market through innovation and continuously changing and adapting the institution's business model due to external forces. The value proposition of HEIs for various stakeholders should be defined, and the strengths of the HEI communicated to all stakeholders (Tian & Martin, 2014:933) through the business model that is followed. The value proposition pillar is the area where private HEIs have the freedom to improve their service quality to ensure customer satisfaction. Newman (2015:9) states that the value proposition of the

organisation is the reason customers choose one institution over the other because it satisfies a specific need that the customer has, or satisfies it in a specific way. For private HEIs, the value proposition is therefore a differentiating factor and important in the supporting of the HEI in developing its competitive advantage (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266).

Due to the changes experienced in the HE sector, combined with the growth in the last few years, private HEIs need to re-examine their business models – and more importantly their value proposition – to stay relevant and competitive (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:3). These institutions have to use these changes as opportunities and determine ways to meet customer needs (Sutin, 2016:18) through focusing on the quality of service they offer (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:49) and ensuring customer satisfaction (Manatos *et al.*, 2017:161). By focusing on the value proposition of the institution, private HEIs will be forced to look at the needs of their students, which will guide them on what their strategies and revenue models should be and ultimately result in a positioning tool that institutions use to distinguish themselves from other providers in the sector (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:4).

2.4.1 The value proposition of private higher education

It is therefore important to focus on what the value proposition of private HE is. This will be discussed in the context of the two primary purposes of HE, namely to equip students with advanced skills for the workplace and to transfer knowledge and understanding of the world (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:6).

The value of the service is defined by the customer, and this is also true in HE where the value and the associated changes required in value creation will be defined by students (Tian & Martin, 2014:939). This value should enhance their quality of life on the completion of their qualification (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:6). Wenger (2015:1) supports the argument that HEIs should see students as customers, and argues that it is crucial to understand customer needs in terms of how they want to receive the service of education. The value of HE, according to Tomlinson (2018:713), is derived from HEIs' goals of transferring knowledge to individuals to empower them; therefore the value of HE is self-formation, and cognitive and social development for the student. HE is able to produce economic value for students through ensuring the development of productive capacity within the student, but remains a future-orientated good because the investment in HE is made in the present with the value only being assessed by the long-term impact it will

make in a student or graduate's life (Tomlinson, 2018:717). Tomlinson (2018:715) argues that the service in the form of knowledge creation and transfer should not just focus on the immediate gratification of student needs in the form of employment after studies but ensure future value in the form of genuine transformation of the student's life. Sutin (2016:23) further observes that HE is a service industry where institutional well-being is connected to the changing needs of students and where the students are unforgiving when institutions do not stay relevant.

The value of education is not tangible and the only experience regarding the value that the student will have during their studies will be the quality of the service students receive from the institution.

For this study, service is defined as the service delivered by the private HEI to students from the student's first contact with an institution, therefore from application and registration at the HEI, through to completion of a qualification and graduation, finally becoming an alumnus of the institution.

Through in-depth knowledge of students' needs and the profile of students, private HEIs can determine how they should structure the service they offer to students (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:5). Armstrong (2014:7) is also of the opinion that the value proposition of customers is constantly changing, resulting in a further challenge and opportunities for private HEIs. Newman (2015:5) argues that the answer to deliver new value propositions is ensuring that private HEIs are able to innovate their business model.

Heizer *et al.* (2017:271) highlight ten determinants of service quality, and it's important to note that nine of these determinants fall within the service process side for the institution. Van Schalkwyk (2017:119) expanded these dimensions to 30 that are relevant for private HE in South Africa. It is therefore important for private HEIs to ensure processes are designed to include these attributes and dimensions as a first step in determining their service offering when looking at their value proposition. For private HEIs, there is the added threat of strong competition within the private HE sector, as well as competing with a still functional public university offering which carries strong brand loyalty from society.

The improvement of the quality of the service offered by a private HEI could be the key factor for success according to Van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:578). This is due to private HEIs understanding the changing consumerist entitlements of students and

thereby adjusting their way of offering the relevant programmes, but also demanding rigorous academic expectations and intellectual effort from students (Tomlinson, 2018:717). It is therefore important to ensure, monitor and develop quality within private HE to stay relevant and competitive within the sector.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter set out to review the literature regarding TQM and service quality in HE as part of the service sector. It began by looking at the HE landscape in South Africa and the growth and expansion of this sector, as well as the existence of private HEIs within this sector. The literature review regarding TQM looked at the principles of TQM in general, and concluded with service quality in HE and the significant effect it has on the value proposition of institutions. It was concluded that private HEIs can use service quality as a value proposition to attract students and gain a competitive advantage over public HEIs, due to the massification of HE and public HEIs experiencing problems with ensuring the quality of the service offered due to the massification trend. Private HEIs operate like any business in the economy and continuously face new challenges, but these institutions are able to seek alternative means to grow and compete in a highly competitive and regulated environment through their offered value proposition. Private HEIs can ensure a sustainable competitive advantage if they ensure quality management is implemented in all aspect of the service delivery to their students as customers.

The next chapter presents the empirical research, wherein the research methodology and results from the empirical study are presented.

CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to determine the influence of TQM on service delivery in a private HEI and whether it can provide a private HEI with a competitive advantage.

This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to understand the phenomena being studied. It describes the research design and methods used to collect and analyse the data to achieve the stated objectives of the research.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research methodology refers to the researcher's approach in studying phenomena during the research process and should be chosen to fit the research strategy involved (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008:144). Two research paradigms exist, namely positivism or quantitative, and phenomenology or qualitative (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:12). The fundamental differences between the two research paradigms can be highlighted as follows:

Table 3: Difference between research paradigms (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:30)

Positivism paradigm	Phenomenological paradigm
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research is deductive, with empirical testing of theory.	Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research is inductive, with generation of theory from data.
Research tends to produce quantitative data.	Research tends to produce qualitative data.
Research is concerned with hypothesis testing.	Research is concerned with generating theories.
The outcome of the research is to generalise from the sample used in the research to a population.	The outcome of the research is to generalise from one case to another.

According to Vaismoradi *et al.* (2013:398), qualitative research is the study of a particular phenomenon to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and lives of the participants. A qualitative research methodology was chosen as the appropriate research design for the study, which was informed by constructionism and interpretivism (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:41). Social constructivism attempts to make sense of the social world through viewing knowledge as being constructed through how the individual defines reality and is therefore concerned about the subjective experience of a person's everyday life and how the individual understand the world, rather than the reality of the natural world (Andrews, 2012:39).

Social constructivism was therefore deemed appropriate for this study, as it allowed the researcher to explore in their natural setting the perceptions and experiences of both managers and students within a private HEI on what the value proposition of private HE is, and if TQM and service quality could be influencing a student's choice of HEI. As the study focuses on experience, reasoning, perceptions and research through the collection of non-numerical data, the use of a qualitative research design supports the contribution to knowledge on topics of TQM and service quality within the private HE sector through utilising an interpretive approach (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:41).

Figure 5 outlines the structured approach that was followed in this research study.

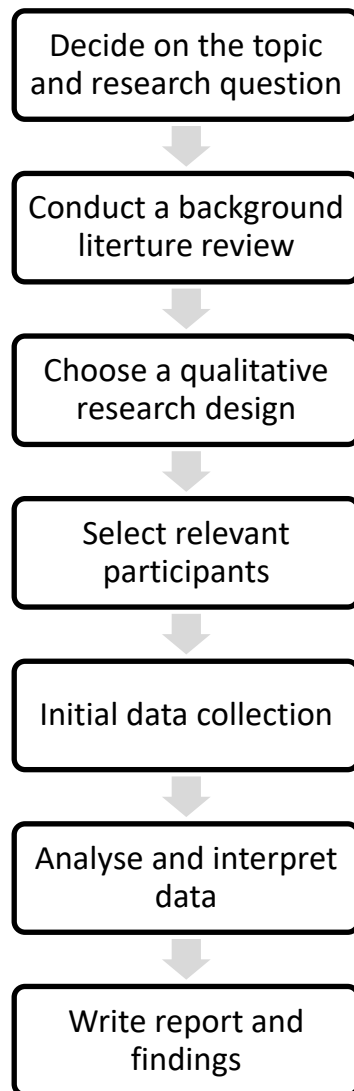


Figure 5: Steps in the research process (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:1)

Step 1: Decide on the research topic and research question

Deciding on the field of research and a research question was the first step the researcher took. As the researcher has experience in the HE sector, and with the challenges experienced in this sector over the last couple of years, the decision was made to investigate and better understand the phenomena of differentiation between institutions in the sector, with specific reference to the value proposition and service quality.

Step 2: Conduct a background literature review

A broad literature review was conducted on the national and international HE sector and the challenges experienced. The literature review focused on areas that included competition in the sector, challenges and changes to the sector in the last couple of years, what the value proposition of HE is, as well as issues regarding TQM and service quality in HE.

Step 3: Selection of research design

The researcher had to distinguish which research method to use by reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The researcher decided on a qualitative research method and identified a single case case study as the most suitable research design to be used.

Step 4: Selection of sample

The unit of analysis was selected and the necessary approval was obtained to conduct the research at the institution. Formal and informed consent was also obtained from all participants that were interviewed during the research process.

Step 5: Data collection

The sources of evidence commonly used in case study research are (Yin, 2009:102) documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artefacts.

For the research study documentation review and interviews were deemed to be appropriate for the research conducted.

Step 6: Analyses and interpretation of data

A data analytical strategy is important in any case study research. The analytical strategy should be supported with analysis techniques that ensure the validity of the research conducted (Yin, 2009:136). For this research, a general analytic strategy was followed that was supported by analysing the data with the pattern-matching technique. The data was displayed by identifying themes and subcategories from the interviews and focus group discussions. The qualitative data analysis was supported by utilising ATLAS.ti, a

qualitative data analysis software programme which visually connects selected texts and codes by means of diagrams.

Step 7: Write a report and findings

The research was based on theoretical propositions that are reflected in the research questions and literature review that was conducted. After the data analysis and interpretation, a conclusion could be drawn and theory modified to the current case, with recommendations made to Akademia as private HEI.

