INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY of BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGIES
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The Effectiveness of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication in Student Enrollment Marketing Management for Georgian Universities

Ioseb Gabelaia
Extended Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation in Business Administration

Tbilisi, 2020

Scientific Supervisor: **Dr. Alan R. Dykens**
(full name)

Scientific Co-Supervisor: **Kakhaber Djakeli**
(full name)

Assoc**.** Prof. Dr. at International Black Sea University
(academic title)

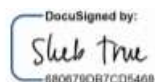**Experts (full name & academic title):**

1. Tatiana Papiashvili Prof. Dr.
   signature

2. Nikoloz Parjanadze Prof. Dr.
   signature

3. Teona Maisuradze Assoc. Prof. Dr.
   (if any)

Opponents (full name & academic title):

1. Sheb True Prof. Dr.
   signature

2. Iza Gigauri Assoc. Prof. Dr.
   signature

3. Charita Jashi Assoc. Prof. Dr.
   (if any)

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Student enrollment management has become a key emphasis of the modern higher education marketplace (Docking & Curton, 2015). Student enrollment statistics define universities' budgetary numbers and future ventures. Besides, economics and intense competition in the student market have disturbed universities to meet enrollment numbers. Low enrollment numbers resulted in budgetary cuts. Consequently, the tendency obliges universities to implement distinct measures and solutions to prevent low student enrollment numbers.

While universities struggle to manage the low enrollment numbers globally, as well as in Georgia, the only proposed solutions are to increase discount rates on tuition or direct cost of attendance. Nevertheless, high discount rates affect future institutional developments and put universities in a delicate situation.

The development of low-cost recruiting strategies is a primary goal of student enrollment management. Prospective students make decisions while evaluating various alternatives, consequently recruiting expectations are high. In contrast in Georgia, according to Glonti (2012), universities do not consider enrollment data and competition at the first level of higher education, hence students do not have to make enrollment decisions.

It is obligatory to note that the student enrollment management comprises a lot of components such as marketing, recruiting, pricing, academics, residence life, career development, student affairs, and so on. Whilst individuals with distinct degrees, professions, diverse cultures, and so on are employed at universities.

Research Problem

Maintenance of student enrollment numbers directly addresses the issue of effective verbal and nonverbal communication. Proper communication between universities and students establish long-lasting relationships, therefore it results in acquiring tailored outcomes. Additionally, employing effective communication tends to increase the accuracy of defining student enrollment numbers, therefore, to effectively allocate institutional resources.

The development of data-driven, low-cost, and efficient enrollment models create a unique opportunity to address root-causes in student enrollment management. In the study, effective verbal and nonverbal communication is a root-cause. Nevertheless, many universities do not know and/or accept modern solutions – due to a lack of consistent strategies in student recruitment.

Research Goal

The goal of the study was to validate the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management through practical and theoretical experiences obtained in the United States, while applying Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods. Therefore, to develop a student enrollment management model for Georgian universities aiming to eliminate waste in the student enrollment process while replacing conservative fixed models, thus applying fresh and strategized solutions.

Research Objective

The research objective was to secure the understanding and significance of effective verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management. The following tasks were formulated. First, the student enrollment market in the United States and Georgia was examined; second, the role of verbal and nonverbal communication in the student enrollment process was conferred; and lastly, Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods were applied to explore root-causes in verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management.

Hypothesis

To define the impact of verbal and nonverbal communication on student enrollment management, the study formulated the following hypotheses.

- **Hypothesis (0)** - The research anticipates finding in fact that effective verbal and nonverbal communication will not influence two-way communication between universities and students; therefore, does not impact overall student enrollment numbers.

- **Hypothesis (1)** - The research anticipates finding in fact that effective verbal and nonverbal communication indeed influences two-way communication between universities and students; therefore, impacts overall student enrollment numbers.

The research tested the hypothesis with empirical research conducted through observation study. Additionally, a survey was conducted in support of empirical research.

Novelty

A small number of studies address the issues of student enrollment management; however, they do not examine the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal communication. As a result, various digital software platforms are created to support student enrollment initiatives. Nevertheless, the general impact on total enrollment numbers is minimal. The actuality is that generating prospective student names require enrollment specialists to effectively communicate for institutional longevity.

The study developed and proposed a GEOSEM model for Georgian Universities from international practical and theoretical experience. GEOSEM model was accomplished by utilizing

2

Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods into student enrollment management, investigating verbal and nonverbal communication as the main source that directly impacts student enrollment numbers, whether it is recruiting or retention. Applying the proposed model allows a more objective assessment of the risks associated with student enrollment management. The model is adjustable not only for universities in Georgia but other small or big, private, or public universities.

Theoretical and Practical Value

The theoretical basis of the study was Six Sigma and Kaizen methods. Six Sigma is a set of techniques and tools for process improvements, which looks to identify root-causes and deliver maximum efficiency. It was introduced by Bill Smith, American engineer working in Motorola. The Council for Six Sigma Certification (2018) explains that by working to reduce variation and opportunities for error, the Six Sigma method ultimately reduces process costs and increases customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, Kaizen is a concept referring to business activities that continuously improve all functions and involve all employees from the top management to the assembly line workers. Kaizen was introduced by Masaaki Imai, a Japanese organizational theorist, and management consultant. Kaizen aims to eliminate waste in all systems of an organization.

Kaizen method is easily integrated into Six Sigma that gave an additional value for in-depth analyzes of effective verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management. Kaizen method is not just a simple improvement process. Consequently, if correctly incorporated, it eliminates extra hard work, fosters the workplaces, and more importantly teaches how to identify and eliminate waste in the business process. Six Sigma and Kaizen added extra validity to the model created for Georgina Universities.

The study applied Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods throughout the research to define, measure, analyze, and improve verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management. The goal was to provide a concept of how to manage communication stream with prospective students.

The practical uniqueness is that verbal and nonverbal communication data was collected and put into perspective to develop better student enrollment strategies, therefore, providing better-recruiting opportunities to Georgian universities. Spending millions on hiring marketing and consulting companies is great. Although knowing how to communicate with stakeholders inhales a new life into institutions.

Research Methodology and Method

The study used a mixed methodology, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Research data was collected via primary research. Primary data examples were online

surveys, in-person surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group observations, and so on. Secondary data was gathered from online sources, notes, and so on.

The study began with market research. Figure 1. illustrates the research design. The first, exploratory research was used to discover ideas, information, and insights around student enrollment and its communication. The second, descriptive research was used to define the characteristics of the environment institutions operate. And lastly, the causal research was used to determine the effective verbal and nonverbal communications in enrollment management.

