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Development of an Effective Marketing Strategy for a Language Institute: Understanding Customer Requirements and Behavior.

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Abstract

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In Sri Lanka, proficiency in English is crucial for achieving success in academic, professional and social aspects. As the school educational system is still finding its way to fulfil this requirement, the commissioning organization, Simple English Academy has been established with the intention of bridging this gap by offering English language education. This thesis intended to explore the potential market of the organization to identify the key expectations of the consumers and understand their behavior. The research findings have been utilized to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for the organization while recognizing the other factors that need to be considered. The theoretical framework mainly consists of three parts: consumer decision making, attributes of service marketing and marketing strategy. The marketing strategy section included a discussion regarding the phases of the SOSTAC framework which will be utilized to construct the organization's marketing strategy.

The research strategy employed was a case study approach, allowing for in depth analysis of specific phenomena within real life context. A survey has been used as the main data collection method to gather information regarding the potential market whereas a semi structured interview was used as a supportive method to collect data regarding internal environment and competition. The information related to the external environment information were mainly gathered from secondary data. Mixed methods have been employed in data analysis where quantitative methods were used to analyze majority of the survey data while qualitative methods were used to analyze free form responses, interview answers and secondary data. The research has followed an abductive approach where literature review findings have been validated through the analytical conclusions generated from the collected data.

This research provided valuable insights into market attributes, consumer behavior, and decision making processes, which were utilized to navigate through each phase of the SOSTAC framework and develop a tailored marketing strategy for the commissioning organization. By highlighting on the preferences and priorities of potential customers, the study indicated the importance of addressing consumer expectations in course content and delivery. Moreover, understanding the consumer decision-making process along with internal and external dynamics proved crucial in crafting an effective marketing approach. This research can be further extended into areas such as customer journey mapping, understanding emerging trends in language education and expansion into international markets.

Table of Contents

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Survey Questions

Appendix 2 - Survey Analysis Illustrations

Appendix 3 - Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Appendix 4 - Timetable

Appendix 5 - Literature Table

Appendix 6 - Data Management Plan

1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the background which has paved the way to conduct this thesis. It includes details about the commissioner, research problem, objectives as well as research questions.

1.1 Study Interest and Background

As highlighted by Indrarathne & McCulloch (2022), Sri Lanka, an island in South Asia, has a population of around 22 million people as of 2021. The two main languages spoken here are Sinhala, which is used by about 75% of the population, and Tamil, spoken by around 16%. Indrarathne & McCulloch (2022) further highlight that English has deep historical ties to colonialism in Sri Lanka. It became the official administrative language in 1833 during colonial rule. Initially, English was the primary language used in state schools established by the colonial government, while temple schools continued teaching in local languages. After Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, local languages were emphasized in education and administration, but English retained its prestige. The country's constitution designates English as the 'link' language, serving as a neutral means of communication between Sinhala and Tamil speakers (Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022).

According to Jayasinghe (n.d.), Sri Lankan English, or SLE, is a unique way of speaking English that developed in Sri Lanka over a long time. It is different from the English spoken by the British who once ruled the country. Instead, it reflects the language of the people who lived there. This type of English has been shaped by the country's history, the different languages spoken there, and its politics. Some people in Sri Lanka use English as their main language, while others use it alongside other languages they speak.

Indrarathne & McCulloch (2022) provide an illustration of the mediums of languages utilized in a country's state education system, as shown in Table 1, detailing the status as of 2020.

Language Medium	No. of Schools
Sinhala Only	6357
Tamil Only	3042
Sinhala and Tamil	42
Sinhala and English	524
Tamil and English	157
Sinhala, Tamil and English	33

Table 1: Mediums of language used in state education system (Adapted from: Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022)

Although English has not been predominantly used as the primary language in majority of schools, Indrarathne & McCulloch (2022) elaborate that English is taught as a core subject from Grades 3 to 11 in state schools, and many private schools registered with the Ministry of Education follow the same curriculum, making English a core subject for them as well. Additionally, English is a compulsory subject in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) examination, meaning that all students are required to take it as part of this exam.

While English has marked its presence in the Sri Lankan educational system, Navaz (2021) states that it has not been successful in achieving a satisfactory level of language proficiency because of the failure of English teaching in schools which is often attributed to incompetent teachers and ineffective teaching methods. Navaz (2021) further states that English is approached more as a subject to be studied rather than as a language to be learned and used in everyday communication. Consequently, students tend to confine their learning to the classroom, focusing solely on passing examinations rather than developing proficiency in the language as they would with other subjects. This limited scope and purpose of learning hinders their overall language acquisition and fluency.

According to Mendis & Rambukwella (2020), English in Sri Lanka extends beyond being just a 'link' language; its influence is pervasive and entrenched in various aspects of society. It is widely used

in the country's judicial system, being the language used in Sri Lanka's Supreme Court. Moreover, it maintains a significant presence in the media and advertising sectors. There is also a resurgence of English in the country's education system. However, its most dominant domain is in the private business and commercial sectors, where it remains the undisputed language of choice. Further, Indrarathne and McCulloch (2022) highlight that during the present time, English remains important for administrative tasks, education, and is the primary language of the private sector. Proficiency in English is associated with high social status and better job opportunities, both within Sri Lanka and internationally. Thus, it can be identified that although English language teaching has not been sufficiently effective in providing language education beyond passing examinations, there's a high demand in the society for individuals to succeed in their education and careers. (Indrarathne and McCulloch, 2022)

1.2   Commissioner Description and Research Problem

Simple English Academy which acts as the commissioner for this thesis is an English language institute which has been established in order to address the above mentioned demand. However, it has been observed that the potential market is large in size and significantly diversified in aspects such as individuals' age group, reasons to learn the language, expectations from the institute, indicating that customer expectations are unclear. The primary research problem revolves around the lack of understanding of customers within this market. Additionally, it is essential to address issues and challenges related to marketing strategy. This includes the need for clarifying customer expectations, which have not been clearly outlined, and developing strategies to effectively reach and engage with the diverse customer base.

1.3   Research Aim & Purpose

The research aim of this thesis is to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy, including a marketing plan, for Simple English Academy. The purpose of this thesis is to research and identify customer requirements and to explore the elements necessary for building an effective marketing strategy. This involves investigating customer preferences, needs, and purchasing behaviors. Additionally, the study will examine various components of marketing strategy development.

1.4   Research Question

The main research question addressed in this thesis is: "How can an effective marketing strategy be developed for Simple English Academy?"

In order to address and support this main question following sub questions will be answered:

1. What aspects need to be considered when constructing a marketing strategy for a service offering?

2. Who are the potential customers of the organization?

3. What are the top priorities and preferences of the identified potential customers?

4. What is the decision making process followed by the customers before finalizing a purchase?

5. What factors affect the purchasing decisions of the potential customers?

1.5   Research Design

When considering the research design, Yin (2018) has indicated that case study offers a comprehensive exploration of specific phenomena within real life contexts, enabling researchers to uncover rich insights that may not be captured through other research designs. Given the complexity inherent in understanding educational services and the need to grasp the unique challenges and dynamics within this sector, a case study approach provides the flexibility and depth necessary to meet these objectives (Yin, 2018). Therefore, in this research, the case study will be employed, focusing specifically on Simple English Academy. This approach allows for a detailed study of the institution's practices, challenges, and successes within the context of educational services, offering valuable insights into the research process and the development task.

According to Babbie & Edgerton (2021), surveys serve as an effective data collection method for gathering information from a large sample of participants, allowing for the systematic collection of quantitative data on attitudes, preferences, and behaviors. Babbie & Edgerton (2021) further state that surveys offer a valuable means to capture the perspectives of diverse stakeholders,

providing insights into their needs and preferences across different geographical locations. Statistical analysis methods enable researchers to analyze the quantitative data obtained from surveys, facilitating the identification of trends, correlations, and statistical significance. Babbie & Edgerton (2021) further notes that utilizing qualitative analysis in surveys offers a robust approach to complement quantitative data collection methods, providing deeper insights into the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of survey respondents. By incorporating open-ended questions or qualitative sections within surveys, researchers can capture rich narrative data that may not be fully captured through closed ended questions alone (Babbie & Edgerton, 2021). Therefore, surveys will be chosen as the primary data collection method, enabling both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This approach facilitates a comprehensive study of the research phenomenon, capturing rich narrative data through qualitative analysis while also providing statistical depth and breadth through quantitative analysis. As highlighted by RAND corporation (2009), Interviews are highlighted as a crucial method for obtaining comprehensive information, particularly when seeking a thorough understanding of a subject matter. RAND corporation (2009) further highlights that interviews provide the depth needed to explore complex topics and resolve conflicting information by allowing direct inquiry into apparent discrepancies. Therefore, interviews were chosen as a supportive method of data collection, particularly in areas where information is not available from other sources, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

1.6 Expected Results and Outputs

The research intends to not only comprehend the complex nature of the market but also to create an appropriate marketing strategy tailored to address these complexities. Understanding the requirements of potential customers in a systematic manner and formulating a marketing strategy are crucial steps in effectively communicating to the target audience that their needs will be met by the institute's products/services. Therefore, the overarching objective of this thesis can be divided into two components as follows:

1. To identify the factors influencing customers' purchasing decisions regarding the utilization of English language services.

2. To develop a marketing strategy for Simple English Academy based on the identified customer requirements.

2 Literature Review

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon various aspects of consumer behavior, particularly focusing on the decision making process within the service industry. Understanding the particulars of consumer behavior is crucial in understanding how individuals evaluate and select educational services, such as those offered by Simple English Academy. This framework includes an analysis of the attributes and aspects that influence consumers' perceptions and choices within the service marketing domain. Moreover, it discusses the application of marketing mix principles, including the seven Ps—product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence as essential elements in crafting an effective marketing strategy. Furthermore, the framework incorporates the strategic marketing process of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) to realize how Simple English Academy can tailor its offerings and communication strategies to resonate with its target audience effectively. By integrating these theoretical components, this study aims to provide insights into enhancing Simple English Academy's marketing efforts and improving its communication with customers.

2.1 Education as a service

Raj et. al. (2013) define services as distinct, intangible activities that fulfil specific needs or desires and are not inherently linked to the sale of a physical product or another service. Raj et. al (2013) further state that education, is considered a service which is primarily targeted towards consumer market. Kalenskaya et. al. (2013) conceptualize education as a service that can be understood as meeting the demand for learning and acquiring knowledge, providing intangible benefits such as increased knowledge, professional expertise, and skills. According to Kalenskaya et. al. (2013) this service is delivered through a combination of tangible elements, such as physical infrastructure, and intangible components, including the expertise of faculty members and the learning experience itself. Importantly, unlike purchasing a physical product, the buyer of educational services does not acquire ownership of the knowledge, or skills gained; rather, they receive the benefits of the educational experience without owning the educational content itself (Kalenskaya et. al., 2013).

2.2   Consumer Decision Making

As defined by Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) the term" consumer behavior" can be defined as the behavior that is displayed by customers when they select, purchase, use, evaluate and dispose the products or services which they expect to fulfil their needs. Belch (1975) emphasizes that consumer behavior may be demonstrated by individuals or in the context of a group or an organization. Panwar et. al. (2019) highlight that several consumer behavior models have been introduced by multiple scholars. However, it can be identified that all models discuss about five general stages that customers go through when making a purchasing decision. Further, the decision making process that leads to the purchasing of a product or a service consists of several other stages before reaching to the actual purchase. Thus, Panwar et. al. (2019) propose the model shown in figure 1 below to demonstrate the decision making process of a consumer.

Need Recognition and Problem Awareness

Information Search

Evaluation of Alternatives

Purchase

Satisfaction
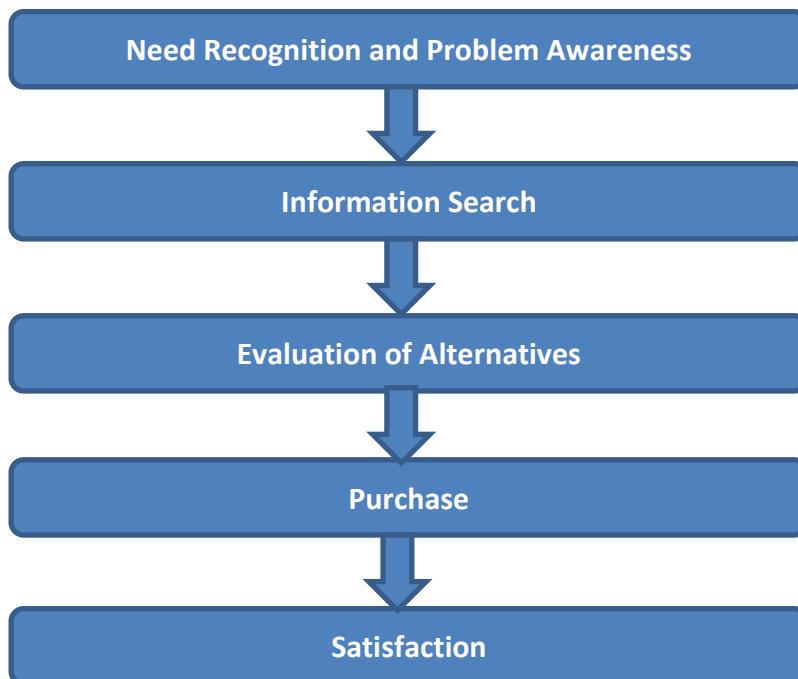
Figure 1: Five Stage Decision Making Model (Panwar et. al. 2019)

According to Panwar et.al. (2019), there could be instances where some of the above steps may be skipped by an individual. For example, a person who suffers from thirst may directly go to the purchase of a certain product merely with the intention of quenching his/her thirst. In that case information search or evaluation of alternatives might not occur. However, Panwar et. al. (2019)

highlight that this process is useful when considering the purchases that require" some thought and deliberation" (Panwar et al, 2019, p.42). As described by Panwar et. al. (2019), the buying process of a consumer starts with the recognition of a need or a problem. Once it is identified, buyer then starts to search for available information regarding products or services which can possibly fulfil the identified need or solve the problem. According to Stankevich (2017), the need for something could be intentionally created in consumers by marketers. This could be done by making or showing an imbalance between consumer's present and preferred statuses. Marketers may use means such as sales promotions and advertising to create this imbalance. Stankevich (2017) highlights that once the consumers realize that their need could be fulfilled through a product, they have created a" want". The moment when a need or a want is created is important for marketers to decide on the ideal time for advertising.

While customers can refer several information sources, it has been mentioned by Panwar et. al. (2019) that they tend to value personal information sources over commercial sources. Hence the organizations are provided with the challenge to identify the most influential information sources that exist in their own target markets. Stankevich (2017) mentions that customers could source information both internally and externally. While recalling the own memory such as past memories related to the same commodity, all other information sources fall under the external category. These external sources could include friends & family, public sources such as blogs and reviews as well as marketing controlled sources such as advertisements, leaflets, and banners.

Stankevich (2017), points out that consumers start to question the attributes of the products during the third stage which is evaluating the alternatives which is the third stage of the five stage model illustrated by Panwar et.al. (2019). Here the consumers tend to choose the most important attribute to them, in order to choose between the available alternatives. Price, quality, product brand are examples of such possible attributes. Marketers are expected to make sure that they have raised sufficient awareness about their products when consumers go through this stage and at the same time, they themselves are aware of the most important attribute to the potential customers.

According to Stankevich (2017), the evaluation process comes to a halt when the consumer decides to purchase a product, the final stage of the five stage model by Panwar et.al. (2019). However, there could be a time period between the moment of making the purchasing decision and actually making the purchase. Further, Panwar et. al. (2019) discuss that, in order for a particular

buyer to be satisfied with regards to a certain commodity the actual outcome of it should either be equal or better than the expected outcome. Similarly, a worse outcome than the expected would make a dissatisfied buyer (Stankevich, 2017).

According to Kotler and Clarke (1987), satisfaction is the feeling experienced by an individual when the performance or outcome meets their expectations. It is influenced by the relative level of expectations and perceived performance. Hasan et. al. (2008) state that it has been challenging to define student satisfaction uniformly. William (2002) expresses that, despite the risks associated with viewing students as customers, the education landscape suggests a shift towards considering students as such. Therefore, students, as fee paying individuals, have a legitimate expectation for their feedback to be acknowledged and addressed (William, 2002).