3.2.1 The researcher's role

Through the qualitative research approach, words are emphasised over the quantification of data, an inductive approach is used to generate theory on the way that individuals interpret their social world and how they view social reality (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:30). This means that the researcher is the primary instrument used to collect and analyse the data, and ensure sense is made of what is said within the participants' context. In this study, the focus was on the experience and perceptions of managers and students regarding the value proposition of a private HEI and how the implementation of service quality contributed to the adaptation of the value proposition of the institution. These experiences and perceptions were investigated by selecting staff members who were responsible for the implementation of service quality in the HEI, as well as senior students that have been at the HEI for more than one year. Due to the researcher being the primary research instrument for data collection, it was important to ensure ethical measures were in place throughout the research.

3.2.2 Ethical measures

The ethical principles that were maintained throughout the research included (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:120):

- obtaining informed consent from all participants;
- ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participants; and
- ensuring no deception is involved in the research process.

(a) Informed consent

In the research study, informed consent was obtained from all the participants through communicating with each participant what is expected from them during the research process prior to them engaging with the researcher. The communication to participants included (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:124):

- the aims and implications of the research project;
- the option to withdraw at any time during the research; and
- being informed that the research is free from prejudice and that participants could ask questions at any time to clarify issues they might not understand.

Approval was obtained from the executive committee of the private HEI involved, and the relevant management team members were contacted. The management members were provided with information regarding the research study and the benefits for the institution expected from the study. The management team voluntarily agreed to be part of the research study. Senior students in their second or third year of study at the institution, were identified through the administrative department of the HEI and were sent information regarding the study. A time and venue were communicated to students where they should meet if they wanted to take part in the study. All students that attended the focus group discussions voluntarily agreed to participate subject to their anonymity and confidentiality being guaranteed.

(b) Anonymity and confidentiality

All participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their identification during and after the information have been gathered. None of the sources from who information have been gathered would be known after the data collection took place.

(c) Deception and privacy

The researcher informed all participants of the purpose and process that would be followed during the research study and obtained informed consent from all participants to ensure deception was avoided during the research process and that the privacy of participants was ensured (Appendix A).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the plan and structure that is used to guide the researcher through the research method and analysis of the data to obtain answers to the research questions that were proposed (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:101). The research design therefore provides the framework through which the data used in the research will be collected.

3.3.1 Case study method

The research design used in this case was an exploratory case study. Case study research studies one specific case in detail, intending to develop a holistic and full understanding of the case in question (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008:162). Yin (2009:18) defines the case study method as the investigation of a phenomenon within the actual environment in which it exists, and where the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the environment itself are not noticeable. The research study is thus an empirical enquiry into the specific case that was selected, where the selected case takes centre stage in the investigation process. The researcher was able to explore a specific private HEI in detail, including the environment in which it operates and internal processes with regard to service delivery to students from registration to completion of studies, and the experience of students during these processes. A single case design was deemed appropriate as the case being studied is representative of business-driven private HEIs in the HE sector in South Africa. The experiences and perceptions of private HE that are learned through this research study are assumed to be informative about the changing HE landscape in South Africa.

The case study method allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of private HE and TQM developments within the contextual conditions of the HE sector (Yin, 2009:18). It allowed the researcher to answer the “how” and “why” questions through the research study (Yin, 2009:11). The research question asked how service delivery quality is ensured through the regulatory environment externally to the HEI and TQM that is internal in the HE institution. The “why” question to this research is investigated through gathering information on the perception of both managers and students on whether service quality offers a competitive advantage to be used as differentiating factor for the institution.

The case study was cross-sectional, as data was collected from the unit of analysis at one point in time and not over a period of time and thus provided information about the current functioning of the institution. Cross-sectional data refers to data that is collected at a given point in time from the unit of analysis where longitudinal research collects the data from the same unit of analysis at different points in time (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:107).

3.3.2 Sampling

Sampling techniques are used to reduce the data that is needed for the research study through establishing the population from which data needs to be collected, rather than all possible elements in the population (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:210). The available sampling techniques can be divided into two categories as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Sampling techniques (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:213)

Probability sampling	Non-probability sampling
<p>The probability of a case being selected is known and the probability of being selected is equal for all cases.</p>	<p>The probability of a case being selected is not known and research questions and objectives cannot be answered if it requires the researcher to make statistical inferences about the characteristics of the case. A generalisation of findings is possible, but cannot based on statistical grounds.</p>
<p>Techniques used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple random • Systematic • Stratified random • Cluster 	<p>Techniques used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quota • Purposive • Snowball • Self-selection • Convenience

Non-probability sampling, and specifically purposive sampling, was used as the sample was selected by the researcher from a specific group of private HEIs, knowing that it does not represent the wider population but is representative of the unit of analysis that the study will be investigating (Gentles *et al.*, 2015:1778). The interviewees and focus groups used in the research study were selected based of their knowledge and experience of private HE, and the models and processes used within private HE (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:102). Maree (2007:178) confirms that a purposive sampling as method is preferable when research is done on a specific area or aspect of interest. Purposive sampling refers to the strategic sampling of participants due to their relevance to the research question (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:186).

Purposive sampling in this research study provided the researcher with the opportunity to gather in-depth information to clarify the research question of the case study as the participants were selected because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research question, are central to the phenomenon in the study, and are located at the same study centre of the institution (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:239). In using purposive sampling the study focused on an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the management team and registered students of a private HEI.

3.3.2.1 Unit of analysis

The sample was heterogeneous and four managers across the top and middle management structure of Akademia were included in the research study due to these individuals forming part of the quality processes in the phenomenon being studied. Ten registered students in their second or third year of studies also formed part of the sample as they are key in investigating the experiences of the service quality and value proposition of the case studied.

Akademia was established in 2012 and registered as a private HE institution. All qualifications are offered in the distance mode of delivery, which means qualifications are registered by the DHET with no required contact between lecturers a student. However, the HEI offers support in the form of video-conferencing technologies at various learning centres. The majority of qualifications offered are in the commerce field of study. In the seventh year since its establishment, the HEI had 1 100 students registered for the 2019 academic year.

The sample size was deemed suitable for the research questions and objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:234) due to the following reasons:

- The data was properly analysed and saturation was reached, with no new evidence being found (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:178).
- The sample size was heterogeneous and diverse with regards to experience and perceptions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:239).
- Multiple sources of data collection were used that included document review, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which ensured rich and in-depth data.

3.3.3 Data collection

As stated, multiple data sources were used in the data collection process. The single case study method, combined with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, was used for cross-checking and supplementing the data obtained from the literature and document review. Triangulation of the data was done to ensure control over the factors that might influence the validity of the research conducted, and to provide a valid and reliable way of research interpretation (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:45). Yin (2009:40) refers to four design tests that can be used to ensure the quality of qualitative research studies.

Table 5: Four design test (Yin, 2009:41)

Test of outcome	Method used in case study research to ensure outcome
Construct validity through the identification of correct operational measures for the phenomenon being studied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure multiple sources of evidence (triangulation) are used in the research investigation when data is collected (Cohen <i>et al.</i>, 2000:112). • Establish the chain of evidence that will be used in the research investigation when collecting data.
Internal validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating pattern matching in data analysis. • Including explanation building when data is analysed. • Addressing rival explanations during data analysis.

External validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use theory in the research design of single case studies. • Analytical generalisation of the result to some broader theory.
Reliability that ensures errors and biases are minimised in the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use case study protocols during data collection. • Continuous development of a case study data-base during data collection.

The data was collected from three sources, namely:

- document review and analysis of national and international literature available on the topics covered in the research;
- in-depth interviews with four middle and senior managers in the institution; and
- focus group discussions with ten registered second and third year students studying at the institution.

3.3.3.1 Document review and analysis

During the document review process relevant research studies, policies and procedures relating to private HE were studied to confirm and increase the understanding of the sector. A literature review of existing business models and value propositions of private HE and TQM and service quality processes used in HE was conducted (Yin, 2009:103). All internal documentation regarding quality frameworks, student satisfaction and adherence to regulatory requirements for the private HEI was reviewed.

3.3.3.2 In-depth interviews

Individual in-depth interviews are an important data collection method in case study research (Yin, 2009:106). The interviewing process was conducted with senior managers as well as middle management within the institution. The purpose of the interviews was to determine what mechanisms exist and are used to ensure service quality, and whether the institution follows a TQM approach. The interviews were further used to clarify the managers' understanding of the regulatory framework and determine their opinion on the support it provides HEIs in terms of ensuring service quality. Appendix A contains the

interview guide that outlines the flow of the questions and topics that were covered during the interview.

The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to gather information that has a direct bearing on the research objectives, as well as clarifying any uncertainty that resulted from the document review (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:268). The interview as method to gather data had the advantage of engagement between interviewer and interviewees, in a guided conversation and not a structured enquiry (Yin, 2009:106).

Semi-structured questions were used during the interviews to acquire unique and personalised experiences and perspectives from the interviewees, with the flexibility to ask follow-up questions as needed (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:216).

Due to time constraints on the availability of the HEI's participating senior and middle managers for lengthy interviews, the following process was followed after approval for the research had been received (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:227):

- an email request was sent to all interviewees outlining the scope of the research and the request for an interview;
- this was followed up with a telephone call a few days after the email to answer any questions interviewees might have regarding the research and the interview;
- an interview guide (Appendix A) was prepared that outlined the flow of the questions and topics that were covered during the interview;
- a time and date was scheduled that suited each interviewee;
- permission was obtained from interviewees to record the interview and prevent the loss of valuable information; and
- field notes were taken during the interview.

3.3.3.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group interviews allow the researcher to conduct interviews with a select group, resulting in an interaction between the group members and generating data and outcomes from the discussions that take place (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:288). Group interviews were scheduled with registered students of the private HEI and allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of their experiences regarding the quality of the service delivery of Akademia as private HEI. The focus group discussions further allowed the researcher to

clarify and understand data that was obtained through the document review process. The focus group discussions were conducted in a central location at a time that was suitable to the students. An interview guide (Appendix A) was provided to participants prior to the focus groups discussions taking place.

3.3.3.4 Data collection process

The following steps were followed prior to and during the data collection process:

Step 1: Ethical approval had to be obtained from the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) at the North-West University (Appendix C).

Step 2: Obtain permission from Akademia to conduct the study at this institution (Appendix D).

Step 3: Identification of participants.

Step 4: Scheduling of interviews with participants.

Step 5: Transcription of interviews.

3.3.4 Data analysis

Various techniques and practices are used in analysing qualitative data and will depend on the researcher's own style of thinking (Yin, 2009:127). Figure 7 presents the process followed by the researcher in this data analysis process, with a brief discussion of the process hereafter (Creswell, 2009:185).

