A longitudinal qualitative study of foreign students at the University of Szeged - Initial results on motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty

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Abstract

Recently, a considerable literature has grown up around the theme of higher education. However, previous studies have failed to demonstrate longitudinal qualitative measures in this field.

The current study aims at investigating the motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty of foreign students throughout their time spent in Hungary at a Higher Education Institution.

Due to the longevity of the study programmes, these factors are examined separately.

In the paper a qualitative research method is applied. In-depth interviews were conducted in three phases with seventeen foreign students throughout their studies in Hungary. The longitudinal interviews were analysed manually. I found that most students were internally motivated, had study-related expectations and were satisfied with the University and the study environment. Their loyalty is projected through the fact that most of them would suggest studying at this specific HEI to other students. In fact, this recommendation has already materialized in certain cases.

The findings implicate that a country- and institution-specific study is essential to understand foreign student needs at a specific HEI. Moreover, motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty should be studied together, but in separate phases of the students' study programme.

Key words: motivation, expectation, satisfaction, loyalty, WOM, HEI, higher education

1. Introduction

In the new global economy, higher education has become a central issue. Internationalization is a major area of interest within the currently mentioned field. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in foreign students' motivation, expectation, satisfaction and loyalty.

However, the search of the literature revealed few studies which focus on a qualitative analysis of foreign students (Roman 2014, Sultan – Wong 2012a, Sultan – Wong 2012b, Templeman et al. 2016, Gallarza et al. 2017). Surprisingly, there has been little longitudinal qualitative analysis (Patterson et al. 1998) on country- and institution-specific motivation, expectation, satisfaction and loyalty of foreign students. So far, very little attention has been paid to the role of examining these factors together longitudinally.

Previous studies focused solely on one of the above mentioned fields. Separate studies have been conducted in the field of foreign student motivation, expectations and loyalty. This indicates a need to understand these concepts together.

This paper reports on a study covering foreign students' motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty altogether. The specific objective of this study was to investigate these factors with a qualitative method. This study was exploratory and interpretative in nature. By employing a qualitative mode of enquiry, specifically in-depth interviews, I attempt to highlight the similarities and differences between students and their motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty towards the HEI.

This is among the first studies to undertake a longitudinal analysis of these factors by employing in-depth interviews on a panel of foreign students. Therefore, this study provides an exciting opportunity to see how the perception of foreign students change in terms of motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty. However, this study is unable to cover every single foreign student of the HEI and the data are not representative. The reader should bear in mind that the study is based on longitudinal in-depth interviews and it does not focus on quantitative methods.

The paper is composed of five main chapters. After the introduction, the second section examines the relevant literature regarding motivation, expectations, satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth. Chapter three introduces the methodology used for this study. The fourth chapter analyses the results of the in-depth interviews undertaken during the research. The final section draws together the key findings and identifies areas for future research.

2. Literature review

In the following section, the theoretical background is investigated. The main concepts of motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty is discussed.

2.1 Motivation

Different theories exist in the literature regarding motivation. A seminal study in this area is the work of Maslow (1987). According to him, the different motives are followed by each other based on their biological strength. When a lower need is satisfied, a hierarchically higher need can arise. Hull's drive

approach (1943) shows that our behaviour is driven by drives. Behaving in a certain way could reduce the drive itself. According to this approach, the person aims at being in an ideal state of mind and reducing the stress by acting upon a certain drive. Maehr's (1976) continuing motivation focuses on how motivation maintains the ability of people to study for a long period of time, even if there are no apparent and visible rewards from it (Kaplan et al. 2009). Skinner's (1995) Perceived Control theory states that our behaviour is driven by the feedback that we get. If it is positive or negative, a person would aim at getting the reward or avoiding the negative feedback again.

As we can see, there are numerous approaches to identifying different motivational types. In this study, I am going to concentrate on one classic approach, namely the self-determination approach (Deci et al. 1999, Ryan – Deci 2000), which is the best for the aim of the current research.