As elaborated by Stankevich (2017), at the beginning of the decision making process, consumers deal with a certain number of brands. However, directed by marketing, they gradually reduce the number of brands and eventually arrive at a single brand which they ultimately purchase and then leads to creating loyalty. This mechanism has been identified by Stankevich (2017) as the Traditional Funnel.
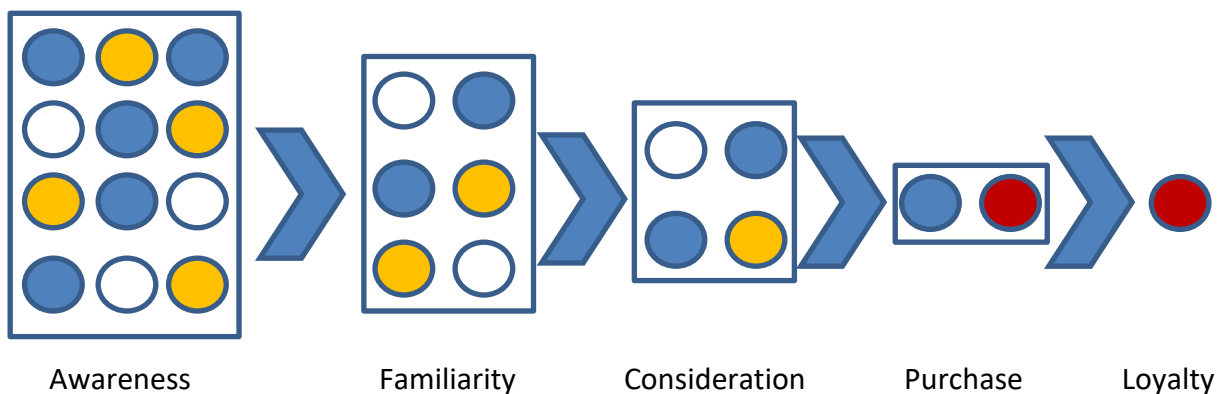
Figure 2: Decision Making Funnel (Stankevich, 2017)

Stankevich (2017) argues that all touch points and important buying factors may not be covered by the traditional funnel method as the buyers are now presented with multiple product choices and digital channels to acquire information which has resulted in a well-informed customer.

As discussed by Stankevich (2017), the consumer decision making is an ongoing process which starts when a customer decides on a purchase and remains active even after the purchase is made. Thus, the marketer's work should also happen along with this decision making process. As

further elaborated by Stankevich (2017), the post purchase behavior of the consumer which would possibly include post sales experience and further research of the commodity will directly affect and influence every subsequent decision that is made by the consumer. Thus, being engaged with the customer even during the post purchase stage is essential for marketers. Moreover, realizing and addressing the underlying values of consumers will provide a better opportunity for organizations to make their efforts more effective and meaningful.

Stankevich (2017) notes that new products with low market share have a different challenge to overcome where they need to disrupt the routine decision making process of the customers. This may be done through intense advertising to promote trial periods or brand switching.

According to Moogan et. al. (1999) the decision making process of students who seek for a suitable educational institute follow stages similar to the five stage model shown by Panwar et.al. (2019) shown in figure 2, however the specifics that they seek for can be summarized as follows.

Problem Recognition and Information Search: Students begin by recognizing the need to continue their education and then embark on searching for information about potential institutes. They often use resources like consultants and review institutions' prospectuses.

Evaluation of Alternatives: After gathering information, students evaluate different institutes based on factors such as course content, reputation, location, and social considerations. They may seek advice from trustworthy individuals like teachers, parents, and friends and attend open-days to get a better understanding of the institutions.

Comparison and Selection: Students engage in rational decision making by comparing the attributes of various courses and institutions, such as geographical location, program structure, entry grades, and accommodation facilities. They aim to select the option that offers the best value in terms of benefits.

Risk and Complexity: There is a significant level of risk associated with choosing the right course and institution, compounded by the intangible nature of the service and the time involved. Many students express fear of making the wrong decision and find the process of gathering information complex due to the multitude of similar offerings and lack of user friendly prospectuses.

Maniu & Maniu (2014) have identified a decision making model followed by potential students when choosing an educational institute which includes three main steps.

1. Desire Motivation (Problem Recognition): This initial phase involves recognizing the need or desire to pursue education. This can be driven by personal aspirations, expectations, or external factors such as career advancement opportunities, or societal trends.

2. Search Evaluation (Information Gathering): Once the need is recognized, students embark on searching for information to satisfy their requirements. This step involves identifying various options available, assessing the level of information available, and evaluating the value of each option. Factors such as course offerings, reputation, location, and facilities are considered during this phase.

3. Decision Election (Enrolment Decision): The final step involves making a decision to enroll in the chosen institution. This decision is influenced by various factors, including satisfaction with the options, the atmosphere of the institution, and possibly time constraints or external pressures.

Maniu & Maniu (2014) further elaborate that, throughout these steps, influencing factors play a crucial role in shaping the decision making process. These factors can include personal preferences, recommendations from trusted sources, perceived reputation of the institution, and individual circumstances. The model emphasizes the dynamic nature of the decision making process and acknowledges that influencing factors can impact each stage of the process.

The decision making models by Moogan et al. (1999) and Maniu & Maniu (2014) both outline structured processes that students follow when choosing educational institutes, emphasizing initial need recognition, information gathering, and final decision making stages. Both models underscore the importance of evaluating information about course offerings, reputation, and facilities, and acknowledge the influence of external factors like advice from trusted sources. However, they differ in their stage definitions and specific focuses. Moogan et al. (1999) detail a five stage model, including "Problem Recognition and Information Search," "Evaluation of Alternatives," "Comparison and Selection," and "Risk and Complexity," highlighting the complexities and risks involved in the decision making process. In contrast, Maniu & Maniu (2014) streamline the process into three main steps: "Desire Motivation," "Search Evaluation," and "Decision Election," focusing on the dynamic nature of decision making and the role of influencing factors throughout.

2.3   Service Marketing

As indicated by Kermally (2003), in the beginning, marketing was primarily concerned about pro-
ducing what the customer wants. Kermally (2003) further highlights the managerial school of
marketing which is a more managerial centric approach. According to Kermally (2003), Theodore
Levitt in 1960 promoted a shift in marketing emphasis from a product centric approach to a cus-
tomer centric one. This era witnessed the emergence of the marketing mix, characterized by the
four Ps: product, place, price, and promotion, as introduced by Neil Borden in 1948. The tradi-
tional marketing mix (4Ps) has evolved to better suit the unique characteristics of service indus-
tries. This expanded framework, often referred to as the 7Ps, incorporates three additional ele-
ments: People, Process, and Physical Evidence (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

According to Kotler & Keller (2016), "Services marketing" refers to the marketing strategies and
practices specifically tailored to promote intangible products or services rather than tangible
goods. Unlike tangible products, services are typically characterized by being perishable, insepa-
rable from the provider, and variable in quality. Services marketing focuses on addressing the
unique challenges associated with marketing services, such as managing customer perceptions,
communicating the benefits of intangible offerings, and delivering consistent service experiences
to build customer loyalty and satisfaction.

As stated by Fournier (1998), "customer-centric marketing" emphasizes the importance of placing
the customer at the center of all marketing efforts. This approach involves deeply understanding
customer needs, preferences, and behaviors through market research and customer data analy-
sis. Customer centric marketing aims to create personalized and tailored experiences for individ-
ual customers, fostering long-term relationships and maximizing customer lifetime value.

2.4   The Marketing Mix

The marketing mix consists of a set of controllable elements that a company combines to influ-
ence consumer behavior and achieve its marketing objectives. In addition to the original four el-
ements of product, price, place, and promotion, the 7Ps model incorporates people, process, and
physical evidence to address the broader scope of marketing strategies (Kotler et. al., 2022;

Zeithaml et al., 2006). This chapter discusses the components of the marketing mix; 7Ps. It also discusses 7Ps framework applies to educational services, emphasizing its relevance in shaping marketing strategies within the education sector.

2.4.1   Product

Kermally (2003) emphasizes that the product category in marketing encompasses both tangible items like cars, furniture, and food, as well as intangible services provided by professionals such as consultants, nurses, lawyers, or doctors. According to Kermally (2003), the features of services include intangibility, perishability, inseparability, and variability. The product aspect includes decisions about what to produce, the product's quality, packaging, branding, design, color, presentation, and other related factors. According to Ruskin - Brown (2006), product denotes the package of advantages that customers purchase from the company, whether they derive from 'goods,' 'services,' or a blend of both.

According to Raj et. al. (2013), in the context of educational services, the "product" refers to the students themselves, while the "services" refer to the intangible offerings provided by educational institutions. These services include aspects such as the courses offered, the quality of teaching provided by faculty members, and other support services. In essence, it is the combination of these services that shapes the educational experience for the students. Educational institutions promote themselves and develop their brand value in the competitive market through the quality of their products (students) and the excellence of their services. This includes factors such as the reputation of the institution, the success of its graduates, and the overall satisfaction of students with their educational experience.

2.4.2   Price

As stated by Kermally (2003), determining the appropriate price, including considerations for discounts and special offers, is a crucial aspect of pricing strategy. It is essential to approach product pricing thoughtfully, emphasizing its alignment with marketing goals rather than solely focusing

on costs. Ruskin - Brown (2006) highlights that the price generates the profit, which is the fundamental purpose of engaging in marketing in the first place.

Raj et. al. (2013) indicate that the price in the context of educational services refers to the amount a student pays for the services they receive. This price is influenced by various factors, including competition in the market, the quality of services provided, placement opportunities, the reputation of the institution, whether it is privately or publicly owned, the infrastructure and facilities available, the location of the institute, the mode of education (e.g., online or in-person), and the brand name of the educational institution Raj et.al. (2013).

It is also argued by Raj et.al. (2013) that the price charged reflects the perceived quality of the services provided to students. Educational institutions can strategically use pricing as a marketing tool to communicate the value of their services to prospective students. A higher price may signal higher quality or exclusivity, while a lower price may attract students seeking affordability or value for money. Therefore, pricing plays a significant role in shaping the perception of an institution and can influence students' decisions when choosing where to pursue their education. Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016), have discussed three pricing strategies that can be applied for educational services.

Cost Based

As discussed by Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016) this strategy can be divided into five categories:

- Cost plus method: A profit margin is applied to the average cost of the service.

- Target return pricing: The price is set to achieve the organization's target rate of return on investment.

- Breakeven analysis: The price is established at the point where total revenues equal total costs.

- Contribution analysis: Contribution analysis deviates from break-even analysis by considering only the direct costs of a product or service.

- Marginal pricing: The price is established below both total and variable costs, covering only marginal costs.

According to Junaris (2022), the cost of education should not be looked at solely from the perspective of cost accounting, which emphasizes only the category of education costs. Instead, the cost of education should be seen as part of an integrated school effort to create value for customers of educational services.

Competition Based

When deciding the price based on the competition, the prices could be set in par with the competitors or the market average. Additionally, organizations could also choose to set their prices above or below the competitor prices. Alternatively, the industry leader's price which is the market dominant price can be adopted. (Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016))

Value Based

According to Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016) when considering the value based pricing strategy, prices could be determined based on the customers' perception on the derived value. Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016) further elaborate that setting a significantly lower price for a higher quality service is another value based pricing method. Organizations could also set their prices in order to satisfy customers' needs. Junaris (2022), highlights that the pricing of educational services determined by the benefits sought, reduces the uncertainty for the customers.

When considering the execution of pricing strategies for educational institutes, James (2019) discusses eight different approaches that can be adopted when charging fees from students. These include a "tuition only" model, which offers an all-inclusive price for the entire program, ensuring simplicity, and a "tuition guarantee" model, which ensures that prices remain stable throughout the course. Another approach is the "subscription tuition" model, allowing students to enroll in unlimited courses within a specified term for a fixed fee. Monthly payment plans are also highlighted, facilitating manageable monthly payments that cover tuition and fees, making education more financially accessible. Additionally, the "reward for retention" model incentivizes students to stay engaged by earning tuition-free courses upon meeting specific criteria. The "relationship incentive" model provides discounted tuition rates to alumni and their families for additional courses or programs, fostering continued engagement and loyalty. The "try before you buy"

model offers free courses or trial periods, particularly for high-demand programs, to allow students to sample the education offered. Lastly, "employer partnerships" involve collaborations between colleges and corporate employers, offering cost-effective education opportunities to employees, often subsidized by the employer, thereby enhancing employee engagement and student retention (James, 2019).

2.4.3   Place

Place involves deciding whether to sell through distributors or directly, with the internet now facilitating direct selling. Considerations also include aspects like warehousing, storage, the selection of outlets, and exploring options such as tele-selling or online selling (Kermally, 2003). Raj et. al. (2013) elaborate that in the context of educational services, "place" refers to the physical location where an educational institution is established. This location is often referred to as the service centre, as it is where the institution delivers its educational offerings and interacts with students.

2.4.4   Promotion

Kermally (2003) illustrates that promotion would involve advertising, publicity, determining the desired image, personal selling, and selecting suitable media channels (such as newspapers, radio, or TV advertisements). The primary objective of promotion is to follow the A.I.D.A. principle, aiming to generate Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action. Ruskin - Brown (2006) elaborates that this indicates the prospective customers regarding the organization's offerings and reasons to buy the same. According to Raj et. al. (2013), "promotion" refers to all the communication efforts undertaken by a service provider in the marketplace. This includes various elements such as advertising, public relations, word of mouth, point of sale, publicity, direct marketing, and web marketing, among others. In the context of educational institutions, the focus of promotion often revolves around two key components: advertising and web-based marketing (Raj et. al. 2013).

2.4.5   People

According to Muala & Qurneh (2012), the personnel factor in service refers to the employees who produce and deliver the service. In many service industries, there is a significant level of personal interaction between customers and employees, which greatly influences customers' perceptions of service quality. Employees are crucial for delivering service to customers effectively, and customers often associate the traits of the service with the company they work for. As highlighted

by Raj et.al. (2013), in this context, "people" refers to both the teaching faculty and the non-teaching staff who are directly and indirectly involved in delivering services to students. The satisfaction and retention of students heavily rely on the ability of teachers to provide high quality services.

2.4.6   Process

Muala & Qurneh (2012) argue that process, in the context of services, refers to the execution of actions and functions aimed at enhancing the value of products while keeping costs low and providing significant benefits to customers. They emphasize that process management is more critical for services than for goods. The efficiency and skill of service providers, as well as the pace of the process, are directly observable by customers and greatly influence their satisfaction with the purchase. In the educational service industry, the way service providers deliver services to students is crucial for gaining competitive advantages. A hassle free, simple, understandable, student friendly, and technology based service process can differentiate an institution from others (Raj et.al., 2013).

2.4.7   Physical Evidence

As described by Muala & Qurneh (2012), this factor pertains to the environment in which the service is delivered, including any tangible items that aid in its execution and communication. The significance of this factor lies in the fact that customers often assess service quality based on physical evidence. When considering educational services, Raj et.al. (2013) emphasize that the direct sensory experience of a service allows a student to gauge whether they have received adequate facilities from the educational institution. This includes aspects such as the physical environment where the service is delivered, the facilities provided, and the infrastructure created by the organization (Raj et. al. 2013).

2.5 Marketing Strategy

In the dynamic business landscape, crafting an effective marketing strategy is imperative for organizations to not only survive but also thrive in highly competitive markets. A well-defined marketing strategy serves as a roadmap, guiding businesses in achieving their objectives while addressing the needs and preferences of their target audience (Kotler & Keller, 2016). With the advent of digital technologies and the rise of social media platforms, the dynamics of marketing have evolved significantly, necessitating a comprehensive approach that integrates both traditional and digital marketing channels (Smith & Zook, 2011).

According to Stevens et. al. (2003), a strategic marketing plan is crucial for businesses aiming to boost revenues. It acts as a roadmap, leading to increased sales, customer base growth, and higher profits. Selecting the right objectives and strategies is key to success, as it can result in stronger revenues. Conversely, without a plan or with incorrect strategies, businesses may face lost revenue and increased costs. Implementing a strategic marketing plan allows for better future forecasting and sound decision-making, shaping the business's destiny. Utilizing a strategic marketing planning process helps set objectives, select strategies, allocate resources, and produce measurable results, enhancing the business's image and appeal to both existing and potential customers.

