STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THE PRACTICES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NON-REGULAR EDUCATION PROGRAMS: THE CASE OF HARAMAYA UNIVERSITY, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess students' satisfaction with the practices and implementation of non-regular education programs (NREPs) with particular regard to Haramaya University (HU), Ethiopia. To achieve the aim of the study, an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design, which initially allows collecting quantitative data and then qualitative data for elaboration on the quantitative data, was used. The study used a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire for quantitative inquiries from 741-students belonging to different centres, and follow-up with 20 interview participants purposefully selected to elaborate those results in more detail. In the quantitative phase, four features were considered as predictors of students' satisfaction with service quality: (a) academic issues, (b) administrative issues, (c) resources/facilities, and (d) assessment and feedback issues. In the qualitative follow-up, the semi-structured interviews outlined three major themes: (a) overall teaching-learning, (b) administrative and management issues, and (c) learning support facilities. The paper used descriptive statistics to interpret the quantitative data and thematic content analysis to interpret the qualitative data. The findings are presented sequentially following the order of the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data presented in the paper. The conclusions and relevant recommendations are also stated at the end of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Universities are important contributors to state and national economies in terms of not only providing skilled human resources for various industries but also in terms of job creation, investment attraction, and revenue generation (Nisar, 2015). To achieve national development, the experiences of university students in their classroom and their satisfaction with the university services are essential (Ambachew and Mekonnen, 2014; Malik, Danish, and Usman, 2010).

As the existing regular higher education programs elsewhere and those in Ethiopia, in particular, have not been able to satisfy the divergent educational needs of all segments of society, NREPs are not optional. Regular education programs (REPs) could not serve the interests of those who could not attend their education for various reasons such as distance, family matters, employment conditions, and personal problems (UNESCO, 2005). For instance, a father who is a breadwinner for his family cannot attend a regular education program since he has to work to earn income for himself and his family. This necessitates the education system with

a different modality, i.e. educational activities arranged outside the established regular system (Baguma and Aheisibwe, 2011). This type of education gives learners a chance to attend education without jeopardizing their means of livelihood.

Depending on their employment conditions, therefore, people may plan to work during the daytime and attend their education in the evening or work during weekdays and attend their education on weekends. Others can opt for attending their education during summer while working for the rest of the months of the year. Still, others can plan to attend their education in distance mode, which has little face-to-face contact hours with tutors at intervals and has no impact on their working time (Tekeste, 1996). For these and other reasons, NREPs are the necessary ways to address the educational needs of a considerable number of citizens. According to Fitzpatrick (2001), the importance of different modalities of education programs is not questionable as they help students save money, time, and energy in addressing their needs. The NREPs modalities are also "considered as an alternative means of providing educational opportunities for those that have been previously disadvantaged" (Birhanu, 2014, p.314). NREPs are thus flexible learning approaches that can depend on the learners' characteristics and can best meet their needs (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020).

Mishira (2002), on the other hand, indicates that NREP is of great advantage to employed workers who wish to enhance their educational or professional equipment, but who are not in a position to attend school on a full-time basis within the given rigid regular framework. Such workers can enrol part-time and complete the requirements in a more flexible situation. They can also work on part of a given program on a course-to-course basis for which they may not attend classes and invest their remaining time on the NREPs based on their preferences. According to Lasonen, Kemppainen, and Raheem (2005), NREP is a concept that provides an alternative chance for citizens through its various modalities. Non-regular students can save costs because they neither travel to campus to attend classes on a regularly scheduled basis nor live on campus and leave their current professional commitments "although they will have to pay for tuition fees and expenses for the purchase of learning materials" (Tripathi, 2014, p. 674).

NREPs have become much more common since very recently in both private and public higher institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia (Alemayehu and Solomon, 2017), via continuing education programs have had a longer history than the rest, as it was started almost three decades ago in a few universities in the country (MoE, 2002). Ethiopian public and private HEIs offer NREPs as a strategy of expanding higher education to produce educated human power in different modalities (Alemayehu and Solomon, 2017). HEIs that achieve student satisfaction engage in positive word-of-mouth and collaborate with the institution after they graduate (Alves and Raposo, 2009). HU, is thus, among one of the pioneers in establishing NREPs that have come to cover education and training initiatives which include Continuing Education Program (CEP), Summer Education Program (SEP), and Distance Education Program (DEP). These educational modalities were adopted in both public and private universities to enlarge the intake capacities of HEIs (MoE, 2002). Based on this direction, HU established its NREPs to reach out to citizens who have been deprived of the opportunity to attend REPs. The university thus is expected to assure service quality not only for its REPs but also for its NREPs. Achieving students' satisfaction is a valuable institutional competitive advantage (Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). To make the institution progressive and effective in the knowledge of expectation students, the higher authorities of the institute (Palacio, Meneses, and Perez, 2002) should keep academic preferences and quality perception about the educational environment.

NREPs in Ethiopia are highly increasing in terms of modalities, coverage, and the number of students. One of the main factors behind the growth of NREPs is its provision without geographical and time constraints for those who are on other businesses (Mulatu, 2014; Birhanu, 2014). However, there seems to be a general feeling in the public that the quality of services in the NREPs is not satisfactory. Sheferaw (2007) argues that such perceptions towards non-regular education can limit the full participation of students in the programs and can affect their education endeavours to meet their objectives.

