Outsourcing in Higher Education Institutes: An empirical examination

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Abstract

To check the degree of implementation of outsourcing strategy and to find out the gratification of outsourcing measures in higher education institutions of Pakistan. Researcher used the survey questionnaire method for data collection and validity of questionnaire was tested. Data was collected form twin cities (Islamabad and Rawalpindi). According to the survey findings, it was found that most of the universities of Islamabad is following the outsourcing strategy to focus on their primary goal, which is providing higher education to the citizens of Pakistan. The research shows that the universities are outsourcing for two main reasons, one is to reduce the cost of outsourced service and the second is to increase the quality of outsourced service in the university because university is not specialized in those specific fields which have been outsourced. The degree of implementation of outsourcing strategy is greater in the Private than the Public Sector universities. Institutions of higher education are not mainly practicing outsourcing due to many reasons but mainly they may have fear to lose the control on activities. It was also found through survey that satisfaction level of outsourcing is less than the dissatisfaction level in the higher education institutions of Islamabad. For the complete and in-depth analysis on outsourcing in the universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi a case study can be good option.
Keywords: Higher education, Outsourcing, Cost, Service quality,

Pakistan

Introduction

There was a time when natural resources of a country stair to success but now this theory has been old and a new theory evolve that a country cannot succeed without an intellectual capital because now the knowledge is key to success and the source of wealth (Levine, 2001). Higher education is very important now a day for succeed and to prosper as a developed nation (Boehner & Mckeon, 2003). For decades, higher educational institutional have been educating the citizens with the help of government educational funding but now to increase in the trend of higher education universities are lacking in funding along with the other constrains like space etc. Most of universities' tuition fees are rising and the quality of education and teaching is decreasing with the passage of time. In order to be competitive and to focus on the giving quality education, the universities are thinking about various strategies for enhancement of quality outsourcing is one of them. Outsourcing is most use full tool in which parent institutions have an agreement to other specialize companies to do some of the secondary activates (Wertz, 2000). Outsourcing is one the most effective way to do things quickly for the universities and the usage of this concept and strategy is increasing particularly in educational institutional (Kennedy, 2002). A study conducted by UNICCOW also found increasing trends in outsourcing (UNICCOW Service Company, 2002). Regardless of recent research on outsourcing, there is larger gap available for new conduction of surveys and research, especially in Pakistani higher educational institutes, the higher education institutes are accepting that researchers need such data as institutions are going to outsource more services and there are some institutes are in need of that data to work

on. For example, the National Association of Colleges and Auxiliary Services now keep the evidence or record of figures of outsourcing in educational institutes (Gupta, Herath & Nathalie 2005). On the other hand, higher education needs to work on the studies which are relevant to the measure of extent of outsourcing which is one of the purpose of this study. Focus of the present study is outsourcing on higher educational institutions while very limited knowledge are available in this context. Although every institution has its own merit and deficiencies in business environment as most of theories are recommended about the implication of outsourcing. This study will enrich the body of knowledge with empirical evidence. Managers in educational institutions can also be benefitted by opting outsourcing strategies in their respective organizations. Implication of outsourcing in Pakistani Higher education institutions may increase the efficiency of these institutions. This research explains about the processes involved during outsourcing implementation which will guide the managers.

Literature review

Outsourcing refers to the contracting out the campus services to the private company or the external provider of the service. While outsourcing any service the institution must keep in mind the long term goals and objectives and the mission which it is going to achieve through outsourcing a specific service. The outsourcing services may include the bookstore services, housekeeping services, dinning services, security services and cleaning services etc. The contractor may take over the existing employees of the university or can replace the employees with its own employees (Ender & Money 1994).

Usually, people do not consider the influence of outsourcing on education when they outsource any service in the higher education to reduce the cost and increase the quality of that specific service associated with the education, it means that they should consider the influence of outsourcing on the education when they implement the outsourcing strategy in the higher education. When services other than providing education are being outsourced then universities can more focus on their core competency which is to provide the quality education to the society. Not long before the present years, universities are trying to decrease their cost of service and for that reason most of the universities are opting outsourcing(Agron, 2002). We have numerous examples of private service provider which provide variety of services rather than traditional services like mass media which includes television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. For instance, Few universities like University of Pennsylvania have it recruited some managers to manage its outsource projects (Kaganoff, 1998, Gilmer, 1997). Kirp (2002) analysis the same thing that 40 % of college's bookstores are now outsourced. Outsourcing in education has lot of reason like budget constraints and stakeholders satisfaction (Kennedy, 2002).