Before examining their theory, a definition of motivation is needed. Motivation is defined as the underlying reasons of the behaviour of people (Guay et al. 2010). Elliot and Fryer (2008) define the same 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, behaviour of people can be categorized. Vallerand et al. (1997) researched the factors that can have an influence on motivation. In his study, he concludes that different social factors influence the motivational types.

Motivation types are distinguished by Deci and Ryan (1985). They distinguish between two basic types of human-specific motivation, namely the extrinsic and the intrinsic motivation. Both types refer to the personal characteristics of people. Extrinsic motivation refers to those aims which include reaching an external benefit or avoiding a negative issue or harm. Extrinsic motivation always has an external aspect, while intrinsic motivation comes from within a person. Intrinsic motivation reflects the needs of the person to get to know their environment better and satisfy their eagerness to learn and develop themselves. In the present study the motivation of foreign students is interpreted based on this categorization.

To date, a number of studies have investigated the motivation of foreign students. Some works focus on the differentiation of certain theoretical aspects of motivation, namely extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the Self-Determination theory (Deci et al. 1991), while others deal with finding the main motivation of foreign students regardless of categorization. In their research, Deci et al. (1991) identifies intrinsic motivation as the major causes of academic success. Areepattamannil et al. (2011) also found that students who went abroad had higher level of intrinsic motivation and better grades than those, who stayed at home. Students, who stayed in their country had stronger extrinsic motivation. Ntoumanis (2001) also observes students based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A questionnaire was developed by Guay et al. (2000) to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students. While in the works of Cubillo et al. (2006), Nyaupane et al. (2011), Hackney et al. (2013) different motivation factors are researched why students pursue foreign education regardless of the intrinsic and extrinsic categorization. Most scientists applied different scales for measuring student motivation (Hanousek – Hegarty 2015, Stover et al. 2012, Utvaer and Haugan 2016, Chirkov et al. 2007, Guay et al. 2000). Hanousek and Hegarty (2015), Stover et al. (2012) and Utvaer and Haugan (2016) used the Academic Motivation Scale of Vallerand et al. (1992), while Chirkov et al. (2007) experimented with a newly developed approach, the Self-Regulation Questionnaire. What is common in all the above mention studies is that their

methodology included quantitative measures. Qualitative measures have been rarely used (Roman 2014, Sultan – Wong 2012a, Sultan – Wong 2012b, Templeman et al. 2016) and in most cases they are applied in tandem with quantitative measures (Zimmerman 2008). Most longitudinal methods involve quantitative measures respectively and are aimed at different motivation types, such as language learning (Sasaki 2011). Little is known about the usage of longitudinal in-depth interviews with a panel of students. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating their usage.

2.2. Expectations

A great deal of previous research focused on expectations. Oliver (1980, 1985) has seminal works in this field. His results can be used in the field of marketing researches (Oliver 1980, Oliver 1985). According to his Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), expectations are relevant to those attributes or characteristics that are thought to be connected to a certain product or service (Oliver 1985, Oliver – Winer 1987, Elkhani – Bakri 2012).

In the literature, there is no common agreement how to categorize expectations. Some scholars differentiate between forecast, normative, ideal and minimum tolerable expectations (Woodruff 1983, Oliver 2015). These refer to expectations prior to purchase (Woodruff 1983, Oliver 2015). Therefore, they are not relevant in the current study.

Expectations can be categorized based on the time of research enquiry (Higgs et al. 2005). If a customer is asked of their expectation prior to purchase, that is called forecast expectation. If they are asked after purchase to remember the expectations beforehand, that is called 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 foreign students.

Several recent studies have been carried out about the expectations of foreign students regarding the foreign university and country they applied to. Most studies use questionnaire method to identify foreign student expectations (Carvalho – Mota 2010, Arquero et al. 2009, Byrne – Flood 2005). As the categorization of expectations differs in literature, usually, the aim of the research determines the categories. Anderson (2007) divides foreign student expectations into nine categories (e.g.: personal development, social environment and study success, etc.). However, the division of foreign student expectations is not so detailed in many other studies, because they mainly focus on one type. Social expectations of foreign 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.