The purpose of this study was, therefore to assess the students' overall satisfaction with the practices and implementations of HU's NREPs within the context of the foregoing arguments to locate the strengths and weaknesses of the programs through both quantitative and qualitative explanatory sequential mixed

methods. Hence, the research questions of this study were: (1) To what extent HU students under NREPs were satisfied with the overall practices and implementations of NREPs? (2) What were the qualities of the most common services of HU's NREPs students expected to be satisfied with?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students satisfaction can be defined as the desired outcome of tasks or jobs that please and satisfy students' self-esteem in HEIs (Kotler and Clarke, 1986). HEIs assess students' satisfaction with their service quality to determine the originalities and accuracies of their educational system at the level of students' grooming their skill development, course knowledge, and mentality (Malik et al., 2010). Huang (2010) identified five determinant classifications of students' quality satisfaction at HEIs: academics, non-academics, reputation access, and program issue (p.38). According to Zeithaml (1988), satisfaction is the product of a well-functioning administrative and educational structure of an institution that testifies the provision of a conducive learning atmosphere to students to drive them to successful completion of their studies. Providing students with essential educational facilities with effective teaching and training are some of the motivating factors considered as best performers in the views of students (Rodie and Kleine, 2000). Student satisfaction is also the key determinant of student loyalty (Webb and Jagun, 1997), and it is student loyalty that encourages positive word-of-mouth and student involvement and cooperation with their institution both during and after their studies. As a result, HEIs often integrate students' satisfaction with assessing the link between teaching quality/learning outcomes and student satisfaction (Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). According to Elliot and Healy (2001), student satisfaction is a short-term attitude based on an assessment of the education services provided. However, according to the argument of Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013), student satisfaction is not only maintained by the experiences of the effective teaching-learning process the HEIs achieve "but also by their overall experiences as a customer of a particular institution" (p, 145).

According to Douglas et al., (2006), HEIs must control every aspect of students' engagement with all of their service offerings, especially those involving their people to provide high-quality services to students. The students' satisfaction is paramount and matters more than ever in an increasingly competitive and commercial higher education sector (O'Donovan1 2017). In the contemporary competitive commercial situation of global-wide education services, HEIs are obliged to provide market-driven educations that emphasize satisfying students' expectations (Arambewela and Hall, 2013). HEIs which run NREPs, that may engage in profit-making or commercial education must maintain students' satisfaction that plays a significant role for universities to be accepted at the international higher education level (O'Donovan1, 2017).

The issue of students' satisfaction with service quality is highly debatable and demands serious scrutiny. For example, Alemayehu and Solomon (2017) argue that "against all its criticism distance education, its contribution both to provide access to the needy and the encouragement it received from the side of the public institutions are immense" (p.38). However, according to Tucker (2001), in developed countries, DEP, which is one of the NREPs and by far different from others in the mode of delivery, is equally important as a regular program in producing competent human resources. Therefore, what matters most is not the type of education modality but the way it is organized and the effort made to achieve students' satisfaction in service delivery.

Several scholars have pointed out the importance of assessing service quality provisions of HEIs and their influence on students' satisfaction. Some of them have seen in terms of both academic and administrative support wings (e.g. Ambachew and Mekonne, 2014; Dawit, Getachew, and Ashenafi, 2017) whereas, some others have reported their findings in terms students' satisfaction based on feedback and assessment (e.g. Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). Still, some others have sought students' satisfaction in terms of facilities/ resources (libraries, laboratories, and other materials) (e.g. Idiegbeyan-Ose and Esse, 2013; Larson and Owusu-Acheaw, 2012), while others have reported their study results as cumulative service quality provision of higher institutions (e.g. Dawit, Getachew, and Ashenafi, 2017; Kristensen, Martensen, Gronholdt, and Elkildsen, 2000).

However, this study was concerned with the investigation of students' satisfaction with the service quality of HU's NREPs. HU was chosen because it was one of the pioneers in establishing NREPs in Ethiopia and has been challenged in the delivery of services that satisfy its students. This study was made to locate where the problem lies and what needs to be done by the university to improve its service delivery and satisfy its students' satisfaction since students' satisfaction matters most in the delivery of quality education. As Webb and Jagun (1997) state, students' satisfaction is the key determinant of students' loyalty. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) also argue that achieving students' loyalty is essential to receive positive word-of-mouth and their "cooperation with their institution both during and after their studies" (p. 146).

It has also been reported that the image of universities (Palacio et al 2002), the qualities of teachers' education, and teaching materials (Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004), influence the students' satisfaction with HEIs. Also, a study conducted in a Spanish university to assess students' satisfaction with educational delivery indicates that students' satisfaction is determined by teachers, teaching methods, and course administration (Navarro, Iglesias and Torres 2005). According to this result, universities can maintain students' satisfaction and their loyalty through careful management of staff teaching, teaching methodology, and implementation of appropriate course administration. Mai (2005) on the other hand, found out that students' satisfaction is affected by the overall impression of the school, the quality of the education, teachers' expertise and their interest in their subject, the quality, and accessibility of resources/facilities, and the appropriateness of the programs taught.

Theoretical Intervention

The theoretical framework underpinning this study was the self-directed learning theory. This theory is applicable in that it helps to examine the students' satisfaction with practices and implementation of NREPs. According to this theory "... individuals take on the responsibility for their learning process by diagnosing their personal learning needs, setting goals, identifying resources, implementing strategies and evaluating the outcomes" (Olaniyi, 2015, p. 264). This theory "entails individuals to take initiatives and responsibilities for their learning" (Loeng, 2020, p.2). The theory points that adult learners are goal-oriented to be self-determined in the learning process with effective practices and implementation of institutional facilitation of the learning process (Manning, 2007; Olaniyi, 2015). Effective facilitation teaching-learning environment (academics), overall management of the programs (administrations), providing resources, and assessment and feedback techniques are the important feature to measure students' overall satisfaction with education programs. The main idea of the self-directed learning theory according to (Boyer, Edmondson, Artis & Fleming, 2014; Olaniyi, 2015) is that students enhance their mental development and attitudinal changes through their self-administrated learning process.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to assess students' satisfaction with the practices and implementation of HU's NREPs. An explanatory sequential mixed method research design is a two-phases model in which, first, collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data that assist to elaborate on the quantitative findings was implemented (see figure 1). Hence, quantitative survey data were collected through a 5-point Likert Scale in the first phase, and then qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews in the second phase. According to Creswell (2012), the approach of using explanatory sequential mixed method research design is that the "quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem; more analysis, specifically through qualitative data collection, is needed to refine, extend, or explain the general picture" (p. 542).