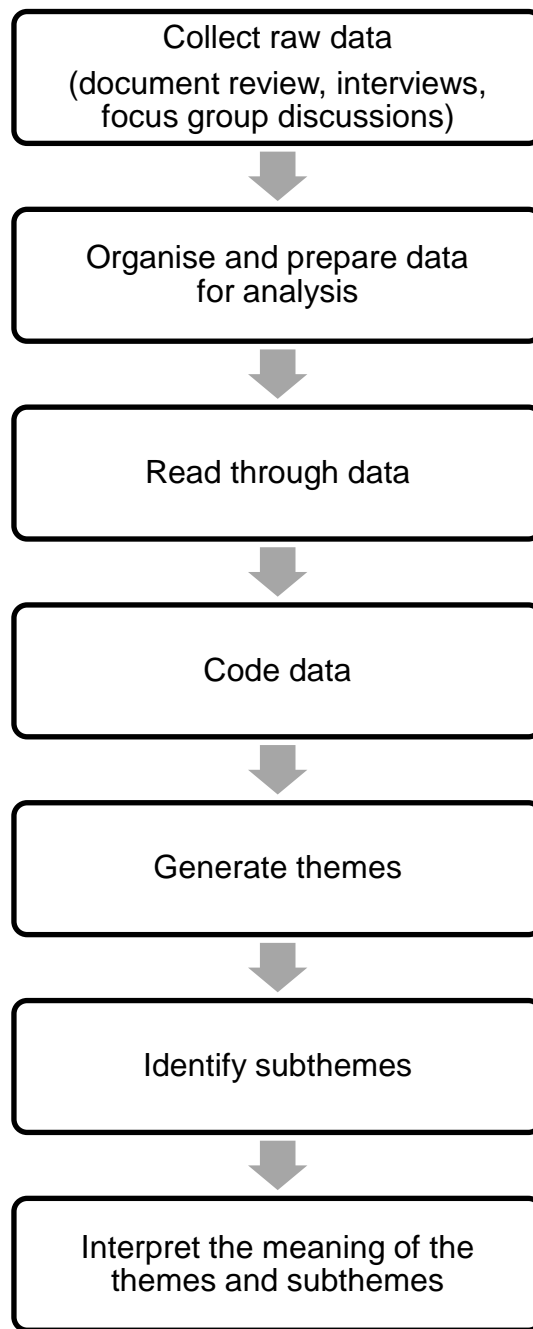


Figure 6: Data-analysis process followed

(a) Organise and prepare the data

This process involved transcribing the interviews and typing up all field notes that were made. This process was continual (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014:458) and allowed the researcher to adjust and redesign interview questions as the research progressed.

(b) Read through all the data

A general sense of the information obtained during the interviews and focus groups discussion was obtained by reading through the transcribed interviews. This allowed the researcher to reflect on the overall meaning of feedback during the data collection process and general ideas of the data could be formed.

(c) Code the data

The coding process was done throughout the research process by employing Excel, in vivo coding and ATLAS.ti to formulate themes, and ensuring that the key terms used by participants were captured (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014:596; Creswell, 2013:258). Coding entailed the review of all transcriptions and creating categories in relation to the data collected, through grouping the data together under a term in areas where the data was regarded as of the same type.

(d) Generate a theme and description

The transcribed data was organised into themes and subcategories, and patterns and themes from the interviews and focus group discussion were noted (Henning, 2018:105). The results of the responses were compared with the research question and summarised to establish if the data fit the purpose of the study and could answer the research question (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2012:600). The major themes were then used in the arguments and discussions. This formed the evidence of the research study (Henning, 2018:107).

The data analysis and transcribing of the interviews and focus group discussions were done throughout the data collection process to avoid data overload and to be able to identify areas that needed further clarification during the interviews and focus group discussions (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:231). Validity refers to the valid findings and interpretations of the researcher where subjectivity and personal views held by the researcher are eliminated to affect data interpretation (Creswell, 2015:158). Validity was achieved through triangulation of the data through document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Riege, 2003:75). Participants were able to provide multiple viewpoints throughout the data collection process due to the semi-structured and open-ended questions.

3.3.5 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity refers to the trustworthiness of the results and is made up of four criteria (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:44):

- Credibility, which refers to how accurately the experiences of participants are represented in the data analysis. Credibility in the research study was achieved through verbatim transcription of the interviews and focus group discussions, as well as using multiple methods of data collection.
- Transferability refers to whether the findings of the research can be transferred to a wider population or different contexts. Due to the case study only focusing on one private HEI, further research amongst other private HEIs can be done in future.
- Dependability is parallel to reliability in quantitative research (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:44) and refers to the “auditing” of the researcher’s research process. Dependability in the research study was achieved by keeping complete records of all phases of the research process.
- Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the researcher during the research process. Confirmability in the research study was ensured through the researcher not allowing personal values or theoretical inclinations to influence the research conducted.

3.3.6 Reliability

Reliability refers to the demonstration that different researchers, through using the same methodologies, will be able to replicate research outcomes (Riege, 2003:81). According to Yin (2009:45), the aim of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases of the research study. The following steps were taken by the researcher to ensure reliability:

- ensuring the data was accurate and comprehensive throughout the data collection and analysis process;
- not deviating from the codes while data was analysed; and
- establishing the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees and focus group members.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 3 provided information regarding the research method that was employed to explore the use of TQM dimensions in adjusting the value proposition of a private HEI. Reasons for selecting a qualitative research method were justified and the data collection and data analysis process described in detail.

Chapter 4 will analyse and discuss the results of the empirical study.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the qualitative findings of the research study are reported and discussed in relation to the research question. In view of the research study, an analysis was undertaken of the research results obtained through the individual semi-structured interviews which were conducted with middle and senior managers from a private HEI and focus group discussions with senior students registered at the institution.

All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted during office hours at the head office of the HEI in question as suitable to the participants. The interview questions for managers and students are attached as Appendix A. The data that was obtained through the research study was focused on the views of participants in terms of the questions posed to them. Quotes that were used in the study were not qualified, as anonymity was ensured by following the North-West University's recommended ethical research processes.

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION

The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of and explore the perceptions and experiences of managers' and students' real-world settings (Andrews, 2012:39) as discussed in the research methodology. The purpose of this study was not to generalise and therefore the data was analysed and examined in totality with comparisons drawn between cases to determine similarities and differences through a social constructivist approach in the interpretations.

Table 6 provides a summary of the participants involved in the study with the management participants identified as M1-4 and the ten students as S1-10.

Table 6: Summary of the participants involved in the study

Participants	Management level		Registered students	
	Senior management	Middle management	Second year student	Third year student
M1		8 years' experience in private HE		
M2	12 years' experience in private HE			
M3		3 years' experience in private HE		
M4	25 years' experience in both private and public HE			
S1			5	
S2				5

The transcribed interviews and focus group discussions were analysed and the emerging terms from the different participants were highlighted and coded. The emerging codes from the data are summarised in descending order in Table 7.

Table 7: Codes and code frequency

Code	Number of times found in the text
Service delivery	52
Student satisfaction	32
Quality	29
Standards	21
Private vs public institutions	18
Change	13
Student-centred	12
Pillars of service quality	6
Values	6
Regulatory framework	4
Accreditation	3
Competitive advantage	2
Core value proposition	1

The researcher analysed the data according to the data analysis process as described earlier. Transcribed interviews and focus groups discussions were analysed by using the exact words of participants via in vivo coding, from which subcategories and themes were then created (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014:596). The qualitative data analysis was supported by using ATLAS.ti, which visually connects selected texts and codes. The aims and research objectives of the research, as discussed above, were used to shape the themes and subcategories in which the raw data were then grouped and organised.

Three key themes emerged from the data (see Figure 7).

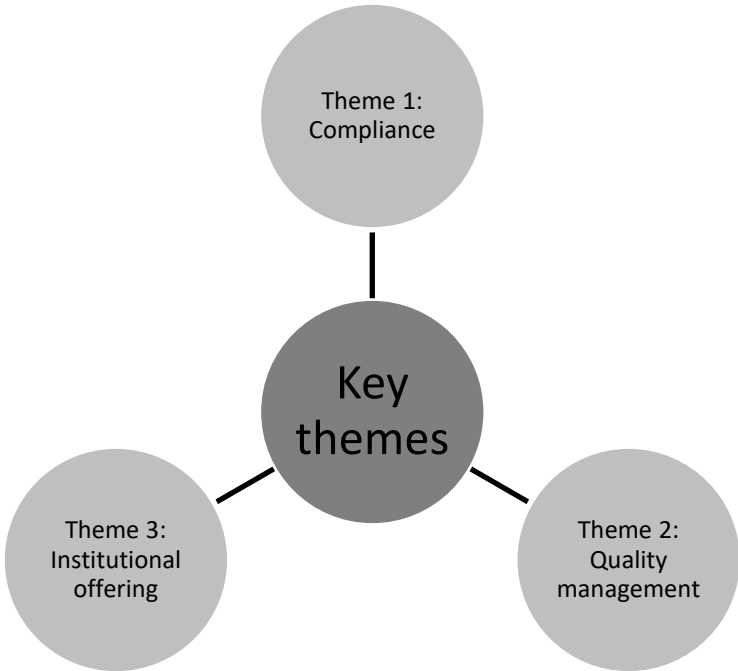


Figure 7: Conceptual illustration of key themes

Categorising the raw data in Table 8 as the subcategories emerged under each theme assisted the researcher in analysing the data:

Table 8: Themes and subcategories

Theme	Subcategory
Compliance to the regulatory framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effect of compliance
Institutional offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private approach to HE offering • Adaptable and flexible processes • Customer-centred approach
Quality management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TQM implementation • Quality in service delivery

The qualitative findings are discussed according to these themes and subcategories. In each case, examples from interviews are quoted in the text.

4.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The results obtained from the research were organised by using codes to firstly identify the subcategories (as illustrated in Table 8), and secondly to identify the themes. These subcategories and themes were used as main headings and subheadings in the discussions that follow.

4.3.1 Compliance to the regulatory framework

The participants' responses were analysed to determine what their viewpoints were on the contribution of the regulatory framework towards ensuring quality in the HE industry. Chapter 2 provided background information of the composition of the HE industry and elaborated on the existence of both private and public institutions within this sector, as well as highlighting the requirement that all institutions have to adhere to the same regulatory framework and regulations imposed by the various regulatory authorities.