The study of Carvalho and Mota (2010) focuses solely on the institution-related expectations, while the questionnaire of Byrne and Flood (2005) already includes in-school and out-of-school elements. Previously, a longitudinal tool was also applied to examine pre- and post-trip expectations (Martin et al. 1995).

I conclude from the literature that in certain cases, expectations are studied together with motivation (Byrne et al. 2012, Arquero et al. 2009). This implies that the two notions are in connection with each other. However, they have been rarely studied with qualitative methods.

2.3. Satisfaction

Research into satisfaction has a long history. A core work in the field is the above mentioned Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver 1980, 1985). According to ECT, customers have certain pre-purchase expectations. Customer experience of the desired product or service is the determiner of satisfaction (Oliver 1980, 1985). In the studies of Yi (1990), they distinguish 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. I define foreign student satisfaction as the combination of process- and result-oriented satisfaction combined. Both the satisfaction during the time of their studies and the satisfaction after graduation is important.

The Expectation Confirmation Theory is later expanded by Elkhani and Bakri (2012) and is called Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). It 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).

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

In the present study, higher education is viewed as a service. However, service satisfaction has different aspects. 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.

The satisfaction of foreign students with the chosen HEI has been largely explored. However, most studies typify satisfaction differently. Among these researches, several focus on in-school satisfaction (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Elliot – Healy 2001, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002, Lenton 2015, Cardona – Bravo 2012, Owlia – Aspinwall 1996, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Roman 2014, Lee 2010). Most often, they enlist the following factors as the source of foreign student satisfaction: available study-

programmes, 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).

Out-of-school satisfaction is rarely investigated in terms of foreign students. However, I think that it is extremely important. There are certain studies, though, which investigate in-school and out-of-school factors. Yet, most of them focus solely on local students not foreign ones. Schertzer and Schertzer (2004) uncovered why students leave a certain HEI. They found that transition and financial problems are the most common 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. All the above mentioned studies used quantitative measures. Qualitative methods are rarely used to identify satisfaction (Sultan – Wong 2012a, Sultan – Wong 2012b).

Regardless of categorization, foreign student satisfaction is usually researched in tandem with foreign student expectations Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Elliot – Healy 2001, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002, Lenton 2015, Cardona – Bravo 2012, Owlia – Aspinwall 1996, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Roman 2014, Lee 2010. Therefore, I assume that these notions are also closely related.

2.4. Loyalty and Word-of-Mouth

A considerable amount of literature has been published on loyalty. In most cases, loyalty is studied together with satisfaction and the retention of students (Oliver 1999, Reichheld et al. 2000, Elliot – Healy 2001, Reichheld 2003, Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016). This is why I assume that they are connected.

However, Reichheld et al. (2000) argues that satisfaction is not always enough to retain customers or make them loyal, but it is a key element to growth (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).

Loyalty has been defined variously in literature. Some, in the early phases of the study of loyalty, argue that loyalty can be measured by retention and satisfaction (Reichheld – Sasser 1990, Reichheld 1996), others say that re-purchase is a good indicator (Tellis 1988, Reichheld et al. 2000, Oliver 1999, Neal 1999). While Newman and Werbel (1973) argued that re-purchase in itself is weak and brand deliberation is needed for the satisfaction of the customer. A more current view states that satisfaction and re-purchase are not enough, but 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).

Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize 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 behaviour" (Oliver 1999, 34.).

However, this definition lacks an important element that the current study needs. Therefore, I rely on the following definition. Reichheld (2003) 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, 46). He determines recommendation as a key element to loyalty.

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the loyalty of foreign students to their HEI (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016). Some of them only define several factors and needs which, if satisfied, can lead to loyalty (Schertzer – Schertzer 2004, Bryla 2014, Giner – Rillo 2016). While some other studies tried to investigate how loyalty materializes in foreign students as WOM recommendations (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009).

The importance of WOM in foreign student satisfaction has been explored by Alves and Raposo (2007). They concluded that if a student is satisfied with the education, they will recommend the institution by WOM. Conversely, WOM is the result of their satisfaction.

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

In terms of measurement, 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.

As previous studies show, loyalty is usually studied together with satisfaction, and there is a link between them (Kandampully 1998, Gronholdt et al. 2000, Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016). In the current study I intend to find out if this applies to a number of foreign students as well at the researched university and I intend to reveal the possible relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, and loyalty and WOM.

