Customer Relationship Management Perception among Students of Higher Institutions in Uganda

Jamiah Mayanja[1] and [2]Anthony Tibaingana
[1]Institute of Open Distance and e-Learning, Makerere University, Uganda. [2]School of Business and Management Sciences, Makerere University, Uganda
jmayanja@cees.mak.ac.ug

Abstract
Higher Education Institutions are increasingly recognizing the need to apply customer relationship management approaches to learning as a way of increasing students' enrollment and retention in the education sector. This paper investigates students' perception of customer relationship management strategy to learning in higher education institutions in Uganda. It draws from a quantitative data generated through questionnaires. The questionnaires covered three customer relationship management components, namely; the people, the processes and the technology involved. The respondents in this study were 400 in number, and it was a random selection of students from Makerere University, Uganda. Findings from the study present technology as the most significant component required for the successful implementation of customer relationship management strategy to Higher Education tutelage in Uganda. Therefore, universities should invest in technology to make people and processes of customer relationship management, more efficient and effective in Uganda, being also a crucial area in students' satisfaction.

Key words: customer relationship management; people; processes; technology; higher education institutions.

Introduction
Customer relationship management (CRM) is a strategic approach that enables organizations to use internal resources (i.e. technology, people, and process) to manage relationships with customers in order to create a competitive advantage and improve on an organization's performance (Mohammed and Bin Rashid, 2012). Although the

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concept has been widely accepted and implemented in the business sector for attracting and retaining a loyal customer base, it is also gaining more importance among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Higher Education Institutions are experiencing problems with retention rates, increased competition, and increased expenses in acquiring new students (Guilbault, 2018). As a result, many institutions are recognizing the need to implement marketing concepts to satisfy their customers and stakeholders who include students, their parents, alumni, staff, companies, local communities and government (Rigo et al., 2016; Van Vugt and Knasys, 2015;).

With globalization and marketization of education, students are being framed as customers and HEIs are subjected to commercial pressures to provide excellent customer experiencees across the students' lifecycle, to satisfy and retain them (Guilbault, 2018). In the current education environment, students are in position shop for the best deal and have become sophisticated to serve. They are demanding for more attention, excellent real-time and personalized support service, and expect the university to provide the same quality and satisfaction as enjoyed from typical commercial enterprise (Akhund et al, 2017). Students are now turning to universities that best accommodate their schedules and learning styles (Brown, 2011). With these behaviors, students have begun acting more like customers, compelling universities to apply marketing strategies that were previously reserved only for the business sector, to promote enrollment and retention (Ariffin, 2013; Rigo et al, 2016). The need for attracting new and retaining current students brings HEIs to view CRM as a key management function to adopt (Seligman and Taylor 2009).

In Uganda, the uptake of customer relationship management in public universities is very slow with only a few universities employing the use of the CRM programs to manage student expectations. At Makerere university CRM is mostly restricted to the use of face to face contact between staff and the students. The University still work with traditional systems to manage students and student are facing several administrative delays which involve considerable waiting time. Faced with the increased infiltration of universities that offer equal

satisfaction levels to customers in the market, the Makerere university is compelled to slowly adapt to technology to satisfy their customers. For example, web-based systems are put in place to improve on students' process such as admissions, registration, teaching and learning. There have however been complaints from the students that these systems have restricted access (Matovu, 2009). Such systems have little to offer to students, particularly those who want technology resources be an integral part of their learning experience (Seeman and O'Hara, 2006). Generally, the lack of empirical research related to the CRM practices in public universities of Uganda in general and in Makerere University, in particular, encouraged this research. Hence, this study aims at investigating students' perception of customer relationship management at Makerere University. In this regard, the research question was formulated as follows:

1. What capability does people/staff to implement CRM?
2. What are the customer relationship management practices present in students' process?
3. What technology infrastructure is available for the effective implementation of CRM?

Review of relevant literature

Customer Relationship Management
Customer Relationship Management process that enables companies to provide excellent real-time customer service by developing a relationship with each valued customer through the effective use of individual account information (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Kotler and Armstrong (2008) define CRM as a business strategy which identifies profitable customers and prospective customers and devoting time and attention to expand such relationships with those customers. According to Wali and Nkpurukwe (2008), CRM is a process of customer acquisition, customer retention, customer extension and the delivering of a sustainable competitive advantage. Customer Relationship Management enable organization to focus on delivering

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the highest value to customers through better communication, faster delivery, and personalized products and services to effect customer acquisition, retention and loyalty and profitability (Akhmedov, 2017; Ranki,2019). Customer Relationship Management strategy depends on balancing three organizational resources; people, process and technology (Rigo et al., 2016). According to Buttle and Maklan (2019) successful CRM implementation includes people to develop and implement the processes that are enabled by technology. By making people and processes more efficient, then investing in the technology to make them more effective organizations can achieve their objectives more effectively.