The managers had different views with regards to the effect of the regulatory framework on quality and whether the existence of the regulatory framework and the accreditation process is effective in ensuring quality. The viewpoints ranged from middle managers that felt that the public is assured of minimum standards in all programme offerings through the regulatory framework, to senior managers who regard the accreditation process as a once-off bureaucratic exercise that ensures minimum standards but not promote quality.

Participant M4 noted that "... the regulatory framework consists of a relatively small organisation that must oversee more than 150 institutions; it is not possible for them to oversee quality... ". Minimum standards are set and checked when HEIs submit programmes for accreditation or register an institution, and therefore constitutes an external quality process that all institutions have to adhere to, and as viewed by participant M2 "... on paper you can claim that private and public institutions have the same standards, because they must meet the same framework... ".

During the student focus group discussion it was evident that the students had limited knowledge about the regulatory framework for HE. None of the students in the focus

group discussions was aware of the accreditation process that programmes offered at institutions had to undergo and that the accreditation process ensured minimum standards in the programmes that they were registered for. A student from group S1 answered that "... all I know is that the institution is registered. I am not sure what you are referring to regarding accreditation...".

Students are therefore knowledgeable about certain areas of the regulatory framework, and from their perspective registration of HEIs means that quality programmes are offered. This confirms the work of Thobega (2010:2637), who found that appropriate and reliable accreditation reassures students that programmes and degrees offered by an HEI meet acceptable academic and professional standards. Therefore, the comment made by M3 that "... enforceable quality assurance measures have improved the quality offered and the public can see it, it has had a tremendous positive impact on the institutions..." is important to note, as the objective of a regulatory framework is to provide stakeholders, and in this case primarily students, with the assurance that when institutions are registered, they meet certain minimum standards.

In summary, compliance with the regulatory framework does have a positive effect on a private HEI given the history of private education as discussed in Chapter 2. Findings recorded by Thaver (2006:862) support the views of both middle and senior managers that quality assurance is the adherence to a set of minimum standards that are critical to ensure quality in the institution. The work of Stander (2017:1) highlights quality assurance as the assurance to students that the offerings of an HEI are credible compared to other institutions in the industry. This confirms the perception of students in the study.

Although the quality assurance process is external and more focused on quality control, the public's perception that is created through adherence to the regulatory framework is that private education is of the same standard and offers the same quality as public institutions. This is fundamental for the growth of private HE, and because excellence (and therefore quality) is difficult to define in the HE context, the quality assurance approach that is adopted in the HE industry aims to promote accountability and enhancement in HE (Grifoll, 2016:95). The regulatory framework therefore provides basic support to institutions to ensure quality and standards, but is structured in such a way that it is not measure continuously, which means ad institutions also have to address quality in their internal processes to ensure a high standard offering to students (Sallis, 2014:6).

The regulatory framework requires institutions to comply with the minimum standards set, but it is also important to further investigate the institutional offering of private institutions.

The below graph provides a summary of the terms from the data that was used by the participants under the theme.

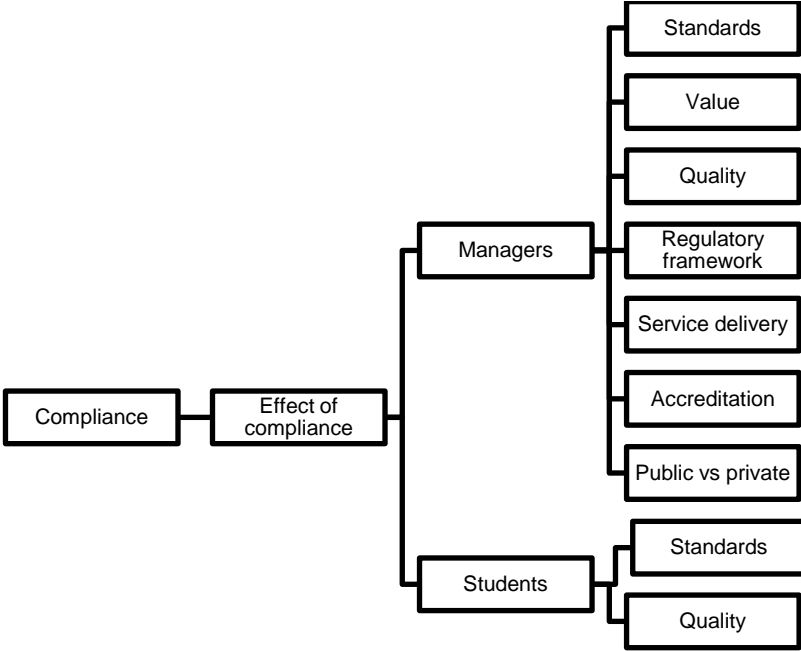


Figure 8: Summary of terms under the theme of compliance

4.3.2 Institutional offering

Private HEIs form part of the broader HE industry and operate in a highly regulated environment, while also competing with public universities. The following subcategories emerged from the data analysis:

- private higher education offering;
- adaptable and flexible processes; and
- student-centred approach.

4.3.2.1 Private approach to higher education offering

The unique characteristic of private institutions is the fact that their operating models are business driven. Although these institutions operate in a highly regulated environment,

they do have the freedom to be more innovative, flexible and creative through their business processes, to remain not only competitive but also profitable.

There was a strong feeling amongst managers that public universities remain strong competitors due to the history and legacy that these institutions have, where participant M3 noted that "... what we offer must be better than the public institutions' offering..." if private institutions were to remain competitive. The notion of a difference in what is being offered between public universities and private institutions could also be found in the data from the student focus groups. From the students' perspective, the private institution offered them a more conducive environment for studies, with a participant from S2 stating that "... it is safer [...] I do not want protests... ". Students were further probed to elaborate on why they favoured a private institution and one S2 participant commented that the major reason was that "... I did not want to get lost in the masses and if the masses decide today we do nothing then I must do nothing. I like what the institutions offers me, it is smaller and not for everyone".

For participant M1, the difference between public and private institutions were on a service delivery and quality level, noting that "... in public institutions, service quality, the actual service from registration to completion of qualifications, are no longer on standard. There are many applicants to these institutions, they are not concerned about the service they provide... ". The undertone of massification was noted in managers answers. The perspective from students also included elements of massification as a differentiating factor, as per the previous comment from participant M1. All students agreed that Akademia allowed them to be more than just a number. There is a need with students to be seen as individuals and to not get lost in the numbers at public universities, and the reason why they chose the private institution was due to its size. It was noticeable that while middle managers focused on the competition with larger public institutions with a focus on service delivery, all students saw the smaller offering as a value proposition of the institution.

In summary, although the focus was to determine what the offering of private HE was, the interviews and group discussions moved naturally towards comparing the two types of institutions with each other. Both managers and students referred to the element of massification in public HE. The massification in public institutions provides an opportunity for private institutions to differentiate themselves, not only through the added support they

are able to finance through their business models (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266), but also in remaining smaller in size and allowing students to feel that they are receiving individual attention and the necessary support to be successful. There seems to be a need for smaller institutions, and not all students associate larger institutions with better offerings, whether that be in programme variety or on a quality level. This corresponds with the work of Tomlinson (2018:723), who argues that the intrinsic value of higher learning is in the emancipatory scope for effecting fundamental change amongst students through transferring advanced knowledge to students which results in their empowerment. This fundamental change in students cannot be achieved with the massification of higher education, and private institutions have the opportunity and advantage of working with smaller student numbers and ensuring developed graduates.

4.3.2.2 Adaptable and flexible processes

Except for complying to the requirements of the regulatory authority in terms of institutional registration and programme accreditation, private institutions have the flexibility and autonomy to decide on how they want to operate within this framework on an organisational level.

Three of the four managers felt that private institutions have more flexibility in changing processes that are not effective and compromise quality. The view of participant M4 was that "... the structures and bureaucracy of public institutions are not always conducive to quality assurance. For private institutions, flexibility and quick adaptation are what sets us apart ...". One senior manager was of the opinion that adaptability and flexibility decreases as an institution grows, and that it is therefore not always easy to change on demand. During the data analysis process, it was concluded that the perceptions of the majority of managers were of viewing flexibility mainly from the focus point of providing quality services to students. Participant M1 noted that "... as far as possible, we try to focus on all departments and processes to provide excellent service in what we do. Our students are important to us...".

Interestingly, from the students' perspective, as mentioned by three students in both the student groups, were the more lenient processes in terms of timelines at the institution – specifically the registration period at Akademia. Students are experiencing the flexible and adaptable processes of private HE on the process level, with one participant from S1

commenting "... I was too late to enrol at another institution. The later closing date for registration made it possible for me to still register...".

Due to private institutions also being business-driven, it is concluded that they have to ensure that their processes are effective and therefore they gear themselves towards having processes with shorter timelines.

Although four students indicated that the mode of delivery suited them, and saw that as flexibility in processes which are linked to private HE, the regulatory framework requires institutions to select the mode of delivery prior to programme accreditation. It is therefore noted that the value proposition is linked to the distance programme offering of Akademia. Private institutions are more widely spread across South African than the public universities and this creates the freedom for students in how and where they study. This allows students to choose the best pathway for them to complete a qualification.

In conclusion, managers experience the flexibility of private HE as allowing them to improve quality by being able to make quicker decisions regarding processes that are not working, whereas students experience the flexibility in terms of access to HE due to later registration periods at Akademia. This is linked to the work of Stander (2017:22), indicating that the expectation from stakeholders has moved towards expecting quality in the form of improved performance, institutional effectiveness in operations and that HEIs should be focussed on student satisfaction.

4.3.2.3 Student-centred approach

Private HEIs operate as businesses and receive no funding from government; they therefore have to generate their own income whilst also competing with other private and public HEIs. The focus on the customer is therefore important for private institutions, as they are dependent on students for their existence.

Khoo *et al.* (2017:432) demonstrate the importance of service delivery when a customer-centred approach is adopted. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an institution depends on their evaluation of the quality of service provided. The evidence from the interviews confirms the arguments of Khoo *et al.* (2017:433), emphasising the importance of a student-centred approach by private institutions. It was evident that all managers agreed that customer service to students is crucial to their operations and success. Key

messages that were identified in the interviews suggested that students are at the heart of the operations of the private institution.