Together these studies indicate that there has been a significant effort of researchers to uncover motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty of foreign students. However, the literature lacks

evidence based on qualitative methods. Overall, these studies highlight the need for a qualitative insight into motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty of foreign students.

3. Methodology

This particular study employs a qualitative research method. Longitudinal in-depth interviews are conducted with a panel of foreign students to explore their motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty throughout their study-programmes at a HEI.

Previous researches mainly focused on quantitative data obtainment from foreign students (Elliot – Healy 2001, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002, Anderson 2007, Firmin et al. 2013, Lenton 2015, Cardona – Bravo 2012, Owlia – Aspinwall 1996, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Roman 2014, Kandampully 1998, Gronholdt et al. 2000, Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016, Cheng 2014, Bryla 2015, Byrne and Flood 2005). Most of them also looked at motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty separately and only a small number deals with all the notions together, but in those cases, quantitative methods are used (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009).

However, there is evidence in the literature for the usage of qualitative measures in the assessment of foreign students (Roman 2014, Sultan – Wong 2012a, Sultan – Wong 2012b, Templeman et al. 2016, Gallarza et al. 2017, Patterson et al. 1998). In-depth interviews offer an effective way of getting to know the personal opinion of students better and this method has already been utilized (Griner – Sobol 2014, Patterson et al. 1998).

The venue of the current research is the University of Szeged, in Eastern-Europe, Hungary. This particular HEI accepts foreign students with and without scholarships and foreign student number is growing continuously (Kéri 2016). The growing population of foreign students gives researchers the opportunity to understand their needs better to be able to satisfy them in the future.

Foreign students of the University of Szeged constitute the subject of the current research. A small sample was chosen because of the expected difficulty of reaching them and obtaining qualitative data. Altogether 18 foreign students were chosen. 6 students started studying in the Bachelor's programme, 6 in the Master's programme and 6 in PhD Programme of the University of Szeged. Demographic data of these students can be seen in the first *Appendix 1*. These students constitute a panel. Only one Master's student was unresponsive to enquiries for interviews. Therefore, the final panel consists of 17 students.

In-depth interviews are conducted with the panel in three phases, at the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of their studies. In the first phase, their motivation and expectations are studied. In the second phase, I asked them about their present expectations and satisfaction. While in the third phase, continuing motivation, met or unmet expectations, overall satisfaction, and loyalty are investigated.

I started the research in the fall of 2015. To date (2017) the first two phases are completed wholly, but the third phase is only done with students who finished their masters, as two years have passed since the start of the first interviews. Therefore, in the current research paper, I only concentrate on the 6 Master's students. Notwithstanding the incompletion, the series of interviews already give an exceptional insight into the researched factors throughout students' life in Hungary.

4. Results

In this section, the primary results of the longitudinal research are presented in a timely order. First different motivations and expectations are revealed, followed by the satisfaction of students. Finally, Master's students' overall satisfaction and loyalty is introduced.

4.1. Motivation

In the first phase the main motivation and expectations were asked from foreign students. In this study, I differentiate their motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) based on the theory of Deci and Ryan (1985) and based on the studies of Deci et al. (1991). The interviewed students' motivation differs in certain aspects. Some of them are intrinsically, some of them are extrinsically motivated. While there are also students, who are motivated by both two types.

Intrinsically motivated students stated the following:

'I was curious to discover (Hungary).', 'The cultural things interest me about Hungary.' (Student 2 – Colombia)

'This is a new adventure for me to discover the country and this is the centre of Europe.' (Student 3 – Algeria)

'My goal was studying.' (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

However, among the six students, there was only one person, who was only extrinsically motivated.