Figure 1. The Research Design
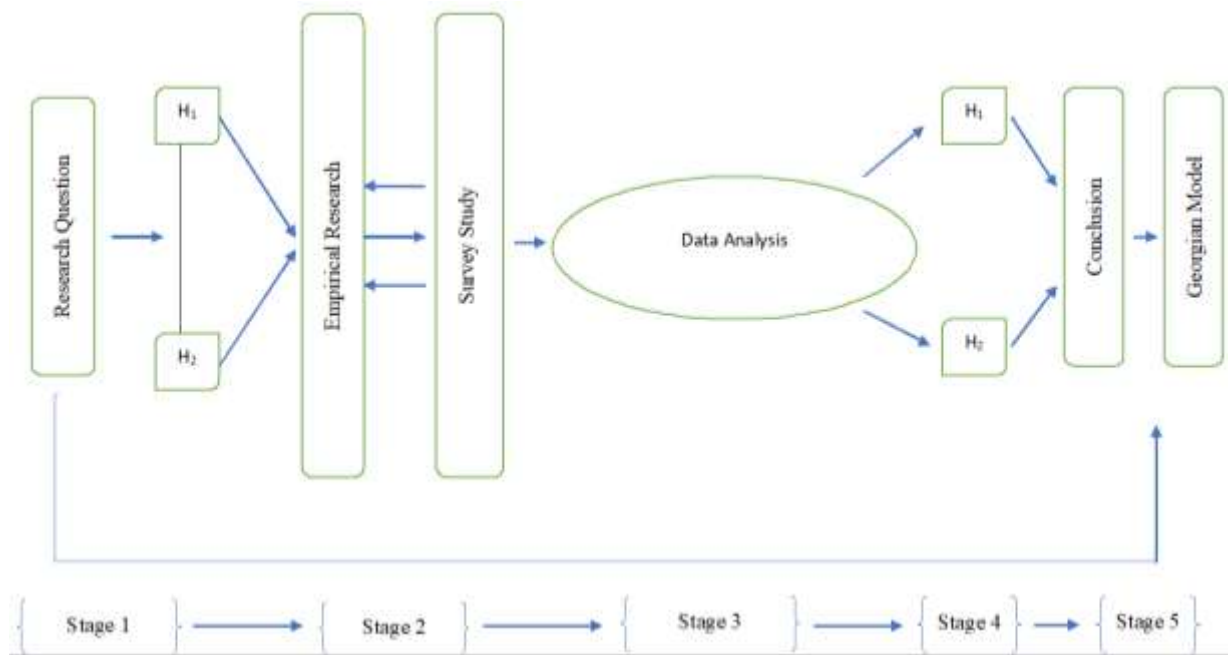
Source: Developed by the Researcher

The study reviewed existing literature related to student enrollment management, verbal and nonverbal communication, and Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods with Muda. Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods facilitated an in-depth exploration of the research problem. It offered guidelines on how to resolve the issue of effective communication.

The study explored influences of verbal and nonverbal communication on student enrollment management through empirical research; conducted survey study, and lastly explored Georgia as a case. Therefore, the first part of the study was empirical research with the observation. The observation was applied to the focus group and studied in the United States of America. The research lasted for two years, between September 1, 2017- September 1, 2019. The empirical research was supported by survey studies conducted between October 1, 2019 – November 25th, 2019. Alongside the studies, the Georgian student enrollment market was observed. The initial calls were made to get insight on communication processes.

For observation, University1 was selected out of 17 other universities. The selection of this particular university was based on software utilized for tracking the communication process and access to the data. University1 uses Uniface - a development and deployment platform for enterprise applications to record verbal and nonverbal communication of admissions team and employees and Cognos - business intelligence solution to report data on weekly calls and so on.

The study group was the admissions team, which consisted of seven admissions counselors. The study goal was to observe the admissions team and see how communication effected recruiting and reaching student enrollment goals. The study had an opportunity to monitor call counts and contacts recorded by admissions representatives for a two-year recruiting cycle.

Furthermore, the online survey was launched. The goal of the survey was to support empirical research conducted. Target was Georgian respondents; however, the survey blended feedback with respondents from around the world.

The target audience for the survey were higher education professionals, students, and high school counselors/coaches/representatives. The sample population was 1000 participants, so approximately between 1300 -1400 invites were spread to the study population. Overall, 890 participants viewed the survey. Out of view population, 453 participants started the survey to some extent. 328 participants completed the survey with 105 being Georgian respondents.

Ethical Statement

Confidentiality was an important part of the research. The study is committed not to use university, students, or other stakeholders' names unless allowed. Permission for observation was obtained. Every survey participant read an informed consent to decide whether to proceed or not with the survey.

Limitations

The biggest limitation to the research was the hesitation of Georgian respondents to complete an online survey.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review divided information in three parts. First, a review of higher education and student enrollment management, consisting of higher education environment, enrollment projection methods, student enrollment patterns, multi-cultural student enrollment, approaches to student development, a crisis in higher education, and marketing in student enrollment management. Second part, a review of effective verbal and nonverbal communication, consisting of fundamentals of communication, effective verbal communication, nonverbal communication, communication management, communication trends and culture in communication. Third part, a

review of Six Sigma, Kaizen and Muda methods, consisting of Six Sigma method, applying Six Sigma knowledge, DMAIC road map, Kaizen method, Muda, and Six Sigma marketing.

CHAPTER 2. THE COMPONENTS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this chapter is to define the three major components of the study from the researcher's practical perspective. First, the study explores student enrollment management and effective verbal and nonverbal communication in depth. The research assesses the student enrollment team, student funnel, management system and areas for future improvements. Second, discusses the role of communication in student enrollment management. Investigates barriers of communication and gives recommendations for effective communication, lastly, the study analysis the usage of Six Sigma into student enrollment management. It illustrates the impact and influence of Six Sigma.

CHAPTER 3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The emphasis of this chapter is student enrollment management in Georgia. The study considers student enrollment management as a new understanding for universities in Georgia. Georgian universities do not have a separate student enrollment department. The study believes that there is only admissions office with a very least capacity. Even though universities receive students from national examinations, potential students still need to be recruited. Students need to be shown what universities represent and why students must choose them.

Today, whether it is Georgia or any other country, universities widely use proven face-to-face recruitment techniques such as educational fairs and university open days. Those techniques are still cost-effective. With technological advancements, e-recruitment is becoming more and more commonly used technique for domestic and international recruiting.