Hence, in this study, the quantitative data were used to arrive at pertinent findings that are relevant to the target population and the qualitative data were used for cross-checking with the quantitative data. The initial phase of data collection (the quantitative phase) was arranged to draw conclusions from the study population through descriptive statistics while the second phase of data collection (the qualitative phase) was made to collect pertinent qualitative data to cross-check them with each other and with the quantitative

data to draw empirical conclusions and policy implications. The target population comprises all non-regular education students of HU in the year when the study was conducted.
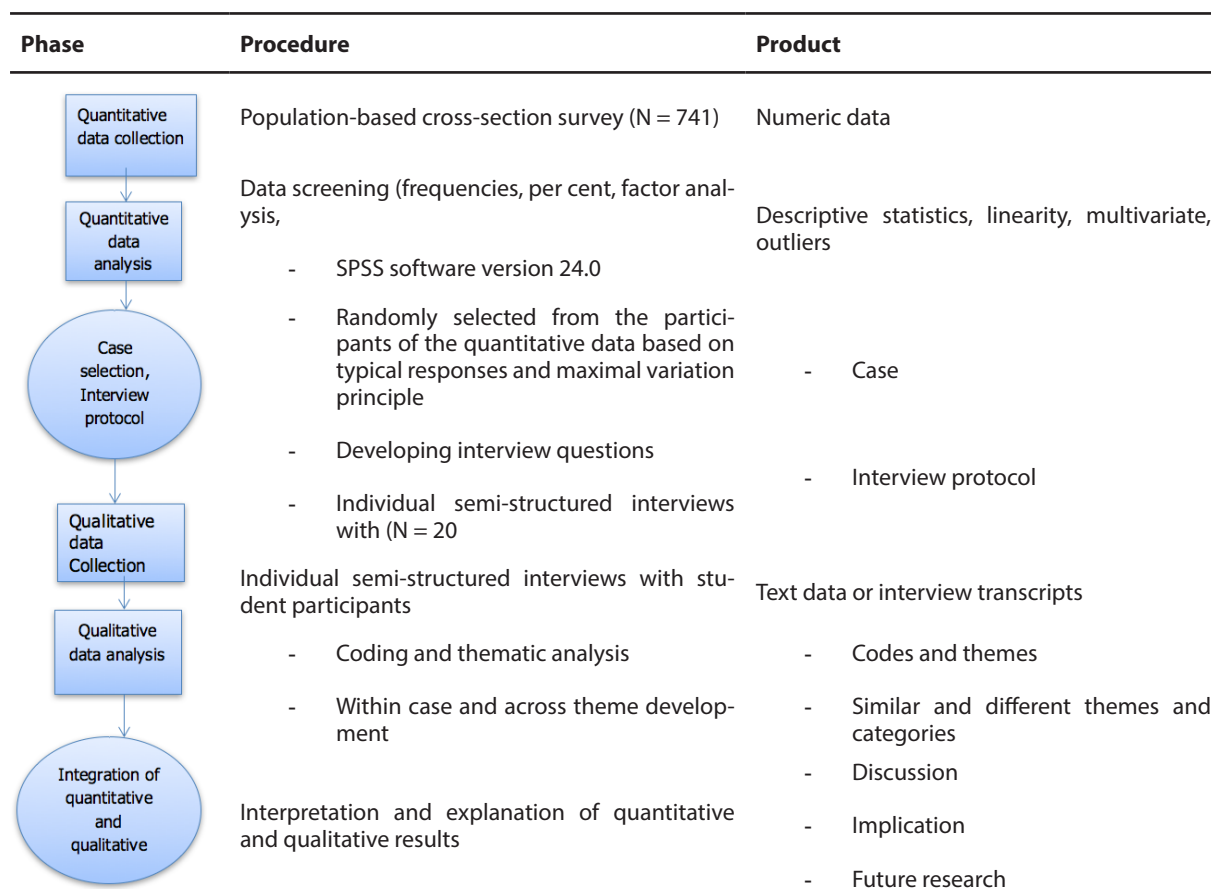
Phase	Procedure	Product
Quantitative data collection	Population-based cross-section survey (N = 741)	Numeric data
Quantitative data analysis	Data screening (frequencies, per cent, factor analysis,	Descriptive statistics, linearity, multivariate, outliers
	- SPSS software version 24.0	
Case selection, Interview protocol	- Randomly selected from the participants of the quantitative data based on typical responses and maximal variation principle	- Case
	- Developing interview questions	
		- Interview protocol
Qualitative data Collection	- Individual semi-structured interviews with (N = 20	
	Individual semi-structured interviews with student participants	Text data or interview transcripts
Qualitative data analysis	- Coding and thematic analysis	- Codes and themes
	- Within case and across theme development	- Similar and different themes and categories
		- Discussion
Integration of quantitative and qualitative	Interpretation and explanation of quantitative and qualitative results	- Implication
		- Future research

Figure 1. An Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method Research Design

(Adopted from Creswell, 2012)

Data Sources and Participants

Data were collected from primary sources around the issue at hand. Fieldwork was undertaken to collect the primary data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) from sampled student populations in two phases. We first collected the quantitative data using the Likert-scale questionnaire and then qualitative data using SSIs.

Quantitative Phase

In the first phase of data collection, the Likert-Scale questionnaire was used to obtain data from significant numbers of respondents (741) drawn from the three modalities of HU's NREPs. The respondents of this study were sampled from 14, 578 non-regular students enrolled in the 2014/15 academic year at Haramaya University (HU, 2014).

The sampled students' populations were proportionally selected as a representative sample first by the programs they enrolled in and then by their respective departments. Accordingly, 5% (n = 750) of the student population was considered for the study using a stratified random sampling technique. After consents were made with both students and middle-level management, a questionnaire was distributed to 750 sampled participants.