'I wanted to come to Europe to have a better degree...' (Student 5 – Tunisia)

Interestingly, we can find students who were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

Extrinsic motivation:

'I saw its (the university's) university rank...','... I found a scholarship here (in Hungary) ...', '... the currency is very near to my currency in Turkey...', (Student 1 – Turkey)

Intrinsic motivation:

'I have been to Budapest before, so I liked Hungary and I liked people...', 'Szeged is a university city. I like small cities.' (Student 1 – Turkey)

Extrinsic motivation:

'They (people who graduate from a Hungarian university) can improve their lives and to have a better future... and I want to be that level.. to work with business.' (Student 6 – Laos)

Intrinsic motivation:

'I can learn a lot about people's lifestyle, economy, etc. Hungary is part of the EU and my country is going to be a member of AEC (Asian Economic Community), so I want to know how the integration here has been and maybe I can learn from (it) and we can adapt it to use in our country, because Hungary and Laos have the similar potential.' (Student 6 – Laos)

It is also very interesting, that Word-of Mouth already appeared at the very first stage of the panel interviews, when students were asked why they chose Hungary and the University of Szeged specifically. This shows that WOM has a huge influence on students when they choose their future higher education institution. I propose that WOM is an influencing motivational factor when foreign students choose a HEI.

'I hear it is one of the best university cities or towns in Europe.' (Student 2 – Colombia)

'... my sister is here... and the Faculty has good reputation.', 'In my country... the teachers told us we can go (to Hungary) and major in our field.'. (Student 3 – Algeria)

'I saw which college is famous and well-known for English studies, so that is why Szeged. They said that Szeged is the best one, so I chose Szeged.' (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

'I have someone here ... and he told me that Szeged is the best place in Hungary to study.' (Student 5 – Tunisia)

'Hungary is a very good place to study as I heard from many people in my university in Laos, (there are) many people, who graduated from Hungary.', 'I heard that this (Szeged) is a beautiful city, because one of my friends was here before.' (Student 6 – Laos)

In the second phase of the interviews, motivations were not discussed. However, in the third phase, students were asked if they had been motivated throughout their studies or not. In most cases, they kept their motivation to study and they mostly mentioned motivation related to academic circumstances. Therefore, I conclude that motivation is a key factor for foreign students during their studies.

'I was motivated during my studies, for my teachers and professors. They helped for personal improvement... But sometimes, I did not feel very motivated because of my classmates. ... they don't like that we (foreign students) study and we try to get higher marks.' (Student 1 – Turkey)

'I never considered the option of failing. Forward is the only direction.' (Student 2 – Colombia)

'Sure. Thanks to the professors' supervisions and other students' help, I could be motivated to study a lot.' (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

There was only one student who did not feel motivated at all. It is interesting though, that this student also finished the studies, in spite of the hardships they encountered.

'Not so much actually (motivated). Actually, when I was studying, I was crying all the time. I was alone, I did not know if I was on the right side. It was really hard for me from the beginning to end.' (Student 3 – Algeria)

From these we can see that foreign student motivation can be diverse. Some of them are intrinsically and some of them are extrinsically motivated, or both. When we talk about continuing motivation, each person has their own reasons for keeping up their motivation to study. Most of these depend on in-school or university related issues (teachers, professors and classmates).

4.2. Expectations

In the first phase of the study, besides their motivation, initial expectations were asked from students. We can see similar enquiries in the researches of Byrne et al. (2012), Arquero et al. (2009), Ding and Hauzheng (2012), Dewey et al. (2013), Firmin et al. (2013), Czerwionka et al. (2015), Bryla (2015), Cheng (2014), DeBacker and Routon (2017).

In the current research, expectations are categorized as recalled expectations, because students were asked after the purchase of the service (Higgs et al. 2005).

From the answers it is apparent that students have expectations towards certain aspects of their foreign education. Firstly, they have expectations about themselves, which can be connected to self-actualization. They would like to show they could accomplish their studies abroad. Secondly, they also have work-related expectations. If they finish the university, they would like to get a better job and higher living standards. Some of them would like to continue their studies and expect an academic career. At this level school-related and non-school-related expectations are not separated from each other. Most of the respondents only focused on the education and their own self.