It is important to note the difference between recruitment and admissions. Recruiting in student enrollment involves interaction and engagement with prospective students. It directs students to prepare and submit the required documents for admissions. Each university, in each country, has its own admissions policies and procedures that stand aside from recruitment. First, the student is recruited and after is admitted. Consequently, national or international policies do not restrict enrollment management to communicate with prospective students.

Today, universities need strategic enrollment planning to create data-driven recruitment plans. Universities want to increase revenue, therefore regulate discount rates. Universities want to incorporate recruitment with retention forecasting and increase yield rates. Consequently, to manage all the above mentioned, universities need to concentrate on recruitment processes. The

key process in student recruitment is effective verbal and nonverbal communication rather than recruiting strategies, or how long or short student funnel is.

Data-driven recruitment projects can map enrollment strategies; however, they cannot educate on the importance of two-way communication. Therefore, the importance falls on student enrollment management to prepare admissions counselors to recruit.

The scope of the study is illustrated in the Figure 2. Figure 2 demonstrates that the interaction between institutions and students happen through verbal and nonverbal communication, therefore, student enrollment management is heavily dependent on communication strategies. The feedback, whether it is from institution or student is run through Six Sigma, where admissions representative, or student enrollment team defines, and step by step, through DMAIC roadmap eliminates waste and gains control.

Figure 2. The Scope of the Study (Interrelationship)
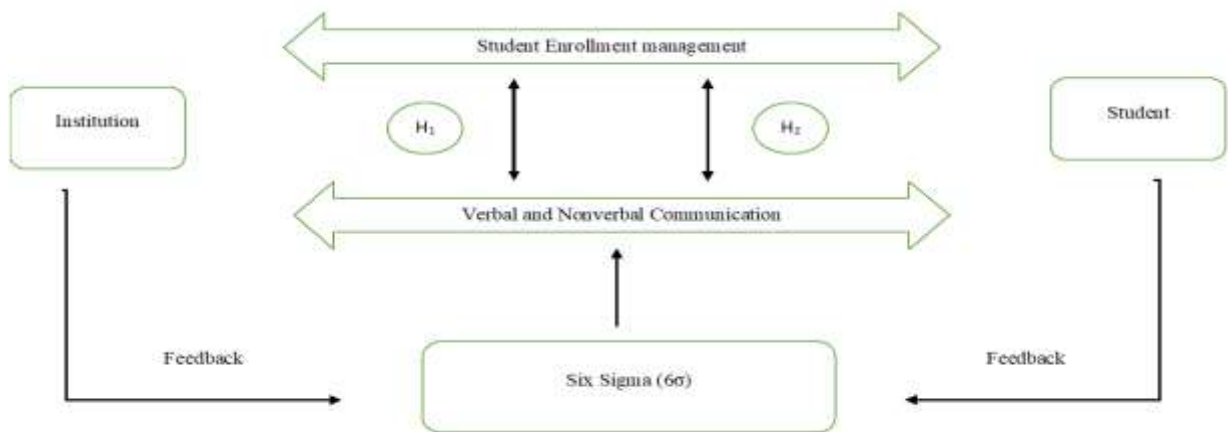
Source: Developed by the Researcher

The study used empirical research to examine the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management. In two years, between September 2017 - September 2019, the study observed and analyzed performances of the enrollment management team at University1.

For observation, Univerity1 was selected out of 17 (3 public, 2 private-for profit and 12 private-nonprofit) universities in the United States. The selection of this particular university was based on software utilized for tracking the communication process and access to the data. Admissions team consisted of seven admissions counselors. At the beginning of every recruiting cycle, counselors were assigned territory to recruit and to meet overall student enrollment management targets.

The study underlines the importance of managing student pool, furthermore, claims that having student numbers does not have a significant value unless data is managed accordingly.

Table 1 illustrates the Admissions status report. Data compares 2018 and 2019 recruiting cycles from observations years to previous years (2015-2016-2017), prior observation.

Every year, recruiting activities started with a pool of students. First, 'total inquiries' show that in 2018, there were 11, 697 total inquiries compared to 2019, with 13, 651 inquiries. These names need to move through the funnel lifecycle and converted into enrolled students, therefore, moving students through funnel requires verbal and nonverbal communication. Second, the table shows 'total applications. In 2018, there was 3, 490 applications received compared to 2019, with a total of 2, 876 applications. Third, 'total acceptances' illustrate that from the 2018 year, 3, 490 applicants converted into 1, 955 accepted students. From 2019 data, 2, 876 applicants converted in 1,616 accepted students.

Lastly, the most important part of student enrollment is 'net confirmed with deposit' and 'total enrolled'. In 2018, out of 1, 955 accepted students 341 confirmed as students by paying a deposit. Contrasted to 2019, 1,616 accepted students generated 244 confirmations. Confirmations do not necessarily mean that students will attend the institution. Consequently, in 2018 from 341 confirmed students only 327 enrolled, and in 2019, from 244 students 245 enrolled. The activity shown in table 2 would not happen without proper two-way communication between prospective students and their parents. Therefore, it must be noted that there are always various barriers in the communication that could have whether a small or big impact on the communication process. The gap between the two years was 97 students. It is significant to mention that the enrollment management goal was around 375 students for each recruiting cycle. Now, the gap within each recruiting cycle (2017/18 and 18/19) for enrollment management was the following (375-341) for 2018 and (375-244) for 2019.

To continue and understand the total impact that verbal and nonverbal communication has on overall student enrollment numbers, therefore, on an institutional budget, let us conduct rough calculation. On average, the direct university cost (including tuition) of attendance at University1 is approximately \$35,000. Consequently, (375-341=34*\$35,000=\$1,190,000) and (375-244=131* \$35,000=\$4,585,000) is the deficit for overall university operational budget. The numbers shown the deficit with roughly \$1.1 million in year 2017/2018 and roughly \$4.5 million in the year 2018/2019. To conclude, this is a direct impact of the unhealthy communication process with prospective students and their families. Those are the rough numbers to indicate the importance of each student for universities. Hence, the role of two-way communications is significant.

To support the research problem, let us go back to inquired students. The study indicated that in 2018, there was 11, 697 total inquiries compared to 2019, with 13, 651 inquiries. Now compare those numbers to non-observation years. It is clear that the inquired student pool in the

past three years is lesser than in observation years. In 2017, there were 9,208 inquired students with 325 enrolled: in 2016, 9,206 with 376 enrolled students, and in 2015, 10,710 inquired students with 359 enrolled students. It is another indication that no matter the size of the student pool, the student data management and speed of communication makes an impact on overall enrollment numbers. Moreover, from operational budget perspective, between 2015 and 2018 University1 maintained on average roughly the same operational budget between $11-12 million, however, significantly dropped under $9 million in 2019.