Of these 750 sampled participants, 741 filled and returned the questionnaire, while the remaining nine (9) participants did not return the questionnaire. The participants were randomly selected so that they could represent the students of the different programs under the NREPs. Accordingly, nearly 47% (n = 346) of the participants were from Summer Education Programs Undergraduate (SEP UG) students, 24.9% (n = 177) were from DEP, 17.1% (n = 127) of the participants were from Continuing Education Program Undergraduate (CEP UG) students, 8.6% (n = 64) were from Summer Education Program Postgraduate (SEP PG) students, and 3.6% (n = 27) were selected from CEP PG (see Table 1).

The questionnaire consisted of 22 Likert Scale items intended to measure students' satisfaction with service quality and practices of the NREPs of HU. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: (1) the demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational qualifications, study disciplines, and marital status; (2) questions intended to measure students' satisfaction and perceptions about services being provided towards their academic success based on a 5-point Likert scale used for data collection with "1" being "strongly disagree" and "5" being "strongly agree".

Table 1. Total number of Enrolled Students in 2014/15 and Samples drawn from the population

Programs	The total population in 2014/15			Samples				
	Male	Female	**Total**	Male	Female	Missing	**Total**	%
CEP, UG	1780	676	**2456**	93	29	5	127	17.1
CEP, PG	489	19	**508**	25	1	1	27	3.6
DEP	1929	2022	**3951**	99	69	9	177	24.9
SEP, UG	5068	1372	**6440**	267	60	19	346	47
SEP, PG	1163	60	**1223**	59	3	2	64	8.6
Total	**10429**	**4149**	**14578**	543	162	36	741	100

This descriptive analysis shows the demographic characteristics of respondents chosen from the HU NREPs. The output of the SPSS version 24.0 shows that there were about 5% missing values in response in terms of gender. There was an overall fair distribution between males and females with about 73% and 22% respectively. The expectation was that more males than females would form part of this study based on the socio-economic and cultural realities in Ethiopia that females get fewer opportunities in education than males. In terms of age, about 66% are 26-40 years old, about 29% of students are between 18-25 years old, and about 5% are more than 40 years old. Regarding their qualification, there were about 10% missing values, about 78% are in the bachelor degree, and about 12% are in the masters' degree. Concerning the respondents' years of services after the last qualification, 40.5% are between 0-5 years services, about 18% are in the range of 6-10 years of service, about 10% are between 11-15 years of service, 9.7% of the respondents have more than 15 years of service, and the missing value in this regard was about 22%. Concerning marital status, about 71% are married, about 25% are unmarried, 0.8% are widowed /widowers, and the missing value was about 3% (See Table 2).

Demographic Characteristics	Description	Frequency (n)	Per cent (%)
Sex	Male	543	73.3
	Female	162	21.9
	Total	705	95.1
	Missing System	36	4.9
	Total	**741**	**100**
Age	18-25	210	28.3
	26-30	342	46.2
	31-40	135	18.2
	above 40	33	4.5
	Total	720	97.2
	Missing System	21	2.8
	Total	**741**	**100**
Educational Background	Degree	581	78.4
	Masters	91	12.3
	Total	672	90.7
	Missing System	69	9.3
	Total	**741**	**100**
Service year	0-5	300	40.5
	6-10	132	17.8
	11-15	75	10.1
	Above 15	72	9.7
	Total	579	78.1
	Missing	162	21.9
	Total	**741**	**100**
Marital status	Married	525	70.9
	Unmarried	186	25.1
	Widowed	6	0.8
	Total	717	96.8
	Missing system	24	3.2
	Total	**741**	**100**

Variables Measured

Likert-Scale was used to measure the entire variables used in the quantitative phase of this study. The overall satisfaction level of respondents was considered in relation to academics, resources, administration, and assessment and feedback-related services of HU's NREPS. The variables are categorized into ordinal and dichotomous. The ordinal classification ranges from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). However, the dichotomous classification is nominal and the binary classification is derived from the ordered categories and coded as 1 if the respondent is satisfied and with measurement variables and 0 if the respondent is not satisfied with services at HU's NREPs.

Demographic variables (such as age, gender, and educational background of the respondents), and the four constructed variables (academic activities, resource availabilities, administration services, and assessment and feedback techniques) were the assumed independent variables for this study. All course delivery modalities, learning-teaching process, courses materials, instructors teaching skills, course delivery methods and techniques, and classroom management have been assessed in the academic category of the variable. Various scholars indicate that these measurement items are very important in the academic world of higher institutions (Skordoulis, Chalikias, and Koniordos, 2014). Availability of resources has been examined using

specific inquiries that include laboratories, libraries, appropriateness of classrooms, and electric power supplies. Administrative services, on the other hand, were evaluated about the registration process and tuition fee collection, provision of market-oriented programs, supervision of courses content, breadth, overall evaluation of the programs by top, middle and low-level managements, complaints, and grievance handling of management bodies regarding courses delivery assessment and grading systems, admission, and graduation practices. These variables were considered because they are among the determinant factors that influence students' satisfaction in higher education institutions (Ambachew and Mekonnen, 2014). Assessment and feedback techniques which comprise the implementation of continuous assessment, transparency in examination and assignment correction, and overall feedback techniques in course handling were also variables considered in this study. These variables were assessed because they are very important in boosting students' satisfaction with the learning-teaching environment. As Maggs (2014) argues, feedback on students' assessments helps them both to modify their behaviours and improve their subsequent performances.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data of this study were analyzed using SPSS version 24.0 to obtain the required results for the Likert Scale measurement. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, means, standard deviation, and standard errors were used in interpreting and presenting the data. The factor analysis model was used to detect the main concepts and ordinal logistic regression of the ordinal responses of the variables to be measured. The study consists of four independent variables (one demographic variable and three scale items variables. The dependent variable for this study is the overall satisfaction, which comprises four items scale (see Table 4). The four features that were identified as predictors of factors influencing students' satisfaction with the practices and implementation of HU's NREPs at the quantitative phase of the study were: (1) academic (teaching, tutoring, and learning factors), (2) administrative role-related factors, (3) resource/facilities (library, study materials, laboratories), and (4) assessment and feedback factors.

