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**Perceptions of
Tertiary Education Service Quality**

An Investigation into
Providing Quality Service Encounters for
International Students

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Masters of Quality Systems
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ABSTRACT

International students have become increasingly important to the financial sustainability of tertiary education institutions in New Zealand. Recruiting and retaining international students in a competitive international marketplace has resulted in individual institutions catering to students as if they are customers. This requires institutions to understand their international students so they can best satisfy their needs.

Published research on student satisfaction and success has identified academic and social integration with a student's institution of study are crucial antecedents to student satisfaction and success. This integration has been identified as being especially difficult for international students as they must acculturate to a new cultural and academic environment. New Zealand research has identified that the quality of the learning experience is the major contributor to overall international student satisfaction. However, there is a paucity of research on the New Zealand international student experience, and the extent to which the New Zealand experience reflects the international experience is unclear.

The research described here is an attempt to clarify to what extent the international student experience in New Zealand differs from the experience of local domestic students and reflects the experience of international students in other countries. Specifically, the research investigated the relationship between international students' perception of learning experience quality and academic integration within one New Zealand Polytechnic. A questionnaire was developed based on two scales to measure the two latent variables of perception of learning experience quality and perception of academic integration. The questionnaire was undertaken by both international and domestic students at two campuses of the institution under study.

The results gained from the questionnaire established that perception of academic integration for international students increased over time, however perception of learning experience quality did not. There was no significant difference in the results between international and domestic students. There was some corroboration of international research, but there were also some significant differences. These results provide further impetus for tertiary institutions in New Zealand to better understand their international students if they are to succeed in the international student marketplace.