Students' experience of whether the institution follows a student-centred approach was tested during the focus group discussions. Three subcategories, namely support, communication and convenient processes, was identified during data analysis as the areas where students felt that Akademia was indeed student-centred in its approach.

a) Support

The perception of seven of the ten students were that they received the necessary support from the institution, academically but also on a personal level, with one participant from S1 commenting that "... lecturers show interest when a student just 'disappears' and they follow up to find out if they can help us ...". This is an important aspect in view of the work of Tomlinson (2018) that was discussed earlier with regards to the true value of HE and therefore the comment made by one participant from S2 that "... I do not just want to be a number and that is what happens at universities. I want to feel that my interests as a student are being looked after, and here I am talking about academic interests ..." is an indication of the value of student support as present in the private institution under scrutiny.

b) Communication

The communication the students received from the institution prior to commencing with studies, as well as during their studies with regards to changes and the availability of coursework on the LMS, was seen by two students as the HEI acknowledging them as customers and providing the necessary services required.

This must be seen in the context of the private institution being used in the case study only offering distance education. There are several challenges that can be experienced by students in a distance mode of delivery, ranging from students not staying on schedule, not having access to lecturers to discuss difficulties in comprehending the study material, and in general not staying connected with their studies. None of the student groups viewed any concerns about feeling on their own or being disconnected from the HEI and this is an indication of how the institution is filling the gap that exists in distance education.

c) Convenient processes

Four of students indicated that the processes at the institution, for example the registration process, is very effective with a comment being made by participants in S1 that "... they know what they are doing, my application was completed quickly and I had direct contact with the same person all the time until my registration was completed ...".

In summary, the student-centred approach is closely linked with the above section on the flexible and adaptable processes that private institutions can adopt. It is again also noticeable that from the students' perspective there is a need for individual and personal interaction, which correlates with their view on why they chose the private institution over a public university. Findings from this study indicate that the private institution focusses on developing processes and approaches that are more customer-centred and correspond with the conclusion from a study by Van Schalkwyk (2018) who also identified personal attention as a driving force in private institutions.

The below graph provides a summary of the terms from the data that was used by the participants under the theme.

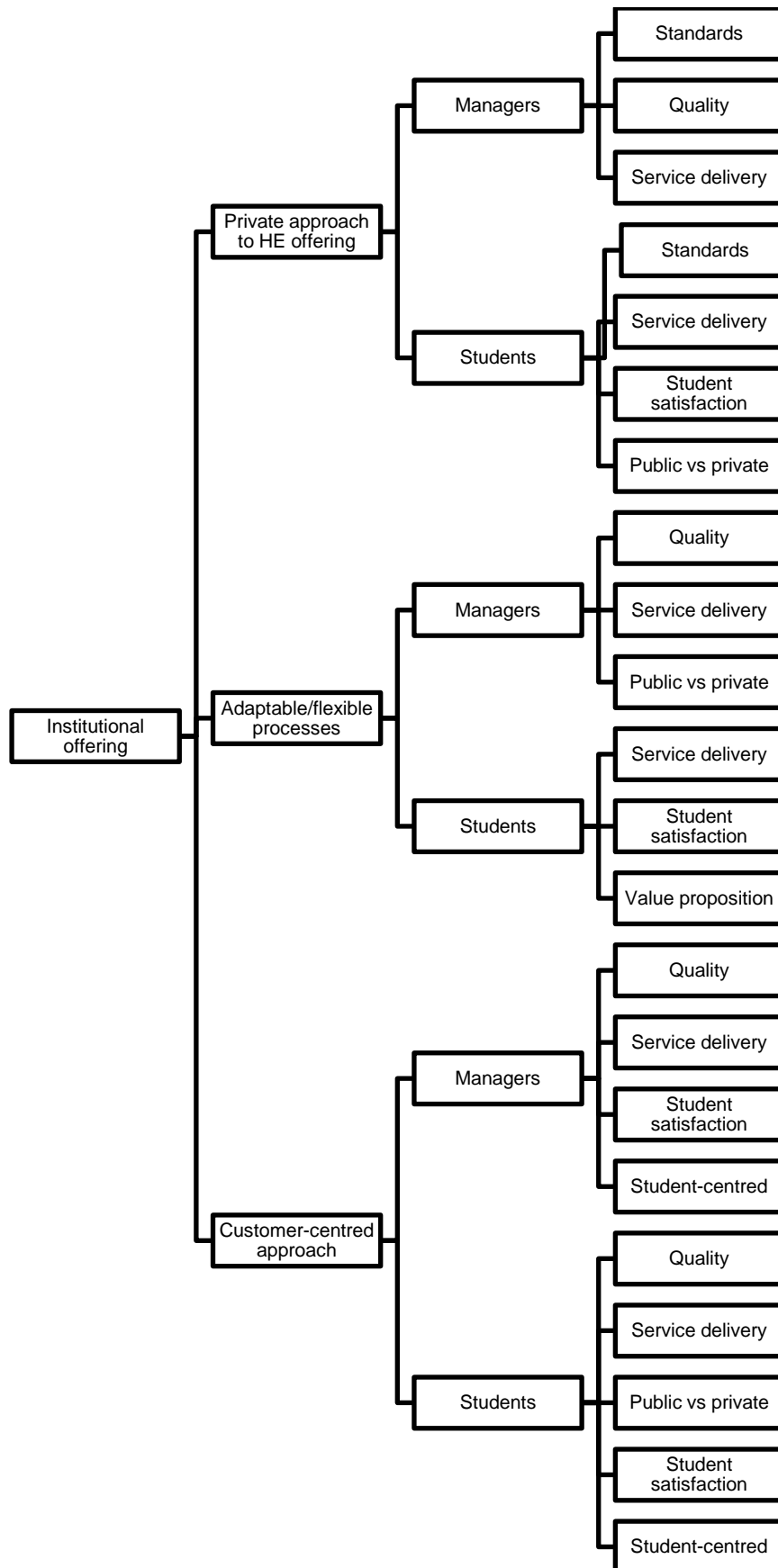


Figure 9: Summary of terms under the theme of institutional offering

4.3.3 Quality management

For a private institution, adherence to the regulatory framework is an external quality control mechanism that reassures the public with adherence to minimum standards. However, internal quality measures are also needed to ensure service quality and refer to the implementation of internal strategies and processes by institutions to ensure service quality as well as satisfying student needs. TQM is used by organisations to continuously improve their quality and service and remain competitive, and is therefore relevant to the private institution, which also operates as a business.

The focus of this category was to determine if TQM was used by the private institution, and also to determine what students' experience was of changes in processes. The focus groups therefore only included senior students that have completed at least one year of studies with the institution.

During the data analysis, the following two subcategories emerged:

- impact of TQM implementation; and
- quality in service delivery.

4.3.3.1 Impact of TQM implementation

Various activities are performed in a private institution, both from an academic and operational level. These activities, when grouped together, form a process in the institution and both the activities and processes are relevant regarding TQM.

The focus during the management interviews was to determine how TQM is implemented in the organisation and what monitoring actions are taken to ensure student satisfaction. From the interviews, it was concluded that the institution adopts a TQM approach and believe that the institutional capability to deliver quality in both academic and service delivery must be enhanced by continuously improving the processes of the HEI to deliver value to students.

The quality in academic service delivery is also linked to the regulatory framework and therefore an external quality assurance element already exists, but an internal quality assurance component is also important to private HE. This was evident from the comment from participant M3 who noted that "... formal quality assurance processes are built into

the institution's structures. In other words, the roles of staff are such that someone oversees the implementation and monitoring of quality ...". Private institutions cannot only rely on the external quality assurance in communicating quality and standards to the public, as quality service delivery is important for private institutions that are business driven.

All managers were in agreement that processes are key in ensuring student satisfaction, with participant M4 commenting that "... processes must be structured in such a way that it can be immediately determined if something is not working, and if not, to then correct it ...", which also eludes to the continuous monitoring that needs to take place as part of the TQM approach. It was confirmed by participant M3, who replied that "... both administrative and academic monitoring processes are in place to ensure student service delivery is up to standard. This happens continuously ...".

It was determined that TQM is implemented through the use of an internal quality framework for teaching and learning that has been adopted by the institution, and student surveys are used to monitor student satisfaction in terms of overall service delivery of the institution. To ensure objectivity, the HEI also schedules peer evaluations, which is not a regulatory requirement, but which provides the institution with a competitive benchmark. The student-centred approach discussed previously is also an indication of the institution's commitment to TQM as essential in meeting students' (as customers) requirements.

During the student data analysis phase it was found that there are positive and negative sentiments amongst the focus groups with regards to the continuous monitoring in the form of surveys and changes that are implemented by the institution, as indicated by the comment of participant M2 that "... we try to change our processes when we find it does not work" and the confirmation by participant M3 "... all processes are constantly reviewed, it must work for the institution but also the students ...".

The student data analysis indicated the below responses:

Table 9: Student response to change

Positive experiences due to changes made and continuous monitoring	Negative experiences due to changes made and continuous monitoring
<p>“Since I started my studies in 2016, the reliability of the systems have greatly improved [...] it is significantly better ...” (S2)</p>	<p>“The ongoing evaluation that forms part of the modules this year is a waste of time for me personally ...” (S2)</p>
<p>“They make changes [...] sometimes there may be too many and as students we feel it is different every year, but through that, we can also see it continuously improving ...” (S2)</p>	<p>“For them, the students are important, but some of the changes this year do not work for full-time students. Yes, they change, but they also need to remember the needs of working students ...” (S2)</p>

The data analysis shows half of the students favouring the changes and the other half commenting negatively on the continuous changes that are made. The negative feedback from students suggests poor communication about quality management activities to students, but it is important to meet all customer requirements and the institution’s process redesign might be too quick.

In summary, quality management integration in the institution exists on a process and organisational level. It is evident that students are also aware of the TQM practices in the institution and that it results in improvements. Further analysis of the perception of quality in the institution due to the implementation of TQM will now follow.

4.3.3.2 Quality in service delivery

Quality was one of the terms most used by participants. The concept of quality in HE is complex and different definitions exist. The regulatory framework is based on the concept of quality in terms of how the institution carries out the core purpose of HE, and includes the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution’s functioning (CHE, 2004a:11). Although the regulatory framework is an external quality assurance mechanism, from the above context there must be an inward-looking view of quality. This qualitative introspection is

what the data from the study also revealed, with the all managers agreeing that quality is the institution’s responsibility, with participant M4 indicating that “... all staff are responsible for quality service to students and all interest groups. It is about the experience you create and that people will choose you over public institutions where there are poor service delivery and protests ...”.

