

International student expectations, perceived HEI quality, satisfaction and loyalty – A proposed conceptual model

Anita Kéri

Internationalization is widely considered to be the most important issue in higher education in recent decades. International student expectations, satisfaction and loyalty have become central in understanding and satisfying international students' needs. This paper sheds new light on these factors by developing a conceptual model of international student expectations, satisfaction and loyalty. Based on the literature review and the results of previously carried out primary research, a new conceptual model is proposed. This paper aims at introducing secondary and primary findings and the steps of building and defining the new conceptual model. The investigations revealed that there is a connection between the researched factors: school-related expectations have an effect on school-related satisfaction and on the perceived quality of the institution, perceived quality affects school-related satisfaction, while non-school-related expectations affect non-school-related satisfaction. The overall satisfaction of students with the study-abroad experience is affected by school-related and non-school-related satisfaction, and this overall satisfaction, it is proposed, leads to loyalty. These results further our knowledge of internationalization and international students at a Hungarian higher education institution and could conceivably be used to better understand international students' needs in general. The new model could be tested in future research.

Keywords: higher education, expectations, perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty, WOM

1. Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of higher education's internationalization. Investigating internationalization is a continuing concern within higher education. Recently, a considerable body of literature has grown up around the theme of international student motivation, expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty.

Motivation of international students is a widely researched concept, but fails to provide a deep insight into the study-abroad process and experience of international students. It is only concerned with the reason why students chose a certain HEI, but in itself fails to present why students stay at a HEI. Therefore, this paper only discusses the importance of motivation briefly and concentrates on the study-abroad experience in depth.

Existing literature recognizes the critical role of motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty. However, the major problem is that these factors are mainly investigated separately (Byrne–Flood 2005, Carvalho–Mota 2010). Surprisingly, these factors are seldom studied together (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009). The search of the literature also revealed that most studies focus on quantitative measures and only few studies apply qualitative analysis (Gallarza et al. 2017, Roman 2014, Sultan–Wong 2013a, Sultan–Wong 2013b, Templeman et al. 2016) or longitudinal qualitative

analysis (Patterson et al. 1998). So far, very little attention has been paid to the role of examining the school-related and non-school-related aspects of the above-mentioned factors (Byrne–Flood 2005, Carvalho–Mota 2010). This indicates a need to understand international student expectations, satisfaction, HEI perceived quality and loyalty from a different viewpoint.

The central aim of this paper is the development of a new conceptual model of international student school-related and non-school-related aspects of expectations, satisfaction and HEI loyalty. The specific objective of this study is to highlight the main theoretical concepts behind the model and to introduce the previously conducted primary research results that contributed to the creation of the new conceptual model. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used in the pilot research. However, in this paper, only the main results are introduced briefly and the theoretical aspects are explained in more detail.

This is among the first studies to differentiate between school-related and non-school-related expectations and satisfaction. This paper also undertakes to study the expectations, perceived quality of the institution, satisfaction and loyalty together. Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to the research on international students at a Hungarian HEI. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the effects of motivation and perceived value of HEIs, and the specific differences between the nationalities and faculties of the international students.

This paper is composed of five main sections. After the introduction, the second section determines the key definitions of motivation, expectations, satisfaction, loyalty and WOM and investigates the relevant literature. Section 3 introduces the pilot studies and their main results and explains how they contributed to the creation of the new conceptual model. Section 4 introduces the new conceptual model and its main concepts, and determines the hypotheses. The final section draws together the key findings and identifies future research directions.

2. Definition of key terms

The following chapter lays out the theoretical dimensions of the research and looks at how the key terms are defined. This section investigates the main and most influential theories behind the studied concepts.

2.1. Motivation

Even though the final model does not include motivation as a separate factor, it is crucial to understand the study-abroad process and its beginning. Therefore, the main theories and findings are discussed briefly first.

Research into motivation has a long history. Motivation is defined as the underlying reasons of the behavior of people (Guay et al. 2010). Mitchell (1982, p. 81) defines motivation as “*those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary actions that are goal directed*”. In the classical human-specific self-determination approach, the behavior of people can be categorized. Vallerand et al. (1997) researched the factors that could have an influence on motivation. In his study, he concludes that different social factors influence the

motivational types. Motivation types – extrinsic and intrinsic – are distinguished by Deci and Ryan (1985).