Customer Relationship Management components

People
People component has the biggest impact in terms of success in CRM implementation (Mendoza et al., 2007; Ranki, 2019). The knowledge and experience of people enables the success of CRM strategies (Bai and Qin, 2016). For processes and technology to work, there have to be people with the appropriate skills, experience and knowledge behind them to succeed (Buttle and Maklan, 2019). CRM initiatives requires participation of all employees within the organization, each and every employee must understand what their roles and responsibilities are in the implementation and support of CRM strategy (Ranki, 2019). CRM implementation cannot be effective without the commitment from the people involved. Customers have become sophisticated to serve; they do not only look for competitive prices and good services but also memorable experiences (Bhatt, 2015). Organizations must motive their employees to dedicate themselves to CRM strategy to serve customers better (Khan and Kamal, 2015; Mendoza et al., 2007). Top management support and commitment to CRM to is the most important factor throughout the CRM implementation (Ranki,2019). Management can enhance employee knowledge, motivation and commitment to reduce employee resistance (Dalati, and Alchach, 2018; Ranki,2019).

Technology

Information Technology has long been recognized as key in implementing the CRM strategy and to assist with the re-design of the business processes (Rahimi and Gunlu, 2016). CRM applications take full advantage of technology innovations with their ability to collect and analyze data on customer patterns, interpret customer behavior, develop predictive models, respond with timely and effective customized communications, and deliver product and service value to individual customers (Chang, Park and Chaiy, 2010; Mendoza et al., 2007). Technology helps company build relationship with customer buy using customer databases to remember a customers buying habits, preference and buying decision process. Customers can also use technology to inform the company their new demands and feeling of existing products and services (Bai and Qin, 2016). Using technology to optimize interactions with customers, companies can create a 360-degree view of customers to learn from past interactions to optimize future ones (Badwan et al., 2017).

Processes

Customer Relationship Management processes involves activities performed by the organization concerning the management of the customer relationship to serve their customers better, cheaper, faster and closer (Moutot and Bascoul, 2008). These process enables business to identify customers' perceptions of an organization and its products (Ragins and Greco, 2003). CRM process might demand the review of all existing processes involved directly or indirectly with customer relationship, to become more customer-oriented and more efficient (Richards & Jones, 2008). Restructuring the processes to be more customer-centric requires change in organization culture and committed leadership (Mendoza et al., 2007). Mouto and Bascoul (2007) mention three CRM processes at different customer touch points; relationship initiation, relationship maintenance, and relationship termination. The initiation process refers to the activities such as identifying potential customers; the maintenance process includes the activities that portray normal customer relationships, such retention programs; and the termination process includes activities used to find and settle on ending a bad relationship.

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Customer Relationship Management in higher education institutions

Customer Relationship Management in HEIs is defined as contentment customer attitude to a service provider, or an emotive reaction to the difference among what customers anticipate and what they accept, regarding the contentment of some desires, aims or needs (Rigo et al.,2016; Wali, et al., 2015). Adikaram and Khatibi (2016) define CRM in higher education as the process of minimising the gap between the expectations and experiences of the students as customers by offering excellent services with equitable relationships at all times within the value system of the organization. According to Adikaram and Khatibi (2016) and Manzuma et al., (2016), services are the core of HEIs process and CRM practices should feature in student services starting from application process, registration process, programs, learning, fees, scholarship, research, community service, and social network. Student-institution interactions have become increasingly important in generating additional value for institutions due to lifelong learning commitments students make when they join the university (Jisc, 2013). Customer relationship management in higher education mainly focuses on automation and improvement of institutional processes associated with managing student relationships in areas such as recruitment, service and support (Grant and Anderson, 2002).

According to previous scholars, adopting CRM in HEIs; improves customer responsiveness of the universities' staff who directly deal with students (Grant and Anderson, 2002), improves student data, process management and sharing of information among departments (Chen and Ching, 2005), personalises communications with students (Rigo et al., 2016), increases student loyalty, retention and satisfaction with the university's programs (Andri, Ubud Salim, and Solimun, 2013), promotes better management practices and improve the institution's relationship with current students (Badwan et al., 2017), provides a competitive advantage for educational institutions and improve their capabilities to attract, retain and serve customers (Seeman and O'Hara, 2006).