'My expectations are a little bit about myself. I will have some competences here, so I can use it in my country.', 'I am sure I will have a better career. I think I will have a chance to get a better job and better salary.' (Student 1 – Turkey)

'I will improve my standards of living. I am interested in making a PhD and Hungary is still and option to keep studying. I would like very much to take a teacher or a docent career and academic career.', 'I meet a lot of new people.' (Student 2 – Colombia)

'I want to do my PhD', 'I can improve my language and myself.', 'I hope that I'll get a job and start a new life.' (Student 3 – Algeria)

'I can study what I want... All day I can focus on the English...', '... with the material I can get general, overall knowledge.' (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

'I want to have good formation (basics), I want to be a good doctor and then I improve my skills and everything.', 'It is an international degree and you can find many opportunities after finishing your studies here.' (Student 5 – Tunisia)

'I want to have a master degree, because it is a very good option to get a good job.', 'We have a higher salary when you have a masters.', 'I want to teach my children about life in here.' (Student 6 – Laos)

In the second phase, students were asked if their expectations had been met or not. The results of these questions can be found in the next section, satisfaction, as usually they are studied together (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Elliot – Healy 2001, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002, Lenton 2015, Cardona – Bravo 2012, Owlia – Aspinwall 1996, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Roman 2014, Lee 2010). During this phase, in-school and out-of-school expectations already separate from each other. It shows that the students got to know the country, culture, city and education system better. In the third phase, expectations were not discussed.

4.3. Satisfaction

Satisfaction of students was studied in the second and third phase of the research. Based on the Expectation Confirmation Theory (Oliver 1980, 1985), the main aim was to get to know if students' expectations were met or not. There was only one student who left the university from the panel at this time, but I could obtain data from her via e-mail. The same question was asked from the respondents in the third phase of the interviews. The phase is indicated in each case so that the conclusions could be understood easily.

In this section, in- and out-of school expectations and satisfaction are mentioned. The reason of this might be that the students had already spent time in the country and got to know their own expectations as well regarding activities that are not closely related to the school.

We can conclude that most of the students were satisfied with the in- and out-of-school activities. Even if one student (Student 4) had to leave Hungary before graduation (for personal reasons), the student is satisfied with the education at the University of Szeged.

Satisfaction with school-related topics is more likely to appear, while some respondents mentioned the lack of possibilities in a small city, Szeged. However, there was one respondent (Student 3), who was not at all satisfied with the university, but liked the out-of-school part better.

Conversely, if satisfaction of foreign students is discussed, in-school and out-of-school related factors should both be investigated.

'I am satisfied and I am not satisfied. I am not satisfied with the overall quality of the teachers. I was expecting something else.', 'But for the university, I see that it is very open to improve.', '... authorities are helpful, ... my coordinators or my officers at international relations are always helpful.', 'Next week, I am going on a conference in Belgrade. I get the chances here, because I can travel freely.' (*Student 1 – Turkey, Second Phase*)

'Yes (satisfied) for learning and learning many things about law and business... No, because when I compare the department, education here is tough and it is totally international relations. Professors are quite new here... I was a little bit surprised and disappointed about seeing some students (teaching), who have a little experience. I was expecting a little more experienced teachers.', 'For student activities, yes. (satisfied)' (*Student 1 – Turkey, Third Phase*)

'It went better than expected in some ways.', 'I feel academically challenged...', 'My teachers speak very good English. I am satisfied with them.', 'Academically speaking, all my expectations were met. Maybe I expected to travel a lot more in Europe.' (*Student 2 – Colombia, Second Phase*)

Yes, absolutely (satisfied).', 'I feel I learned a lot. Culturally, academically in a lot of issues. So in many aspects, I am definitely satisfied.' (*Student 2 – Colombia, Third Phase*)

'I think we have, we can reach a good level of studies, the teachers are good. I am not speaking about my case, but I know that in general they are.', 'When you have to do your studies alone, it is hard.' (*Student 3 – Algeria, Second Phase*)

'Actually, no (satisfaction). I was studying for the exams and not to know things. I was always stressed and I was studying by my own. The language was really hard for me, because I was studying everything in Hungarian.', 'For me it was only bad.', That side (out-of-school) completely yes (satisfied). (*Student 3 – Algeria, Third Phase)*

'With regard to school, I met my expectations in the University of Szeged. Unfortunately, I couldn't join the out-of-school activities due to the personal circumstances. That was the only thing I regret.' (Student 4 – Republic of Korea, Second Phase)