Developing an effective marketing strategy is crucial for businesses aiming to achieve their objectives and remain competitive in today's dynamic marketplace (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017; Kotler & Keller, 2016). This process involves several key components, each playing a vital role in guiding the direction of the marketing efforts and maximizing their impact. Firstly, market research is essential for gaining insights into customer needs, preferences, and market trends (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Next, target market segmentation allows businesses to identify specific customer segments and tailor their marketing efforts accordingly (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). Target marketing involves identifying the most lucrative market segments, leading businesses to concentrate on specific segments rather than addressing the entire market (Camilleri, 2018). Companies may create

products or services tailored to meet the needs of each chosen segment. This targeted marketing strategy differs from mass marketing, where a company produces and distributes one product for all consumers, or product differentiation, where a company offers various products to a broad market. Marketers are increasingly moving away from mass marketing efforts, opting instead for customized marketing programs aimed at smaller segments (Camilleri, 2018).

Setting clear objectives and goals ensures that the marketing strategy aligns with the overall business objectives (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Developing marketing mix strategies involves making decisions about product, price, place, and promotion to meet the needs of the target market (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Armstrong & Kotler (2017) further illustrate that, selecting appropriate marketing channels ensures that businesses reach their target audience effectively. Finally, monitoring and evaluation enable businesses to track the performance of their marketing efforts and make adjustments as needed to optimize results. The primary stages/components involved in formulating a marketing strategy are discussed below.

2.5.1   Market Research

Market research involves gathering and analyzing information about the target market, including customer demographics, preferences, purchasing behavior, and market trends (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This step helps businesses gain insights into their customers' needs and preferences, as well as understand the competitive landscape and identify potential opportunities and threats.

As illustrated by Churchill & Lacobucci (2019), market research for educational institutes can be conducted through various methods to gather insights into the needs, preferences, and behaviors of students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders. One approach is through surveys, where structured questionnaires are distributed to target audiences to collect data on aspects such as program preferences, satisfaction levels, and perceptions of the institution. Focus groups can also be utilized, allowing for in-depth discussions to explore attitudes, opinions, and motivations regarding educational offerings. Additionally, interviews with key stakeholders, including current students, alumni, faculty members, and administrators, can provide valuable qualitative insights into their experiences, expectations, and suggestions for improvement. Observation methods

may also be employed to observe and analyze behaviors and interactions within educational settings, providing valuable context to inform marketing strategies (Churchill & Lacobucci, 2019).

2.5.2   Market Segmentation

Market segmentation involves dividing the overall market into distinct segments based on characteristics such as demographics, psychographics, geographic location, or behavioral patterns (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). This allows businesses to tailor their marketing efforts more effectively to meet the needs of specific customer groups and maximize their return on investment. According to Camilleri (2018), market segmentation is the active process of identifying distinct segments within a market and dividing a broad customer base into subgroups that include both existing and potential customers. This consumer-oriented approach is applicable to various markets. When segmenting markets, researchers typically seek shared characteristics like common needs, interests, lifestyles, or demographic profiles. The underlying assumption of market segmentation is that distinct segments necessitate distinct marketing programs. Diverse customers are targeted through different approaches, including offers, prices, promotions, distributions, or a combination of various marketing variables. Ruskin - Brown (2006) emphasizes that segmentation involves segmenting marketplace into distinct 'homogeneous groups of potential customers,' commonly referred to as 'prospects.' The four main segmentation categories stated by Niculescu (2019) are shown in table 2 below.

Segmentation Type	Description
Geographical	According to Niculescu (2019), this the oldest and most commonly used method, divides markets based on geographical areas such as countries, cities, regions, and even postcode areas. Its primary objective is to identify customers in specific areas who share similar behavioral patterns, thus providing a foundation for targeted marketing efforts.

Demographic	Age, gender, and family life cycle are commonly regarded as primary variables in this type of segmentation. However, neither age nor gender reliably predict consumer behavior across diverse contexts (Niculescu, 2019).
Behavioral	Niculescu (2019) illustrates that this covers a broad spectrum of behavioral metrics, encompassing consumer attitudes, knowledge, benefits sought, and usage rates. The concept of "sought after benefits" serves as a prevalent framework for behavioral segmentation, operating under the assumption that consumers primarily purchase products or services to address their needs. These solutions, or intended benefits, form the most suitable foundation for market segmentation.
Psychological	According to Niculescu (2019), psychographic segmentation uses variables such as the activities of the applicants, their interests, opinions, attitudes and values.

Table 2: Segmentation Categories (Niculescu, 2019)

In the context of educational services, Niculescu (2019) highlights that market segmentation is a crucial strategy for institutions aiming to tailor their marketing approaches to diverse consumer groups within a market. This segmentation recognizes that buyers or consumers within a market are not homogeneous, but rather differ in various respects, necessitating differentiated strategies. Niculescu (2019) further elaborates that the purpose of market segmentation includes better meeting consumer needs, increasing profitability, attaining segment leadership, retaining customers, and guiding marketing communications.

2.5.3   Targeting

Ruskin - Brown (2006) highlights that targeting refers to selecting specific groups from those identified in the segmentation stage, towards which we will direct our business focus. After completing market segmentation, the company should understand the needs and wants of its chosen segments. It is crucial for the business to identify any unmet needs in the market, as there might be customers not adequately served by competitors. The next step involves recognizing the most

profitable segments and determining which segments the company will serve. According to Camilleri (2018), three market coverage alternatives can be applied: undifferentiated marketing, differentiated marketing, and concentrated marketing. An undifferentiated marketing strategy disregards market distinctions, offering a single market offer to all customers. However, in today's environment, discerning customers are increasingly demanding, and developing a product or brand that satisfies all consumers with diverse needs, wants, and expectations poses significant challenges for businesses. On the other hand, a differentiated marketing strategy targets multiple segments by developing unique product or service offerings and devising distinct marketing plans for each segment. This approach requires comprehensive market research to understand how to meet the needs of the selected segments, resulting in higher costs compared to an undifferentiated strategy. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to prioritize services critical to their chosen segments and assess the feasibility of differentiated marketing against the expected yield (Camilleri, 2018). Lastly, concentrated marketing involves companies with constrained resources focusing on just one or a few sub-markets. While successfully selecting a segment can yield a promising return on investment, this strategy also involves considerable risk. If the chosen segment underperforms, the company may face significant financial losses (Camilleri, 2018). According to Usertesting (2024), a customer persona (also known as a buyer persona) is a semi-fictional archetype that can be used to represent the key traits of a targeted segment of the audience, based on the collected data which provides insight into the traits of prospective customers.

2.5.4   Positioning

Positioning refers to the process of determining how a business wants to be perceived in the minds of consumers relative to competitors (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). This involves identifying the unique value proposition and key differentiators of the business and communicating them effectively to the target audience to create a favorable brand image. According to Ruskin - Brown (2006), positioning involves tailoring organization's overall offering of 'Goods,' 'Services,' 'Place,' 'Price,' etc., to meet the needs of the target group in a manner that is distinctively appealing compared to what the competition provides. Camileri (2018) elaborates that the final step in target marketing is product positioning and companies develop "positioning statements" to articulate the position they aim to establish in the minds of their target customers, relative to competitors' products or services. Since customers continuously compare products or services,

marketers must design their positioning strategies to enhance customers' (and prospects') perceptions of their products. Effective product positions possess four key characteristics. Firstly, they focus on benefits for potential customers. Secondly, they differentiate the company's products or services from those of key competitors. Thirdly, the company must possess the necessary skills, resources, and credibility to deliver on the implied statements and promises. Lastly, an effective position is defensible, meaning that aggressive competitors cannot quickly neutralize or pre-empt another positioning strategy (Camileri, 2018). The figure 3 below illustrates the characteristics that compose an effective positioning statement.
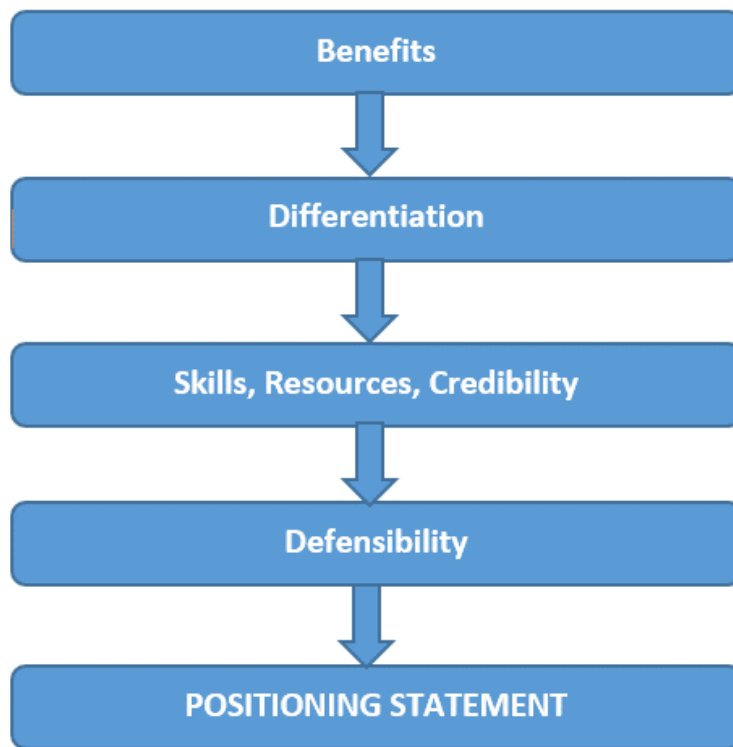
Figure 3: Characteristics of positioning statement. Adapted from Camileri (2018)

2.5.5   Setting Objectives and Goals

Setting clear and measurable objectives and goals is essential for guiding the direction of the marketing strategy. Objectives may include increasing market share, revenue, brand awareness, customer acquisition, or customer retention. Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound -SMART (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.5.6   Developing Marketing Mix Strategies

The marketing mix consists of the four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. Developing marketing mix strategies involves making decisions about product design and features, pricing strategies, distribution channels, and promotional activities to meet the needs of the target market (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.5.7   Selecting Marketing Channels

Selecting the most appropriate marketing channels involves choosing the channels and platforms through which to reach the target audience. This may include digital marketing channels such as social media, email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), as well as traditional channels like print, television, and radio advertising (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017).

2.5.8   Implementation and Execution

Implementation and execution involve putting the marketing strategy into action by developing and deploying marketing campaigns, initiatives, and tactics (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This step requires careful planning, coordination, and execution to ensure that marketing efforts are effective and aligned with the overall business objectives (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.5.9   Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation involve continuously tracking the performance of the marketing efforts against the established objectives and goals (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). This may involve collecting and analyzing data on key performance indicators (KPIs), such as sales, website traffic, conversion rates, and customer feedback, to assess the effectiveness of the marketing strategy and make adjustments as needed (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and metrics play a crucial role in evaluating the performance of marketing strategies in the service sector. Commonly used metrics include Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Customer Lifetime

Value (CLV), Customer Retention Rate, Net Promoter Score (NPS), Conversion Rate, and Return on Investment (ROI). These metrics provide insights into various aspects of marketing effectiveness, such as acquisition efficiency, customer loyalty, satisfaction levels, and overall profitability (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

2.6   SOSTAC Framework

As indicated by Strong (2014), SOSTAC planning system model includes a simple yet formal structure for the development of strategic marketing plans while providing a holistic approach in measuring environmental influences. While the previous section has wholistically discussed the steps and tasks involved in developing a marketing strategy, below discussion illustrates phases involved in developing a marketing strategy based on the SOSTAC framework.

When considering the structure of the framework, Strong (2014) highlights that at the top of the cycle, researchers conduct a thorough situational analysis encompassing both external and internal factors. These findings are then integrated into strategic planning, guiding the development of marketing objectives while considering overarching business goals. Strong (2014) further elaborates that, once the objectives are defined, the overall marketing strategy undergoes a detailed review, assessing potential impacts on turnover. At the operational level, strategies transition into tactics aimed at actualizing the strategic plan. Progressing from tactics, implementation is facilitated through action plans, demanding management oversight and control. Implementation often represents the riskiest phase of the entire marketing plan (Strong, 2014). The phases included in the SOSTAC Framework are shown in the figure 4 below.

Figure 4: SOSTAC Model. Adapted from PRSmith (n.d.)

2.6.1   Situational Analysis

As stated in LinkedIn (n.d.), this step involves gathering both internal and external data and in-sights regarding the current market situation which includes the market, customers, competitors, and own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strong (2014) specifies that the or-ganization should also consider their performance against budget as well as the level of appropri-ateness of its existing marketing mix. According to Schlegelmilch (2016 as cited in Stephenson, 2024) organization can use SWOT analysis in order to gain insights regarding their internal envi-ronment.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic technique used to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Indeed, 2023). Gurel (2017) highlights that strengths and weaknesses represent internal

factors and attributes of the organization, while opportunities and threats pertain to external factors and attributes of the environment. SWOT Analysis is commonly illustrated in a four quadrant box, enabling a structured summary organized according to these four section titles. Table 3 below demonstrates the four quadrants associated in the SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Attributes that provide an edge over competitors in the industry.	Attributes that put the organization at a disadvantage compared to others in the industry.
Opportunities	Threats
Factors in the environment that provide advantages for the organization.	Elements in the environment that may pose challenges or difficulties for the organization.

Table 3: Features of SWOT analysis. Adapted from Gurel (2017)

Schlegelmilch (2016 as cited in Stephenson, 2024) further highlights that the PEST analysis could be used as an effective approach to analyze the organization's external environment. PEST analysis, including Political, Economic, Social, and Technological factors, outlines a framework for assessing macro environmental factors crucial in strategic management's environmental scanning process. Expanding further, some analysts include Legal and Environmental factors, forming the PESTEL or PESTLE framework. (Vileta, 2020)

PESTEL Analysis

According to Washington State University (2023), a PESTEL analysis is a strategic tool utilized by marketers to evaluate and monitor the macro-environmental factors that influence an organization, company, or industry. It analyses Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal aspects within the external environment. Below is an elaboration of the Washington State University (2023), for each of the factors included in the PESTEL analysis.

- Political - Government policies, leadership dynamics, foreign trade policies, internal political trends and issues, tax policy, and the trends in regulation and deregulation.

- Economical - Projected economic growth, inflation rates, interest rates, job market dynamics including growth and unemployment, labor expenses, the influence of globalization, disposable income levels for both consumers and businesses, and anticipated shifts in the economic landscape.

- Social - Demographics such as age, gender, race, and family size, along with consumer attitudes, opinions, and buying patterns, population growth rate and employment patterns, socio-cultural changes, ethnic and religious trends, and living standards.

- Technological - Emerging techniques for communicating with target markets along with innovative methods of producing and distributing goods and services.

- Environmental - Targets for pollution and carbon footprint. Ethical and sustainable ways of doing business.

- Legal - Health and safety regulations, equal opportunity measures, advertising standards, consumer rights and legal protections, as well as product labelling and safety standards

It is further elaborated by Schlegelmilch (2016 as cited in Stephenson, 2024) that an assessment of the competitive advantage can be included in the situational analysis by analyzing the competitors and their impact on organization's future operations.

Porter's Five Forces

As indicated by Danao and Watts (2024), the five forces model introduced by Michael Porter can be used as an effective tool when analyzing the competitive environment. Table 4 below illustrates the forces included in the Porter's five forces model and the elements that are used to assess the impact of each force.

Competitive Force	Description	Elements
Power of suppliers	Assesses the extent to which suppliers impact a company's profits by providing	• Number of suppliers

	the essential components for its operations.	• Size of suppliers • Uniqueness of service • Ability to substitute. • Cost of changing
Power of buyers	Buyer Power denotes the influence customers hold over a business. In industries with significant buyer power, consumers can request lower prices, enhanced quality, or better service, which can impact a company's profitability.	• Number of customers • Price sensitivity • Ability to substitute. • Cost of changing
Threat of new entry	Assessing the ease with which new competitors can enter the market and potentially challenge existing players involves examining the Threat of New Entrants, which involves evaluating the barriers to entry within an industry.	• Time and cost of entry • Specialist knowledge • Economies of scale • Barriers to entry
Threat of substitution	The Threat of Substitution pertains to the probability of customers switching to alternative products or services. When substitution threats are elevated, businesses become prone to sudden changes in consumer preferences.	• Substitute Performance • Cost of change
Competitive Rivalry	Competitive Rivalry assesses the quantity and strength of existing players within the industry. This included the number of competitors exist in the market and the strength of their offerings.	• No. of competitors • Quality differences • Switching cost

Table 4: Porters five forces (Adapted from Danao and Watts, 2023; Mind Tools, n.d.)