Research Methodology
Research approach and participants
This research adopts a quantitative research design focusing on a single case of one public university in Uganda, Makerere University. A survey was conduct on students at all levels ranging from undergraduate to graduate. The rationale for selecting them was that these students' directly affected by the CRM issues. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) surveys are used to determine opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher. The University has a total student population of thirty eighty thousand (38,000) students in 10 colleges. 40 students per college were randomly selected giving a sample of 400 students. As regards to the adequacy of sample size, in behavioral research, sample size of between 30 and 500 is recommended (Roscoe, 1975, p. 163). Kline (2015) also recommend a sample size of around 200 for multivariate analysis.

Measuring Instruments
A self-completion questionnaire consisting four sections was used to collect data. Section A depicted participants' demographic data which involved gender, year of study and level of education. Sections B, C and D comprised of thirty-five (35) questions which were used to measure CRM components namely people, process and technology. The items which measure CRM components were developed by the current authors with the help of existing literature (Badwan et al., 2017; Chen and Popovich, 2003; Mendoza et al., 2007). Respondents were requested to indicate their response on a 5-point itemized rating scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cooper and Schindler (2003) note that Likert scales are relatively easy to use and provide respondents with a wide range of choices and enable the researcher to discover the strength of feeling or attitude towards an issue. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of those 384 completed questionnaires were received (a response rate of 96%). The participants were given the questionnaire in their various lecture hall and halls of residence to answer after obtaining their informed consent to participate in this research. This strategy was used to

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clarify any misinterpretation associated with the questionnaire items. Reliability analysis of the construct was examined using Cronbach's alpha.

People. Eleven items were identified based on literature review to measure people capability to implement CRM. These include admission and library staff, registrar, lab attendants, counselors and teaching staff. For the ⠆ study, the Cronbach's-alpha coefficient of this scale wa   92   4 suggesting that the items used to measure this construct a   le.

Process. Eleven items were identified based on literature review to measure CRM practices present in students' processes which include; application, registration, teaching and learning, examinations and communication processes among others. The Cronbach's-alpha coefficient of this scale was α = 0.85 suggesting that the items used to measure this construct are reliable.

Technology. Thirteen items were identified based on literature review to measure technology infrastructure available for the effective implementation of CRM. These technologies include; mobile phones, computers, student portal, learning management system, social media, website. The Cronbach's-alpha coefficient of this scale was α = 0.78 suggesting that the items used to measure this construct are reliable.

Statistical analysis
The statistical package SPSS version 20 was used for the analysis. Several tests are conducted to determine data reliability, demographic profile of the respondents, mean values, standard deviation of each construct and inter-correlation among variables. The Pearson product-moment correlation (Pearson r) determined the strength of the relationships between people, process and technology. For the purpose of the study, the strength of the correlation relationship is guided by the following measures: strong relationship < 0.7, fairly strong relationship 0.5 < 0.69, average relationship 0.3 < 0.49 (Cozby 2007).

Results

Demographic profile of respondents

The Demographic profile of the 384 participants have been investigated in this section. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage of respondents in terms of gender, year of study and level of education.

Table 1: Demographic profile of research participants (n = 384)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	208	54.2
	Female	176	45.8
Year of study	First	50	13
	Second	199	51.8
	Third	96	25
	Fourth	39	10.2
Level of education	Undergraduate	360	93.8
	Postgraduate	24	6.2

The respondents were dominated by males (54.2%) with females constituting 45.8 per cent. Respondents in their second year of study constituted (51.8%), followed by those in third year (25%), while those in first and fourth year accounted for (13%) and (10.2%), respectively. The research was dominated by those who were pursuing their bachelor degree (98.3%)

The descriptive statistics for the CRM components were reported upon with the means, and standard deviations presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: mean and standard deviation of CRM elements

Variable	Statement	Mean	SD
f capability to implement	Recruitment team offers the required information	3.57	1.02
	Admission staff deal with students queries promptly	3.18	1.20