Qualitative Phase

The chief intent of these mixed-methods sequential explanatory studies was to identify the factors that influence students' satisfaction with HU's NREPs. Four features have been identified as predictors of factors influencing students' satisfaction with the practices and implementation of HU's NREPs at the quantitative phase of the study: (1) academic (teaching, tutoring, and learning factors), (2) administrative role-related factors, (3) resource facilities (library, study materials, laboratories), and (4) assessment and feedback related factors.

In the qualitative follow-up phase of data collection for this study, SSIs were used. As Longhurst (2003) states, "[a] semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions" (p. 103). In a similar vein, McIntosh and Morse (2015) state that "[t]he SSI is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced" (p. 1). Accordingly, 20 students were selected randomly and proportionally from each NREP of the university for SSI. The interviews were conducted at the different centres of HU NREPs (main campus (HU), Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, and Harar. to elicit pertinent information. Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewees were informed that their names and the information they provide would be kept confidential.

The qualitative data collected during the second phase of the study was particularly used to check the soundness of the data collected through the quantitative method during the first phase of the data collection phase and augment them in the effort to explain deeply the topic under the study. According to Creswell (2012), in the qualitative phase of data collection and analysis in a sequential explanatory mixed-method research, investigators can use qualitative follow-up procedures to elicit more understanding of the research questions that are fully or partly unanswered.

The following interview guide questions were developed to get the responses of the interview participants regarding their satisfaction with the NREPs: (1) How is your satisfaction with the service delivery of HU's NREPs? and (2) What factors are responsible for influencing (either positively or negatively) your satisfaction with the service delivery of HU's NREP you are attending?

The SSI was conducted fifteen days after the statistical analysis was completed. Interviews were conducted with the 20 randomly selected participants from each program after calculating the number of participants to be included. Accordingly, from SEP UG (n = 9), from DEP (n = 5), from CEP UG (n = 3), from SEP PG (n = 2), and from CEP PG (n = 1) were randomly selected from the student population who completed the quantitative questionnaire. Though the proportions of the departments they were attending were not considered during the selection of the 20 participants, the maximal variation strategy that Creswell (2012) recommends was assumed. As a result, compositions of gender, age, geography, and respective fields of study in the NREPs were carefully considered.

Qualitative Data Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to facilitate subsequent data analysis. The analysis was performed using the following seven steps of qualitative analysis recommended by Ivankova and Stick (2007). These are (1) exploring data; (2) coding the data; (3) verifying the codes; (4) developing themes by using codes; (5) connecting and interrelating themes; (6) constructing narratives composed of descriptions and themes; and (7) cross-case thematic analysis (Ivankova and Stick, 2007, p. 103).

In this study, first, the audiotaped interviews were transcribed and translated into English and the textual data were thematized for analysis. The textual data were then coded and categorized based on the emerging themes pertinent to the objectives of the study. The main themes and subthemes were extracted by going through the textual data of the interviews several times for conformability, dependability, and transferability of the data. Hence, the trustworthiness of the qualitative data was checked and rechecked for the accuracy of the results emanating from them vis-a-vis the data collected through the quantitative method and review of related literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitative Data Results and Discussions

The quantitative phase of this study was intended to identify the levels of students' satisfaction with the overall practices and implementations of HU's NREPs. Hence, the dependent variable is 'students' satisfaction' that was measured by using 22 Likert question items. To compute the overall students' satisfaction with the practices and implementations of HU's NREPs all of the independent variables were coded as 0 = not satisfied and 1 = satisfied. All 0-3 responses were coded as not satisfied, though the response level of 3 indicates neutral, which does not always necessarily indicate disagreement or dissatisfaction with the variable. All 4-5 responses were coded as satisfied with HU's NREPs.

The sampled respondents were asked to indicate their level of overall satisfaction with the academic performances (teaching-learning process), resources/facilities availability, administrative services, and assessment and feedback) of the HU's NREPs. Based on the responses, the level of students' satisfaction is presented in Table 3. There was a relatively high percentage (65.78%) of the students' satisfaction with assessment and feedback techniques. Table 3 shows that the satisfaction of respondents with academic practices and administrative activities were significant percentages of 64.8% and 61.65% respectively. However, relatively low percentages (53.7%) of the respondents were satisfied with resources/facilities availability. It is not difficult to decipher from these figures the fact that nearly half (46.3%) of the respondents did not appreciate the level of satisfaction with the availabilities of resources/facilities (such as laboratories, libraries, and other resources) of the NREPs of the university. Regarding the dissatisfaction level with academic activities, administrative services, and assessment and feedback techniques, 35.2%, 38.35%, and 34.2% of respondents were not satisfied respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for students' overall satisfaction with HU's NREPs using construct varibles

Variables	Not Satisfied	Satisfied	Total
Academics	35.2%	64.8%	100%
Resources	46.3%	53.71%	100%
Administrative	38.35%	61.65%	100%
Assessment	34.2%	65.8%	100%

Table 4. Distribution of Scale Items of Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error values

Construct variables	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Academic	I am satisfied with the courses delivery modalities of the NREPs of HU	3.96	1.093	
	I am satisfied with the learning/teaching materials of HU's NREPs	3.81	1.171	
	I am satisfied in instructors' courses offering methods and techniques in the non-regular programs	3.67	1.166	0.872
	Most teachers in HU NREPs teach with their full potential.	3.66	1.042	
	Best instructors are often involved in HU's NREPs	3.66	1.111	
	The instructor's use of time in the learning-teaching process of the HU NREPs is effective.	3.64	1.113	
Resources	HU non-regular programs have well-established libraries and other facilities for its students	3.44	1.170	
	Electric power supplies and lighting at HU's non-regular programs classes and centres are satisfactory.	3.42	1.205	
	HU NREPs' laboratories are sufficient concerning the number of students	3.60	1.266	0.73
	HU's NREPs learning classes at centres are effective and up to standard	3.50	1.167	
	HU's NREPs have many contributions to the human resource development of the country	3.42	1.205	