2.6.2   Objectives

According to Strong (2014), marketing objectives serve as a statement indicating the company's desired position concerning sales and chosen markets. These objectives are crafted to be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time defined (SMART). LinkedIn (n.d.) states that the set objectives need to be aligned with the organization's overall goals and vision. As stated by Stephenson (2024), within this domain, the marketing team is directed to address inquiries regarding the future trajectory of the company, namely, where the firm sees itself in the future. This aspect is attached within the broader framework of the mission/vision statement utilized by the firm.

2.6.3   Strategy

The strategy phase should answer the question: how are you planning to achieve those set objectives? (LinkedIn, n.d.) It is further elaborated by Strong (2014) that based on the researcher's insights, marketers must decide on, target market segments to focus on and product positioning, to effectively support the objectives.

2.6.4   Tactics

In the fourth stage of the SOSTAC model, the marketing tactics are figured out which need to be in line with the organization's marketing strategy. These tactics should address how you intend to execute your strategy. This involves choosing the suitable marketing mix elements, including product, price, place, and promotion, as well as identifying the specific tools and channels required to effectively reach and engage your target audience. (LinkedIn, n.d.)

2.6.5   Action Plan

Strong (2014) highlights this as the most important stage of the SOSTAC model. Strong (2014) expresses that, during this phase marketers are expected to allocate responsibilities clearly, defining tasks, timelines, and individuals accountable for each. Budgets must be cautiously outlined,

item by item, ensuring appropriate resources are allocated for plan implementation. Utilizing a roadmap approach can be beneficial, providing a visual guide for those executing or impacted by the plan, fostering buy in and understanding of proposed activities (Strong, 2014).

2.6.6   Control

As illustrated by Strong (2014), in this phase, researchers must establish systems to gather and analyze performance data, facilitating the evaluation and adjustment of plans based on outcomes. Metrics will encompass web analytics and sales tracking across product lines, regions, and outlets. Strong (2014) further illustrates that, conducting customer satisfaction surveys will be essential to staying attuned to consumer needs. As stated in LinkedIn (n.d.), it is crucial to compare actual performance with expected performance and identify any disparities or deviations. Subsequently, if necessary, corrective actions should be taken, and the plan needs to be updated accordingly.

3   Research and Design Methodology.

3.1   Research Design and Methods

Market research has been considered crucial in gaining insights into consumer behavior, serving as the primary method to understand how individuals intend to interact with the organization's offerings as well as their expectations which is a key component of this thesis. Smith and Albaum (2010) elaborate that market research could be conducted for observing customers and markets, assessing awareness, attitudes, and image, monitoring product usage patterns, identifying immediate business challenges, and assisting in the formulation of strategies.

Although the exact purpose of conducting market research for this thesis is not mentioned in the above, those points imply the underlying purpose of the conducting the same. For example, "Assisting in the formulation of strategies" implies that the assisting data represents the customer expectations in order to formulate the marketing strategy for the organization. "Assessing awareness, attitudes and image" is another implication regarding the task of figuring out consumer expectations. Smith and Albaum (2010) highlight that the above purposes are fulfilled by gathering data using surveys as the primary data collection method.

According to Hair et. al. (2018), both companies and researchers are leveraging the digital transformation to connect with survey participants through online platforms. These platforms offer convenient access to business and consumer samples that were previously challenging, expensive, and sometimes unattainable to reach. Smith and Albaum (2010) further highlight that data can also be acquired through the observation of current or historical behaviors. When focusing on past behaviors, data collection methods encompass examining secondary sources such as company records and reviewing studies published by external sources.

For the empirical section of this thesis, the data collection aims to gather both qualitative nuances and quantitative metrics through surveys, designated as the primary method. Surveys are selected for their ability to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and opinions from a relatively expansive customer base, aligning with the objective of comprehensively identifying customer needs and expectations (Babbie & Edgerton, 2021). The survey questions are carefully structured to elicit responses that provide insights into customer preferences and expectations, laying a solid

foundation to explore the marketing mix and employ the components involved in building a marketing strategy. In addition to the surveys, interviews will be utilized as a data collection method to gather data related to the organization's internal environment and competitor behavior. It is important to note that interviews will only be used as a supportive method for data collection due to the limited availability of secondary data resources related to company and industry specific information.

3.2   Research Strategy

According to Yin (2018), case study involves an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Yin (2018) emphasizes that case studies are particularly valuable for exploring complex natured phenomena in depth. They allow researchers to analyze real world situations in detail, uncovering rich insights that contribute to theoretical understanding and practical applications. Additionally, case studies offer flexibility in research design, enabling researchers to adapt their approach to the unique characteristics of the case (Yin, 2018). In the context of this research, the case study method is suitable because it enables an in-depth examination of marketing strategy development within the educational services sector. By focusing on a specific case, such as Simple English Academy, the particulars of marketing strategy can be explored within a real world context, providing valuable insights for theory and practice.

3.3   Research Approach

According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), the deductive approach in research involves the development of specific predictions based on existing theories or general principles, which are then tested through empirical observations or data collection. Creswell & Creswell (2017) further state that, in this approach, researchers start with a theoretical framework or established knowledge and use it to deduce specific expectations or hypotheses about how variables are related or behave in a given context. These hypotheses are then subjected to empirical testing to evaluate their validity and confirm or refute the theoretical assumptions. As elaborated by Creswell & Creswell (2017), the inductive approach in research involves the process of deriving general

principles or theories from specific observations or cases. Creswell & Creswell (2017) further elaborate that, unlike deductive reasoning, which starts with a theory and tests it against empirical data, inductive reasoning begins with specific observations and uses them to generate broader theories or generalizations. Creswell & Creswell (2017) identify abductive research as an approach that involves the use of inference to generate explanations for observed phenomena. In abductive reasoning, researchers start with an observation or a set of data that does not fit existing theories or explanations. They then propose several possible explanations to account for the observed phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In this study, the research begins with existing theories and literature on consumer behavior, marketing strategies, and service industries. These theories provide a conceptual framework for understanding the research problem. Subsequently, empirical data, collected through surveys and interviews will be analyzed to validate the theoretical framework. The research approach of this thesis also consists of elements where the qualitative data collected will allow to explore specific cases and experiences related to consumer expectations and decision making. Thus, it can be concluded that this research follows the abductive approach, as it involves generating possible explanations for observed phenomena based on the available evidence.

3.4   Data Collection

The survey employed in this study is a semi structured questionnaire designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative aspect of the survey seeks to uncover deeper meanings, sentiments, and perceptions embedded within customer responses, while the quantitative aspect enables the identification of patterns, trends, and correlations across the dataset (Babbie & Edgerton, 2021). By leveraging both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, this approach aims to extract valuable insights from the data pool, facilitating the development of a marketing strategy in order to meet customer needs and expectations effectively.

The sample for the survey includes a diverse range of customers to ensure representation across different segments of the customer base. As suggested by Babbie & Edgerton (2021), the survey questions are validated through a rigorous process, including pilot testing and expert review, to

ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability. The primary data collected through survey questions are intended to address several critical research questions essential for informing the development of a robust marketing strategy for the organization. Firstly, the surveys aim to identify the potential customers of the organization, exploring into their demographics, preferences, and behaviors to establish a clear understanding of the target market. Secondly, the survey seeks to uncover the decision making process followed by customers leading towards finalizing a purchase, exploring the factors influencing their choices and the sequence of steps involved in their decision making journey. Moreover, the survey questions aim to clarify the factors affecting the purchasing decisions of potential customers, including price sensitivity, product features, brand perception, and the overall customer experience. It is also expected to ascertain the key aspects that need to be considered when constructing a marketing strategy for a service offering, such as market segmentation, positioning, pricing strategies, promotional tactics, and distribution channels. Through the collection of primary data via surveys, the research intends to gather insights into these fundamental aspects, laying the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive marketing strategy tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the organization's target market. The data collection for this study was conducted for a period of one week, from 23rd April 2024 to 30th April 2024. The online survey was be distributed via email and social media platforms. With regards to the social media platforms two identified Facebook groups were used which is dedicated to English language learning in Sri Lanka. Since these groups consist of Sri Lankan members who are enthusiastic in learning English, they were considered as ideal representatives of the commissioning organization's potential customer base. The survey was answered by 53 respondents and each respondent had been informed about the purpose of the survey, the confidentiality of their responses, and the voluntary nature of their participation. As stated above, the survey aims to gather detailed information on various aspects of customer behavior and preferences, including demographic data (age, gender, income level, etc.), purchasing habits, product preferences, and factors influencing purchasing decisions. This data is intended to provide actionable insights into the customer preferences and requirements and identify crucial aspects to be considered when developing a marketing strategy.

As a supportive approach, interviews were utilized in conjunction with the survey which is the primary data collection method, in order to gather insights regarding the company's internal dynamics and competitive landscape which are not easily attainable through other sources. A semi-structured interview format was followed, and one interview was conducted on 27th of April 2024

with the operations manager (referred with initials D.P.), selected purposively for his comprehensive understanding of the company's internal environment and the competition. This purposeful sampling method ensured that our interviewee possessed the specific expertise and insider knowledge necessary to provide comprehensive insights. It is important to highlight that while interviews played a supplementary role, the main data collection method revolved around survey. The findings derived from the survey formed the cornerstone of the development process of marketing strategy with interviews providing additional context.

3.5   Data Analysis

When considering the data analysis methods, both qualitative and quantitative techniques will be employed. According to Babbie & Edgerton (2021), qualitative analysis methods like content analysis are well-suited for uncovering nuanced meanings and themes within textual data, making them valuable tools for interpreting survey responses and understanding complex phenomena. Thus, content analysis, will be used to interpret the qualitative data gathered from the survey responses, uncovering deeper insights and meanings. Content analysis will also be employed to analyze interview data, facilitating the identification of recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative responses.

Babbie & Edgerton (2021), elaborate that descriptive statistics, including measures such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies are employed to summarize the main features of the dataset. Descriptive statistics offer a concise overview of key variables, facilitating an understanding of the central tendency and variability within the dataset (Babbie & Edgerton 2021). In the analysis of the quantitative data collected from the survey, a comprehensive approach has been taken to ensure a thorough examination of the dataset. Charts and graphs have been utilized extensively to visually represent the data and identify patterns or trends, with a particular focus on identifying the highest frequency occurrences. Histograms, bar charts, and pie charts have been proven instrumental in elucidating the distribution of responses and highlighting noteworthy aspects of the dataset. Microsoft Excel is the primarily used software for this analysis. Furthermore, in exploring relationships between variables, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is calculated using PSPP software GNU general public license Version 3. This comprehensive approach to data analysis ensures a thorough examination of the collected data, facilitating the

extraction of valuable insights to inform the development of the marketing strategy for the organization.

4 Empirical Research

The empirical research design for this study has primarily utilized surveys as the main method of data collection to gain insights into the expectations and behavior of potential customers. Survey questions have been carefully designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative metrics from the respondents. The research aims to gather a broad spectrum of perspectives and opinions, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of customer needs and expectations within the organization's context.

The stakeholders involved in this research primarily consist of potential consumers seeking English language education. Insights generated from consumers primarily focus on understanding the reasoning behind their desire for English language education and their expectations from Simple English Academy. Qualitative data collected through open ended survey questions provide insights into the motivations, goals, and preferences of potential consumers, while quantitative data obtained from structured survey questions allow for the measurement of factors such as satisfaction levels, perceived value, and expectations from the organization. The interview findings are utilized when carrying out the situational analysis. As elaborated in the Data Analysis section, once the data collection phase is complete, both qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed using appropriate techniques. Qualitative data are analyzed content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns while quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive statistics to uncover relationships and associations within the dataset. The findings from the analysis have been used to the process of development of marketing strategies tailored to meet the needs and expectations of potential consumers of Simple English Academy.

The development work in this context pertains to the formulation of a marketing strategy for Simple English Academy. The implementation plan involves identifying potential customers and understanding their decision making processes and expectations. This step is crucial as it provides insights into the target market's preferences, needs, and behaviors. Subsequently, a review of the marketing mix components, has been conducted to devise a comprehensive strategy. Each element of the marketing mix has been carefully analyzed and tailored to align with the identified customer preferences and market dynamics. Based on the findings from the previous steps, the marketing strategy has been developed, encompassing strategic decisions on market segmentation, targeting, positioning, and the allocation of resources across various marketing channels.

This process ensures that the marketing strategy is well-informed, evidence based, and strategically aligned with the organization's objectives and market realities.

5   Survey Results and Discussion

The chapter is dedicated to provide a thorough analysis and strategic discussion of the survey results. It includes a detailed overview of the quantitative and qualitative findings, highlighting the implications of findings while relating to the theoretical framework identified in the thesis literature. This chapter provides an understanding regarding how the observed results can be strategically leveraged in the development of a marketing strategy including an indication regarding the application of these results into the organization's marketing strategy. A comprehensive discussion regarding the application of the survey findings has been presented in Chapter 7, which is focused on the development task.

The survey distributed among the potential customer audience consisted of 29 questions and had been answered by 53 respondents. The survey questions are included in the Appendix 1. The respondents for the survey act as a cross section of commissioning organization's target customer base and their responses reflect the nature of the target audience.

The survey consisted of two questions (questions no. 10 and 13) which were added with following intentions:

1. To filter out the responses which do not fall under the potential customer category.
2. To get an understanding regarding the size of the potential customer audience.

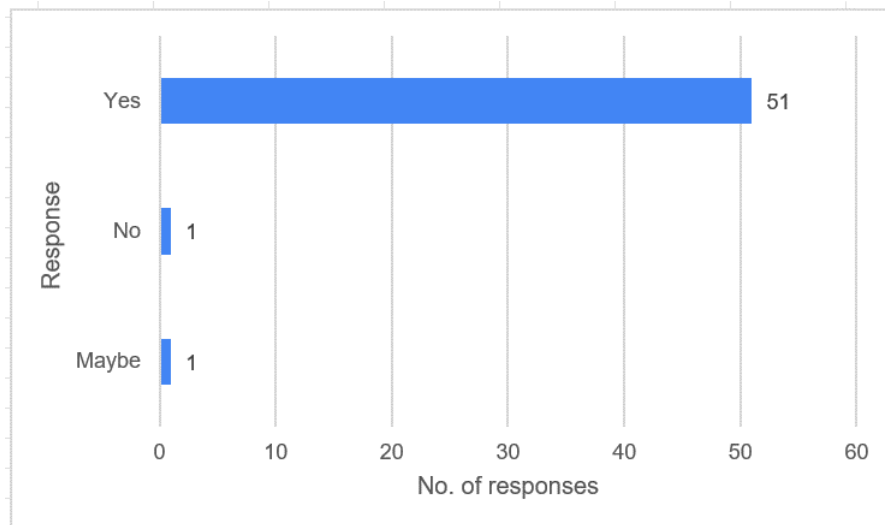Below is the response analysis of those two questions.

Figure 5: Interest in learning English (n=53)

This question prompted the respondents to express their interest in learning English language and as shown in figure 5, 51 (96%) respondents have answered "yes" to this question where 1 (2%) has answered "may be". This means that altogether 53 (98%) respondents are interested in learning English language. 1 respondent has stated that he/she is not interested in learning hence cannot be considered as a potential customer. As the above question acts as a primary filter of the responses, the analysis from this point forward will be carried out after eliminating the response of the person who doesn't have an interest in learning the language.

While 53 respondents are interested in learning English, it is also important to know how many of them are willing to fulfil their language needs by attending a class as opposed to 100% self-learning. The graph shown in figure 8 indicates the responses receive for this question.
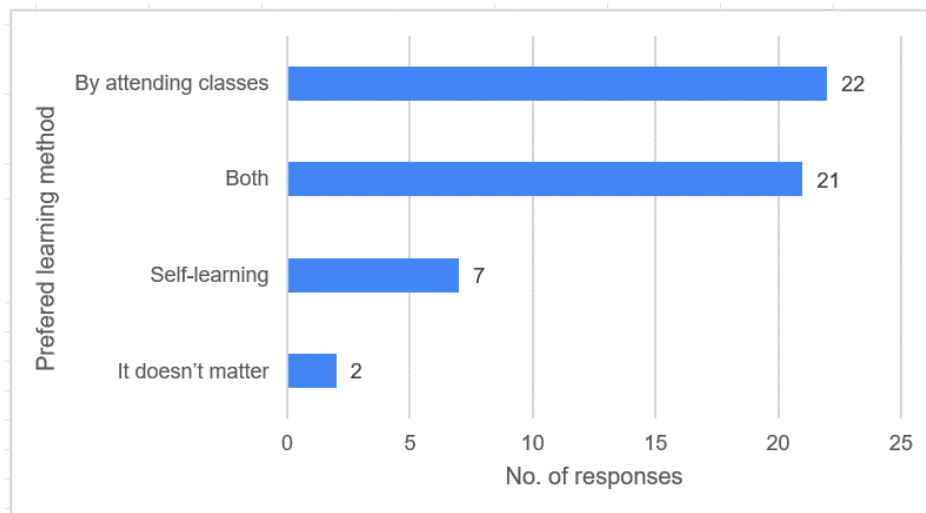
Figure 6: Learning methods (n=52)

The details shown in figure 6 show that 22 (42) of respondents are looking forward to learning English through attending classes and another 21 (40%) have revealed that they wish to attend classes while making self-learning efforts. 7 (14%) respondents are not concerned about the learning method which means they will accept attending classes if it fulfils their language needs. This exhibits that 45 (87%) respondents who have the interest in learning English language seek to learn it through attending classes, thus can be considered as potential customers. The findings of these two questions provide an indication that the potential customer base in large in size where 45 out of total 53 respondents (85%) fall into the potential customer category.