	Registrars respond to students' complaints quickly	2.97	1.27
	Registrars provide information about the course requirements	3.30	1.33
	Teaching staff release student assessment timely	2.22	1.00
	Lecturers provide 94 ized attention to students	2.37	1.10
	Lectures respond to my concerns outside class	3.38	1.17
	Lab attendants provide help for using laboratory equipment	3.63	1.02
	Library staff train students on use of resources	3.10	1.32
	University counsellor provide satisfactory services	2.91	1.26
	All staff place priority on meeting students' needs	2.16	0.85
CRM practices in students' processes	Application process is easy to follow	3.74	1.27
	Admission guidelines are easy to understand	3.67	1.27
	Orientation events are organized for fresh students	3.83	1.23
	Registration process is clear to students	3.48	1.27
	Tuition payment procedure is easy to understand	3.82	1.18
	The procedure for handling student complaints is clear	2.42	1.23
	Health services are easily accessible	2.34	1.31
	The process for clearing for exams is easy	2.78	1.16
	Feedback to students is provided on a regular basis	2.30	1.38
	Students have regularly meetings with management	2.23	1.23
	The process of borrowing books from the library is short	3.53	1.34

	Computer labs are adequate	2.80	1.31
	Application for new students is done online	3.99	1.06
	I receive feedback on admission status via SMS on phone	3.40	1.28
	Registration for all students is done online	3.07	1.30
	I receive learning support through e-mail, SMS and on forums	3.23	1.19
	SMS are used to communicate with students	3.82	1.18
	Students receive their assessment online	2.71	1.20
Technology infrastructure for CRM implementation	Study materials is posted on the l 96 management system	2.68	1.18
	All students announcements are posted on the website	2.64	1.27
	I university emails through which I receive information	3.32	1.35
	Website provide information about study opportunities	3.41	1.49
	Social media are used to communicated with students	3.32	1.35
	Free internet is provided to students all time while at campus	3.41	1.49

Table 3 presents information about the mean, standard deviation, and about Cronbach's alpha of the construct. Given that a 5-point scale was used to measure the constructs, mean scores of 4 when the means are rounded off to their nearest decimal place, indicate that the participants agree with the statements pertaining to each construct, while mean value rated at the level of 3 or 3 when the means are rounded off to their nearest decimal, imply that participants were impartial with the statements pertaining to each construct. The mean value rated at the level of 2, imply that participants disagreed with the statements pertaining to each construct.

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Table 3: Descriptive statistics and inter correlation among variables

Variable	Average Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. People capability to implement CRM	2.98	1.14	1.00		
2. CRM practices in students' processes	3.10	1.26	0.537**	1.00	
3. Technology infrastructure for CRM implementation	3.22	1.28	0.488**	0.713**	1.00

**p < 0.01

Table 3 show technology infrastructure for CRM implementation with the highest mean score (M = 3.22; SD = 1.28), indicating that participants felt technology infrastructure is moderately used to implement CRM. The participants achieved the lowest average mean scores for the People /staff (M = 2.98, SD = 1.14) implying that participants found people/staff capability to implement CRM inadequate.

Table 3 shows positive and significant correlation among variables. Table 3 shows positive and significant correlation among variables. Correlation is practically significant < 0.7 (strong relationship) 0.5 < 0.69 (fairly strong relationship) and 0.3 < 0.49 (average relationship) Cozby 2007). People/staff capability to implement CRM reported fairly strong relationship with CRM practices present in students' processes (r = 0.537; p ≤ 0.01). Correlation analysis also shows a medium relationship between people/staff capability to implement CRM and technology infrastructure available for the effective implementation of CRM (r = 0.488; p ≤ 0.01). A very strong significant relationship existed between CRM practices present in students' processes and technology infrastructure available for the effective implementation of CRM (r = 0.713; p ≤ 0.01). The association between people, process and technology could be argued that, these components have to work together to ensure effective implementation of CRM.

Discussion

This research strongly emphasizes the importance of CRM practices to HEIs in terms of acquiring, building and maintaining excellent customer relationships among Higher Education Institutions in Uganda. The empirical results of the study, confirmed that there is a positive relationship between the three components of CRM, however, a strong relationship was found between CRM practices present in students' processes and technology infrastructure available for the effective implementation of CRM. This finding is supported by Chen and Popovich (2003) and Ranki (2019), affirmation that for processes and technology to work, there must be people to develop and implement the processes that are enabled by technology. Results also indicated technology infrastructure available for the effective implementation of CRM with the highest mean score. This implies students find technologies such mobile phone, computer, internet to be of great importance when working with university process. These results are consistent with the studies conducted by Mayanja, Tibaingana, and Birevu (2019) and Muyinda, Lubega and Lynch (2010) where they indicated that Makerere University students use mobile phone to access and update information without requiring assistance from staff members. Students indicated that they use technologies to apply for admission, register for courses, pay tuition, access the learning management system, receive learning support, feedback and information about study opportunities, and communicating with peers.