Table 1. Fall Admissions Status Report

FALL 2019 ADMISSIONS STATUS REPORT					
August Week 4 8/18/2019					
	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
TOTAL INQUIRIES	13651	11697	9208	9206	10710
Target Segment 1	766	775	1129	1760	1095
TOTAL APPLICATIONS	2876	3490	3272	2961	2744
Target Segment 1	176	163	163	215	220
YEAR TO DATE HOLDS	186	291	333	228	183
CURRENT HOLDS	6	3	0	0	10
CANCELED BEFORE ACCEPTANCE	1131	1423	1444	1527	1340
ACCEPTANCE DENIED	37	92	74	44	42
APPLICATIONS IN-PROGRESS	92	20	5	43	126
ACCEPTANCES	1616	1955	1749	1347	1236
Target Segment 1	112	109	110	141	125
DECLINED WITHOUT DEPOSIT	1307	1570	1367	961	783
RESCIND WITH DEPOSIT	31	37	40	33	33
NET ACCEPTANCES	34	7	13	21	46
NET CONFIRMED WITH DEPOSIT	244	341	329	332	374
Target Segment 1	47	58	51	86	53
STOPOUTS	1	0	3	3	4
Target Segment 1	0	0	0	2	2
TOTAL INCOMING STUDENTS	245	341	332	335	378
Target Segment 1	47	58	51	88	55
TOTAL ENROLLED	?	327	325	376	359
Target Segment 1	?	51	91	55	73

To support the above-mentioned statement on the significance of student-centric, customer service-oriented, therefore effective verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management, let us take a look at Table 2. It illustrates the comparison of the counselor's performances within the observation years. The study indicated that each year counselor has individual goals for recruitment that makes together a total enrollment number. It is another suggestion, that universities must plan ahead of the recruiting cycles, therefore provide the "Confirm to Decline Ratio" formula could be implemented by universities.

For example, AC5 on table 2 started the year in 2018 with 1,495 students, and 2,052 inquired in 2019. It was a 37% increase in the student pool. Now, the number of applied students was 2018 with 514, and 2019 with 364. It indicated the drop in numbers by -29% even though the change in the inquired pool was higher. Moreover, the accepted numbers for AC5 was following, in 2018 with 317 and 2019 with 214. The drop of the accepted pool was -32%, which results in a

decline of the confirmed pool. Finally, in 2018, AC5 had 74 confirmations, in contract to 40 in 2019. The drop was -46%. It is a high drop from the previous year. In overall, the comparison between AC's on the table 3.33 reveals that between 2018 and 2018 years in net confirmations AC1 dropped by -41%, that is 24 recruited instead of 41; AC2 dropped by -21%; AC3 increased by 6%; AC4 dropped by -21%; AC6 dropped by -5% and AC7 dropped by -56%. It is a warning that two-way communication was not effective between the university and prospective students.

To summarize table 2, let us look at the total comparison numbers. There was a 17% increase in inquired students from 2018 to 2019. However, the inquired pool resulted in a drop of -18% of application numbers. Furthermore, it resulted in a -17% drop in accepted students. So far, the table showed the smooth 17-18% drop ratio, however, the confirmation numbers dropped by --28% percent. If we apply a "successful counselor" approach as presented and discussed in the study, it is signal that the communication between the university and prospective students struggle in the third stage, therefore enrollment numbers dropped significantly in the last stage, and University1 finished recurring cycle with a negative difference.

Table 2. Fall 2019 Historical Comparisons by Admissions Counselor (AC)

Fall 2019 Historical Comparisons by Counselor											
August Week 4 8/18/2019											
Campus	Inquired	Inquired	inc/dec	Applied	Applied	inc/dec	Accept	Accept	inc/dec	Net Confirm	Net Confirm	inc/dec
AC	2019	2018		2019	2018		2019	2018		2019	2018	
AC 1	4,371	2957	48%	773	668	16%	474	421	13%	24	41	-41%
AC 2	2,275	1911	19%	460	613	-25%	311	393	-21%	42	53	-21%
AC 3	737	930	-21%	196	308	-36%	100	144	-31%	37	35	6%
AC 4	574	649	-12%	341	442	-23%	137	182	-25%	44	56	-21%
AC 5	2,052	1495	37%	364	514	-29%	214	317	-32%	40	74	-46%
AC 6	2,284	1330	72%	428	516	-17%	219	249	-12%	39	41	-5%
AC 7	1,358	2425	-44%	314	429	-27%	161	249	-35%	18	41	-56%
Total	13651	11697	17%	2876	3490	-18%	1,616	1,955	-17%	244	341	-28%

Additionally, the study conducted an online survey to support observation and answer the research question, therefore, accept or reject the proposed hypothesis. The survey was conducted between October 1st to November 25th, 2019. 328 participants completed the survey, from which 105 were Georgians.

One of the key questions asked was, how satisfied respondents were with marketing materials provided by the university? 1.52% of respondents were "very unsatisfied", 3.35% were "unsatisfied", 19.51% were "neutral", 64.63% were "satisfied, and 10.98% respondents were "very satisfied". The second key question was how often admissions representative had contacted respondents. 1.52% respondents indicated "never", 23.17% indicated "once in a while", 34.15% indicated "about half the time", 30.79% "most of the time", and 10.37% indicated "always". The frequency of communication by admissions counselors, is illustrated on Table 3, how admissions representatives were asked to project their individual student enrollment numbers.

Table 3. Enrollment Projections by AC 2019 (March).

Enrollment Projections 2019

	INQUIRED		PREAPP		APPLIED		APPWDOC		APPCOMP		HOLD		ACCEPTED		CONFIRM		Totals	Goals
	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	Cur	Proj	GOAL	
AC 1																	65	0
AC 2	39	1	6	0	11	3	21	4	3	2	25	5	77	15	37	35	60	65
AC 3																	65	0
AC 4																	45	0
AC 5																	70	0
AC 6																	65	0
AC 7																	60	0

For example, AC2 at the beginning of recruitment cycle had a individual goal of 60 students. Therefore, the need of effective communication through "Successful counselor" is significant. The table 3 has 10 brackets. For example, let us look at applied bracket. Applied bracket has two columns; first, current applied number and second, projected number that AC2 anticipates enrolling. It is the same structure for other brackets too.