As the further analysis of the survey will be done on the potential customers of the institute, responses of the seven respondents who are willing to learn English solely depending on self-learning methods will be eliminated.

The thesis literature discusses the target market segmentation where Armstrong & Kotler (2017) highlight regarding the process of dividing the target market using geographic location, demographics, psychographics and behavioral patterns. Since the commissioning organization is intending to address the Sri Lankan customers, the survey questionnaire contained a question to obtain an understanding about the geographical location of the potential customers in terms of the district that they reside in. The responses received for the question are shown in figure 7 below.
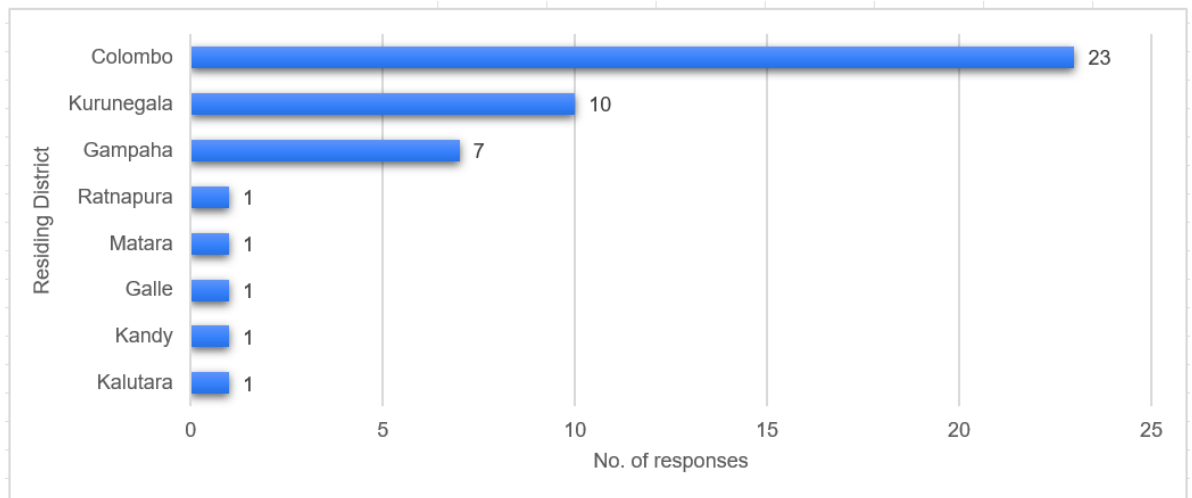
Figure 7: Geographical Location (n=45)

As shown in the figure 7 above, 23 respondents (51%) reside in the Colombo district which in-cludes the country's capital and other surrounding cities. 7 respondents (16%) have mentioned that they reside in the Gampaha district which is adjacent to the Colombo district. Importantly, it is revealed that a prominent 10 survey respondents (22%) are from the Kurunegala district.

Moving on to the demographics, the demographical variables identified by Niculescu (2019) have been used for the demographical segmentation. Survey questions no. 2 to no. 8 (refer appendix 1 for the questions) gather the demographical data including age, gender, marital status, family size and the occupation details. Below is the analysis of the responses received for those ques-tions.
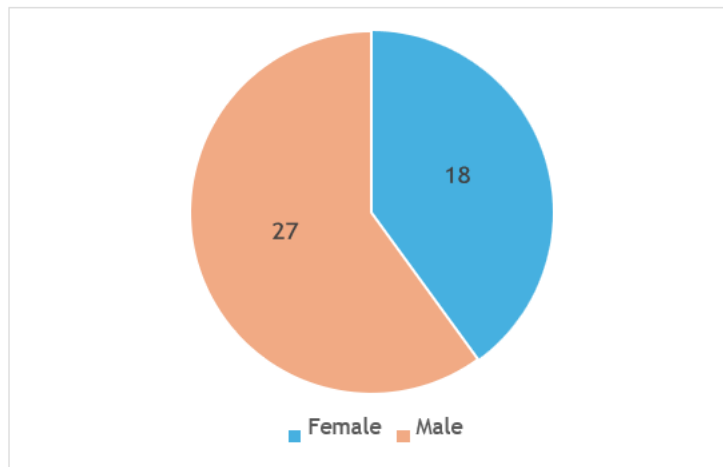
Figure 8: Gender distribution (n=45)

As shown in the above figure 8, 27 respondents (60%) are male while the remaining 18 (40%) are female. This reflects that the majority of the potential customers would be male customers.
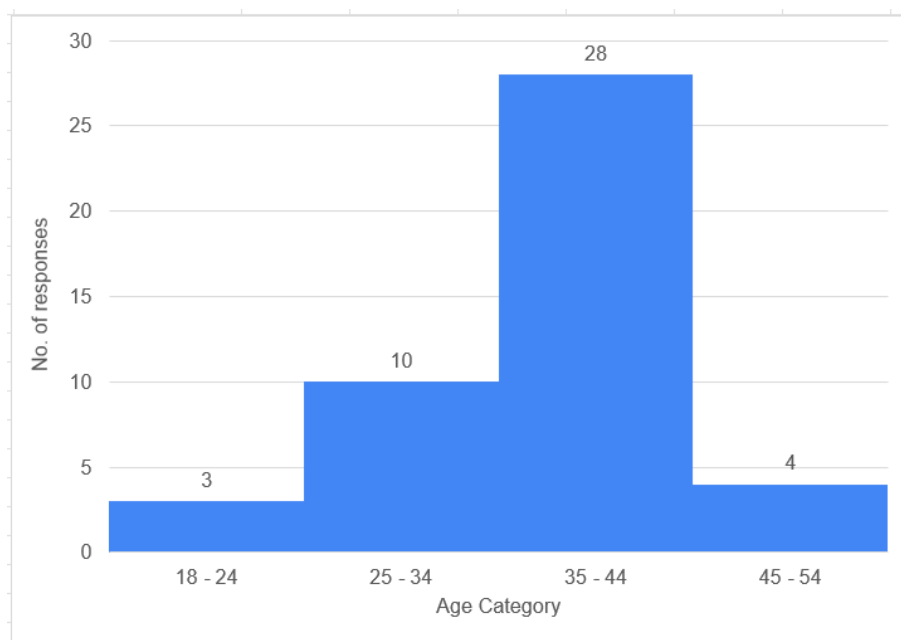
Figure 9: Age Distribution (n=45)

As indicated in figure 9, responses received for the customer age group revealed that a majority of 28 respondents (62%) belongs to the 35-44 age group. The 25-34 age group contains the second highest portion of 10 respondents (22%) while 4 respondents (9%) belong to the age group of 45-54. It is also revealed that 1 respondent (7%) is from the 18-24 age group.
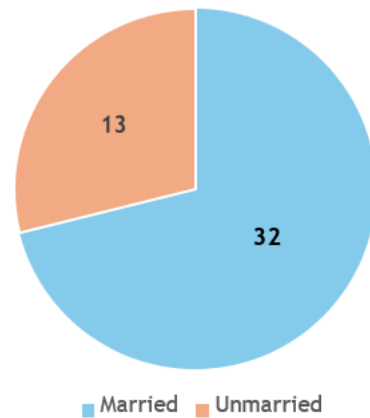
Figure 10: Marital Status (n=45)

The figure 10 above reveals that a considerable majority of 32 respondents (71%) are married while the remaining 13 (29%) have stated their status as unmarried. This reflects the marital status of the organization's potential audience.
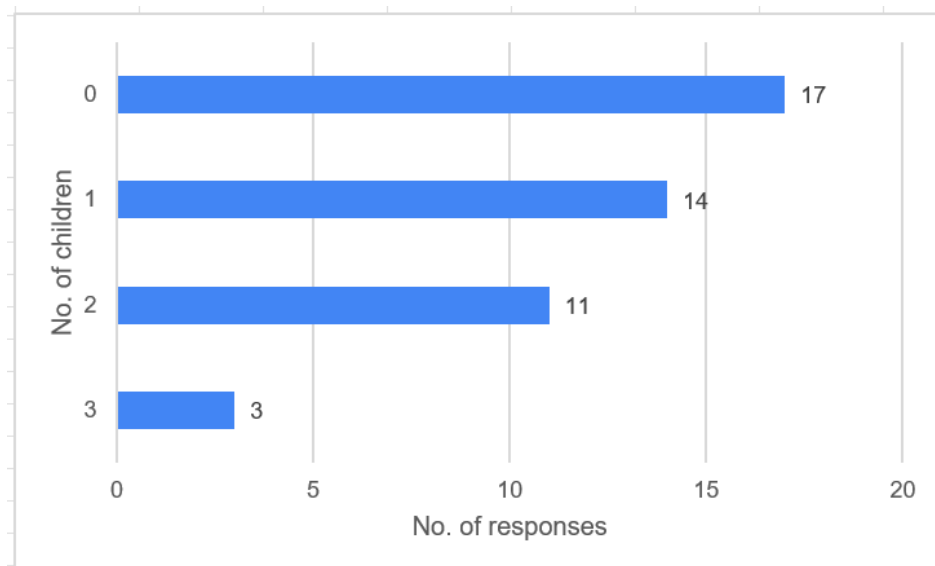
Figure 11: No. of children (n=45)

The above illustration (figure 11) proves that 28 respondents (62%) have families with children which reflects the level of family commitments attached with the potential customer base.

Questions no. 6 to no. 8 in the survey questionnaire gather the details of occupations of the target audience.
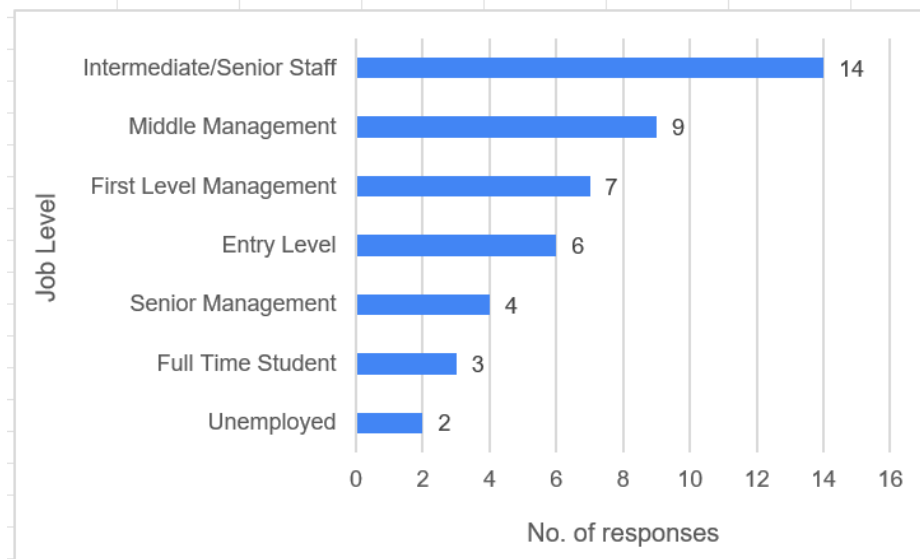
Figure 12: Job Levels (n=45)

As indicated in the figure 12, a majority of 14 respondents (31%) are performing job duties of intermediate/senior staff. 9 respondents (20%) perform middle management level jobs while an-other7 respondents (16%) identify their job level as first level management.
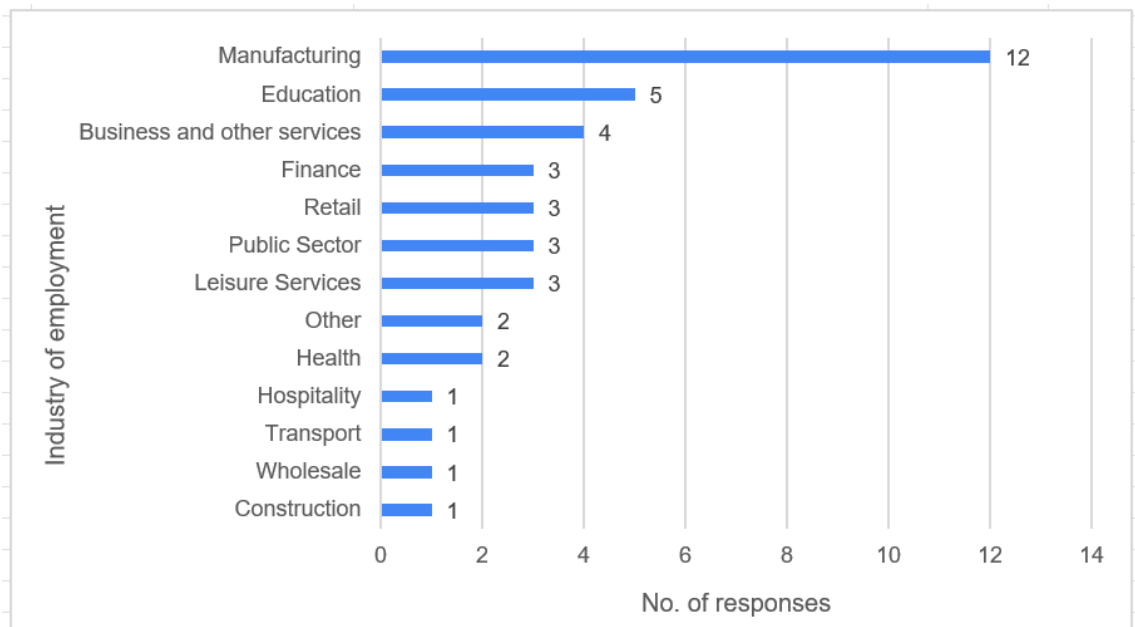
Figure 13: Industries of employment (n=41)

The above question (figure 13) which inquired the industry of employment resulted in receiving the majority of responses (12) as "manufacturing". It also revealed that 5 respondents (12%) are from the education industry while 4 respondents (10%) are from business and other services. This can be considered as a crosssection of job industries attached with organization's potential customer base.

Survey question no. 8 prompted the job title of respondents. This question received 37 responses and they were highly varied from one another. Job titles "teacher", "senior graphic designer" and "senior executive" had two respondents each while all other titles were unique.

The literature of the thesis discusses that according to Niculescu (2019), the concept of sought after benefits acts as the framework for behavioral segmentation while variables such as customers' interests, opinions and values are considered for psychological segmentation. The survey included questions which gather information regarding the customer behavioral patterns and psychographics. It is also important to note many of the below questions have been constructed to gather information regarding multiple factors. (eg: behavioral segmentation and marketing mix). The type of information collected and their use have been elaborated in the analysis of each question.