Many theories have emerged throughout the years in connection with motivation. One seminal study in this field is by Maslow (1987), according to whom different motives are followed by each other based on their biological strength. A hierarchically higher need can arise when a lower need is satisfied. According to Hull's drive approach (Hull 1943), our behavior is driven by drives. People's behavior can reduce the drive, because a person aims at being in an ideal state of mind and reducing the stress by acting upon a certain drive. The continuing motivation theory of Maehr (1976) focuses on the motivation and long-term ability of people to concentrate on studying for a period of time, with no apparent and visible reward in exchange (Kaplan et al. 2009). The Perceived Control theory of Skinner (1995) states that our behavior is driven by the feedback that we get. Depending on whether it is positive or negative, the aim of a person would be to get a reward or to avoid a negative feedback again.

Based on the evidence provided in the literature, we can see the large number of different approaches to the identification of different motivational types. In the present study, the motivation of international students is only studied as the basis of their study-abroad experience. The final conceptual model does not include motivation as a separate factor.

2.2. Expectations

The field of expectations is a widely researched area. Oliver (1980) has produced seminal works connected to expectations which can be used in marketing research (Oliver 1980, Oliver – Bearden 1985). He formed the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), according to which expectations are defined as those relevant attributes or characteristics that are thought to be connected to a certain product or service (Elkhani–Bakri 2012, Oliver – Bearden 1985, Oliver–Winer 1987).

The categorization of expectations has been subject to considerable discussion in the literature. Some scholars differentiate between forecast, normative, ideal and minimum tolerable expectations (Oliver 2015, Woodruff et al. 1983). These refer to expectations prior to purchase (Oliver 2015, Woodruff et al. 1983). Therefore, they are not relevant in the current study.

As seen above, expectations can be categorized based on the time of research enquiry (Higgs et al. 2005). If a customer is asked of their expectations prior to purchase, that is called forecast expectation. If they are asked after purchase to remember the expectations beforehand, that is termed recalled expectation (Higgs et al. 2005). Evidently, forecast expectations seem a better choice to study, because then the customer is not biased by the purchase itself. However, in the current study, I am going to focus on recalled expectations, due to the limited access to international students.

2.3. *Satisfaction*

Studies over the past decades have provided important information on the research of satisfaction. Churchill and Surprenant (1982, 493) define satisfaction as the result of usage and purchase, which is based on the customer's comparison of cost and benefit analysis. According to Oliver et al. (1997), satisfaction is a pleasurable fulfilment of certain needs, desires or goals.

Throughout the years, different theories in the field of satisfaction have emerged in the literature. The above-mentioned Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver 1980, Oliver–Bearden 1985) is considered a core work. According to this theory, customers have certain pre-purchase expectations and their experience of the desired product or service is the determiner of satisfaction (Oliver 1980, Oliver – Bearden 1985). Later the Expectation Confirmation Theory of Oliver (1980) was expanded and named the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) (Elkhani–Bakri, 2012). This new theory differentiates between pre- and post-purchase satisfaction based on whether the customer's expectations are met or not. The consumer compares expectations to perceived performance, which leads to a subjective disconfirmation (Yi 1990). In their studies, Yi (1990) distinguishes between process-oriented and result-oriented satisfaction. Result-oriented satisfaction refers directly to the experience after consumption. According to process-oriented satisfaction, the consumption process is the most important. In the current paper, I define international student satisfaction as the combination of process- and result-oriented satisfaction. Both the satisfaction during the time of their studies and the satisfaction after graduation is important for this research.

The area of interest of the present study is higher education and higher education is viewed as a service in the current paper. Therefore, service satisfaction should be discussed, as it has features different to those of product satisfaction. Zeithaml (1981) argues that customers employ certain criteria to a higher extent, when it comes to services, namely experience and trust. Parasuraman et al. (1991) created a method which measures service quality based on the difference between consumer expectations and experience. It is called SERVQUAL and measures the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

To sum up this chapter, in the current paper, higher education is viewed as a service that international students receive. In the pilot study regarding satisfaction, and during the development of the new conceptual model, I base my hypotheses on the work of Oliver (1980) and Zeithaml (1981).

2.4. *Loyalty and word-of-mouth*

In the field of higher education, scientists have shown an increased interest in the study of loyalty. Mostly, it is studied together with satisfaction and student retention rates (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Elliot–Healy 2001, Giner–Rillo 2016, Oliver 1999, Reichheld et al. 2000, Reichheld 2003). Therefore, it is safe to assume that there is a connection between satisfaction and loyalty. Reichheld et al. (2000) states that satisfaction is a key element to growth, but argues that satisfaction is not always enough to retain customers or gain their loyalty (Reichheld 2003). In order to be

successful, a company or institution should create and provide value for its customers, its employees and its stakeholders as well (Reichheld et al. 2000).

