

Customer Loyalty In Foreign Language Institutions: An Empirical Study On Turkey

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Abstract

This empirical study concerns the evaluation of customer loyalty trends and practices in Turkish foreign language learning institutions. Using a mixed methods approach, the research utilized both secondary and primary research methods to study the aspects of the theme. English-medium education enjoys unlimited space in educational sector of Turkey which is why the cultural distinctiveness of other countries seems to have faded away. Even the Turkish culture itself, appears to have been repressed through English-medium education which should be the main purpose why foreign language learning and development within the state is somewhat dubious and challenging. As per the study, some students studying in these institutions believed that the language acquisition is ultimately isolating them from their own country's culture and values.

Keywords: *customer, loyalty, institutions*

Introduction

"A different language is a different vision of life."

- Federico Fellini, Italian film director

This is the preliminary chapter of this thesis, which will introduce the main contents of the research project, as well as, will set the stage for other succeeding chapters. This chapter opens with a detailed background on the issue being studied, to evaluate the emergence of a research need. The background of the research topic deals with illustrating the usefulness of English as a foreign language as well as introduces the reader to the chosen country: Turkey. The

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research background details out the essentiality of foreign language competency and acquisition, carefully pinpointing the present state of its development and acknowledgement in the chosen nation. Followed by an overview of the study topic, the researcher attempts to bring about the exact issue to light, by highlighting the key issues that will be discussed. In a rationale, the researchers justifies the selection of Turkey as the case country; while the purpose of thesis details out the intention behind the research work as well as the determined outcomes which the researcher hopes to achieve. The research questions for the study have been developed with much carefulness, assessing the need to have clear benchmarks in mind for data collection and analysis. Next, the significance of this study and its use to potential stakeholders is explained while discussing the main ethical considerations involved.

Research Methodology

The main reason behind choosing Turkish institutes of foreign language learning is that Turkey presents as an interesting case for a variety of factors. Although, the labour market value of learning foreign languages in Turkey was little researched in previous times, the present era brought with it, evident trends and growth in the number of globalized firms operating in the country. Mostly discussed in the form of a detailed research outline, the most critical element of a research method is to facilitate a researcher in achieving the key aims of study. The main purpose behind a successful research design is not just limited to providing a detailed plan or a working schedule; research design, in turn, must facilitate the researcher in being able to unambiguously answer or reach a conclusion so that all his research questions are answered and satisfied. A suitable research design follows the research questions and scope of study to be carried out, and often combines a mixture of qualitative and quantitative or primary and secondary sources of data collection, synthesis and analysis (Leary, 1995). It often happens that a researcher starts conducting surveys and interviews without actually knowing the main purpose or the main set of questions he is supposed to ask (Fitzpatrick, Wright & Secrist, 1998). This unplanned approach

towards data collection leads to unconvincing or a weak research conclusion which is why research design and its planning gains significant attention in literature favouring the formulation of a research methodology before the work has begun.

In the context of defining and discussing research design and its appropriateness towards a research work, it is pertinent to discuss that there are marked differences between designs and methods. Research methods texts often confused these two terms together while often times, research design is mainly taken in the sense of a mode of inquiry and its pathway rather than as a holistic structure of the study (Fitzpatrick, Wright & Secrist, 1998). The most important point to note is that data can be collected using any research method for any research design. The ways of collecting data actually reinforces the logic of the research theme and provides it with an encompassing structure (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

This research will be based on a mixed methods' approach in which both primary and secondary data collection methods will be utilized in order to increase the efficiency of the research, as well as, reach the goals of the study in a more comprehensive and credible manner. Mixed method research allows the researcher to study a given or selected research question from any perspective possible and from an appropriate angle as possible (Doz, 2011). The investigative perspective of the research and the scope of inquiry in such cases are broad-based which means that the researcher can study thematic aspects of the work in more than one ways. Mixed method research is hence, deemed as the most appropriate and holistic way to carry out a research project since analyses can then, be done in more than one ways (Silverman, 2013).