The question no. 9 in the survey prompted the customer regarding their current level of English knowledge. The respondents were supposed to answer this question from their own belief and experiences.
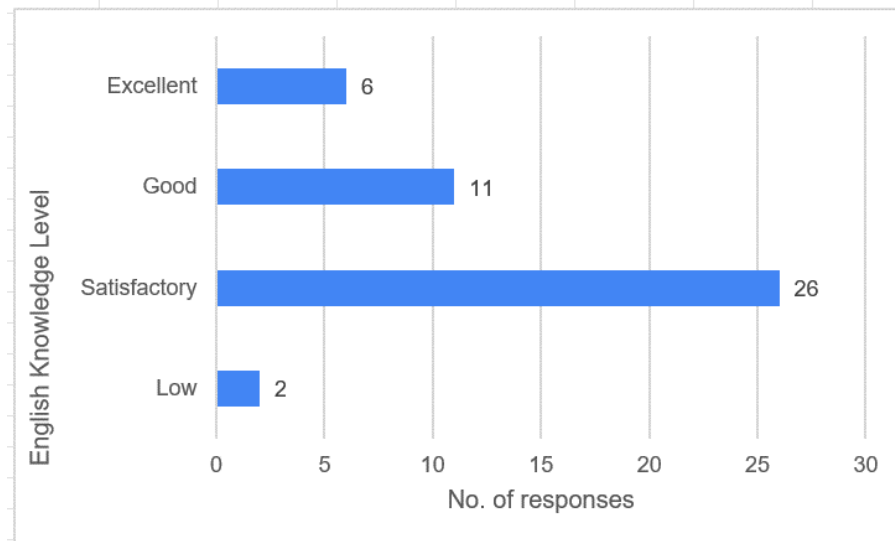
Figure 14: English knowledge level (n=45)

As shown in the above figure, the majority of respondents (26) have marked 3 from the likert scale (1 to 5) which indicates that they believe that their English language knowledge is at a satisfactory level. 11 respondents (24%) have stated that they have a good English knowledge while 6 respondents (13%) believe that their English language knowledge is excellent. Two respondents (4%) have rated their level of English as low. This information could be considered for psychological segmentation. Additionally, this could also be used when constructing the product element of the marketing mix.

While realizing the English knowledge level of the target audience, a question was added to the survey to determine the level of importance they have given to learning the language.
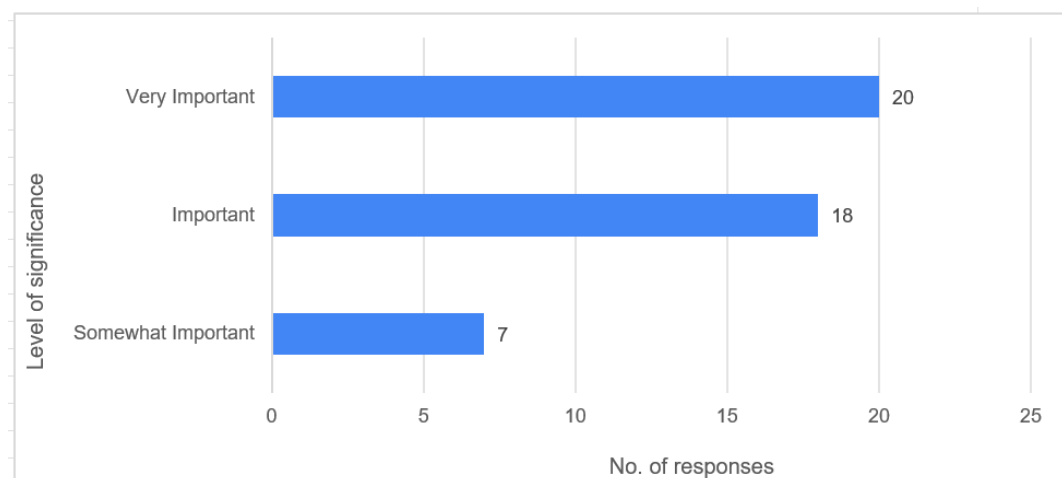
Figure 15: Levels of significance in learning English (n=45)

As shown in figure 15, this likert scale of 1 to 5, 20 respondents (44%) have marked 5 (very important) as their answer while another 18 (40%) have marked 4 (important). This reflects that a vast majority ofmore than 80% of the target audience have provided high priority in their lives for English language learning. 7 respondents (16%) have marked 3 which is the mid rank of the scale. No respondent has stated that they have given less or no importance for learning English.

The responses of this question were used along with the responses of question 7 which prompted theno. of children of respondents in order to figure out whether there is any relationship between the customers' family commitments and the interest in learning English. (The no. of children has been utilized as an indication which represents the level of family commitments.)

To explore the relationship between customers' family commitments and their interest in learning English, Spearman rank correlation coefficient was calculated. The no. of children was considered as the variable which was used to indicate the level of family commitments. The resulting coefficient was -0.349, indicating a moderate negative correlation. (Refer figure 34 in Appendix 2) This suggests that as the number of children increases, indicating higher family commitments, the interest in learning English tends to decrease. In other words, individuals with more family commitments are somewhat less likely to show interest in learning English.

As one of the main purposes of this research to identify customer preferences and priorities, a question was added to the survey in order to realize the main intentions of the potential customers that they wish to achieve by learning English. This question helps in behavioral segmentation and the information received could also be utilized in developing the course content. Additionally, the information obtained from this question intends to realize the "need recognition and problem awareness" stage on the five stage decision making model by Panwar et.al. (2019) discussed in the thesis literature. The responses received for thequestion are shown in the figure 16 below.
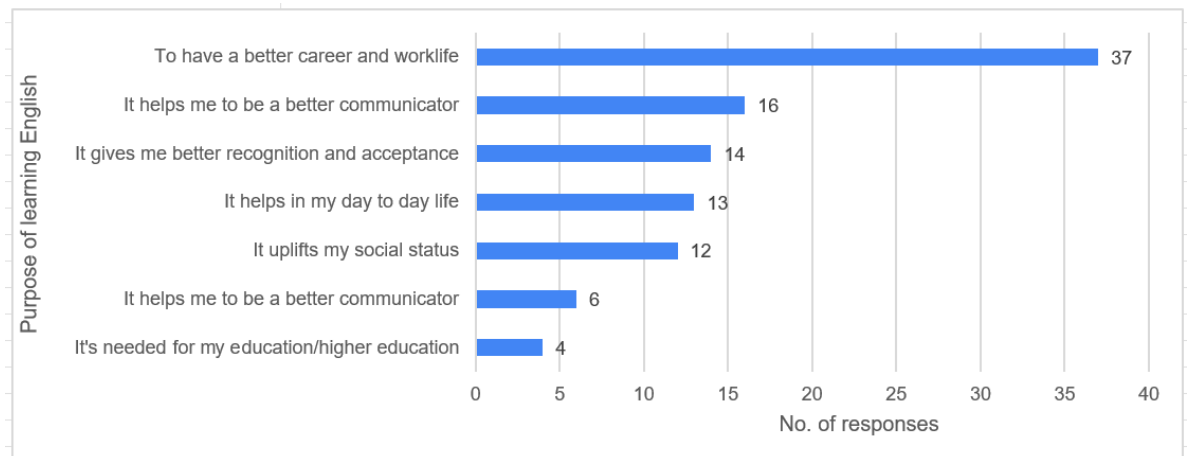
Figure 16: Purposes of learning English (n=45)

Respondents were given the opportunity to select multiple answers for this question and to provide their own information if they wish. The above figure shows that the most prominent purposes for learning English are to achieve career success and to be effective in communication. A large portion of the respondents require English knowledge for their educational purposes. 12 to 15 respondents have stated identified social status, acceptance and helpfulness in daily lives as purposesin learning English language.

Question no. 12 of the survey gathered information regarding the customer's preferred learning mode. This information mainly helps to figure out the place element of the marketing mix which was identified in the literature by Raj et.al. (2013) as the location where an educational institute would deliver their offerings and interact with the students. It would also act as a variable in psychological segmentation. The results of the responses are shown in the figure 17 below.
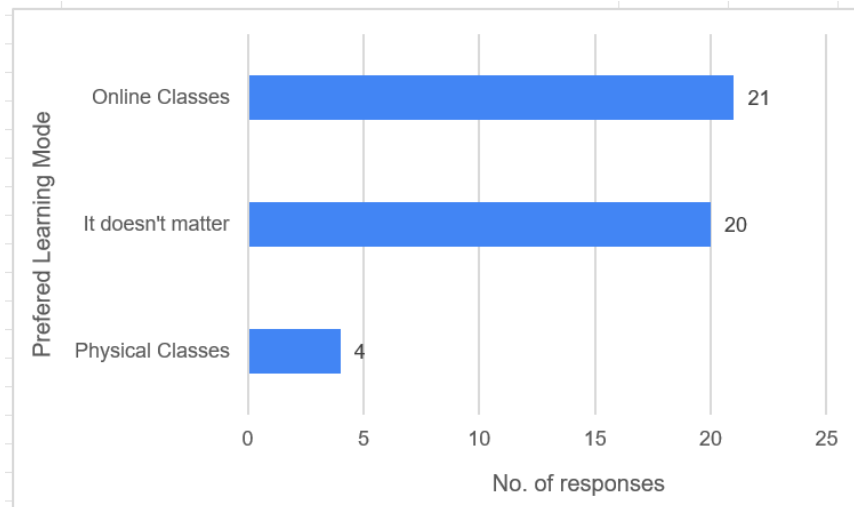
Figure 17: Preferred learning mode (n=45)

It is evident from the details demonstrated in figure 17, that 21 customers (47%) prefer to attend online classes while another 20 (44%) are not concerned about the mode of learning. Only 4 respondents (9%) wish to attend classes entirely in a physical environment.

Questions 15 and 16 in the survey questionnaire collected information regarding customer perception towards the teachers' track record and the institute's reputation. The information obtained from these two questions could mainly be used for segmenting the customers based on behavioral grounds. Further, this information is intended to support significantly in determining people and place elements of the marketing mix (elaborated according to Raj et.al. (2013) in the literature) respectively. As discussed in the thesis literature, according to LinkedIn (n.d.), during the situational analysis phase in the SOSTAC framework, an assessment of the internal environment needs to be carried out. The findings of these questions will provide an understanding about consumer expectations which could be compared with in order to assess the organization's existing status.

The analysis of the answers received for the two questions are discussed below.

No. It doesn't matter as long as he/she teaches well.

Yes. He/she should have a proven track record.
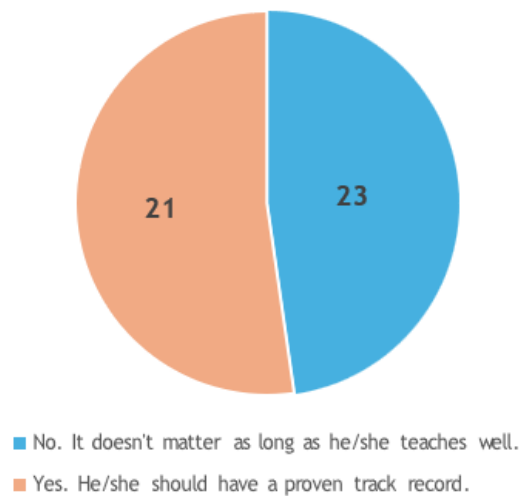
Figure 18: Expectation on teachers (n=44)

As illustrated in the figure 18, respondents from the target customer base have a distinct divided perception regarding the teacher's reputation. While 23 respondents (52%) believe that the quality of the education they receive is reflected through the teacher's past track record, 21 of them (48%)are not concerned about it. However, it is important to notice that there is no clear leniency towards either of the responses in this question hence both perceptions would have to be considered when constructing the marketing strategy especially the "people" element of the marketing mix which is identified in the thesis literature where the academic staff is a key component (Raj. et.al. 2013).

No. I am only interested about learning the language.

Yes. It reflects the quality of education.
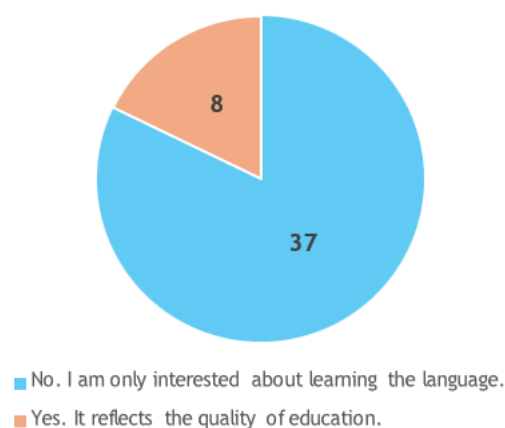
Figure 19: Expectations on the institute (n=45)

Figure 19 demonstrates that, unlike the question prompted regarding the teachers' track record, customer opinion is much clear regarding the relationship between the quality of education and

the reputation level of the institute. A majority of 37 respondents (48%) do not seek for a reputed institute and only concerned about fulfilling their language needs. However, 8 respondents (18%) believe that the quality of the education is reflected through the reputation of the institute.

Questions no. 17 and 18 were included in the survey in order to figure out the expectations of the customers in terms of course content. The respondents were given the opportunity to select multipleoptions along with their own statement (if any) for these questions.
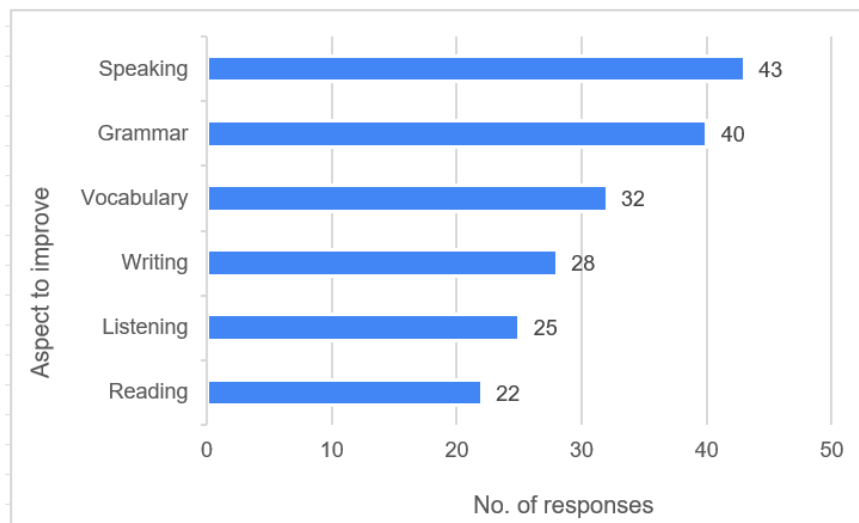
Figure 20: Aspects of English that need to be improved (n=45)

The response rate shown in figure 20 indicates that a large portion of the respondents believes that their speaking ability and the knowledge regarding grammar rules need to be improved. Responses "Speaking", and "Grammar" have received 43 and 40 responses respectively. As per the respondents it is observed that the target audience have given the next priority to develop their English "Vocabulary" and "Writing" abilities while the "Reading" and "Listening" have received the least number of responses.
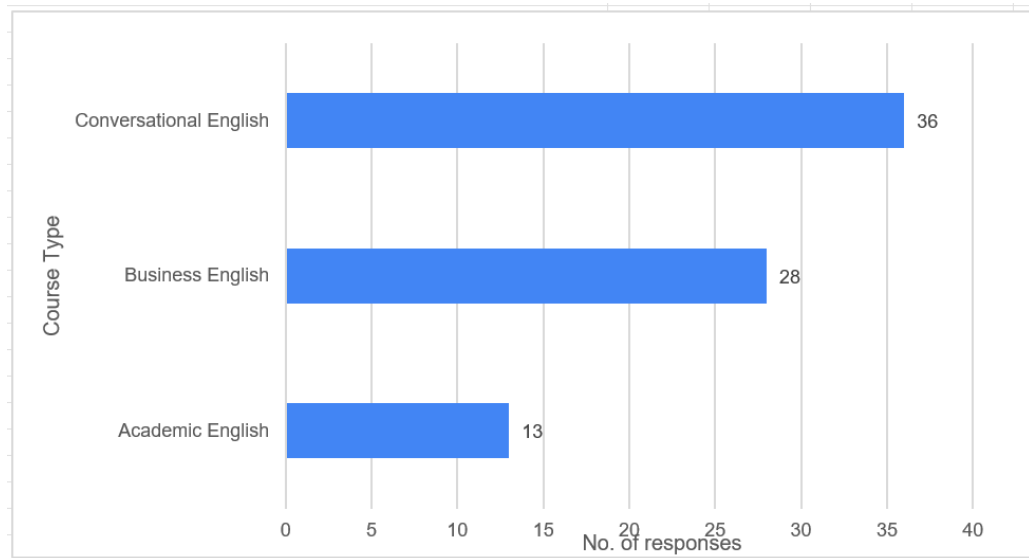
Figure 21: Course type preferences (n=45)

Survey question no. 18 prompted the customer to state regarding the types of English courses that they wish to take. As shown in figure 21, Conversational English has been marked as the course type which is required by most of the respondents who represent the potential audience. 28 respondents require Business English courses while 13 have stated that they require Academic English courses. The responses received for this question could directly be considered when deciding on the course content which was elaborated by Raj et.al. (2013) in the thesis literature as a part of the "Product" element of the marketing mix.