The data analysis further revealed that the term “quality” was in the majority of cases used by both managers and students together with “service delivery”. Table 7 indicates that these two terms were found in high numbers within the transcribed interviews. The data indicates that the focus in terms of quality from a management perspective is broadly in two areas, namely student satisfaction and as a differentiating factor amongst competitors, as indicated by the quotations in the table below.

Table 10: Dimensions of service quality delivery

Quality service delivery to ensure student satisfaction	Quality service as a differentiating factor
“... quality of service means ‘in time’ in dealing with student inquiries, registration and all aspects of the student’s academic life.” (M3)	“... we need to attract and recruit students through the good service we provide from their first contact with us.” (M4)
“... what is important to me is the quality of service delivery, from registration to alumni, all processes must make the path for student as easy as possible so that they can focus on their studies.” (M2)	“... poor service will cause a lot of damage to the institution, when it is still being established.” (M2)
	“... service delivery is important for private institutions because we get no subsidies, the students are the funders.” (M1)
	“... without good service, we will not be able to exist, it is what differentiates us

	from other institutions, public and private.” (M1)
	“... service delivery is a competitive advantage and students want to feel they are important and not just another number.” (M4)
	“... the market is competitive, and the public institutions have good brands [...] a lot of effort and cost goes into recruiting students, so it is important to retain them by [...] good service delivery” (M3)
	“... students are recruited through quality service [...] this in turn, attracts more students ...” (M4)

Findings from the student data indicated that quality in service delivery had a positive impact on the students’ view of the standards of the institution. The students used the term “quality” interchangeable with “standards” or “high standards”. Key aspects that related to quality service delivery included the following: respect for the institution, feeling that the institution is more than able to compete with public institutions, the support distance students receive through the online platform, the timely feedback from academic staff, the content of the modules, the international acceptance of programmes offered. One participant from S1 made the statement that “... although I initially had high expectations for the programme, I can say that my expectations and needs were exceeded with the good quality and quality service delivery I received ...”.

In conclusion, the data revealed that the institution focuses on quality service delivery as a means of differentiating the institution from competitors in the market, but also to ensure student satisfaction through adopting a student-centred approach in their service delivery. Stander (2017:89) determined that private institutions are more focused on student satisfaction and meeting student needs in their broader HE function of teaching and

learning, and in the overall efficiency and effectiveness of these institutions. Service quality is confirmed by Paul and Pradhan (2019:262) to be the most important dimension of value that has an impact on student satisfaction. For the private institution, student satisfaction is important, as it ensures the sustainability of the business-driven institution.

The below graph provides a summary of the terms from the data that was used by the participants under the theme.

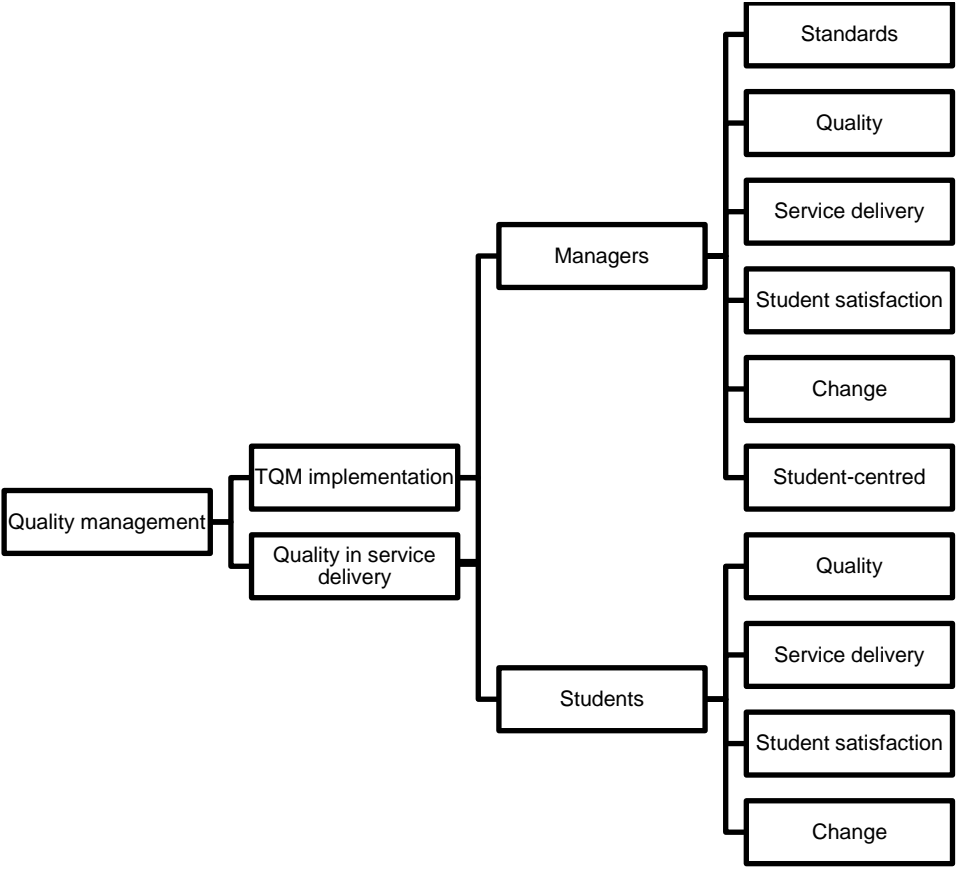


Figure 10: Summary of terms under the theme of quality management

4.4 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The external quality mechanism and adoption of TQM principles in a private HEI, and the impact these mechanisms have on the quality of delivery and value proposition of the institution, are graphically summarised in the following figure.

Figure 11 illustrates the findings of the research conducted in a summary format.

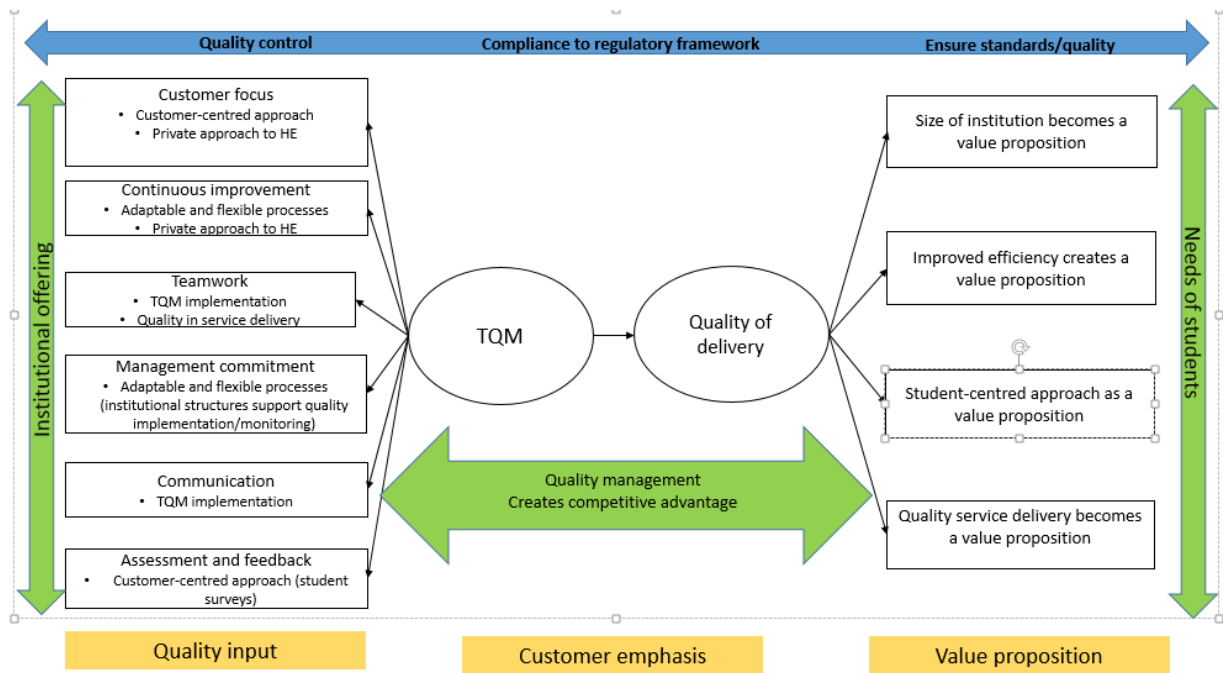


Figure 11: Findings of the research study

Compliance to the regulatory framework is external to the institution, but assists in ensuring quality in private HEIs. It is experienced as a form of quality control by the institution, and from students' perception it ensures standards and quality. The institutional offering in the left of figure 11 correlates with themes found in the literature study, these themes were experienced as dependent variables by participants in the study.

The adaptation of TQM in a HEI resulted in a customer focused approach to service offering, as well as continuous improvements in the service offered. These are important elements of quality management and the institutional offering and are an indication of the importance of internal quality improvement as opposed to external quality control.

Internal quality measures are of fundamental importance to private institutions that are business-driven and therefore reliant on student numbers to fund their operations. The institutional offering must therefore create the competitive advantage for the HEI, and the implementation of TQM principles are key in this process. Quality is defined through using the institution as criteria, and good management through a central control approach is

seen as the solution to achieving organisational effectiveness and efficiency. The focus should be on quality inputs to the delivery of services to students.

The principles of TQM, namely customer focus, continuous improvement, teamwork, management commitment, communication, assessment and feedback have all been established in the interviews with the institution's management. Through the analysis of the student responses, it was determined that TQM implementation resulted in quality of service delivery which is a competitive advantage for the private institution in the market. Various value propositions that the institution could offer students exist and are developed due to the adoption of a TQM approach in the institution's operations. It is important for the institution to look at the needs of students, as this will guide it on strategies that should be followed. It is also the positioning tool that the institution uses to distinguish itself from other providers in the sector. If the quality inputs are focused on the customer, the value proposition will attract students to the private institution.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the analysed data obtained through the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher indicated how the collected data was analysed and developed into themes and subcategories. From the emerging themes, the research findings were discussed and supported by using verbatim accounts of participants. Evidence from the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 was applied to support the findings. A graphical representation of the research findings was included to illustrate the effect TQM implementation has on a private HEI.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusions reached in the research study, as well as the limitations of the research and recommendations specific to future research and Akademia in particular.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of the research and conclusions of the results obtained with regards to the research objectives. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for the private HEI in question are made. Research opportunities that emanate from this study and recommendations for future research are presented.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 1, an overview was given of the HE context in South Africa (section 1.2.1), with a focus on private HE (section 1.2.2), the effect of external changes on the value proposition of HE (section 1.2.3) and the importance of service quality for private HE (section 1.2.4).