'I am satisfied with the university of Szeged. It has well organized education system and it is excellent for supporting the international students.' (Student 4 – Republic of Korea, Third Phase)

'From the university, this is what I expected. It is not easy, it is not an easy field, I don't have a lot of time.', 'I thought that people would be more happy, more cheerful. (There is) a lot of pessimism. I feel it in the complaining.' (*Student 5 – Tunisia, Second Phase)*

'(There is) nothing in Szeged. You can not have the choice. You can not choose between the prestige place and the low place and the middle place. All of them are the same concept.' (*Student 5 – Tunisia, Third Phase)*

'I think I am really satisfied and I feel that my knowledge has improved a lot and I got a lot of friends. I have learned a lot from my professors. My vision is wider and I can see bigger problems better than before.', 'I think that my expectations about Europe are fulfilled.' (*Student 6 – Laos, Second Phase)*

'Actually, it is over my expectations, because my BA ground was not really good. So everything that I learned in Hungary was almost new.', 'Szeged made me feel like home.' (Student 6 – Laos) (*Student 6 – Laos, Third Phase)*

4.3. Loyalty and WOM

Loyalty and WOM were only studied in the third phase of the research. However, there have already been answers given connected to WOM during the first phase of the interview, which shows its importance and can be seen in chapter 4.1.

Based on the definition of Reichheld (2003) and on the previous researches on foreign student loyalty and WOM (Oliver 1999, Reichheld et al. 2000, Elliot – Healy 2001, Reichheld 2003, Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016), repurchase possibility and possible future WOM recommendation were asked from students in the third phase. More specifically, they were asked if they would choose the same University and same city again and if they would recommend the University and the city to their friends or acquaintances.

We can see that even those students who were not satisfied would recommend the university to others for certain reasons. In this case, they would also tell the others certain warnings, which may count as negative word-of-mouth. Though, most of them were satisfied and showed interest in promoting the country and the University to their friends and acquaintances. Moreover, some of them have already done it and as a result, their friends are now studying in Hungary. This can not be a better indicator of their satisfaction towards the University, the city, the culture and the country.

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'It is a hard question. For masters yes, but for PhD no. ... in Szeged, I don't know if I can survive.'* (*Student 1 – Turkey*)

Recommendation: *'I already recommended it. After my studies, my close friend, she came to study for her PhD studies. I recommended for some points and I already warned for some points.', 'At least three people now (came to Szeged because of her recommendations), after seeing my studies in Hungary. This is like a chain.'* (*Student 1 – Turkey*)

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'Yes, absolutely. It is a no-brainer.'* (*Student 2 – Colombia*)

Recommendation: *'Absolutely. I have already done it. To some of my friends.'* (*Student 2 – Colombia*)

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'Yes, but I would change something for sure. Maybe not Szeged, but Budapest and to have out-of-school activities to do.'* (Student 3 – Algeria)

Recommendation: *'For sure, because my case was different, but I know other students' were good.'* (Student 3 – Algeria)

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'In the near future, I will go back to Szeged to meet my friends. I miss my mentor, Lily, and my professors, Rosa.'* (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

Recommendation: *'Absolutely, I already recommended to some of Filipino students who are studying in Korea to study in Hungary.'* (*Student 4 – Republic of Korea*)

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'In my case, it is not about choice, but about opportunity. This opportunity was the best opportunity that was in front of me. If I had the same circumstances, I would choose it again.'* (*Student 5 – Tunisia*)

Recommendation: *'Yeah, why not, if they are hard workers.', 'Honestly, I think that the tuition fees are so so higher what they are supposed to.'* (*Student 5 – Tunisia*)

Repurchase (choosing it again): *'Of course, even though Szeged was not my first choice at that time...'* (*Student 6 – Laos*)

Recommendation: *'Sure, yes. One of my friends, he is now in Szeged, yeah. I recommended him to study in the same major. And one of my friends, he is going to the university in Szeged, because he said he is going to Szeged, I also recommended him.'* (*Student 6 – Laos*)

5. Conclusions

This particular study used a qualitative research method. Longitudinal in-depth interviews are conducted with a panel of foreign students to explore their motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty throughout their study-programmes at a HEI.