According to "monthly guide" model, in March, AC2 projected following numbers to meet his/her individual goal. AC2 has 39 inquired students and projects to convert 1 student; AC2 has 6 in preapp, with 0 projections; AC2 has 11 applied, with 3 projections; AC2 has 21 in appwdoc with 4 projections; AC2 has 3 in appcomp with 2 projections; AC2 has 25 in hold with 5 projections; AC2 has 77 accepted with 15 projections and 37 confirmed with 35 projections. At the end, AC2 projected 65 however the goal is 60. This type of activities requires constant communication; therefore, admissions representatives "always" needs to be in touch, but not "half of the time" or "once in a while".

Therefore, planning, organizing, leading and control becomes essential for AC2 to manage communication flow. From the data, respondents believe that organizing is very important compared to planning. However, the difference between was in 0.4 points. It allows us to divide this process into two parts: first, planning and organizing, second, leading and controlling. Additionally, projections in recruitment places more responsibilities on student enrollment management attributes. AC2 needs to equally embrace knowledge of subject matter, a caring attitude, knowledge of discipline, the desire to make a difference and management technique. Otherwise, enrollment projections will lack efficiency. It is important to note that, respondents chose management technique and a caring attitude as top 2 choices, while knowledge of subject matter was slightly behind compared to knowledge of discipline and the desire to make a difference.

Comparing the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal communication for both overall and Georgian respondents reveals the significance of two-way communication between universities and prospective students. The importance of effective verbal and nonverbal communication is

illustrated on Table 1, 2 and 3. Last, but not a least important question was to select preferred communication methods. "Call" received 109 (18.89%) counts, "Email" received 229 (39.69%) counts, "text" received 61 (10.57%), "social media" received 47 (8.15%), "personal note" received 16 (2.77%) counts, "face-to-face" received 115 (19.93%) counts.

Admissions representatives need to be strategic in communication and utilize all the possible ways of communication to engage and interact with students and their families. Today, majority of the students will not answer the phone call, however, they tend to be open to other communication mediums. As mentioned above, today e-recruitment is getting more commonly used because of conversational marketing, therefore, they tend to connect via text messages, social media platforms, and so on. Perhaps, 7C's are the key components of effective verbal and nonverbal communication. At last, the study indicated that student-centric, customer service-oriented communication is essential for student enrollment management. It is a signal that universities need to invest in monitoring verbal and nonverbal communication to effectively manage student pool. Marketing strategies does not have the same impact or influence unless it is supported by effective verbal and nonverbal communication.

CHAPTER 4. THE GEORGIAN MODEL FOR STUDENT ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Applying the study into the Georgian Model

Globally, student recruitment is a crucial element for many universities. Therefore, whether it is Georgia or any other country, universities widely use proven face-to-face recruitment techniques such as educational fairs and university open days. Those techniques are still cost-effective. However, with technological advancements, e-recruitment is a more commonly used technique for domestic and international recruiting. Consequently, Georgian universities are obliged to allocate resources accordingly and prepare for the competitive student market.

To implement the GEOSEM model, first, university management needs to evaluate the whole concept and principles of the model. Moreover, the study recognizes the financial and structural burden associated with creating a new department. The GEOSEM model requires complete dedication, therefore, redesigning of university management structure, preparing qualified staff, and allocating financial resources.

Second, the higher education system is organized differently in Georgia. Per, Jibladze (2017), the admissions process is managed by the National Examination Centre. Based on three exams, the center determined the level of success of the prospective students and grants student vouchers according to the 100%, 70%, and 50% success scale. Additionally, Chankseliani (2013) indicates that applicants must indicate their preferred program of study on their application forms,

before taking the entrance exams. An applicant can gain admission to only one program of study in their application. Therefore, Georgian universities are required to know the difference between recruitment and admissions.

Recruiting in student enrollment involves interaction and engagement with prospective students. It directs students to prepare and submit the required documents for admissions. Each university, in each country, Georgia in the study, has its own admissions policies and procedures that stand aside from recruitment. Universities should recognize that first, the student is recruited and after is admitted. Consequently, national or international policies do not restrict enrollment management to communicate with prospective students throughout the year. Moreover, it encourages more collaboration and interaction.

The study broke down of student enrollment management funnel in five main categories. Adapting them to Georgian recruitment will be slightly different, however, the core processes will be maintained. Importantly, admissions representatives will continue communicating through calling, texting, emails, and social media. Face-to-face recruitment techniques with e-recruitment will remain the same.

The processes in Category 1 will not change, however, Category 2, 3, and 4 would be merged based on national examinations. The application process starts right after the applicant's university and the program of study is determined. It is when the admissions representatives advise students to bring all required paperwork to complete registration and finalize financial arrangements. Category 5 will be graduating students and welcoming them to the alumni family. Universities in Georgia will be advised to heavily invest in alumni development programs, as globally, alumni's make difference.

Today, universities need strategic enrollment planning to create data-driven recruitment plans. Universities want to increase revenue, therefore regulate discount rates. Moreover, student enrollment wants to enlarge the geographic reach and tap new student markets. Universities want to incorporate recruitment with retention forecasting and increase yield rates. Consequently, Six Sigma provides a continues process for improvement. Six Sigma tools and techniques lead the GEOSEM model. Six Sigma is specifically applied to the communication process through the DMAIC road map, which additionally provides support for managing the GEOSEM model. It is important to mention that, globally many universities, gradually apply Six Sigma in various departments to eliminate waste to support cost-effective processes.

GEOSEM model additionally promotes following internal models such:

- "Successful counselor" – Yearly recruitment planning with 5 phases
- "Confirm to Decline Ratio" – Projecting yield enrollment numbers

- "Monthly Guide" – Monthly projection planning with set goals

Each internal model has its specifications, that is adjustable to the Georgian universities. The important prerequisite is to utilize the GEOSEM model into the university structure, as all activities depend on the effective student management structure.

"Successful counselor" will enable Georgian universities to strategically plan monthly activities, therefore, generate effective student funnel, especially in Category1. Phases in "Successful counselor" adapts with the national examinations. For example, in the "homework" phase September-November cycle will change to November – March, "make or break it" will change to April-August", "harvest" will be August" and "Zenith" with "matriculation" will be September-October. Consequently, all student funnel categories will adjust alongside with "successful counselor".

Georgian admissions system should not be a barrier to use face-to-face enrollment techniques and engage with prospective students. The major assignment, throughout "successful counselor" will be to motivate prospective students to choose a particular university as top options for national examinations. Apparently, monthly assignments should be strategically planned with various activities such as individual high school visits throughout Georgian regions and open days. In the Georgian student market, universities should seek locations that need more attention.