There are different approaches to the definition of loyalty. In the early phases of studying loyalty, some scientists argued that loyalty can be measured by retention and satisfaction of customers (Reichheld–Sasser 1990, Reichheld 1996), while other stated that a good indicator of loyalty is re-purchase (Neal 1999, Oliver 1999, Reichheld et al. 2000, Tellis 1988). Re-purchase is thought to be weak in itself and Newman and Werbel (1973) argue that brand deliberation is needed to create a satisfied and loyal customer. Nowadays, there is a more current view stating that satisfaction and re-purchase are not enough, but that the customer's willingness is needed to advocate and promote the product or service. In other words, recommendation or word-of-mouth (WOM) is needed (Reinartz–Kumar 2002, Reichheld 2003).

One of the most widely-used definitions belongs to Oliver (1999), who defines loyalty as *“a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior”* (Oliver 1999, p. 34). However, from the perspective of the current study, this definition lacks an important element. That is why, in this research, I use the loyalty definition of Reichheld (2003). He states that loyalty is *“the willingness of someone – a customer, an employee, a friend – to make an investment or personal sacrifice in order to strengthen a relationship.”* (Reichheld 2003, 46). Additionally, he also claims that *“customer loyalty is about much more than repeat purchases”* (Reichheld 2003, p. 46). He determines recommendation as a key element to loyalty.

Consequently, it is apparent that WOM has significant importance in satisfaction; therefore, a definition of WOM is necessary for use in this study. Word-of-mouth is interpersonal communication (Arndt 1967) that is informal and about a product, its usage or its characteristics (Bughin et al. 2010).

As repurchase is not a good determiner of loyalty in terms of higher education, I must define what this study means by loyalty. In the current model, loyalty is comprised of the retention of a student and WOM together.

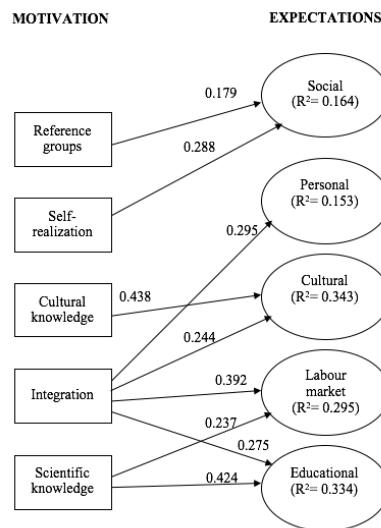
3. Pilot studies and their results

To better understand international students' expectations, satisfaction and loyalty, pilot studies have been conducted. In three different pilot studies, I have investigated international student motivations, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty at the University of Szeged. The subjects of the research were international students studying at the University of Szeged.

Firstly, based on the results of an online questionnaire (N=128), I determined the main factors influencing international student motivation at the University of Szeged. For the motivation questions, a Likert scale was applied. Factor analysis was used on the data to determine the main motivation of international students for coming to the University of Szeged to study. The five main factors influencing international student motivation are reference groups, self-realization, getting to know the culture, integration and knowledge gained by the Hungarian degree (Kéri 2016).

Even though understanding the motivation of international students is crucial, it does not give deep enough insight into the process of HEI choice among international students. Therefore, in a quantitative pilot study, I investigated a connection between international student motivations and expectations related to their studies at the University of Szeged (N=121). For the questions, a Likert scale was applied. With the help of PLS-SEM analysis, the connection between different types of motivation and expectations was revealed. The results of the model can be seen on Figure 1.

Figure 1 Model of international student motivation and expectations



Source: Kéri (2018, p. 175)

The study revealed that reference groups' motivation has an effect on social expectations ($\beta = 0.179$) and the motivation of self-realization also has an effect on social expectations ($\beta = 0.288$). Cultural motivation affects cultural expectation of international students ($\beta = 0.438$). The motivation of integration into the Hungarian community has an effect on four expectation types. Its weakest effect is on cultural expectations ($\beta = 0.244$), which is followed by its effect on educational expectations ($\beta = 0.275$), personal expectations ($\beta = 0.295$), and it has the biggest effect on labor market expectations ($\beta = 0.392$). The motivation of gaining scientific knowledge in Hungary has an effect on labor market expectations ($\beta = 0.237$) and on educational expectations as well ($\beta = 0.424$). The strongest effect in the model are the effects of cultural knowledge motivation on cultural expectations ($\beta = 0.438$) and the motivation of gaining scientific knowledge on educational expectations ($\beta = 0.424$).