	The registration process and fee collection in the NREPs are effective.	2.69	1.334	
	The NREPs of HU are relevant to the interests, needs, and goals of students	3.36	1.141	
	Non-regular education courses are of sufficient content, breadth, and length to permit the students to learn and attain the required knowledge, skill, and abilities	3.17	1.068	
Administrative				0.449
	HU develops, implements, and evaluates the effectiveness of its NREPs	3.01	1.126	
	In the NREPs of HU, students' complaints or grievances regarding courses and grades are carefully investigated and feedback are given in time	2.83	1.281	
	The admission practices and placements of NREPs are effective and carefully made	3.03	1.276	
	There is a sufficient provision of continuous assessments by instructors who offer courses in the NREPs of HU	3.28	1.156	
	There is transparency in assignment and exam correction and feedback in time in the NREPs of HU	3.59	1.124	
Assessment	Exam distribution and administrations are effective and carefully made.	3.79	1.072	0.808
	Students are well informed of their roles as students before dealing with each course	3.78	1.114	
	Irregularities in course handling and grading students in the non-regular educations in HU are not the main problems	3.91	1.133	

Qualitative Data Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the 20 participant interviews generated essential data associated with the quality of service of HU's NREPs. Accordingly, the SSI interviews revealed that three major issues influence students' satisfaction with the service delivery of NREPs. These are (1) Academics pertinent services affecting student satisfaction, (2) general administrative and management issues, and (3) learning resources/facilities as indicated in Table 5 below.

In the qualitative phase of this study, academic-related issues such as instructors' course handling, instructors' transparency in assessment and feedback, instructors' time management, and appropriately and accurately advising on senior essays and MA/MSc theses of students were identified. Administrative and management-related factors like admission procedures, registration process, exam administration, and efficient orientation and communication on university rules and regulations were also identified. Furthermore, in relation to the availability of resources/facilities, the availability of libraries, laboratories, the internet, and other teaching materials were issues identified by the interviewees.

Table 5. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Exemplary Translated Interview Statements

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Exemplary translated interview statements
Academics	• Programs relevance • Course Delivery - Teaching/ Tutoring	*"I am very satisfied with the relevance of the program I am attending. All my colleagues and I do not have problems because we were already admitted to the programs of our choices and market demands"* (38 years, DEP, 35 years, SEP UG).
		"In terms of quality, however, one can question a lot about the curricula of the programs, module design, and management, course/module handling, professional ethics of instructors, pedagogical skills, and knowledge of instructors" (28 years, CEP PG).
		"I like much of our instructors' course delivery techniques. However, there were few instructors whom I felt were pedagogically and professionally incapable of handling the courses" (30 years, SEP UG).

	• Assessment and Feedback
	  - Transparency in exam correction
	  - Transparency in assignment correction
	  - Transparency in course grading
		"I have never seen my exam and assignment results since my enrolment in this program" (31 years, SEP, UG).

		"I am now a graduating class. I used to see only my courses letter grades posted on the notice board of the university. I am not sure whether those grades are mine or not since I did not know my exam and assignment results" (40 years, SEP UG).
		"I need to know how I am coping with coursework through tests and assignments. But I did not get the chance from my instructors yet "(36 years, SEP UG).
		"I wish I would have known my errors in assignments and exams. Unfortunately, I have not seen all courses' exams and assessment results except their grades posted" (31 years, CEP UG).
	• Commitment - MA/MSc thesis advising and supervisions	*"I do not want to discuss my thesis openly with my advisor as he is not willing to closely discuss it with me. However, I am always eager to work with him on my thesis in a friendly manner"* (33 years, CEP PG).
		"I have not been adequately and accurately advised. Both major and co-advisors seem very reluctant to advise me to the level required" (29 years, SEP PG
		"Advisors often promise to help to the maximum possible but most of the time they are not available in their office as per their consultation hours" (33 years, CEP PG).
Administrative and Management	• Time management	*"I like the time management of many of our instructors. They come to class and leave class on time. However, some instructors come to class very lately and leave very early. I feel that such instructors do not care about time management"* (34 years, DEP).
	• Admission procedures	*"I feel that the admission procedures of the NREPs are good and as per the rules and regulations but the problem is that sometimes classes do not begin right after admission and enrolment"* (26 years, CEP UG).
		"I hate my summer classes. A very large number of students are being enrolled and I feel that our teachers do not have time for such large classes to check the progress of each student" (27 years, SEP UG).
	• Registration and Tuition Fee collection Processes and procedures	*"The fee collection process of the SEP is not conducive. It is boring to wait in a queue for a long time during registration to pay tuition or registration fee and get registered. The registration process is time-wasting and completely traditional"* (35 years, SEP UG).
		"As far as I know, most students were not discouraged by the tuition fees. It is affordable. However, some students were asked much amount of money when they repeat courses for various reasons and this is very much discouraging" (33 years, DEP).
	• Effective Orientation and Communication - University's rules and regulations	*"There is no effective communication and orientation on how the learning and teaching process is accomplished in HU right from the beginning of our admission. We need to know the rules and regulations of the university in general and the SEP in particular"* (29 years, SEP UG).
		"I feel there is a poor record handling in the CEP. Many of our students are told that they did not take some courses later after years even though they claim that they took them already" (28 years, CEP UG, and 41 years, DEP).
	• Setting schedules	*"I sometimes observe overlap of class and exam schedules for students who add courses and take them with some other class students (not their batches). Failures to consider such circumstances were some of the sources of complaints I often hear from students. Generally, there were timetabling problems (makeup and tutorial exams, courses, classes, etc."* (32 years, DEP).