In contrast to international recruitment, "Successful counselor" enables to strategize and allocate resources accordingly. Universities should decide on geographic locations, and how to enter those student markets; identify international donor high schools and agents, and so on. Domestic students do not have any specific admissions deadline besides national examinations; however, international students must have deadlines according to immigration procedures. Consequently, the phases in "successful counselor" will remain the same with small alignment, as there are specific days at universities when students should complete registration and start classes.

"Confirm to Decline ratio" will be restructured, and most probably applied to international students. Therefore, the same conditions will be applied to the "monthly guide". "Monthly guide" will enable admissions representative to plan and organize communication strategies, therefore, persuade prospective students to choose university they represent as a top choice. In general, student enrollment is a multiple-stage process that incorporates every aspect of the institution. Everything is interdependent. Misleading processes could result in unforeseen outcomes.

The study introduces a GEO-SEM model for Georgian universities. The study believes that the model and approaches provided will provide both groundwork and launchpad for student enrollment evolution and the steadiness of Georgian universities. The model is a result of long-run practical and theoretical learning. The research provides a two-step model for Georgian

universities. At first, universities must introduce the Student enrollment management department. Second, universities must follow the Student enrollment management process. Georgian universities need to know the difference between the two steps. The model requires full commitment and strategical allocation of institutional resources. Figure 3 illustrates GEO-SEM student Enrollment Management Model.

GEO-SEM Model - Structure

The study recommends university-wide adaptation of a student enrollment management with a set of common terms. Everything needs to be incorporated to meet the learning outcomes of institutions. The GEO-SEM model shows that student enrollment management needs to be introduced as a new entity in the university overall structure. It must have its leadership team to lead student enrollment processes. Leadership must report to the Rector, Vice-Rector or Director depending on the university management structure. The leadership must oversee admissions, financial aid, marketing, and retention offices. The responsibilities have to be coordinated within all offices. Individuals working in student enrollment must know the importance of the structure. Without committed staff, the student enrollment department will not be effective.

GEO-SEM Model – Process

To implement student enrollment structure is time consuming. It has several moving parts that are fundamental for overall student enrollment performances. In the process of student enrollment management everything interdependent. Leadership is required to know what and how to play the game. The significance of each area cannot be ignored. In the competitive higher education market, everything can happen. Universities are constantly affected by different developments and every institution wants to survive. The GEO-SEM model showcases factors that student enrollment management must take into consideration when planning: student characteristics, environmental factors, institutional objectives, institutional goals, institutional strategies and desired outcome. They directly or indirectly define the path of each institution.

The study believes that the proposed GEO-SEM model is ideal for universities in Georgia. It will have a huge impact on overall student enrollment developments, which will lead Georgian universities to be more competitive domestically and internationally. It can make universities shift into mergers, as it will create a high-level competition where universities who are for short-term will not survive. The goal is to create a more vibrant educational market in Georgia. and, finally, it is an investment in a better future for Georgian students and Georgian university.

Figure 3. GEOSEM Model
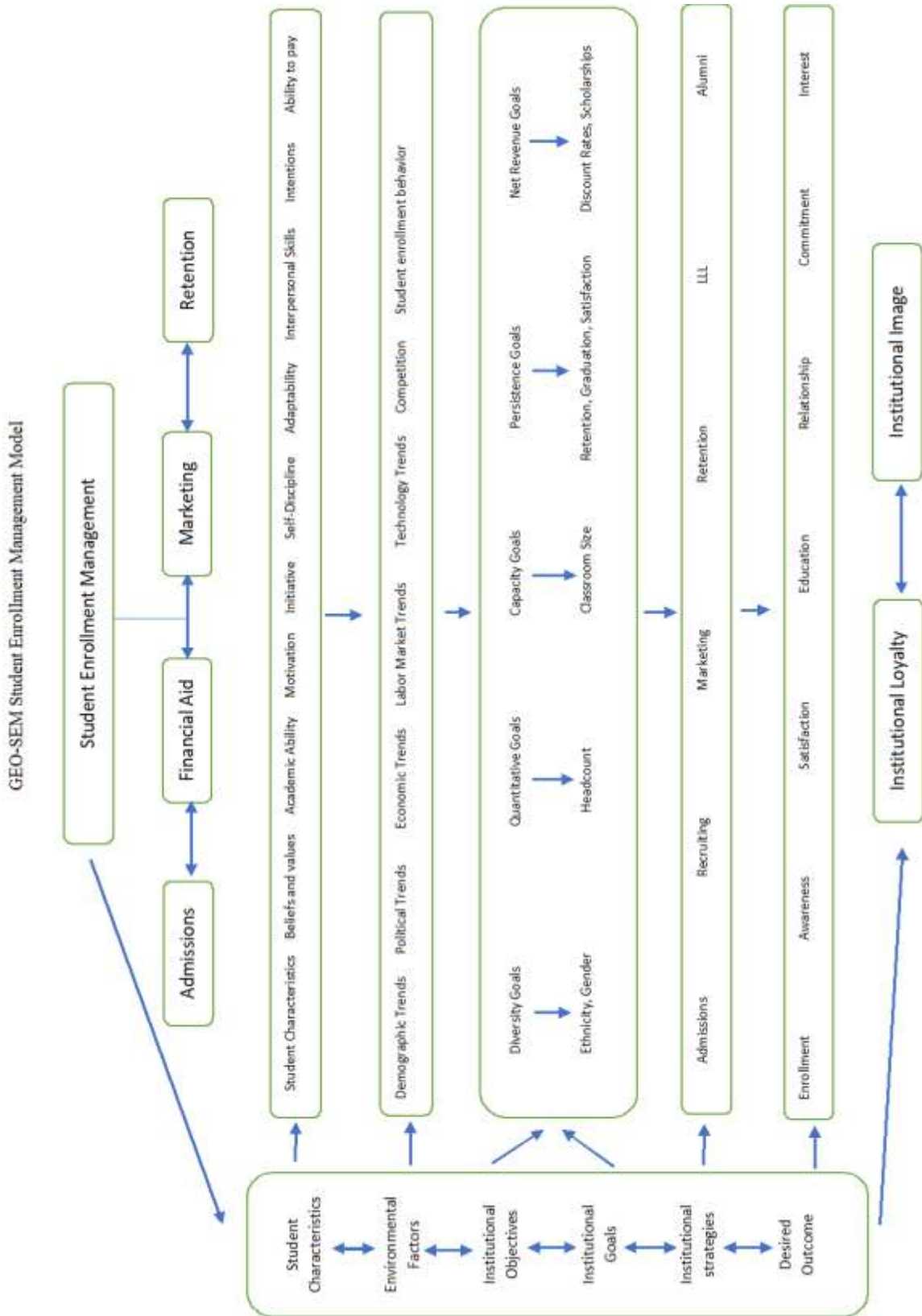
Source: Developed by the Researcher

CONCLUSSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Globally, in a competitive higher education environment, universities continuously face challenges to recruit new students. Many institutions fail to understand that recruiting is not just to enroll students rather a long-term relationship beyond graduation.