Even though the motivation of international students is not included in the final model, it provides a good foundation for exploring international student expectations of their desired higher education institution.

Further investigating the HEI choice of international students and their study-abroad experience, it became necessary to research their satisfaction and loyalty as well. In order to get an overall insight, I conducted longitudinal in-depth interviews with a panel of international students (N=17). It takes three academic years to complete the whole study program. Two phases of the research have already taken place and the third and last phase is also completed with those Master's students (N=6), who finished their degrees. The longitudinal interviews were analyzed manually.

The results indicate that word-of-mouth advertisement is one of the most influential factors when international students choose the University of Szeged and Hungary. It already appeared at the very first stage of interviews and almost every respondent mentioned it as an influencing factor for coming to Hungary (*'I have someone here and he told me that Szeged is the best place in Hungary to study.'* – student from Tunisia). Therefore, I conclude that WOM has a crucial influence on the choice of international students in terms of location and HEI.

In terms of expectations, most students had school-related expectations (*'My expectations are a little bit about myself. I will have some competencies here, so I can use it in my country.'* – Student from Turkey), but non-school-related aspects were also highlighted. Students' loyalty is projected through the fact that most of them are satisfied with the school-related and the non-school-related aspects (*'It went better than expected in some ways. My teachers speak very good English. I am satisfied with them.'* – Student from Colombia), and would suggest studying at this specific HEI to other students (*'Yes, absolutely. It is a no-brainer.'* – Student from Colombia). Some of them have already recommended it to others, who started or will start their studies at the University of Szeged. Therefore, I conclude that WOM plays an active part in the loyalty of international students and I determine WOM to be a factor of international student loyalty.

Based on the results of the previously mentioned primary research and the literature review, a conceptual model of international students' expectations, satisfaction and loyalty was developed. In the next chapter, the model is introduced and hypotheses are defined.

4. Hypotheses and the new conceptual model

When considered separately, neither expectations, satisfaction nor loyalty are sufficient for understanding differences across groups in student HEI choice. Therefore, in the following section, I propose a new conceptual model that includes all the above-mentioned factors and proposes hypotheses connected to these factors.

4.1. Expectations

There is no unified categorization of expectations in relation to international students. Mostly an arbitrary selection of different expectations applies, or a higher education quality measurement method is selected, but mostly, the aim of the research determines the categories. Anderson (2007) divides international student expectations into nine categories (e.g.: personal development, social environment, study success, etc.). However, the division of international student expectations is not so detailed in

many other studies, because these studies mainly focus on one category of expectations. Social expectations of international students are examined by Ding and Hauzheng (2012), and Dewey et al. (2013), personal expectations are studied by Firmin et al. (2013), cultural expectations are investigated by Czerwionka et al. (2015), while Bryla (2015) focused on labour-market expectations and Cheng (2014) on educational expectations. Interestingly, DeBacker and Routon (2017) focused on parental expectations of their children's education.

If service quality is measured, usually only the school-related aspects are researched. There is very little research in which non-school-related and school-related aspects appear and are studied separately (Byrne–Flood 2005, Carvalho–Mota 2010). The study of Carvalho and Mota (2010) focuses solely on the institution-related expectations, while the questionnaire of Byrne and Flood (2005) already includes school-related and non-school-related elements as well. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature examining international students' school-related and non-school-related expectations separately under the same framework.

In the qualitative pilot research, I investigated international student expectations. Respondents claimed that they had heard good reports about learning and had related expectations of the university (*'I saw the university's rank' – Student from Turkey*), about themselves, (*'My expectations are a little bit about myself. I will have some competencies here, so I can use it in my country.'* – *Student from Turkey*), and about the living conditions in Hungary as well (*'I was curious to discover Hungary.'* – *Student from Columbia*). Conversely, their expectations could be divided into two different categories, non-school-related expectations (*'I want to teach my children about life here' – Student from Laos*) and school-related expectations (*'I want to be a good doctor' – Student from Tunisia*). This is the reason, why I assign utmost importance to the differentiation between these two aspects of expectations.

In conclusion, there is a lack of studies that examine school-related and non-school related expectations mutually. These aspects have also rarely been investigated separately before under the same framework (Byrne–Flood 2005, Carvalho–Mota 2010, Martin et al. 1995). Consequently, I propose that expectations should be divided into two separate categories, when researching study-abroad experience of international students. The current study and theoretical model focus on both school-related and non-school-related expectations.

4.2. Expectations and satisfaction

Several recent studies have been carried out about the expectations of international students regarding the international university and country they applied to, as we could see above. Based on the literature review (Oliver 1980, Oliver – Bearden 1985) we can conclude that expectations are also key elements of determining satisfaction.