The problem statement contained the need to determine the effect of TQM implementation and service quality in a private HE institution, and the effect it has on the adaptation of value proposition (section 1.3). To provide evidence-based research on service quality in private HE, objectives were determined in the aims of the study (section 1.4).

The qualitative research study and a single case study methodology (section 1.6), enabled the researcher to understand participants' views and perceptions. For the purpose of triangulation and confirmation, three methods were used to collect data (section 1.6.4). Data analysis was used to interpret the research findings (section 1.6.5). All ethical measures were adhered to (section 1.7) and the limitations of the study were noted (section 1.8).

Chapter 2 focused on the different HEIs that exist in South Africa, with a focus on the regulatory changes that impacted private HEIs (section 2.2.1). Quality in the HE industry was discussed and background information to the regulatory framework was provided (section 2.3.1). Accreditation as an external quality assurance measure is discussed (section 2.3.2) and the effect that massification of higher education has had on quality is highlighted (section 2.3.2.1). The existence of internal quality measures in private HEIs

is identified (section 2.3.3) and the TQM principles (section 2.3.4) are introduced to support the discussion regarding the importance of TQM for private HEIs (section 2.3.5).

The value proposition of private HE (section 2.4) is explained, followed by further discussion on the value proposition of private HEIs (section 2.4.1).

In Chapter 3, the research methodology (section 3.2) and research design (section 3.3) are discussed. The researcher used the case study research methodology (section 3.3.1) based on a single case, and provides a brief discussion on the sampling used and the unit of analysis in the research (section 3.3.2). Data collection methods used in this case study include document review and analysis (section 3.3.3.1), in-depth interviews (section 3.3.3.2) and focus group discussions (section 3.3.3.3).

The data analysis process (section 3.3.4) was explained, and trustworthiness (section 3.3.5) and reliability (section 3.3.6) of the research was confirmed.

In Chapter 4 the researcher focuses on the data analysis and the discussion of the findings from the research conducted with middle and senior managers as well as senior students at the private HEI. The data presentation (section 4.2) provided information on the terms, themes and subcategories that were identified in the empirical study. The findings of the study (section 4.3) were presented with verbatim quotations included to support the findings. The three main themes that emerged from the data were:

- Compliance (section 4.3.1)
- Institutional offering (section 4.3.2)
- Quality management (section 4.3.3)

A graphical representation of the summary findings was provided (section 4.4).

Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions of the study, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings from the literature review on the HE landscape in South Africa and quality management in a private HEI, and the findings of the empirical study, the following research conclusions are presented.

5.3.1 Conclusions from the literature study

An in-depth literature study was conducted on the HE industry in South Africa, where private HE, external and internal quality measures in HE and the value proposition of private HE were investigated.

5.3.1.1 Higher education in South Africa

The South African HE industry has undergone tremendous change over the last couple of years and moved from an unregulated industry to a highly regulated one. The regulatory framework has at its core the intention to provide minimum standards and quality in the industry through external quality measures in the form of national policies and frameworks.

The higher education sector is experiencing various challenges, as most sectors in the economy are, with the massification of higher education and the increased demand for education being some of the challenges experienced. Public and private institutions play a complementary role to each other, with public institutions being able to provide access for students that are left out by the limited capacity of the public sector (DHET, 2018; Stander, 2017:4; Van Schalkwyk, 2017:24; Thaver, 2006:860).

Private HEIs have a different operating model and are business-driven, and as such need to generate their own funding. These institutions have to optimise efficiency in their operations if they want to remain competitive (Ellis & Steyn, 2014:445), continuously review their value propositions (Lichy & Birch, 2015:1) and ensure they stay relevant to customer needs (Ibrahim & Dahlan, 2016:600).

5.3.1.2 Ensuring quality in higher education

The process of quality assurance was introduced, with the CHE as the guarantor of quality in the industry to increase public trust in the HE industry as a whole and protect students against poor quality offerings by private HEIs. External quality assurance is a mechanism used by the government to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in the HE industry (Lockett, 2007:98). Accreditation of HEIs and all programmes is one of the mechanisms to ensure accountability and assist with the improvement of the quality that is offered in the HE industry (Stander, 2017:19).

According to Sallis (2014:6), external quality measures are important, but mainly act as quality controls which enforce compliance with the set criteria (Luckett, 2007:111). For quality improvement to be effective it must be internally adopted in the institution and become a management approach which focuses on delivering service quality (Alani *et al.*, 2014:232). The management and improvement of service quality is a critical aspect for a private HEI and could be seen as a differentiating factor between private and public HEIs (Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2016:578).

5.3.1.3 Private higher education

Massification is challenging the public HE industry with absorbing the increased demand and has raised the question of quality in public HE (Stander, 2016:24; Thaver, 2006:861). Private HEIs are using this phenomenon to their advantage to differentiate themselves from public HEIs by providing product and quality services that the public institutions cannot provide (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266; Stander, 2016:139).

According to Van Schalkwyk (2017:280), private HEIs need to use industry-specific service quality dimensions to ensure quality services in the form of institutional effectiveness in operations which will lead to student satisfaction (Stander, 2017:22). Consistent quality of service builds confidence with customers (Sallis, 2014:5), which is an essential dimension for private HEIs (Hwang & Choi, 2019:1). Private HEIs are predominately focused on customers and therefore student satisfaction (Stander, 2017:139) and with a business-driven model being followed by these institutions, TQM aspects form part of their operations (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:29).

TQM implementation in an organisation is the commitment to a process of continuously working towards excellence in all areas of the organisation to ensure customer satisfaction through offering a quality service. Private HEIs can create value (Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2016:579) and achieve a competitive advantage (Van Schalkwyk, 2017:49) by offering a service of high quality. For private HEIs, the value proposition is therefore a differentiating factor and important in supporting institutions in growing their competitive advantage (Miller *et al.*, 2014:266).

The value of education is not tangible and the only experience regarding the value that the student will have during their studies will be the quality of the service received from the institution. Through in-depth knowledge about students' needs and the profile of

students, private HEIs can determine how they should structure the service they offer to students (Wehn *et al.*, 2017:5).

5.3.2 Conclusions from the empirical study

The three main themes that appeared in the empirical study (summarised in Figure 8) were (a) compliance, (b) quality management, and (c) institutional offering.

5.3.2.1 Compliance

Compliance to the regulatory framework has a positive effect on a private HEI and assures students of the standards and quality offered by the institution. Quality assurance assures students that the offerings of an HEI are credible compared to other institutions in the industry (Stander, 2017:1). This is important for private HEIs and their growth in the industry. The regulatory framework therefore provides basic support to institutions to ensure quality, but it remains a minimum standard that is set and externally controlled.

5.3.2.2 Institutional offering

According to the perception of the interviewed students and managers, the private HEI's offering differs from public institutions'. Students were positive about the smaller institution compared to the size of public institutions. The flexibility of a private HEI to make quick decisions regarding processes that are not working in order to improve quality is an advantage to these institutions. Students are expecting improved performance and institutional effectiveness in operations that are focused on their needs, and are therefore positive about the flexible and adaptable processes of the private HEI the student-centred approach is has adopted.

5.3.2.3 Quality management

Internal quality measures are also needed to ensure service quality where the activities of the institution are business-driven. Internal quality measures refer to the implementation of internal strategies and processes by the private HEI to ensure service quality as well as satisfying student needs. It was determined that the HEI adopts an internal quality framework and uses student surveys to monitor student satisfaction. The continuous monitoring process results in changes being made to processes. These

changes result in both positive and negative experiences amongst students regarding the monitoring that takes place, but also the changes made to processes.

The quality management integration in the private HEI exists on a process and organisational level. The focus on quality service delivery in the institution is the result of the need for diversification from competitors, but also due to the student-centred approach in service delivery that was adopted.

5.3.3 Research findings

In answering the research question and objectives, the following conclusions are made from the empirical study:

- The qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions conclusively demonstrated that quality in service delivery is not ensured through the regulatory environment externally, and that quality in service delivery is only supported by the regulatory environment. The current regulatory framework is focused on external quality control more than ensuring quality improvement and transformational quality within a private HEI. Transformational quality refers to the intangible aspects of quality and has to do with continuous improvement and organisational transformation. Business-driven organisations also have to improve quality internally to ensure customer satisfaction and develop a competitive advantage.
- The adoption of internal quality mechanisms and TQM principles are therefore of fundamental importance for a private HEI. The data obtained from the managerial interviews confirms that internal quality mechanisms are implemented in the institution. An internal quality framework and peer evaluations are used as mechanisms to ensure quality in the institution. Internal quality mechanisms are built into the structure of the private HEI in both administrative and academic monitoring processes. Continuous student feedback and engagement regarding student experience is perceived as an important objective for the HEI to maintain institutional success. Process reviews are conducted to ensure efficiency and effectiveness and student satisfaction.
- The implementation of TQM assists the private HEI in providing a quality service to students by ensuring the institutional offering is aligned to the needs of students.

The institutional offering of a more customer-centred approach ensures the needs of students are met and provides the institution with the opportunity to ensure that its value proposition is aligned with student needs, and creates a competitive advantage for the institution.

The study confirmed that quality service in a private HEI is only ensured through the regulatory environment externally in terms of minimum standards and that internal quality assurance is needed for transformational quality to be achieved. Based on the findings, it is clear that TQM implementation assist a private HEI in staying relevant in the industry through understanding student needs and being able to adjust the value proposition to satisfy student needs.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

The following limitations regarding the research were identified:

- The viewpoints of select managers and students of the private HEI were presented, and this was tied to quality management and service quality perception. As such, only their viewpoints are included in the study, which cannot be generalised or applied to other private HEIs.
- Due to the limited data on the effect of TQM implementation in higher education, an exploratory case study was implemented to learn from participants' views. However, as TQM continues to develop in higher education, it will yield more results, and different conclusions may be made.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations relating to the specific private HEIs used in this study, as well as recommendations for further research, are made in this section.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Akademia as private higher education institution

5.5.1.1 Competitive advantage

The value proposition of an HEI will provide it with a competitive advantage only if satisfies students' needs. The determinants of service quality fall within the service process side for the private HEI and illustrate the importance of processes within the institution. The institution should therefore focus on the quality of inputs, which include:

- a quality teaching process;
- an application and registration process;
- a continuous improvement process; and a
- benchmarking process.