The recruiting has changed. Student enrollment management is under constant pressure. Every dollar spent on recruiting campaigns is monitored with high expectations, therefore, communication has become more complicated, demanding, and inclusive.

Technologies are developing which makes communication with prospective students more and more complex. Universities need to adapt to the changes to meet student demands.

Yearly, institutional leaderships are concerned with the name availability on the student enrollment market. Many enrollment practitioners spend a lot of funds to generate applications, however, it still does not pay dividends. Furthermore, the study underlines that building and managing student enrollment funnel is based on strategic marketing initiatives.

The higher education market will continue to be competitive, therefore, to eliminate any setbacks universities must invest and establish strong student enrollment teams. The enrollment management team must unite all departments at the university. It must create a centralized system. The whole institution must perform as one entity and deliver an effective message to the customers.

Student enrollment management must pay attention to its stakeholders such as students, parents, high school staff, government, and so on. University-to-student and student-to-university communication must be a two-way process. By implementing effective communication strategies, student enrollment management can influence university decision processes, therefore impact enrollment numbers.

Student enrollment management must employ effective communications and collaborative approaches to increase student enrollment numbers. They should understand the importance of admissions and marketing initiatives for building bridges with prospective students. The communication process between university departments has to be enhanced. Effective verbal and nonverbal communication must be the basis of successful student enrollment teams.

The study provided a summary of the theoretical research: first, on higher education and student enrollment management; second, on effective verbal and nonverbal communication; and the third, on Six Sigma, Kaizen, and Muda. Therefore, a key theoretical finding from the literature review was the following:

First, Docking and Curton (2015) provide key takeaways: First, attempting to grow enrollment with new academic buildings and computer labs do not work. Second, students assume

their professors are knowledgeable, skilled teachers who will help them to succeed. Third, students know how to have fun. Fourth, do your homework. Write down your enrollment goals including the financial requirements to run the university.

Second, according to Kretovics (2010), there are two ways to approach a marketing strategy – from a product or a service approach. Regardless of whichever approach you believe best fits your institution, it is important to understand them both because there will be a significant number of internal and external stakeholders who will view it from the other side. Third, Berko et al. (2010) claim that many educational institutions assume because you can speak, you can communicate, and because you can hear, you can listen. Further, Chen (2017) states that culture is an ever-present part of any communication activity yet often taken for granted.

Fourth, the Council for Six Sigma Certification (2018) emphasis that the Six Sigma method lets organizations identify problems, validate assumptions, brainstorm solutions, and plan for implementation to avoid unintended consequences. Six Sigma methods do not offer a crystal ball for organizations. Moreover, one thing that sets Six Sigma apart from some other quality improvement management methodologies is a structured approach to every project. Additionally, Kaizen is a concept referring to business activities that continuously improve all functions and involve all employees from the top management to the assembly line workers.

The study found that planning, organizing, leading, and controlling are critical in student enrollment management, therefore, features like knowledge of the subject matter, having a caring attitude, knowledge of the discipline, a management technique and making a difference in students' life have a significant impact on the overall communication process.

The study found that building student funnel starts from the backyard. Based on location, institutions should identify, target and position in the local impact radius for recruiting. For growth, only positioning is not enough, as it requires maintaining positions against the competition. Hence, after gaining a competitive edge in a local impact radius, institutions need to strategically advance and prioritize recruiting efforts. This applies to domestic as well as to international recruiting.

The study found that effectively conducted marketing and admissions campaigns guide institutions to anticipate and predict future enrollment numbers. However, it is not achievable without proper communication strategies, speed of communication, and student-centric, customer service-oriented recruiting interaction. Recruiting students requires multiple communication at various stages. Each stage is unique and carries a distinctive value for institutions. Moreover, enrollment management should create a working environment where employees are empowered to develop communication strategies.

The study found that to maximize the value of your university and the return on investment, student enrollment should recognize what students really want, to what extent they are getting it from your university, and how you can keep them coming back for more.

The study highlighted that enrollment communication is a continuous process. Staff must monitor communication strategies for effectiveness and visibility. Students prefer individual approaches, contrasted to mass communication. Enrollment communication is building strong customer relationships, therefore creating student-centric, customer service-oriented awareness.

The study emphasized that student enrollment management should understand that communication is a two-way process. There is a constant expectation of the feedback, reliability, speed, and flexibility in communication.

Moreover, an area for improvement in enrollment management always exists. The student market is constantly changing therefore, the study examined several hints for improvement. First, always assess student enrollment, retention rate, employment goals, financial aid distribution, discount rates, and so on, to be compared to regional, and national standards. Second, provide clear communication to offer clear-cut communication to student, faculty, and staff needs. The third is the anticipation. And fourth is technology. Institutions need to implement new technologies into student enrollment management processes.

The study underlined that Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods were vital in discovering root-causes in student enrollment management and the communication process. The goal of Six Sigma is to improve effectiveness and efficiency with low cost for the organizations. Six Sigma is low a low-cost method to achieve that goal, however, if universities decide to apply Six Sigma, they need a long-term commitment and trust for Six Sigma methods.

In empirical research, the study introduced a "successful counselor" model, "Confirm to Decline Ratio" formula, and the "Monthly Guide" projection strategy. Findings were presented and analyzed. The outcome of the survey was beneficial for the study, particularly in terms of helping the research to analyze empirical data to examine the relevance of effective verbal and nonverbal communication.

The research has identified the hypothesis that had to be tested first with empirical research and second with survey studies. Therefore, data obtained from both empirical research and survey study was reported and analyzed in chapter 3, section 3.5. Data analysis gave conclusions and helped to test hypotheses. Furthermore, permitted to create a model for Georgian universities.

Two-year observation on the student enrollment team has shown the importance and the role of effective verbal and nonverbal communication. Besides, the survey study was significant to support empirical research with additional data. The data drawn from observations has given a

guideline on how important it is to have effective verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management. Moreover, it is essential to note that, internal and external factors will affect the results.