Outsourcing, when designed or carried out according to plan and influence skill fully is likely to produce distinct advantages, for instance minimized cost, better to speed up the process with quality. (Jefferies, 1996). Service providers are specialized in their specific area of operations and they have the most up to date information (Kaganoff, 1998). External service providers are more focusing on housing and food services because they can convince the colleges and universities that we they have better services like food, hostel facility

and the optimum cost and The University of Texas is an example that its has outsourced hostel facility (Gilmer, 1997). Outsourcing of bookstores is a also a common practice by the different higher education institutions and the example of outsourced bookstore operations is the Follett College Stores will have to upgrade its services as well during the contract (Sheffield, 1997). The University of Mississippi did also a new furnished building opportunity are provided by outsourced bookstores and the improvements in the facilities are very crucial because the University would not be able to finance and maintain the upgrades (Sheffield, 1997). Through best partnership business, both the partners will be able to focus on the core competencies and to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects (Bartem and Sherry, 2001).Institutions can manage its resources, both human and financial, flexibly through outsourcing (Savarese, 2003).

A fundamental benefit that argue in favor of outsourcing in the higher education often indicate is that outsourcing provide an opportunity to concentrate on its main mission, and not on managing support services which can be provided by the external service provider (Bartem and Sherry, 2001). The things which make the higher education institution distinctive and play a critical role in its success are its core competencies. Advocates of outsourcing frequently highlight that the outsourcing can minimize the institution's labor (Ender & Mooney, 1994). There is also an indirect advantage of outsourcing that it creates an environment of competition between the employees of the higher education institution to achieve the high level of efficiencies, which is going to create a competitive advantage. The overhead cost of institution

associated with the hiring permanent staff can be eliminated through variable service contracts and this state leads to necessary cost savings by educational institutes (Gupta, Herath & Mikouiza, 2005). Outsourcing presumes that a service should be outsourced in a condition if institution is unable to manage that activity .Higher education institutions are doing experiments with these theories and trying to outsource more of their functional areas in order to save the cost (Jefferies, 1996). A negative aspect of outsourcing is that outsourcing in educational institutions can have negative effects as well. One most important thing to worry is the implication of outsourcing on the training and work conditions. The staff which outsourcer is going to provide only hold rudimentary skills and not the specialized skills and there can be a lack of obligation of the arena of higher education in the outsourcer's staff as well (Lafferty, 2000). Alike any other modern method of management, if not organized and administer in the right manner; outsourcing can be upshot in a several unskillfulness and troubles for institutions of higher education. Another school of thought is that outsourcing has divergent effect on the culture and missions of the higher education institutions. There is a big difference between the vendor's cultural norms and the norms of academic profession (Johnstone, 2004). Few researchers have the opinions that outsourcing may have adverse effect on commitment of the organization, job stress may also be increased and that also decrease the employee's productivities (Ender & Mooney, 1994). A new trend has also been introduced in governments sectors that they hired contract faculty with the less salaries and benefits (Gilmer, 1997). Contractual management staff has also issue for outsourcing, they may not properly handling the

outsourced activates, as they feel it's not their duty. Uncertainties related to the outsourcing has also impact on value of higher education which includes increase in cost, employees stress and loss of core activates. (Gupta, Herath & Mikouiza, 2005). The University of Pennsylvania is an example of outsourcing. However they breach their contact with Trammel Crow Company because they were not providing quality services. They claimed housekeeping and other maintenance of the institutions building was not up to the mark. University declared that main flaw is in outsourcing. (Werf, 1999). The situation indicates if outscoring is not properly handled which may lead to sever loss to the parent institution. Van der Werf (1999) ancillary recommend that the university lose control when its contract with the external provider in the following areas which includes hostel charges , observing student security , discipline, and the quality of all services . In university of North Carolina happened the same thing (Gilmer, 1997). There is an additional example of Tufts University who had faced problems during outsourcing. In the end, significance or effect of outsourcing on higher education institutions must to be investigated from a altered standpoint, the perspective of the academician. So, the lesson is that it is crucial for the higher education institutions to add up more flexibility, entrepreneurship, responsiveness and efficiency and proper evaluation of outsourcing opportunities and threats because these qualities of the institution will support to achieve new goals and institutions will be able to try new things. The universities need to provide distinguish service which may strengthen the capabilities of the human resource and the last and the least which is most important that to focus on the mission an objective of the higher education institutions. (Bartem & Sherry,