Resource Availability	• Availability of learning-teaching resources/facilities - Availability of libraries, ICT, quality modules/books	*"I am not satisfied with HU's CEP learning resources/facilities. For example, there is no well-established library in our centre, and the computer laboratory is not sufficient as many students want to use them"* (28 years, CEP UG).
		"When I have free time, I want to go to the library. However, I could not access reference materials from my centre, and I am obliged only to depend on the courses modules" (33 years, DEP).
		"I had never enjoyed HU's library as much as I can for the last three summers except when individuals or group assignments were given. I always feel a shortage of time to study in libraries due to the tight schedule of the summer program" (27 years, SEP).
		"Some of the modules I am offered seem very poor in quality and difficult for independent learning and the instructors often fail to complete them within the reserved time for tutorial classes as they are very bulky" (38 years DEP).
		"Some of our programs need well-established laboratories. However, we do not have labs for our engineering courses at our centres" (31 years CEP, UG).
	• Availability of Laboratories	*"Few computers are available in the computer lab. Even the available ones are not good for practical support. They are very old and you should wait several minutes to start them up* (26 years, CEP UG).
		"We need internet connectivity at our campus either wired or wireless. But no such service at all" (36 years, SEP PG).

Theme 1: Academics Pertinent Services Affecting Student Satisfaction of HU's NREP

Programs Relevance: The relevance and usefulness of programs offered under the NREPs of HU were not questionable as they were launched based on students' and stakeholders' demands. As a result, students did not have any problem as far as the relevance and usefulness of the programs were concerned.

Courses Delivery: The qualitative data obtained from the SSI interviews revealed that NREPs students' satisfaction with course delivery was determined by the instructors' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Advising: Participants of the interviews generally believed that transparency in assessment and feedback is essential in determining students' academic progress but instructors of the NREPs of HU were rarely transparent in this regard. Hence, the practices and implementation of instructors' transparency in assignment and exam corrections and course grading were found to be less satisfactory in the NREPs of HU. Though Students were eager to get feedback on their works and progress in discussion with their instructors, in the context of many of the HU's NREPs this was lacking. Lack of transparency in assessment also created not only an atmosphere of mistrust between students and instructors but also students' lack of trust in the final grades they were given in each course. For example, 25 years old female student of CEP UG, reflected on the assessment and feedback techniques of her courses instructors as follows: "I have never seen my exam and assignment results since my enrolment in this program."

It is needless to mention that this phenomenon was jeopardizing students' satisfaction. This finding goes with the work of other scholars in the field. For example, according to Browne, Kaldenberg, Browne, and Brown (1998), students' satisfaction is driven by their assessments of course quality and other curriculum-related factors. In a similar vein, Ramsden (1992) and Rust et al. (2003), argue that efficient and effective assessment and corrective feedback are pivotal for driving students learning behaviour. Students often harness good marks in course assessment with good teaching and tutoring (Ivankova and Stick 2007).

Students' satisfaction regarding instructors' advising and supervision was another sub-theme that emerged from the interviews. Many of the quotations from interviews indicate that students of the NREPs of HU were less satisfied with the advisory or supervisory services they were provided with. This again indicates that there is a significant gap in terms of service delivery as exemplified by instructors' disposition towards their advisees.

Classroom and Time Management: Interview participants also addressed that teachers frequently miss classes or tutorial sessions without substantial reasons. On the other hand, interview respondents from the graduates of the NREPs of HU unanimously argued that the majority of the teachers were not serious when they taught courses or handled tutorial classes. As they indicated, many teachers do not start tutorial classes

or teaching courses of a semester on time but they finish classes before using all the hours assigned for each course. As they further stated, a considerable number of teachers come late to class every time and leave class early (see Table 5).

Theme 2: Administrative and Management-Related Factors Affecting Students' Satisfaction

From participant interviews, it is possible to realize that students' satisfaction with service delivery in the area of administration and management was significantly affected by the following factors.

Lack of Proper Communication and Orientation: participants in the interview believed that lack of proper communication and orientation about the university's rules and regulations in general and the practices of NREPs, in particular, exposed them to several messes and irregularities. They strongly stated that they were exposed to wastage of their money, time, and energy due to a lack of sufficient information about the actual procedures and processes of NREPs. Late registration with a penalty, inactively attending courses and achieving poor results in course works and repeating courses with additional tuition fees, missing exams, etc are partly the consequences of lack of information about the actual requirements of NREPs. Most students did have little or no knowledge at all about the pedagogy of NREPs even after joining one of the programs. Furthermore, most of the students, if not all, did not do the assignments given to them by their instructors/tutors on their own but they were always supported by others around them either freely or by paying them at the expense of educational quality as they wrongly thought that their mission to be in one of the programs was not as such to acquire knowledge but to obtain a degree at whatever cost in the desire to get a job promotion.

Admission: Interview participants did not have serious concerns in the admission procedures of the NREPs except the absence of clear orientation and communication timely. They indicated that they were less challenged by the admission process of the NREPs of HU. However, the SEP respondents did express their frustration due to the highly increasing number of students admitted and enrolled in some of the SEP departments that, according to them, was affecting the quality of the learning-teaching process and becoming a challenge for the administration. Instructors were thus facing the serious challenge of assessing students' learning progress. Apart from these issues, the university is said to have been successfully and effectively admitting its NREPs students in the fields of their choice. Hence, it seems that the admission procedure of HU's NREPs did not significantly affect students' satisfaction though the responses from informants from the different programs seem to be inconsistent (See quotes from Table 5).

The Registration Process, Tuition Fee Collection, Communication, and Orientation: According to the interview results of this study, the registration process of HU's NREPs is time-wasting and completely traditional. The lack of a faster and efficient process of registration made the students feel bored and unsatisfied.

The interview participants indicated that the tuition fees paid for the different NREPs of HU were affordable but the absence of proper orientation and effective communication on the rules and regulations of the university were exposing many students to unnecessary monetary punishments. Students obtained Incomplete (I), No Grade (NG), and F grades sometimes because they were not well informed about the procedures, rules, and regulations to be followed to successfully deal with courses of the different programs. Scoring these grades would cost students to repeat these courses paying higher fees than the fees for the normal course registrations. In addition, late registration with a penalty which was also partly one result of lack of adequate orientation would bring additional cost on students. As most of the students of NREPs were self-sponsored, these additional costs would affect students' satisfaction with the service delivery of the NREPs of the university. These and other additional costs contributed to students' dissatisfaction with the service delivery which the administrative management did not consider at all.