The satisfaction of international students with the chosen HEI is a widely researched area. However, most studies typify satisfaction differently. Among these pieces of research, several focus solely on school-related satisfaction (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Cardona–Bravo 2012, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Elliot–Healy 2001, Lenton 2015, Lee 2010, Owlia–Aspinwall 1996, Roman 2014, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). Most often, they enlist the following factors as the source of international student satisfaction: available

study-programs, location, size, complexity of the institution, quality of teaching (Huybers et al. 2015), feedback from teachers, communication with teachers (Jager–Gbadamosi 2013), appropriate study schedule, supporting facilities for students, physical environment and equipment (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002).

Although there is a study (Yang et al. 2013) in which scientists distinguish classroom factors from non-classroom factors, non-classroom factors are strongly related to the school (e.g.: location of school, GPA, year of higher education studies). The research of Ostergaard and Kristensen (2005) differentiates between the hardware and software elements. Hardware elements are related to the study programs, courses, and several support facilities, while the software elements are related to behavior of the people participating in the service and to the service environment. If student's expectations are met in this model, it has an effect on their satisfaction. Doña-Toledo et al. (2017) also concentrated on school-related quality aspects. If quality expectations are met, then students are satisfied.

Non-school-related satisfaction is rarely investigated in connection with international students. However, I think that it is extremely important. There are certain studies, though, which investigate school-related and non-school-related factors. Yet, most of these studies focus solely on local students, not international ones. Schertzer and Schertzer (2004) uncovered why students leave a certain HEI. They found that transition and financial problems are the most common non-school-related reasons. They also claim that the happiness of students depends on the life outside the classroom excessively. Evans (1972) followed the same logic and stated that student satisfaction is highly dependent not only on the quality of education and recognition, but also on social life, living and working environment and the compensation for study-pressure.

The qualitative pilot research results also showed a connection between international student expectations and satisfaction. Some students claimed that their expectations were met, so they were satisfied (*'It went better than expected in some ways. My teachers speak very good English. I am satisfied with them.'* – Student from Colombia), while others said they had different expectations, so they are not completely satisfied (*'I was expecting something else'* – Student from Turkey). Respondents differentiated between school-related expectations and satisfaction and non-school-related expectations and satisfaction too (*'I was expecting more experienced teachers, but for student activities, yes, I am satisfied.'* – Student from Turkey).

Regardless of categorization, international student satisfaction is usually researched in tandem with international student expectations (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Cardona–Bravo 2012, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Elliot–Healy 2001, Lenton 2015, Lee 2010, Ostergaard–Kristensen 2005, Owlia–Aspinwall 1996, Roman 2014, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). However, in previous research, school-related and non-school-related satisfaction are not separated and this study aims to fill this research gap. I propose a distinction between school-related and non-school related satisfaction in the model of international students' study abroad experience. Based on the secondary literature and the results of the pilot research, I assume that expectations and satisfaction are also closely related and propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: School-related expectations influence school-related satisfaction.

H1b: Non-school-related expectations influence non-school-related satisfaction.

4.3. School-related expectations, perceived quality, and school-related satisfaction

School-related expectations and satisfaction constitute a widely-researched area in contrast to non-school-related aspects. Previous research has highlighted the importance of perceived quality of the HEI and found links between school-related expectations and perceived quality (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Brown–Mazzarol 2009, Pinto et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2008). These studies are mostly based on the CSI model of consumer satisfaction (Fornell et al. 1996). In the CSI model, customers' expectations are proven to have a positive effect on the perceived quality.

The CSI model has been successfully applied in the higher education sector (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Brown–Mazzarol 2009, Pinto et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2008). Alves and Raposo (2007, 2009) proposed that international students' expectations influence the perceived quality of the institution. Zhang et al. (2008), Brown and Mazzarol (2009) and Pinto et al. (2013) also found that expectations have an effect on the perceived quality of a HEI.

Based on the secondary literature, perceived quality is a key aspect in international students' study abroad experience. Conversely, a definition of perceived quality is needed. Zhang et al. (2008) defines perceived quality in the higher education as “*students' judgments to education service offered by the college*” (Zhang et al. 2008, 47). In the current research I base my proposed theoretical model on this definition. In the proposed conceptual model, my hypothesis regarding school-related expectations and perceived quality is as follows.

H2: School-related expectations have an effect on perceived quality.