Previous researches mainly focused on quantitative data obtainment from foreign students (Elliot – Healy 2001, Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002, Anderson 2007, Firmin et al. 2013, Lenton 2015, Cardona – Bravo 2012, Owlia – Aspinwall 1996, El-Hilali et al. 2015, Roman 2014, Kandampully 1998, Gronholdt et al. 2000, Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009, Giner – Rillo 2016, Cheng 2014, Bryla 2015, Byrne and Flood 2005). Most of them also looked at motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty separately and only a small number deals with all the notions together, but in those cases, quantitative methods are used (Alves – Raposo 2007, Alves – Raposo 2009).

However, in certain cases, qualitative measures are used in the assessment of foreign students (Roman 2014, Sultan – Wong 2012a, Sultan – Wong 2012b, Templeman et al. 2016, Gallarza et al. 2017, Patterson et al. 1998), but these usually depict only one specific time in the lives of the students and there was a need for longitudinal interviews with foreign students to understand their motivation, expectations, satisfaction and loyalty better. The present study aimed at filling this knowledge gap.

Based on the results of the qualitative research, it is quite interesting that word-of-mouth appears in the first stage of the interviews. Almost every respondent mentioned it as an influencing factor of coming to

Hungary. Therefore, I can conclude, that not only satisfaction and WOM are connected, but there must be a relationship between WOM and motivation as well. Future quantitative researches should pay much more attention to the relationship between motivation and WOM of foreign students.

Regarding motivations, I found that most students had intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic and mixed motivations also appeared. In terms of expectations, in-school and out-of-school factors should both be taken into careful consideration.

When discussing satisfaction, an expectancy based theory could be a good ground to start researching student satisfaction. If their expectations are met, it would lead to satisfaction and satisfaction would lead to WOM. Even if the student is not satisfied, WOM can appear. Although, this may be negative in certain aspects.

All in all, WOM is a result of students' satisfaction. However, due to the nature of the service students buy at a foreign university, they can not repeat the same purchase again (with the same programme at the same faculty – otherwise yes). Therefore, their loyalty can only materialize in WOM, but most times not in repurchase. Therefore, I conclude that foreign student loyalty is equal to positive word-of-mouth recommendations. If a foreign student recommends the studied HEI to their friends or acquaintances, it means they are loyal to the HEI.

The current research has certain limitations. Only a few number of students were interviewed in the panel, which means a limited number of responses and data which is not representative.

However, the current study establishes the basis for further researches, as it obtains qualitative data through three phases with a panel of foreign students.

In the future, my aim is to design a quantitative research which would be based on the current results. With the results of the current research, we can gain an insight into the motivation, expectations, satisfaction, loyalty and WOM of foreign students throughout their studies, which revealed certain connections between these factors. The development of a model and its quantitative analysis is essential.

However, we should bear in mind the key findings of the current research that the research factors are connected and there is even a connection between WOM and motivation of foreign students.

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Appendix

Study level	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Studies
PhD	India	Woman	25	Biology
PhD	Namibia	Man	36	Educational sciences

Degree	Country	Gender	Age	Field
PhD	India	Woman	25	Information technology
PhD	Ecuador	Man	unknown	Law
PhD	India	Man	31	Pharmaceutical sciences
PhD	Vietnam	Man	29	General Medicine
Master's	Turkey	Woman	26	International relations
Master's	Columbia	Man	29	Software development
Master's	Alger	Woman	23	Chemistry
Master's	Tunisia	Man	26	Dentistry
Master's	Republic of Korea	Woman	41	English studies
Master's	Laos	Man	22	International economy
Bachelor's	Kazakhstan	Woman	19	Business and Management
Bachelor's	Tunisia	Woman	19	Agricultural engineer
Bachelor's	Turkey	Man	unknown	History
Bachelor's	Tunisia	Man	22	Physical education
Bachelor's	Vietnam	Man	unknown	Mechanical engineer

Appendix 1: Demographic data of foreign students participating in the panel