2001).Outsourcing is a higher cognitive process which should involve a number of strategic issues to be addressed first and then management need to examine the all alternatives and choose some competitive strategies which may lead to enhancement of productivity of the institution and for that purpose SWOT analysis is the best option to make the fully informed choice of decision (Goldstein et al., 1993). The cultivating operationalization of outsourcing strategy in the higher education throughout the world is acceptable by educational bodies and that expecting to reduce in cost and will provide essential services to the institutions effectively and efficiently(Gupta, Herath & Mikouiza, 2005)

Research methodology

Buttleman (2003) develop questionnaire, to measure the level of satisfaction among chief business officers in two-year colleges. Later, the instrument was refined by Cooper and Schindler to include the faculty, senior administrators in both public and private higher education institutions in the eastern USA. Gupta, Herath and Mikouiza(2005) rewrite the questionnaire for their research to measure the level of satisfaction of outsourcing in the higher education institutions of Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia in the USA.

For the measurement there are six important factors conferring to the suggested criteria in Contract Management or Self Operation: Decision Guide for Higher Education (Goldstein et al, 1993) which is very crucial to analyze during the outsourcing decision making. These factors although vary from institution to institution and from functional area of one institution to functional area of another institution. These factors are given below:

- Financial implications
- Human resource implications,
- Institution's mission and cultural implications
- Managerial control and efficiency implications
- Quality of the service provided
- Legal and ethical implications

We have used only five factors to assess the level of satisfaction in the Higher Education Institutions. For that reason, we have made a conceptual model for research which is given on the next page (Figure 1)
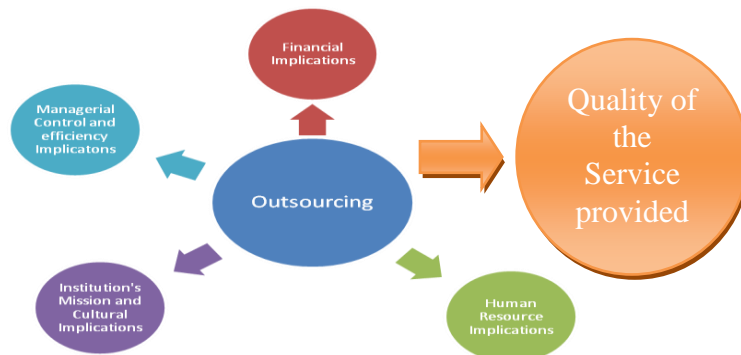

Figure-1: Schematic illustration of the Conceptual Model

In the upper diagram, outsourcing is the Independent Variable and financial implications, quality of service provided; human resource implications, institution's mission and cultural implication, managerial control and efficiency implications are the dependent variables.

Data collection

The survey was tested for validity after that it get filled by the total number of 160 high level management employees and/ or low level management employees of public and private universities of Islamabad in the Pakistan.

Survey results

As it took lot of time and personal efforts to get 160 questionnaires filled. Some people were not willing to fill the questionnaires due to lack of time or lack of knowledge about the concept. But researcher makes it possible to brief about the importance of research and concept. In the previous research for similar studies, response rates were 19.6% and 41%, but our response rate was 93.75% (see Table I)

Demographics

The institutions were classified according to the rate of enrollment of the students. We have received more responses from the bigger institutions of higher education of Islamabad which have enrollment over 5,000 students (Table II). Other demographic information includes the title of the participants which were top managerial employees and middle level managerial employees. We have received more responses from middle level managerial employees (85%) than top managerial employees (15%) because top managers were most time busy and were not available for the research purpose and the results of it are quantified in the Table III.

Surveys	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
160	150	93.75%

Table I. Response rate for all surveys

Institution size	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
2,001-3,000	39	18
3,001-4,000	33	27
4,001-5,000	38	20
5,000 +	40	35
Total	150	100

Table II. Response rate by enrolment

Title	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
Top Level Management	45	15%
Middle Level Management	105	85%
Total	150	100%

Table III. Title of participant

RQ1. To what extent is the board of the university supportive of the outsourcing effort?

From the survey we obtained the results which shown in below mention table IV. In the survey 25% respondents think that, the board of the university is very much supportive for the outsourcing initiatives but there are 23% respondents think that board is not supportive and they oppose the outsourcing efforts in the university. There are other 25% respondents who think that the board of the university is neutral, which means that some time they do think about outsourcing initiatives but not very much supportive about it. Only 8% respondents think that the board of the university is strongly oppose the outsourcing efforts and according to them outsourcing is not beneficial for the higher education institutions (Table IV). Outsourcing is not an easy subject and it needs depth apprehension of the process and it is bound with the political condition existing in the institution (Agron, 2002) and that's why most respondents' point of view is neutral about outsourcing initiative in the institution.