The literature also demonstrates evidence that there is a connection between perceived quality and school-related satisfaction (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Brown–Mazzarol 2009, Pinto et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2008). Based on the CSI theory, numerous pieces of research have proven a positive effect of the HEI perceived quality on the school-related satisfaction of international students (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Brown–Mazzarol 2009, Pinto et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2008). Therefore, my hypothesis is as follows.

H3: Perceived quality has an effect on school-related satisfaction.

4.4. The definition of loyalty and the importance of WOM

Reference group influence and WOM are proved to be significant on student willingness to study abroad and choice of HEI (Cubillo et al. 2006, Hackney et al. 2013, Nyaupane et al. 2011). Reference groups include family members, friends and acquaintances. There is an extremely influential fragment of reference groups that includes those people, who already participated in a study program at a desired university. These people are the WOM advocates of the university and based on their

recommendation, a new international student can choose the university at hand (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009). In this case, these recommending students are the WOM advocates of the university, therefore considered loyal to the university.

In terms of measuring loyalty, in his study, Reichheld (2003) uses a one-question method of determining customer loyalty. They use a simple question of “How likely is it that you would recommend (X) to a friend or colleague?”. They found that the answer to this one question could be the sole determiner of company success and customer loyalty. Conversely, growth by WOM is the key.

Even though most papers use quantitative measures for getting to know international student motivation (Chirkov et al. 2007, Guay et al. 2000, Hanousek–Hegarty 2015, Stover et al. 2012, Utvaer–Haugan 2016), qualitative (Roman 2014, Sultan–Wong 2013a, 2013b, Templeman et al. 2016) and longitudinal (Sasaki 2011) research types have also been applied. Therefore, based on the one-question method of Reichheld (2003), in the longitudinal pilot study, I also asked students if they would recommend the institution to others and got the result that most of them would (*‘Absolutely. I have already done it.’ – Student from Colombia*). The pilot studies also revealed a connection between international student loyalty and WOM. WOM appeared at the very early stages of longitudinal interviews and student mentioned WOM as one main influencing factor (*‘I have someone here and he told me that Szeged is the best place in Hungary to study.’ – student from Tunisia*).

As previous studies and the pilot research show, loyalty is usually studied together with WOM, as it is considered to be the result of it. There seems to be a link between the two notions (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Giner–Rillo 2016, Gronholdt et al. 2000, Kandampully 1998). However, in the research of Ostergaard and Kristensen (2005), loyalty is considered to be equal to WOM recommendations. In their scale, they apply questions regarding repurchase and WOM together, which together constitute loyalty. Therefore, based on secondary research articles and the applicability of qualitative results, my proposal is as follows. In terms of higher education, loyalty comprises the students’ willingness to stay at the university for the total length of the study program and their WOM recommendations, as the repurchase behavior is not a valid determinant and does not provide enough feedback on students’ loyalty.

4.5. Satisfaction and loyalty

Student satisfaction and loyalty have been subject to recent scientific research. Based on the findings of the literature review and pilot research, it is now essential to differentiate between school-related and non-school-related satisfaction.

Previous studies have attempted to explain the loyalty of international students to their HEI and usually handled loyalty and WOM as separate elements (Alves–Raposo 2007, 2009, Giner and Rillo 2016, Ostergaard–Kristensen 2005). According to this research, student satisfaction can lead to WOM and loyalty. The importance of WOM in international student satisfaction has been explored by Alves and Raposo (2007). They concluded that if a student was satisfied with the education, they would recommend the institution by WOM. Conversely, WOM (loyalty) is the result of their satisfaction. Other researchers define several other factors or needs, such

as commitment to the institution, international student mobility options and co-creation, which, if satisfied, can lead to loyalty (Bryla 2014, Giner-Rillo 2016, Schertzer-Schertzer 2004). Ostergaard and Kristensen (2005) also indicated that if an international student is satisfied with the specific elements of the service they receive, they would be loyal to the institution and would recommend the institutions or study-program to others. Douglas and Davies (2008) and Zhang et al. (2008) found that some quality variables can also lead to satisfaction and then loyalty. Concluding the secondary research, several studies focused on determining the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Bryla 2014, Giner-Rillo 2016, Schertzer-Schertzer 2004), while others revealed that loyalty can result in international student WOM recommendations (Alves-Raposo 2007, 2009, Ostergaard-Kristensen 2005).