As discussed in the literature, according to LinkedIn (n.d.), the first phase of the SOSTAC framework which is the "situational analysis" includes an analysis of the organization's competition. Questions no. 19, 20 and 21 had been included in the survey questionnaire in order to gather information related to the competition.
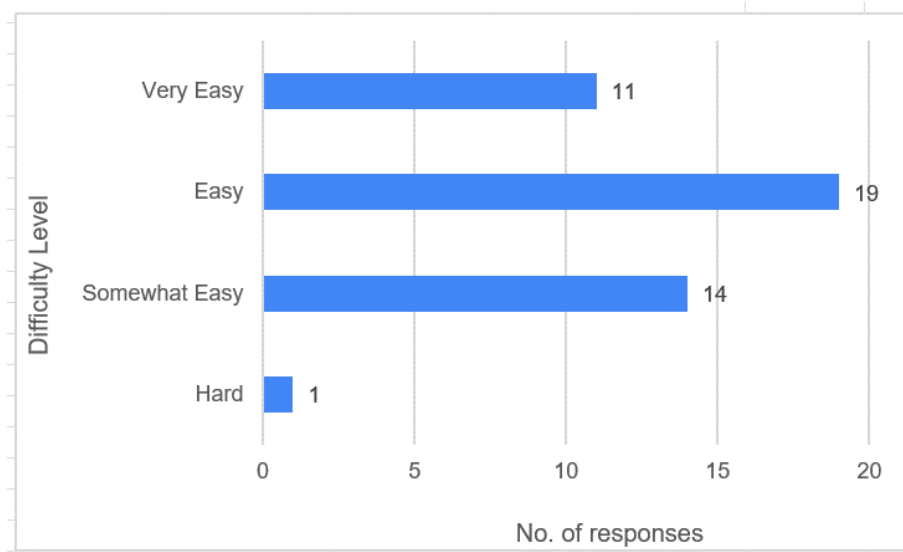
Figure 22: How easy it is to find an English course (n=45)

Survey question no. 19 asked the respondents regarding the difficulty level in finding an English course in their area. A likert scale was given to answer where scale 1 represented very hard and scale 5 represented the difficulty level as very easy. As clearly indicated in figure 22, 44 respondents (98%) have marked within the somewhat easy to very easy (3 to 5) range of the likert scale. Thus it is evident that the competition prevails in a highly active state making it easy for the English language education seekers to find a solution for their needs.
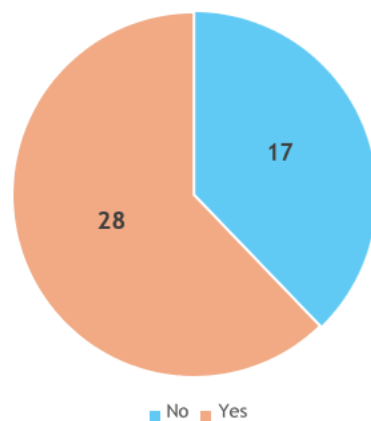
Figure 23: Respondents' previous experience in attending English courses (n=45)

The question shown in the figure 23 had been added to the survey in order to determine whether thepotential customers have earlier been using a similar product/service so that they carry previous experiences which they would probably use to benchmark or compare against the services offered bythe organization. Additionally, similar to the previous question, this too helps to realize

the extent to which the competition has reached the potential audience. The responses received for the question reveal that a majority of 28 respondents (62%) had been attending a course previously. This indicates that the organization needs to consider the competition with high significance when performing their marketing activities.

The next question (question no. 21) was an open-ended question which is included in order to gatherinformation regarding customer perceptions and experiences of the English courses they have been previously attending. A total of 21 responses have been received and each response was identified as a like or a dislike regarding the previous experience. Further, each response was categorized (refer table 11 in appendix 2). Two responses out of the 21 could not be identified as a like or a dislike regarding the previous course hence a total of 19 responses were considered for further analysis.

A key observation from the analysis is that 8 responses have made positive comments (Like) while 11responses have made negative comments. Thus it is clear that the target audience have mixed feelingsregarding their previous English courses with a slight leniency towards negativity. Further, it was evident that all responses have either made a comment regarding the course content or the lesson delivery. However, three responses do not indicate any specific category hence 16 responses will be considered for further analysis. Out of the 16 responses 11 responses (69%) are made regarding the course content whereas 5 responses (31%) are regarding the lesson delivery. Thus it is observed that the customers have been more concerned regarding the course content when expressing their feedback. While the comments on lesson delivery are mainly focused around the effectiveness of teaching and understanding the lessons, among the comments regarding the course content it was noticed that multiple responses were made highlighting the importance of spoken English (4 comments) and grammar (2 responses). These findings would be useful in the process of determining the "product" element of the marketing mix which is illustrated in literature. These findings would be useful in the process of determining course content which is a part of the "product" element of the marketing mix as illustrated by Raj et.al. (2013) in the literature.

Responses illustrated in figure 24 and figure 25 target to receive information regarding the channels used by the customers for information search and evaluation of available alternatives. This information directly relates to the "information search" and "evaluation of alternatives" stages of the five stage decision making model by Panwar et.al. (2019) included in the thesis literature.
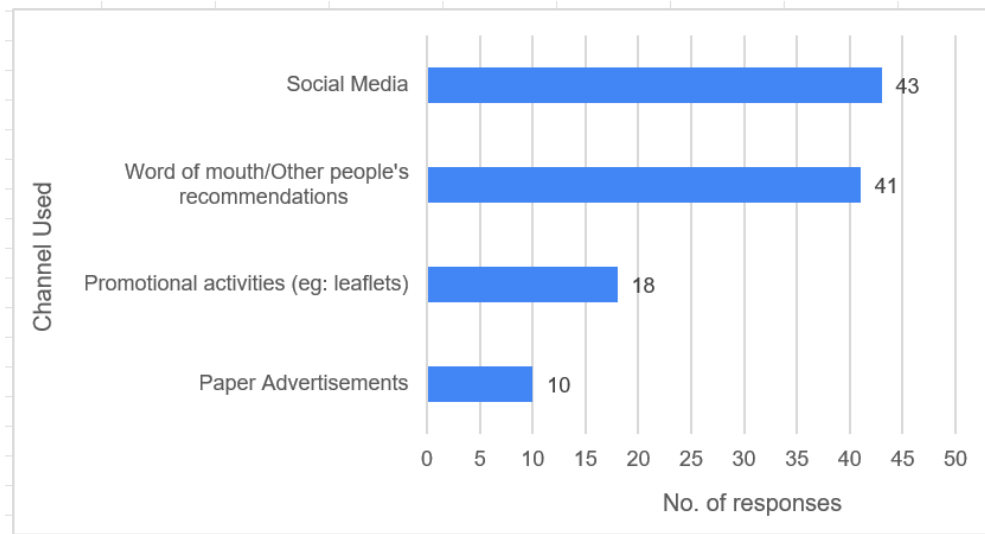
Figure 24: Channels used for information search (n=45)

The question 22 of the survey questionnaire gathered information regarding the channels that customers usually use in order to search details regarding a suitable English course. While the respondents could select multiple answers for this question it is evident that a vast majority of 43 respondents use social media to carry out the information search. (figure 24) Furthermore 41 respondents consider the comments made by other people when searching for an English course forthem. As discussed in the thesis literature, according to Raj. et.al. (2013) the communication related efforts carried out by an education institute construct the promotion element of the marketing mix of an educational institute. Hence the findings of this question could also be used when determining the channels to be utilized for communication activities.
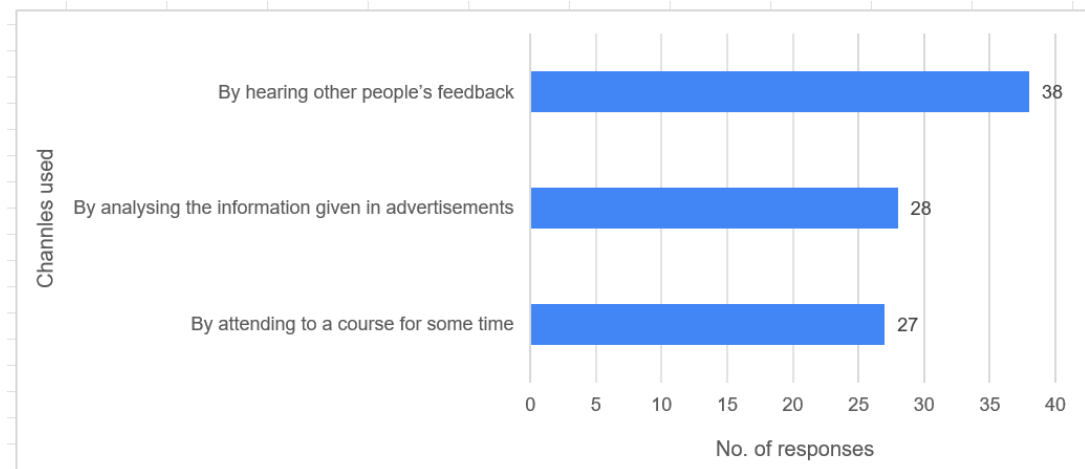
Figure 25: Channels used for choosing between alternatives (n=45)

The question 23 intended to collect information regarding the ways in which potential customers evaluate the alternatives they found through the information search. As shown in figure 25, the responses received clearly indicate that customers highly rely on other people's feedback (38 responses) when comparing the options available. Moreover, by receiving 28 and 27 responses respectively, it is noticed that customers also use the information in advertisements as well as their ownexperience by attending a course for some time to decide the best alternative. A notable observation of both the above questions is that people's feedback, opinions and experiences play a major role in the decision-making process of potential customers.

Questions 24, 25 and 26 aimed to receive information regarding the target audience's perceptions oncourse pricing which is discussed in the literature as indications to be utilized when determining the price element of the marketing mix (Raj et.al., 2013).
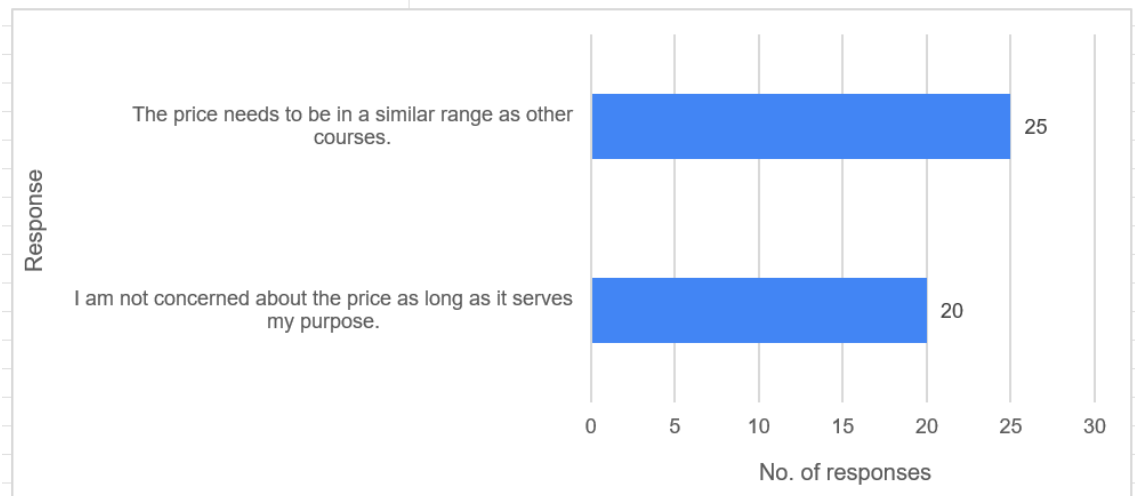
Figure 26: Perception on the course pricing (n=45)

The figure 26 above shows that, 25 respondents (56%) prefer prices in par with the market average while 20 respondents (44%) are only concerned about the derived value. None of them have requested the price to be lower than the market range. These findings also provide insights into determining the pricing strategy that has been discussed in the literature. It is observed that the competition based pricing strategy which is illustrated by Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016) could be chosen as the most fitting strategy to be utilized for the commissioning organization. Additionally, these findings indicate the level of price sensitivity of the potential customer base which could be utilized in internal environment analysis as well as in psychological segmentation.

Survey question no. 25 intends to collect information that is useful in determining the fee structure of the courses.
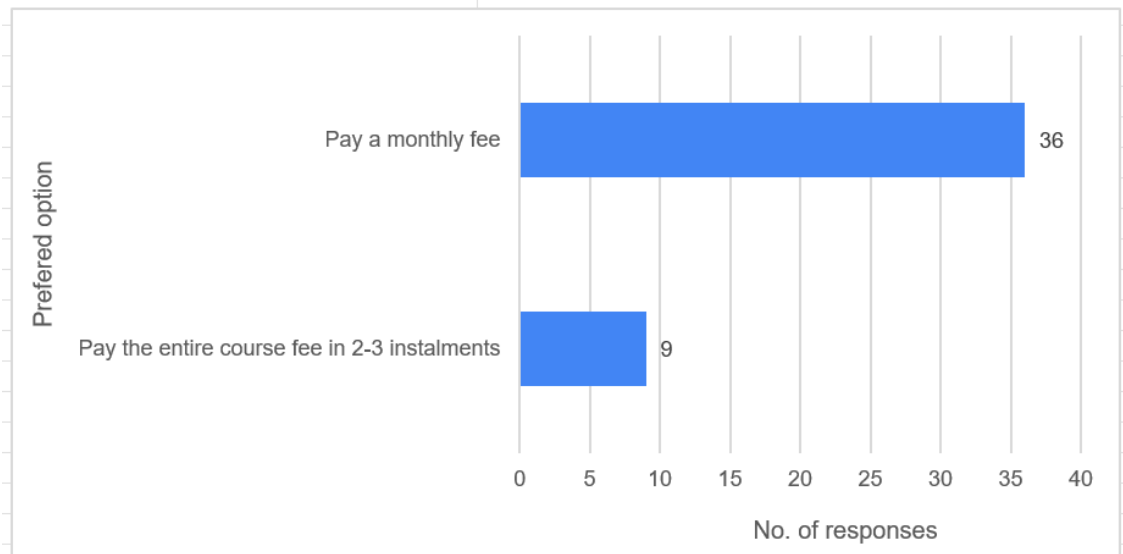
Figure 27: Opinions on payment plans (n=45)

As indicated in figure 27, the respondents have provided a clear reflection of the potential customers where 36 of them (80%) have stated that they prefer to pay a monthly fee. 9 respondents (20%) prefer to pay the course fee in few instalments whereas none prefers to pay the entire fee at once. These findings indicate that the customers have a strong interest in paying a monthly fee which relates to the "monthly payment plans" free structure identified in the literature as elaborated by James (2019).
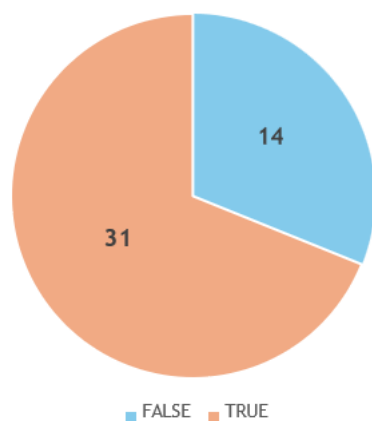
Figure 28: Perception on trying out two free classes (n=45)

As shown in figure 28, the responses received prove that 31 respondents (69%) have marked True whichmeans that if the first two classes of a particular English language course are offered free of charge, they will try it out. 14 respondents (31%) have marked their answers negatively. This question specifically explores whether the "try before you buy" option discussed in the literature as one of fee structures identified by James (2019) is a feasible option for the organization to utilize as a tactic in capturing new customers. The responses received prove that customers would accept the "try before you buy" option if they were offered.