CEO support	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
Strongly opposed	27	18.3
Opposed	35	23.33
Neutral	32	25
Supportive	32	25
Strongly supportive	12	8.33

Total	150	100

Table IV. Board of University's support for the outsourcing effort

RQ2. To what magnitude pretentious employees encompassed in the outsourcing verdict creating process?

As per the survey 18% respondents think that board of the university involve the employees formally whenever, the board of the university thinks about outsourcing initiative and only 8% respondents think that board of university does not involve any employee in the outsourcing decision. 20% respondents says that board of the university sometimes or little bit involves the employees in the outsourcing decision but 40% respondents oppose them and says that no we are not included in the decision making process about outsourcing. The result shows that there is authoritative culture in Pakistani universities and there is lack of communication between the top managers and lower or middle level managerial employees that's why top managers does not involve the lower or middle level managerial in outsourcing process (Table V). We suggest that Board of directors of the higher education institutions should recognize as to how and when to comprise their employees for a efficiently renovation of workforce.

Employee inclusion (%)	Usable surveys	Response rate
Formally excluded	12	8.33
Somewhat excluded	60	40
Neither excluded/included	20	13.33
Somewhat included	30	20
Formally included	27	18.33
Total	150	100

Table V. Inclusion of pretentious employees in the executive process

RQ3. To what extent do you feel the use of outsourcing will increase or decrease in your own institution and all the institutions in the next five years?

From the survey we obtained the results mention in table VI. It was interesting to see that 27% respondents think that outsourcing will increase slightly with the passage of time but 25% respondents think that outsourcing will increase rapidly and speedily with the passage of time. Only 13% respondents think that outsourcing will decrease slightly with the passage of time and 10% respondents says that outsourcing will decrease rapidly and speedily with the passage of time. But the most important thing to note here that 25%, which is very big percentage of respondents, they think that the outsourcing will not increase or decrease but will remain the same or constant (Tables VI and VII).

Level of outsourcing	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
Decrease rapidly	9	10
Decrease slightly	12	13.33
Remain the same	38	25
Increase slightly	39	26.67
Increase rapidly	38	25
Total	150	100

Table VI. Nature of outsourcing in your institution in the next five years

Level of outsourcing	Usable surveys	Response rate (%)
Decrease rapidly	9	10
Decrease slightly	12	13.33
Remain the same	38	25
Increase slightly	39	26.67
Increase rapidly	38	25
Total	150	100

Table VII. Nature of outsourcing in institutions of higher learning in the next five years

Goals and motivations for outsourcing:

RQ4. What motivations and/or goals are considered most important for outsourcing non-instructional services?

Accused were obligatory to position the connotation and importance of the motivation for outsourcing in the higher education institutions of Islamabad. *From the survey we obtained the following results.* 33% respondents said that the biggest motivation for outsourcing is, to improve the quality of a specific service, and 23% respondents said that Cost Savings or Budgetary Constraints are the main motivation for outsourcing. 21% respondents said that it is mandatory from the governing body of the institution. 13% respondents said that institution has lack of competence to deliver a specific service , that's why institution outsources that specific service. Safety Concerns and Pressure from Peer Institutions (3% and 5%) are the least motivational factors to outsource the specific service (Table VIII).

So, we can conclude that the Quality and Cost are the most important motivational factors to outsource a specific service.

Goal or motivation	Response Rate (%)
Cost savings and budgetary constraints	23.33
Improve quality of services, staffing or products	33.33
Lack of capability/skilled workers to provide service	13.33
Safety concerns or liability of service	3.33
Mandated by governing body	21.67
Pressure from peer institutions doing it	5

Table VIII. Importance for motivations for outsourcing

Concerns about outsourcing:

RQ5. What are the greatest concerns for your institutions about outsourcing non- instructional services?

From the survey we obtained the following results. 18% respondents think that the greatest concern or fear about outsourcing is that the contractor and 15% respondents said that the Loss of Control, Decline in Quality of specific Service and Decline in the employee morale are the greatest concerns of outsourcing. Here, it is very important to note one thing that in institutions of higher education Quality of Service and Employee morale are most preferred things and the upsurge in the Cost of Service is the least important thing in outsourcing, specifically in higher education institutions (Table IX).

Concern about outsourcing	Response Rate (%)
Loss of control: inability to manage contracting agency	15
Decline in quality of services	15
Employee displacement or decline in employee morale	15
Loss of sense of community/culture	13.33
Fear of contractor not being able to respond to campus change	8.33
Costs associated with return to in-house service if contract does not succeed	6.67
Loss of profits to contracting agency	8.33
Increase in cost of service	8.33

Table IX. Concerns about outsourcing

Levels of satisfaction in the respective functional areas:

RQ6. To what extent are you satisfied with the level of outsourcing in the functional areas?