In the pilot qualitative research, it became evident that if a student was satisfied, they recommended studying at the HEI to others ('*Sure, yes. One of my friends, he is now in Szeged, yeah. I recommended him to study in the same major.*' – Student from Laos) and would choose the same program under similar circumstances ('*Yes, absolutely. It is a no-brainer.*' – Student from Colombia). It is an interesting finding, that even if a student was not completely satisfied, they would also recommend studying at a specific HEI ('*I already recommended for some points and I already warned for some points. At least three people now (came to Szeged because of my recommendations)*' – Student from Turkey), but in terms of re-purchase, they were uncertain ('*It is a hard question. For masters yes, but for PhD no. I don't know if I can survive in Szeged.*' – Student from Turkey).

On the basis of the above-mentioned evidence from the literature and the pilot study, my proposal for hypotheses regarding international student satisfaction and loyalty are as follows.

H4a: School-related satisfaction can lead to overall satisfaction.

H4b: Non-school-related satisfaction can lead to overall satisfaction.

H4c: School-related satisfaction can lead to loyalty.

H4d: Non-school-related satisfaction can lead to loyalty.

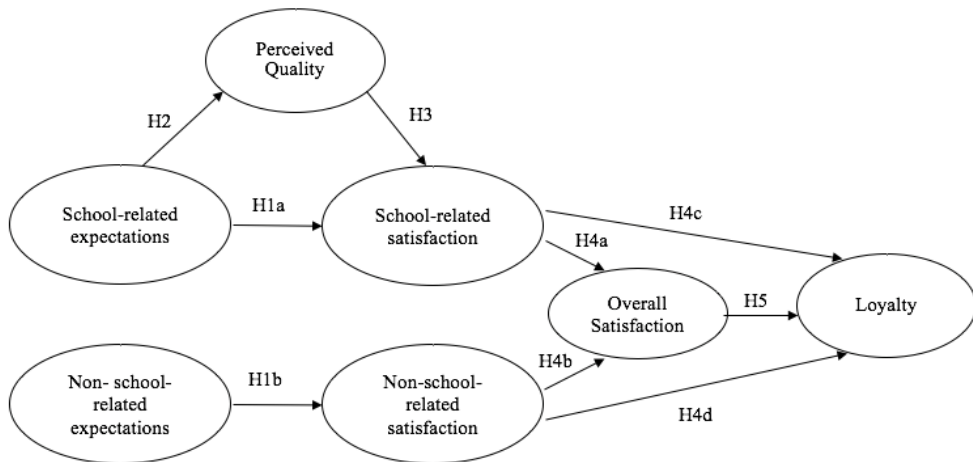
Taking the CSI-based models into consideration, numerous studies have found that HEI satisfaction is the determinant of loyalty (Alves-Raposo 2007, 2009, Brown-Mazzarol 2009, Pinto et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2008). Consequently, the final hypothesis is the following.

H5: Overall satisfaction leads to loyalty.

This study set out to propose a new conceptual model of international student expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty. The study has found that it is essential to differentiate between school-related expectations and satisfaction, and non-school-related expectations and satisfaction of international students if we look at their study-abroad experience, as these categorizations provide a more accurate feedback on international students' experience. The study also found that WOM also has a key role in understanding international student loyalty. In the proposed conceptual

model, WOM is considered to be an essential element of loyalty and is not handled as a separate element in the model. The present investigation proposes 5 main hypotheses. The proposed hypotheses and the new conceptual model are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Hypotheses and the proposed conceptual model



Source: Own construction

In summary, the secondary research results show that there has been a significant effort by researchers to gain insight into the expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction, and loyalty of international students. The pilot research phases revealed that both motivation, expectations, satisfaction, loyalty and WOM have significant importance in the decision-making process of international students. However, the literature lacks enough evidence regarding the division of expectations and satisfaction into school-related and non-school-related aspects. Overall, this study aimed at highlighting a need for the development of a conceptual model and proposes the new conceptual model of international student expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty.

5. Summary

This particular study intended to introduce the theoretical background and pilot research steps that lead to the creation of a new conceptual model. After the literature review, pilot research results are introduced briefly. Then, the new conceptual model and hypotheses are defined.

As we could see, the studied concepts of motivation, expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty and WOM are usually investigated separately and only a small number of studies deal with all the notions together (Alves and Raposo 2007, Alves and Raposo 2009). Expectations and satisfaction have not been separated into well-defined categories. The present study aims to fill this gap.