5.5.1.2 Quality assurance

The success of private HEIs are dependent on their reputation, that is the offering of products and services of high quality. The regulatory environment sets the minimum standards in terms of the quality of programmes, but the HEI has to focus internally on the quality of service delivery. It is important that the institution has the necessary student support processes in place and that the customer-centred approach is filtered through to all departments within the HEI, as this differentiates the institution from competitors and constitutes a value proposition for the institution.

5.5.1.3 Continuous improvement

Adaptable and flexible processes are one of the advantages that a private HEI has. The continuous improvement of processes to ensure quality is therefore possible. However, caution should be taken to avoid changing too often and not allowing sufficient time in the redesign process for stakeholders to get accustomed to the changes.

5.5.2 Recommendations for future research

- Future research could study a diverse research population that include both private and public HEIs to determine the different service quality dimensions in private and public institutions.
- Including more stakeholders, such as support staff and sponsors, can contribute more to the understanding of private HEIs in future studies.
- Similar research to this study, but following a longitudinal method where student perceptions from their first year of study through to completion of their qualification are determined.
- Through doing a similar quantitative research study at the private HEI amongst all registered students could provide more information that can be generalised for the institution.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a conclusion regarding the theoretical and empirical objectives of the research study. The limitations of the research were noted, and recommendations were made for the HEI on which the case study was based, as well as future research that can be conducted. All theoretical and empirical objectives that were formulated for this research study, have been achieved.

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APPENDIX A

Data collection instrument(s)

Discussion guide: Individual interviews

Discussion guide: Focus group interviews

Discussion guide: Individual interviews

Research topic

The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education

Introduction

My name is Liana Venter and I am currently busy with my MBA studies at the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus). I have decided to conduct a qualitative research study, which means I will investigate the lived experiences of selected people in a certain environment. Because I am working in the private higher education section for the past twelve years, I am interested in the topic under research.

The aim of the study is to explore and describe the experience of the management team of a private higher education institution in determining the core value proposition of the institution within the higher education sector. In the process I wish to learn more about your process of deciding on to keep the value proposition relevant as well as how decisions are made regarding improving the quality of the service offered to students, resulting in possible greater student satisfaction. Lastly, your view on the impact of the regulatory environment of higher education and specifically private higher education and the effect it has on the quality of service delivered by the institution will be established.

You have been specifically selected for participation in this research study based on your privileged knowledge of the higher education sector and your involvement with private higher education.

This study involves participating in an individual interview and talking about your experiences regarding managing the institution and ensuring quality of delivery of a service to students. This individual interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded for verification of the findings.

TIME OF INTERVIEW:

DATE:

PLACE:

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE:

QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE DISCUSSED:

1. How do you see the role of the regulatory framework in South Africa?
2. What value is being added to the service of the institution by having to comply with the registration and accreditation requirements of the regulatory framework?
3. What is your broad, general definition of service quality?
 - From the student's perspective?
 - From managements perspective?
4. What formal quality processes are in place within the institution?
5. In your opinion, what are the crucial pillars of service quality for your institution? Why?
6. In your opinion, is service quality more important for private HEIs than for public HEIs? Why?
7. Could you discuss why you believe Akademia has been as successful as it has, focusing on what you view as the core value proposition of the institution?

Thank you for your time and sharing of information in this interview. Records obtained during the study will be regarded as confidential.

(Source: Adapted from Ellis, 2017:281)

Discussion guide: Focus group interviews

Research topic

The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education

Introduction

My name is Liana Venter and I am currently busy with my MBA studies at the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus). I have decided to conduct a qualitative research study, which means I will investigate the lived experiences of selected people in a certain environment. Because I am working in the private higher education section for the past twelve years, I am interested in the topic under research.

The aim of the study is to explore and describe the experience of students in a private higher education institution in determining what they perceive as the institution's core value proposition. In the process, I wish to learn more about the factors that contributed to your selection of the institution, as well as what you perceive as quality of service. Lastly, your view on the implementation of changes for quality purposes and ultimately greater student satisfaction will be discussed and determined.

This study involves participating in a focus group interview and talking about your experiences regarding the value proposition of the institution and your satisfaction with quality reviews implemented by the institution. This focus group interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio recorded for verification of the findings.

TIME OF INTERVIEW:

DATE:

PLACE:

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE:

QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE DISCUSSED:

1. What were the core factors that contributed to your selection of a public or private higher education institution?
2. What was the main reason you chose this institution?
3. What is your definition of quality of service?
4. Do you feel that the institution is using student feedback to make changes to the quality of service?
5. During 2019 there were various changes made to the academic year and contact sessions. Do you feel that these changes have added value for you?

Thank you for your time and sharing of information in this interview. Records obtained during the study will be regarded as confidential, and results and findings will be published in such a way that your identity remains unidentifiable.

APPENDIX B

Informed consent form: Individual interviews

Informed consent form: Focus group discussions

Ethics informed consent form: Individual interview

RESEARCHER: Liana Venter

CELL: 071 600 0368

Email: liana@akademia.ac.za

Dear Interviewee

This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as an interviewee. This **Informed Consent Statement** serves to confirm the following information as it relates to the MBA mini-dissertation:

Title of the research: The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education

1. The sole purpose of this study is to obtain information from managers employed in a private higher education institution on their perception of the core value propositions of the institution and its contribution to the quality processes implemented and used in the institution.
2. The procedure to be followed is a qualitative research design, which includes semi-structured, open-ended questions where you will have the opportunity to communicate your views on the relevant topic during a face-to-face in-depth interview. Basic background information related will be asked, e.g. your name, academic qualifications and related experience to the topic.
3. The duration of the interview will take no longer than a maximum of 1 hour.
4. If at any point during the interview you should feel uncomfortable, you will be provided with the opportunity to make your discomfort known or have the option to immediately end your participation.
5. This interview takes place on a voluntary basis.
6. The confidentiality of the interview data is guaranteed. Fictitious names will be utilised when quoting statements in the dissertation.
7. Any confidential information that prohibits the researcher to publish it in the final dissertation should be communicated during the interview.
8. A list of questions to be asked in the interview will be made available to the interviewee prior to the interview. This is done to ensure a mutual understanding of what will be asked to avoid confusion during the interview.
9. A summarised copy of the final dissertation will be made available to the interviewee upon request.
10. The data gathered from the interview will only be used for research purposes.

I, _____ (name and surname), hereby declare that I have read and understand the contents of the Informed Consent Statement, and give my full consent to _____ to progress with the interview on _____ (date) and use the information communicated by myself to them in their MBA dissertation.

Name and designation	Signature	Date

Ethics informed consent form: Focus group interview

RESEARCHER: Liana Venter

CELL: 071 600 0368

Email: liana@akademia.ac.za

Dear Interviewee

This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as an interviewee. This **Informed Consent Statement** serves to confirm the following information as it relates to the MBA mini-dissertation:

Title of the research: The use of total quality management in the adaptation of quality of delivery: A case study in private higher education

1. The sole purpose of this study is to obtain information from managers employed in a private higher education institution on their perception of the core value propositions of the institution and its contribution to the quality processes implemented and used in the institution.
2. The procedure to be followed is a qualitative research design, which includes semi-structured, open-ended questions where you will have the opportunity to communicate your views on the relevant topic during a face-to-face in-depth interview. Basic background information related will be asked, e.g. your name, academic qualifications and related experience to the topic.
3. The duration of the interview will take no longer than a maximum of 1 hour.
4. If at any point during the interview you should feel uncomfortable, you will be provided with the opportunity to make your discomfort known or have the option to immediately end your participation.
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9. A summarised copy of the final dissertation will be made available to the interviewee upon request.
10. The data gathered from the interview will only be used for research purposes.

I, _____ (name and surname), hereby declare that I have read and understand the contents of the Informed Consent Statement, and give my full consent to _____ to progress with the interview on _____ (date) and use the information communicated by myself to them in their MBA dissertation.

Name and designation	Signature	Date

APPENDIX C



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Economic and Management Sciences Research
Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)
Tel: 018 299-1427
Email: Bennie.Linde@nwu.ac.za

30 August 2019

Mr J Jordaan
Per e-mail
Dear Mr J Jordaan,

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 30082019
L Venter (31353339)(NWU-00727-19-A4)
MBA – Mr J Jordaan

Your ethics application on, *Die gebruik van totale gehaltebestuur in die aanpassing van dienslewingskwaliteit: 'n Gevallestudie in Privaat Hoër Onderwys*, that served on the EMS-REC meeting of 30 August 2019, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number **NWU-00727-19-A4** is given for three years of ethics clearance.

Prerequisites:

1. This study is phased research and all following phases need to be approved by EMS-REC before they can be applied;
2. The documentation need to be signed and forward to EMS-REC administration before the data get collected.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Linde'.

Prof Bennie Linde
Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)
Potchefstroom Campus

APPENDIX D



INSTITUSIONELE TOELATINGSBRIEF

TITLE VAN NAVORSINGSPROJEK	Die gebruik van totale gehaltebestuur in die aanpassing van dienslewingskwaliteit: 'n Gevallestudie in Privaat Hoër Onderwys
NAVORSER	Liana Venter
INSTELLING VAN STUDIES	Noordwes Universiteit

Hiermee word toestemming van Liana Venter (studentenommer: 31353339) verleen om die data vir die bogenoemde navorsingsstiel binne Akademia te versamel.

Die volgende voorwaardes word gestel:

1. Die data as vertroulik hanteer sal word.
2. Die bevindings slegs met toestemming gepubliseer sal word.
3. Alle aanbevelings sal geskied teen die agtergrond van die instelling se groei, industrie asook regulatoriese vereistes binne die industrie.
4. 'n Volledige voorlegging sal aan die bestuur gedoen word na die voltooi van die navorsing.

Die uwe

Marthinus Visser

Besturende Direkteur