This finding is then proved to be consistent with the result demonstrated by Kissi, Oluwatobiloba and Berko (2007) in which they discovered that technology enhances the efficiency of university students' payment services. The results of this study also support what Seeman and O'Hara (2006) said that information system offer a streamlined application and allows registration of students wherever and whenever they want. This enables students to have full access to their information and they can update their information without requiring assistance from staff members. The results support earlier studies by Badwan et al., (2017) as well as Daradoumis, et al., (2010), who recognized the importance of technology in CRM in Higher

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education, technology improve the services on offer by reducing waiting times. Electronic application forms (Daradoumis, et al., 2010), student portals (Seeman and O'Hara, 2006) along with website (Badwan, et al., 2017) were among the technologies identified from existing literature linking to the findings of this study.

Staff capability to implement CRM was found to be inadequate, yet staff have a fundamental role in the relationship between universities and their students. Rootman, Tait and Bosch (2008) stress that effectiveness of CRM in a service driven organization, mainly depends on the organizations employees who come in contact with customers. Participants in this study indicated that the recruitment team and lab attendants provide the required assistance. However, no personalized attention is provided to students by teaching staff and these staff do not release students results on time. In support, Rodić, Lukić and Rodić, (2012) clarify that administrative staff should focus on more satisfying activities, such as building long-term relationships with students by helping them with their problems, professors can also use CRM to prepare a personalized learning options for students who have difficulties.

Customer relationship management practices in students' processes were found to be moderate. Participants indicated that application and admission guidelines as easy to follow, registration processes, examination clearance and tuition payment procedures being clear. The university organizes orientation events to familiarize students with university environment. These results are consistent with the study conducted by Grant and Anderson (2002) where they indicated that CRM practices should feature in institutional processes associated with managing student relationships in areas such as recruitment, admissions/registration, service and support (Grant and Anderson, 2002). Badwan, et al., (2017) in their study, noted that streamlining students' process starting from registration process, programs, learning, fees, scholarship, research, community service, and social network makes service delivery essay. Customer-centric organizations streamline business processes to serve customers and respond to market pressures (Chen and Popovich 2003).

Managerial implications

University managers must understand that effective implementation of customer relationship management requires people to develop and implement the processes that are enabled by technology. The University should therefore;

- Revise its strategies for extensive use of technologies such mobile phone, computer and internet to manage student's relationship. This will easy service provision, since students are already using mobile phones when working with university process.
- Step up the professional development programs to capacitate staff in order to ensure that their students – institution relationship is enhanced. Staff should be trained and motivated to meet students' expectations and needs. The working principles for CRM effectiveness such efficient communication between staff and students must be encouraged and practiced.
- Redesign university processes starting from the students' perspective and involving student feedback. Management should regularly meet students to understand their needs and students' complaint handling procedure should be simplified. Student satisfaction surveys should be constantly carried out to monitor and evaluate existing processes, while understanding student experiences and expectations.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has limitations that should help guide future research. First, the study made use of a quantitative research design. The data collection instrument restricted the response options available to participants, which may have prohibited the researcher to gain in-depth information from the respondents. Future research initiatives should consider a qualitative research approach in order to gain more insight on the students' views about CRM practices. Second, the main criticism of this research applies to the case study approach. The study investigated Makerere university students' perception of CRM in HEIs, therefore it is difficult to generalise the findings to a larger population. A survey with a large sample size that covers different

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university both public and private is recommended for future studies to shed more light on the students' perspective on CRM in HEIs. The study should also be extended to university administration and teaching staff to get their view about CRM practices. Finally, findings were based on perceptions, therefore, bias as a result of incorrect interpretation of the questions by the participants could have occurred. Perceptions are not the same as the actual experience; our current findings could change if we had continually measured the participants' responses over a long period of time, when possibly many of them would have had real experience of CRM processes and outcomes.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions should use CRM to move away from the traditional ways of service provision. Customer relationship management enable organisations to focus on delivering maximum value to customers through better communication, faster delivery, and personalized products and services. The study investigated Makerere university students' perception of customer relationship management practices in higher education institutions. This research examined three crucial components universities should take into account: people, process and technology to succeed in CRM implementation. The findings presented in this paper are confirming CRM as an important strategy for acquiring, building and maintaining excellent relationships with students as well as increasing students' satisfaction with the university's programs and services. The study presents technology as the most important element in successful CRM implementation in HEIs, as it eases the provision of services across the students' processes. However, for processes and technology to work, there must be people to develop and implement the processes that are enabled by technology. In summary, to achieve CRM success, HEIs should understand the issues regarding technology, process and people, components individually so as to manage the integration of all three components, and ensure the right blend during all phases of the students' lifecycle.

Acknowledgements

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