As per the results of the survey researchers obtained the following results. 36% respondents said that we are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of Bookstore and 20% are "Satisfied" with the outsourcing of the Bookstore. 13% are "Extremely Dissatisfied" and 10% are "Extremely Satisfied" with the outsourcing of Bookstore. 20% respondents are "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" with the

outsourcing of the Bookstore of the university. Overall, 49% people are "Dissatisfied" and only 30% respondents are "Satisfied" with the outsourcing of the Bookstore of the Institution (Table X).

Bookstore	Score%
Extremely dissatisfied	13.33
Dissatisfied	36.67
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20
Satisfied	20
Extremely satisfied	10

Table X. Levels of satisfaction in Bookstore

From the survey we obtained the following results. 30% respondents said that we are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Canteen or Dinning services but 30% respondents said that we are "Satisfied" with the Dinning services. 8% respondents are "Extremely Dissatisfied" and 7% respondents are "Extremely Satisfied" with the outsourcing of the Canteen or Dinning services of the institution. 20% respondents said that we are "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Dining services. Overall, 43% respondent are "Dissatisfied" and 37% respondents are "Satisfied" with the outsourcing of Dinning (Table XI).

Dining	Score%
Extremely dissatisfied	8.33
Dissatisfied	35
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20
Satisfied	30
Extremely satisfied	6.67

Table XI. Levels of satisfaction in Dining

From the survey we obtained the following results. 37% are "Satisfied" and 23% are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Security services. 3% respondents are "Extremely Satisfied" and 13%

respondents are "Extremely Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Security services. 23% respondents are "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Security services. Overall, 40% are "Satisfied" and 36% are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Security services (Table XII).

Security services	Score%
Extremely dissatisfied	13.33
Dissatisfied	23.33
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	23.33
Satisfied	36.67
Extremely satisfied	3.33

Table XII. Levels of satisfaction in Security services

From the survey we obtained the following results. 40% respondents are "Satisfied" and 27% respondents are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Cleaning service. 10% respondents are "Extremely Satisfied" and 12% respondents are "Extremely Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Cleaning services. 11% are "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Cleaning services. Overall, 50% respondents are "Satisfied" and "39% are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of the Cleaning services (Table XIII).

Cleaning services	Score%
Extremely dissatisfied	11.67
Dissatisfied	26.67
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11.67
Satisfied	40
Extremely satisfied	10

Table XIII. Levels of satisfaction in cleaning services

(Tables X-XIII) outline the feedback of the participants that 157% are "Satisfied" and 167% are "Dissatisfied" with the outsourcing of four

functional areas discussed previously. Based on the analysis done, we can summarize now that those universities who have opt outsourcing are not satisfied and there can be couple of reasons that they are not happy and on these reasons, new research can be done a good option.

Conclusion

Universal research regarding the condition or position of outsourcing in the higher education institutions over the USA gives the evidence that the trend is slightly increasing (Wertz, 2000) and that the case here may be but the research results should be taken carefully that the majority of the higher education institutions practicing the outsourcing concept and using it as a strategy to improve the Quality of Specific Service and to Decrease the Cost of Specific Service.

During research we also observed that the Private Sector Universities have outsourced more services than the Public Sector Universities. According to the survey, more respondents of Public Sector Universities were participated then the Private Sector Universities. So, on this basis we can say that there is a lack of management in the Universities that they cannot manage the Outsourced Services or there is some gap regarding coordination between the Universities and the Service Provider of the Specific Service that has been outsourced.

During research, we also observed that Public Sector Universities have the capability to captivate the costs of the thoughtful services such as Bookstore, Dining, Security, and Cleaning services etc, because government provides them a large amount of funds and these universities have the largest number of student applicants as well, that's why they have outsourced very less

services than Private Sector Universities. International Islamic University and the National University of Modern Languages in Islamabad are the examples of those Public Sector Universities. The other reasons for the least outsourcing in the Public Sector Universities are mainly due to a partial information about the notion, privation of understanding, a fear of loss of control, and the political itinerary public sector universities. Even though Outsourcing is one approach which is very easy to implement. It is very easy concept and if well executed and rightly interpreted, it can result into favorable returns on investment for the higher education universities. If we will concentrate only on the surveys to find out the level of satisfaction of outsourcing in the higher education institutions, then it can mislead us to the false conclusion because in fact many of those who participated in the survey had little knowledge about the concept. So, it is very important to increase the knowledge about the concept of outsourcing and this target can be achieved by educating through seminars and conferences regarding the outsourcing.

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