Setting Timetables: As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, NREPs, as their names imply, are education arrangements that do not follow the format of the REPs and hence need careful considerations of timetabling and scheduling. Participants of the interviews pinpointed that due attention needs to be given to exam schedule preparations of NREPs as students who added courses faced overlap of course and exam schedules which forced them to miss one of the courses or exams. This also contributed to some extent to students' dissatisfaction with service delivery though the problem did not affect the majority of the student population

Theme 3: Availability of Learning-Teaching Resources/Facilities

The availability of educational resources/facilities such as libraries, laboratories, ICT, and others is very significant in bringing about students' satisfaction with service delivery. The finding of this study revealed that the lion's share of students' dissatisfaction with the service delivery of HU's NREPs goes to the unavailability and inefficiency of educational resources/facilities.

Availability of Libraries, ICTs, and Laboratories: These are the main resources/facilities that support effectively the learning-teaching process in any educational institution. Regarding the NREPs of HU, almost all SSI participants indicated that they were not satisfied with the availability of libraries, ICTs, and laboratories (See Table 5). According to informants, NREPs are not effectively supported by the necessary services such as libraries, ICTs, and laboratories. The absence of these supporting services were other crucial factors that negatively affected students' satisfaction with the NREPs of HU. The availability of resources/facilities is mandatory in providing quality education and in satisfying students' educational needs. As Idiegbeyan-Ose & Esse (2013) state, "[l]ibraries are service-oriented organizations established for the provision of relevant information resources and quality services to meet their users' information needs" (p. 66). In the same token, laboratories are very important in assisting learners for scientific discovery and inquiry-based learning. ICTs are also the most relevant resources in supporting libraries and laboratories for effective functioning.

Text Books, Reference Books, Modules, and Related Resources: The availability of up-to-date textbooks, reference books, quality modules, and related resources is another crucial factor that affect students' satisfaction with NREPs of HU. Interview respondents indicated that the teaching modules and other materials they were being offered were poor in quality as many of them were haphazardly prepared and their contents were copy-pasted from internet sources without due regard to pedagogical and professional concerns. Interviewees also indicated that most of these modules were bulky both in content and in the number of pages they contained and hence could not be covered by tutors within the specified time allotted to the theme. This forced students to be left to themselves to cover all the chapters left uncovered by the tutors of the modules. Furthermore, informants also indicated that many of the modules and teaching materials were outdated once as they were not revised for a long period. It is, therefore, needless to mention that all these service delivery defects would negatively affect students' satisfaction with the NREPs of HU and hence demand serious attention from the university to be addressed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is needless to say that enhancing students' satisfaction with educational service delivery is very essential in producing a well-educated workforce for national development. Students' satisfaction needs to be seen not as an optional aspect but as one of the core components of the education process.

Concerning the level of students' satisfaction with HU's NREPs, the findings of the study revealed the fact that a lot remains to be done to bring HU's NREPs to the required standard. Therefore, assessing student satisfaction with the NREPs is necessary from the viewpoint of identifying the internal features affecting students' satisfaction. Since NREPs aim at the maximum involvement of people belonging to different cross-sections of society, it is natural for diverse groups to raise questions and seek answers on the efficiency and effectiveness of these programs from one angle or the other (Tefera, 2010).

NREPs can gain students' satisfaction via the delivery of up to standard services, and this is an integral part of securing a sustainable competitive advantage in today's educational market (Huang, Binney, and Hede, 2012).

The findings derived from both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that the issue of quality service of the NREPs of HU deserves critical attention and serious intervention for improvement. The issues of academics, administration and management, and resources/facilities are very important in students' satisfaction with NREPs which the university should closely consider in its practical roles to improve the quality of its NREPs. Both phases of the study consistently revealed that these factors need serious scrutiny to sustainably and progressively improve the practices and implementation of NREPs at HU.

The internal problems identified through the study were lack of experts who have the know-how about non-regular education, lack of proper attention from the university in strengthening the administrative capacity

of the programs and in providing the necessary resources for these programs, and the teaching staffs' wrong perceptions about the programs and poor knowledge and skills about NREPs' teaching modalities.

The findings of the study are more or less in line with the findings of previous scholars in the field of education. For instance, Ramsden (1991) states three important factors that affect the quality of NREPs. These include the quality of student learning, their satisfaction with their courses, and their lecturers' descriptions of their attitudes to teaching and students.

All the above conclusions call for all stakeholders to work hard separately, collaboratively, and jointly to address the gaps and challenges of providing quality education in the non-regular modalities to achieve students' satisfaction by fulfilling educational support resources and technologies. HU should work hard for the betterment of its NREPs by providing appropriate academic, administrative, and logistic services. Both academic and administrative staff involved in the programs should exert more effort and commitment to improving the teaching-learning process and services that support the learners including library services, module preparation and distributions, and other facilities to achieve students' satisfaction. Students' satisfaction is an increasingly important indicator of the quality of teaching performance and can be considered as a measure of the outcome of the education process itself (Ramsden, 1991). As a result, the HU's NREPs should practice achieving the students' satisfaction in all its dimensions. As Munteanu, Ceobanu, Bobâlcâ, and Anton (2010) rightly argue, being driven to engage in a commercial rivalry, higher education institutions have to be cautious not only about the quality of education they provide but also about students' feelings regarding their learning experiences.

Future Research

This research is limited to students' service quality satisfaction with HU's NREPs. Future studies in this area should examine students' satisfaction with NREPs across HEIs of the country. Future research in this particular area should also cover more diversified participant groups from the different universities of the country as this research only focused on the case of HU. Future research can additionally investigate the roles of teachers on student satisfaction in the NREPs. This research only sought internal factors on students' satisfaction with NREPs. Future research should also look at external factors such as socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, and individual motivations that were left unaddressed in this particular research.

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