Based on the secondary research and primary research results, I can conclude, that there is a gap in the literature in terms of the categorizations of expectations and satisfaction of international students with the study-abroad process. In the new conceptual model, I propose to differentiate between school-related and non-school related expectations and satisfaction. If we consider the school-related aspects, the perceived quality of the HEI also has a crucial role. School-related expectations affect the perceived quality, while perceived quality has an effect on school-related satisfaction. School-related and non-school-related satisfaction together lead to overall satisfaction. Finally, school-related, non-school-related and overall satisfaction lead to loyalty. WOM is a result of student satisfaction. However, due to the nature of the service students buy at an international university, they cannot repeat the same purchase again (with the same program at the same faculty – otherwise yes). Therefore, their loyalty can only materialize in WOM, not in repurchase. Conversely, I conclude that international student loyalty is equal to word-of-mouth recommendations. If an international student recommends the studied HEI to their friends or acquaintances, it means they are loyal to the HEI. Based on the findings, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: School-related expectations influence school-related satisfaction.

H1b: Non-school-related expectations influence non-school-related satisfaction.

H2: School-related expectations have an effect on perceived quality.

H3: Perceived quality has an effect on school-related satisfaction.

H4a: School-related satisfaction can lead to overall satisfaction.

H4b: Non-school-related satisfaction can lead to overall satisfaction.

H4c: School-related satisfaction can lead to loyalty.

H4d: Non-school-related satisfaction can lead to loyalty.

H5: Overall satisfaction leads to loyalty.

The current study establishes the basis for further research. The proposed theoretical model should be tested, the measurement items can be found in Appendix 1. Quantitative research is strongly recommended to investigate the proposed hypotheses. The results of a quantitative study would enable us to gain a better insight into the expectations, HEI perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty of international students. Therefore, school- and non-school-related expectations, HEI perceived quality, school- and non-school-related satisfaction and loyalty should be studied together under the same theoretical framework, as it would provide an essential insight into the study-abroad process of international students.

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Appendix 1. Initial measurement items

Initial measurement items

- School-related expectations
 - I expected the university equipment and facilities to be of high quality.
 - I expected the teachers to be experts in their fields with extensive knowledge.

- I expected that students' needs would be understood.
- I expected the curriculum to be well-developed.
- I expected to get effective education with feedback.
- I expected trustworthy teachers and support staff.

- Non-school-related expectations
 - I expected many different accommodation opportunities.
 - I expected many leisure time facilities, such as restaurants, cafés, bars, clubs, etc.
 - I expected many non-school-related leisure programmes.
 - I expected a lively European city.
 - I expected an international environment.
 - I expected a reasonable cost of living here in Szeged.

- Perceived quality: How would you rate the following? (1-5, 1 – Poor, 5 – Excellent)
 - The overall quality of the structure and selection of courses offered in the programme.
 - The overall quality of the facilities and framework.
 - The overall quality of the lecturers/tutors teaching and contribution in general.
 - The overall quality of service rendered by the administrative staff.

- School-related satisfaction: How much do you agree/disagree with the statements below? (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, strongly agree)
 - Tangibles:
 - The overall equipment available for students is in a good condition.
 - The computers students are allowed to use are sufficient.
 - The learning environment at the University is modern.
 - Competence
 - Teachers are well-prepared for foreign students.
 - Teachers have excellent theoretical knowledge.
 - Teachers have the ability to convey their knowledge to students.
 - Content
 - Most classes are interesting.
 - The study material is easily available for foreign students.
 - Courses are pleasure to attend.
 - The study material is well-developed.
 - Attitude
 - University teachers understand students' needs.
 - University administrators understand students' needs
 - Most University employees have positive attitude towards foreign students.

- University staff seem comfortable around foreign students.
- Reliability
 - Teachers are reliable.
 - Students can trust their teachers.
 - Students can turn to the administration of the university with their problems.
- Delivery
 - The material is presented effectively by teachers.
 - Teachers present the course material in a clear and informative way.
 - Foreign students always know the evaluation criteria of a subject.
 - Students always get relevant feedback to their work.
- Non-school-related satisfaction
 - How much do you like living in Szeged?
 - How much are you satisfied with the living conditions? (living costs, housing situation, accommodation, etc.)
 - How much are you satisfied with the international environment in the city?
 - How much are you satisfied with the different facilities in Szeged? (cafés, restaurants, bars, pubs, etc.)
- Overall satisfaction
 - My experience of university and the city Szeged is/was very satisfactory.
 - Overall, I am satisfied with my university and the city Szeged.
 - I made the right decision when I chose this university and this city.
 - I am satisfied with the service provided by my university.
- Loyalty
 - How much would you recommend studying in Szeged to others?
 - How much would you recommend studying at the University of Szeged?
 - Would you choose this city for studies again, if you were to start higher education today?
 - Would you choose the University of Szeged for studies again if you were to start higher education today?