Secondary data analysis of this research was based on exploring the concepts of customer loyalty, and its application to centres of foreign language learning. For this purpose, the official Turkish websites for statistics relates to foreign language centres and their intakes would also be referred to. On the other hand, primary

methodological approach of this research revolves around gathering, synthesizing and inferring upon first-hand information as the source of data. A close-ended questionnaire consisting of 15 questions were broadly be designed and administered to the chosen sample size through electronic mail, based on a random sampling method, where each subject had equal chances of being chosen or selected for their response. The responses obtained from the questionnaire will theoretically be analysed using the percentages of the responses obtained and assessing on the basis of majority opinions.

While discussing questionnaires as the selected instrument for this study, it is pertinent to see and compare points of difference between questionnaires and interviews. Leary (1995) described that there are marked advantages in using survey-based questionnaires in comparison to interviews as data collection methods. Questionnaires are more convenient and easy-to-administer while being economical means to collecting data (Leary, 1995). They can be administered in groups while ensuring confidentiality of the involved personnel. Mailed and online surveys, as noted by Robson in the year 1993, are efficient ways of collecting and presenting information in a comparatively less time and at a lower cost (as stated in (Payne et. al, 2013)).

Research Methods and Instrumentation

Research methods are broadly divided into two categories - qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research involves defining variables while discussing numbers and statistics. On the other hand, qualitative research methods are based on opinions and generalizations. In qualitative research, the scope of inquiry is broad and mostly theme-based. Quantitative research methods produce data that can be presented in the form of charts and graphs while qualitative analysis (in case of open-ended questionnaires/interviews as its instrument) is described in words and presented in a more detailed manner than quantitative techniques (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative research method was used in this study as per the nature of the research undertaken, with the research instrument being questionnaires. The

research method and its instrument has been determined for this study by assessing the nature of the research and its underlying research questions for which a questionnaire-based survey appeared to be the most useful data collection instrument to the researcher. Qualitative studies make use of natural settings instead of artificial scenarios, where the researcher is more attentive towards and interested in perspectives and opinions (Leary, 1995). In qualitative studies and researches, assumptions are hardly composed beforehand, it is something that you learn while conducting the research activity and do not know before conducting it. The researchers in a qualitative setting are more interested in learning about the scenario which is why they give more attention to natural settings, and must develop a feeling of mutual trust and friendship with the respondents before the project begins. Obviously, this trust and friendship should not be abused later on when the researcher leaves the field.

The most widely-used, qualitative instrument in research is a questionnaire in which respondents respond to a stimulus and therefore, do not interact in an already-established natural setting (McDaniel & Gates, 1996). However, they come with their own set of disadvantages especially in comparison to in-depth, personal interviews. However, action research employs questionnaire when it is not possible to conduct very lengthy interviews. Questionnaires enlist certain theme-based questions in an open-ended or closed-ended form which are intended to measure values, behaviors, perspectives and facts. Close-ended questions give the respondent a boundary-based platform to choose one of the given options which is why they force a response that scores quickly otherwise; on the other hand, they are also easy to evaluate against pre-determined option sets given (McDaniel & Gates, 1996).

The chosen research instrument in this project is a questionnaire, based on its advantages to the researcher in many ways, as discussed above. The research instrument chosen has cost advantages over other forms of qualitative analysis methods, and takes less time to administer depending upon the number of questions included. The

questionnaire used in this study consists of simplified questions that are directly based on extracting the needed information from the respondents. The researcher chose this instrument, keeping in mind the constraints regarding time and efforts that are least required in questionnaires as opposed to interviews. Another major point of assessment is that the best questionnaires are the ones containing the least number of subjective, or open-ended questions; in short, the more structured the questionnaire is the more likely it is to result in effective analysis (Leary, 1995). Compared to other forms of research, questionnaires can more subjectively be analyzed which was why they had been chosen for this research as well (Doz, 2011). The researcher chose to include opinion based questions in the survey with an objective to deeply discuss the issue at hand from the perspectives of both the students and the education institutional players in order to obtain a holistic picture. These questionnaires were distributed randomly to the participants through the electronic mail. Email based questionnaires carry significant advantages over other forms of the distribution since a larger number of people can be contacted through the electronic or online means. Respondents, in this case, enjoy the freedom to complete the survey as they please and can then, give attention to each question/section as per their convenience. This came as a good research technique before the researcher to have the questionnaire distributed and filled through online means also because in Turkey, the mediums of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is greatly promoted mostly in the educational realms. Using online means, student and academicians can schedule their time accordingly, and can effectively participate in the study; these were also the benefits that were realized through this particular project. Following is the questionnaire for this study based on 15 close-ended questions; their percentage-wise responses were given in the next section that also contains a personal commentary on the obtained results:

The ethical considerations for this study includes respondents' confidentiality and preservice of personal data, their integrity and anonymity, their concern for freedom of withdrawal form study

in case found inappropriate, and rights against possible private intrusions. Another set of considerations against following proper ethics of research comes under the secondary sources category whereby each source of study needs to be originally cited within the thesis, while agreeing to avoid plagiarism by any means. Correct references and anecdotes from past researches and precedents is necessary so that due credit is given to the original researcher/writer, and that the researcher of this study, in no way, violates any principle of academics and research that does not agree with the obligations set by the institutional committee for research or by the Federal governing bodies for academic research projects (Fitzpatrick, Wright & Secrist, 1998). Appropriate steps will be ensured to embody the main principles of ethics and its underlying guidelines to uphold and protect the privacy of the participants, their rights and dignity during and after the study ends, their right to know about the researcher before agreeing to participate in the study, and their rights to preserve their identities and ensure confidentiality of their names and personal details. In this context, the following are the key ethical considerations that have been addressed for this study:

- **Informed Consent:** Before agreeing to participate, the researcher has duly informed the research participants- the students and their academicians/tutors about the sole aim behind data collection, the nature and purpose of collecting data, and the extent to which the research details were utilized prior to an engagement in the process itself. The researcher also properly explained the role of the respondents in the study which was an essential step keeping in mind, the nature of administration of the email based survey which was altogether different from face-to-face interactions.
- **Risk and Harm:** The researcher guaranteed that the participants of this research study were not physically or psychologically harmed during the course of the study. Risk was avoided by not choosing or participating in any form of activity that endangers the sanctity of academics and puts the participants' dignity on stake.
- **Honesty and Respect:** Strictly adhering to all the governing ethical morals and principles, will be served as standards for

trust, respect for participants and honesty of all the members involved in study.

- Anonymity, privacy and participants' confidentiality: The researcher ensured that the confidentiality and privacy of the entire respondents' group with the elimination of all identifying information regarding important personal characteristics before any questionnaire information is distributed anywhere. The names of the respondents were ensured to have not been used anywhere in the study and that their anonymity will completely be protected.
- Participation on Voluntary basis: Despite the clarification of each and every ethical consideration as mentioned above, the respondents were given full freedom to participate in the study on voluntary basis and were given the right to withdraw during or before it, on will. The purpose of the research was purely academic and the respondents could leave the activity as soon as they please.

Research validity and reliability are important concepts whose usage, as compared to daily life instances, is fairly complicated in research realms (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The following sections are dedicated to defining and discussing about validity and reliability individually while explaining their involvement and criticality in survey-based research realms. The validity and reliability of the testing instrument is a significantly-critical factor to consider during the determination of a research design. In lieu of studying about validity and reliability, it is also critical to note that an instrument may be reliable but not valid; or may be valid but not reliable (Bloom & Martin, 2003).

Conclusive Remarks

Many economic, social, cultural and academic benefits have been responsible in the growing interest and attention of the students to become customers at the foreign language learning institutions whether it is about developing a global understanding of people, cultures and customers or about increasing and enriching employees' potential across the globe. There is a need for foreign language

curriculum to meet the changing needs of a modern educational system that can compete with the world standards; our children need to be developed into professional who can compete in a variety of international employment settings.

The needs and expectations of learners of foreign languages, if improved and catered, can lead to better academic results while producing effective opportunities on a personal and professional level. This thesis can be concluded by saying that Turkish students as customers have realized that foreign language acquisition is necessary to achieve if they are to succeed in a dynamic world; however, their trust in their institutions can only be gained through producing success stories and by meeting their needs of professional development while guiding them to blend in with other cultures and open their own personalities to others, for better learning and progression.

Motivation of learners and their interests towards learning a foreign language varies; educationists and policy-makers must pay attention towards their differences so that better policies are promulgated. The effectiveness of a learning centre is gauged by learners in the light of proficiencies obtained by others as well as by themselves. Owing to a rich variety of requirements of learning foreign languages, customer loyalty in foreign language is not an easy task to achieve.

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