Observation believes that admissions counselors, and generally the whole student enrollment team must understand how important everyone is. Listening and speaking are unchangeable components of effective communications. Students look for loyal and dependable university representatives. Student Enrollment management representatives must know that nonverbal communication is not seen in many cases, although students see the body motions. Consequently, student enrollment management representatives must be confident in communications. The need to adapt to various circumstances is a vital technique.

Founded on literature review - studying influences of verbal and nonverbal communication on student enrollment management; empirical research – conducting observation on a focus group for two years and survey study – studying the relevance of verbal and nonverbal communication in student enrollment management utilizing Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods, therefore analyzed in subchapter 3.5, the study concludes:

- *First, the study declines the Null Hypothesis that effective verbal and nonverbal communication will not influence two-way communication between universities and students; therefore, does not impact overall student enrollment numbers.*

- *Second, the study accepts suggested Hypothesis that indeed effective verbal and nonverbal communication undeniably influences two-way communication between universities and students; therefore, impacts overall student enrollment numbers.*

The most importantly, the study presented the GEOSEM model for Georgian Universities. The GEOSEM model was accomplished by utilizing Six Sigma and Kaizen management methods into student enrollment management, investigating verbal and nonverbal communication as the main source that directly impacts student enrollment numbers, whether it is recruiting or retention. The model is adjustable not only for universities in Georgia but then again to other small or big, private, or public universities.

The study concludes that the need for effective verbal and nonverbal communication is fundamental, as well as utilizing institutional data to improve recruiting activities. Institutional resources must be allocated with purpose therefore sustaining effective student funnel is critical for many institutions.

The study offers the following suggestions: first, student enrollment practitioners should focus on yield-associated marketing, invest in long-term benefits. Further, Institutions must recognize the significance of student enrollment marketing, consequently, frequently rethinking

and revamping content shared with prospective students. Second, student enrollment marketers must recognize that the university selection process starts way before students decide to approach university or show themselves on the recruiting radar. Third, the student enrollment management should: first, think critically; second, make decisions quickly and confidently; third, work effectively with others and finally, embrace the change.

Furthermore, the study presents three key recommendations to effectively manage enrollment funnel: engage more – universities should develop communication strategies to engage effectively with prospective students.; understand data – universities should not ignore available data; accept new trends – universities should understand that the student funnel changes quickly; additionally, digital trends should be accepted

Moreover, Six Sigma and Kaizen method require total commitment to its processes. The study suggests several points for student enrollment management using Six Sigma. First, performances and analyses should be related to day to day work. Daily check-up routines will eliminate defects right away to avoid long-term issues. Second, routines need to be manageable in terms of timeframe, so students and families receive top-quality customer service. Third, performances should be aligned with business goals and results. And last, performances should address issues that are important to the students.

Additionally, the study provides suggestions and recommendations with Six Sigma DMAIC roadmap.

Phase 1. Define. A key element in the define phase is to have an appropriate insight into the current stance at the university. Universities should define customers; develop problem statement, goals and benefits; identify process owners; define resources and evaluate key organizational support.

Phase 2. Measure. It is vital to measure performances that happen around the university to better define business outcomes. Universities must find data-driven solutions. Therefore, define defect, opportunity; detailed process map and develop data collection plan.

Phase 3. Analyze. By analyzing the data, student enrollment management will determine the impact it will have on student enrollment. Correct analyzes of the performances will empower employees. Universities should define performance objectives; identify value/non-value-added process steps and determine root causes.

Phase 4. Improve. The main initiative is to create a scheme for a long-term solution. Universities will concentrate on improving productivity and performance.

Phase 5. Control. The processes need constant monitoring and surveillance. Students' behaviors change all the time. Solutions applied now, might not be suitable the next year. Universities should define monitoring and control systems and communicate and celebrate.

Publications

Gabelaia, I. (2018). Importance of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Strategies in Student Enrollment Management. *The 8th International Research Conference on Education, Language and Literature* (pp. 165-169). IBSU Publications. Retrieved from https://ircelt.ibsu.edu.ge/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IRCEELT-2018_Proceedings_Updated.pdf

Gabelaia, I. (2019). Relevanța competențelor de marketing în media de socializare online pentru manageri într-o lume digitală în schimbare. *Quality-Access to Success, 20*, 155-162. Retrieved from https://www.srac.ro/calitatea/arhiva/supliment/2019/Q-asContents_Vol.20_S3_October-2019.pdf

Gabelaia, I. (2019). Residence Life Role in a College Education; Another Form of Classroom That Matters. *American Studies International Research Conference* (pp. 118-123). Tbilisi: IBSU Publications.

Gabelaia, I. (2019). The Magnitude of International Enrollment Management in the Era of Technologies for Small, Private Universities. *The 9th International Research Conference on Education, Language and Literature* (pp. 184-188). Tbilisi: IBSU Publications. Retrieved from https://ircelt.ibsu.edu.ge/irceelt-2019-proceedings-book/

Gabelaia, I. (2019). The Relevance of Social Media Marketing Skills for Managers in a Changing Digital World. *Quality-Access to Success, 20*, 65-72. Retrieved from https://www.srac.ro/calitatea/en/arhiva/supliment/2019/Q-asContents_Vol.20_S3_October-2019.pdf

Gabelaia, I. (2020). Enhancing the Customer Experience Through a Feedback-driven Conversational Marketing: Encouraging Superior Engagement. *International Academic Conference on Management, Economics, and Marketing, IAC-MEM Venice 2020* (pp. 36-49). Budapest: Czech Institute of Academic Education z.s., Publishing. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/

Gabelaia, I. (2020). The Relevance of Mobile and Distance Education; Developing an Advanced Approach to Learning. In I. Kabashkin, I. Yatskiv, & O. Prentkovskis (Eds.), *Reliability and Statistics in Transportation and Communication* (1st ed., Vol. 117, pp. 675-683). Riga: Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-44610-9

Gabelaia, I., & Bucovetchi, O. (2020). The Relevance of Corporate E-Learning/E-Training for Job Development: Crafting Culture and Evolving Yourself. *The 16th International Scientific Conference "eLearning and Software for Education" (eLSE). 1*, pp. 491-498. Bucharest: Carol I National Défense University Publishing House . doi:10.12753/2066-026X20-064

Gabelaia, I., & Tchelidze, L. (2020). Effectiveness and Influence of Mobile Marketing on Consumer Behaviour in Digital Era. *International Academic Conference on Management, Economics, and Marketing, IAC-MEM Budapest 2020* (pp. 98-111). Budapest: Czech Institute of Academic Education z.s., Publishing. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/