As discussed in the thesis literature, Strong (2014) describes that, the fifth phase of the SOSTAC framework is "control". Strong (2014) has further elaborated that conducting satisfaction survey is one measure that could be used to assess whether the marketing efforts that were employed have been paid off. Questions no. 27 and 28 evaluate the target audience's tendency in sharing their feedback therefore evaluating the possibility of using it as a performance measure. Survey question no. 27 tried to understand whether the customers share their experiences with the service provider and while question no. 28 tried to realize whether they share it with other people (third parties). The responses received are shown in below figures.
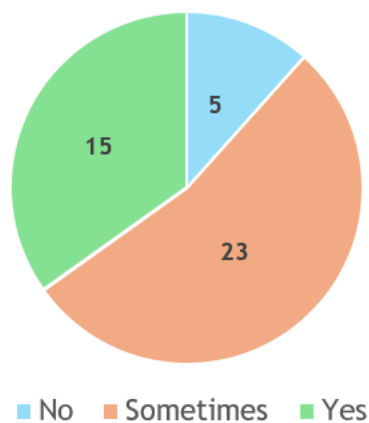
Figure 29: Tendency on sharing feedback with the service provider (n=43)

As indicated in figure 29, a majority of 23 respondents (54%) have answered as "sometimes" while 15 respondents (35%) have conveyed that they share their experiences with the service provider. Only 5 respondents (12%) have answered "No" to this question.
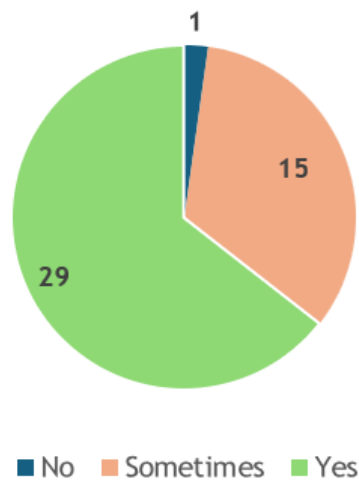
Figure 30: Tendency on sharing feedback with third parties (n=45)

When the potential customers were asked about sharing feedback with third parties a clear majority of 29 respondents (64%) have directly conveyed that they do so (figure 30). Another 15 respondents (33%) have answered "sometimes" while only 1 respondent (2%) has stated that he/she does not share their experiences with others. The key observation from the above two questions is that the organization's target customers have a significant tendency of sharing their experiences both with the service provider and with third parties. However, when comparing the responses received for the two questions it is evident that although the organization directly receives only the feedback shared with them, customers appear to express themselves with third parties more often than with the service provider itself.

The last question of the survey was an open-ended question where the respondents were given the opportunity to express any comments, suggestions or opinions they have with regards to English language learning. This question was added to the survey in order to obtain any relevant information that respondents have but has not been able to capture through the survey questions. Altogether 13 respondents have answered this question however if the provided answer had already been prompted through survey questions, such answers were removed from the analysis to avoid repetition.

A validity check was performed for each response (refer table 12 in appendix 2) and it identified below four responses to be considered for future analysis.

1. Should teach from the basics.

2. Need to use the language more often in order to achieve fluency.

3. Learning should be fun and effective.

4. Individual attention is required.

The meanings of those responses can be summarized into a single sentence as below.

"English Language should be taught from the basics in a fun and effective way while providing individual attention to the students and encouraging the frequent use of language". The core message of this could be used in structuring the organization's course offerings which is identified in the literature according to Raj et.al. (2013) as a part of "product" element in the marketing mix of an educational institute.

6 Interview Results and Discussion

This section analyses the findings from the interview, which served as a supplementary method for collecting data. The primary focus of the data collection was particularly on the academic staff, lesson delivery methods, as well as the competitive landscape. The operations manager of the institute was chosen as the resource person (referred as D.P.) for this interview considering his knowledge and expertise regarding these areas. The list of interview questions is included in the appendix 3. The findings derived from this interview are intended to be utilized for the situational analysis which has been identified in the thesis literature according to Strong (2014) as the first phase of the SOSTAC framework.

As discussed in the thesis literature, Schlegelmilch (2016 as cited in Stephenson, 2024) identifies SWOT analysis as an effective tool to be used in the process of analyzing the internal environment. Thus, with the intention of utilizing the outcomes in the SWOT analysis, the interview initiated by exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the academic staff. The interviewee initially highlighted the following strengths of the academic staff: exceptional language proficiency, a strong emphasis on flexibility and adaptability, and knowledge in managing online platforms. It was also revealed that teaching experience and track record were perceived as weaknesses.

"The language proficiency of our academic staff stands out, surpassing that of other language institutes, Additionally, our staff demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and adaptability, while also being well-equipped and highly knowledgeable in managing online platforms. The institute's academic staff lacks proven teaching experience and relevant qualifications or certifications related to English language teaching" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Thereafter the discussion shifted to dynamics related to staff acquisition. It was mentioned that academic staff, serving as the primary resource personnel, have opportunities to explore other institutes or establish their own ventures, posing a retention challenge. Additionally, the institute's recent establishment contributes to difficulties in attracting new staff due to job insecurity. However, despite challenges in gathering specialized personnel, operations can commence with a single teacher.

"Attracting new academic staff can be challenging for our relatively newly established institute, leading to uncertainty about job consistency and security. While gathering academic staff with specialized knowledge presents a challenge, having even a single teacher is sufficient to initiate operations"(D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

The discussion then shifted to lesson delivery methods and their associated costs. Key findings from the discussion include the institute's utilization of the Zoom platform for online teaching, with the flexibility to transition to alternative platforms at minimal switching costs. Additionally, teaching materials sourced from online marketplaces which facilitate cost effective procurement for the organization.

"The institute currently conducts online teaching through the Zoom platform and has the option to transition to similar platforms like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, or GoTo Meeting at little to no additional cost. Additionally, most teaching materials used by the institute are purchased from online marketplaces such as eBay and Daraz, providing ample availability of resources"(D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

The discussion shifted towards analyzing the competitive landscape findings of which primarily are aimed to be utilized in the Porter's five force analysis. The key outcomes reveal that the English language market consists of various players, including internationally and locally recognized institutes, individual teachers with substantial student bases as well as less popular institutes and teachers. Additionally YouTube channels dedicated to English language teaching contribute to the competitive landscape. Each service provider employs a distinct content delivery method.

"With regards to the competition, it is apparent that there's a diverse range of providers, although the exact number of competitors remains unknown. This includes internationally recognized institutions, local favorites, and individual educators with significant followings. Additionally, there are smaller institutes and teachers, as well as a notable presence of Sri Lankan and international YouTube channels. Each provider brings their unique approach to content delivery, often using it as a key factor in attracting and retaining their audience"(D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

It was also revealed that the institute, being a newcomer in the market, faces a challenge in raising awareness among potential customers.

"As a new entrant in the market, the institute faces a challenge in gaining visibility among potential customers, who may not yet be aware of its existence. Meanwhile, established service providers are already known within the market and have begun receiving feedback regarding their content" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Following the examination of the institute's visibility among potential customers, the discussion turned to assessing the likelihood of customers switching between service providers. It was revealed that switching costs for customers often involves no monetary cost.

"As most programs feature affordable pricing and monthly fees, shifting from one course to another typically does not impose any financial burden on customers" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

The conversation subsequently transitioned to analyzing the dynamics surrounding new entrants in the market and the key finding was that new entrants can readily penetrate the market.

"The market is pretty open for new players. There aren't any significant barriers, like government regulations or industry specific constraints, that could stop someone from getting in. You don't need a lot of money to start. All you really need is a computer and internet connection. So, it is pretty easy for anyone to jump in and get started" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Following the findings on market entry dynamics, the conversation shifted towards exploring the potential for substitution within the market. Firstly, inquired regarding the nature of substitutes available within the market followed by inquiries made regarding their presence in the market and the associated costs for customers to switch between them. The following statement revealed that there is a variety of substitute options available.

"Customers see options like self-study materials, university courses, and English teaching social media channels as alternatives to what we provide" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Further, it was indicated that the mentioned substitute options are abundant and readily accessible in the market. Additionally, the switching cost incurred by customers revealed to be minimal to zero.

"There's a wide range of easily accessible options, many of which don't cost customers anything, and switching between options doesn't really cost them much, if anything at all" (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

7   Development Task

The findings of the survey results will be utilized in this section to carry out the development task which is the development of a marketing strategy for the commissioning organization: Simple English Academy. The SOSTAC framework discussed in the literature will be used as a guideline for this development. Each phase of the SOSTAC framework has been taken into consideration.

7.1   Phase 1 – Situational Analysis

As discussed in the thesis literature, during this initial phase the internal and external environments of the organization is analyzed along with its competition (LinkedIn, n.d.).

7.1.1   SWOT Analysis

It is mentioned in the thesis literature that the factors that SWOT analysis could be conducted in order to assess and evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the organization (indeed, 2023). Table 5 below illustrates identified factors in designated quadrants.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• The language proficiency of the academic staff is observed to be at a higher level compared with the other language institutes (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).	• The institute is a new player in the market hence the potential customers are not aware of its existence whereas the existing service providers are known and already generating feedback regarding its content (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024). As 41 out of 45 survey respondents (91%) use word of mouth and others'
• The institute staff is equipped with and well knowledgeable in handling online platforms. (D. P., Personal Communication,	

27.04.2024). 41 out of 45 survey respondents (91%) prefer or willing to participate in online classes.

- The organization and the staff have a high degree of flexibility and adjustability (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024). Survey results proved that the customer preferences vary in terms of course type and aspects need to be improved (eg: spoken and grammar).

recommendations as a method for information search, the company offerings and perceived benefits could go unnoticed. (This factor could also be used as an opportunity which is explained under opportunities.)

- Institute's academic staff lack proven teaching experience and related qualifications/certifications (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024). The survey analysis revealed that 23 out of 44 survey respondents (52%) expect their teachers to have a proven track record.

Opportunities

- The market size is significantly large such that 51 out total 53 survey respondents expressed need of learning English language out of which 43 respondents feel the need of attending classes (as opposed to self-learning).

- 21 out of the 45 surveyed audience prefer online classes and another 20 have no objection in conducting the classes online. Hence a widespread customer base can be addressed using online resources.

- Customers are less price sensitive. 25 out of 45 respondents (56%) have stated that

Threats

- The survey results reveal that 44 out of 45 respondents (98%) find it relatively easier to find an English course (marked from "somewhat easy" to "very easy" in the scale). This means that the customers have a considerable number of alternatives to choose from and the competition has adequately raised awareness regarding their offerings. This proves that the competition is plenty and active.

the course price should be in par with the market price range whereas the remaining 20 (44%) are not concerned about the price which makes a total of 100%. None of the respondents expect the courses to be lesser than the market average. Hence the organization could invest in resources in order to make quality deliverables. • Generating a positive perception through successful service delivery can be utilized to widen the customer base. It was proven from the survey that the potential customers utilize the word of mouth and other people's feedback in order to pick and choose a suitable English course. 41 of 45 respondents (91%) use this method for course search and 38 (84%) use to choose a course. It was also proven that the customers have a high tendency of sharing their own feedback with third parties. 44 survey respondents out of a total of 45 (98%) had expressed that they would share their experiences with others.	

Table 5: SWOT Analysis

Summary and key findings of SWOT analysis:

1. The potential market is large in size however there are many English language institutes/teachers operating.

2. The institute is equipped with a flexible academic staff with higher language proficiency and technical knowledge; however, they lack proven track record of successful teaching and related qualifications.

3. As the customers seem not to be extremely price sensitive, the organization's financial freedom is not significantly restricted.

4. Word of mouth could be used to attract new customers by quality service delivery; however, it could also be a barrier since there is a possibility of not detecting the organization for the radar of potential customers as a good portion of them use others' feedback to search for a suitable course.

7.1.2 PEST Analysis

The thesis literature identifies the elaboration of Washington State University (2023) that PESTEL analysis as an effective tool to evaluate the factors in the external environment of an organization.

As significant information regarding ethical and environmental factors was not gathered from the data collection or from literature, the analysis was limited to political, economic, social and technical factors (PEST) as elaborated below.

Political factors:

- The education ministry of Sri Lanka has started the use of English language for all grade one students in government schools. This initiative has commenced in March 2023 (Ministry of education, 2023).
- 13,800 teachers have been trained to facilitate the English medium education in the country (Ministry of education, 2023).
- Sri Lankan president has stated that an "English for all" initiative is set to carry out by the government of Sri Lanka aiming to enhance the English language proficiency at school and university levels by the year 2030 (Economynext, 2023).

Economic factors:

- The economy of Sri Lanka had expected a 4.5% growth in the fourth quarter of 2023 (The economic times, 2024).

- The Sri Lankan economy has seen a positive growth after six consecutive quarters of negative growth (The economic times, 2024).

- In the year 2022 the inflation rate of Sri Lanka has had a record high of more than 50% however in March 2024 the country has seen the lowest inflation rate (0.9%) in since 2009 (Trading economics, 2024).

Social factors:

- English language has been becoming a medium of communication in national and international levels which increases the opportunities for quality employment for school leavers and graduates (De Silva & Palihakkara, 2020).

- English Language is considered as a status symbol in Sri Lanka which is perceived as an essential factor to gain a recognizable social status (Karunaratne, 2009 as cited in De Silva & Palihakkara, 2020).

- Teachers of English language (in government school system) are not sufficiently competitive in carrying out the teaching task effectively (Wijesekara, 2012).

- Shepherd and Ainsworth (2018) have discovered that female students (sampled from grade 11 students in government schools) demonstrate a higher ability and motivation in learning English than male students.

- Sri Lankan students who are at their undergraduate studies lack English speaking skills compared with reading, writing and listening skills (Kennedy, 2017).

Technological factors:

- English language learners in Sri Lanka significantly use social media platforms for language learning purposes (Halik & Rafeena, 2020).

- In alignment with Sri Lankan government initiative "Vision 2025", the government prioritizes technology and digitalization to address low IT literacy and internet access (De Silva &

Amaradasa, 2022). Proposed objectives include enhancing technical infrastructure in rural areas and integrating ICT literacy into the school curriculum to cultivate a skilled workforce essential for economic revitalization (De Silva & Amaradasa, 2022).

- Chong (2018) has identified the following technologies that could be employed in the teaching and learning of English language:
    - Blended learning - Combining face to face (physical) classes with online classes.
    - Mobile learning - Mobile application based courses that are equipped with fun and interactive features.
    - Gamification - Language learning through games.
    - Embodied learning - Courses (preferably technology based) designed with the idea that learning extends beyond mere memorization; it includes engaging the mind and body, collaborating, discussing, and exploring.
    - Learning and teaching management platforms (LMS) - Online platforms that provide learners with an online avenue to access handouts, participate in ongoing classroom discussions, and submit homework assignments. Additionally, these platforms now facilitate communication with parents and other stakeholders, offer teachers and administrators enhanced insights into the curriculum, and assist in managing lesson plans and educational materials.

Summary and key findings of PEST analysis:

1. From the government administration level, the country has realized the importance of English proficiency as they have kicked off several initiatives to stimulate the English language learning. This will increase the awareness regarding its importance among the public thus they would increasingly seek for ways to learn the language.
2. The adverse economic conditions may have resulted in people focusing their spending more on their primary necessities against a less prioritized need such as language learning. However, as the economy and inflation have become a lot better in recent months it could help the public to be in a better financial position so that they can consider investing on language learning.
3. The Sri Lankan society continues to have English language knowledge as one of the key requirements in order to succeed academically and professionally as well as to gain social recognition.

4. New technologies are increasingly used among communities for educational purposes where distance/online learning play a significant role.

7.1.3 Porter's five forces

It is discussed in the thesis literature that according to Schlegelmilch (2016 as cited in Stephenson, 2024) the competitive environment of the organization could be analyzed in the situational analysis phase of SOSTAC. Moreover, Danao and Watts (2024) indicate that Porter's five force model is an effective tool to analyze the competitive forces. This competitive environment of the organization has been analyzed using the Porter's five force analysis. This analysis has been conducted mainly based on the interview insights.

Power of suppliers

*   The institute currently uses the Zoom platform for online teaching and the organization can switch to a similar platform such as Microsoft teams, Google Meet or GoTo Meeting with minimum to zero switching cost (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).
*   The academic staff who act as the key resource personnel of the organization has number of other institutes to work for or could establish their own institute (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).
*   Attracting new academic staff is a challenging task as the institute is relatively a newly established company thus there is an uncertainty in job consistency and security (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).
*   Almost all teaching materials that are used in the company are purchased from online marketplaces such as e-bay and daraz (Sri Lankan site). Therefore those materials are largely available with plenty of different options and competitive prices (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Power of buyers

- The survey results reveal that, the potential customer base is quite large in number (45 out of 53 respondents could be categorized as potential customers) while a large portion of potential audience consider learning English as a requirement of high priority (scale 5 which represents the highest significance was marked by 20 respondents whereas 18 had marked 4)
- It was also revealed from the survey analysis that potential service seekers are less price sensitive as all the respondents expect course prices to be similar with market prices or they are more concerned about the quality of the content than the price.
- Switching costs for the customers are less as most of the courses have affordable price structures and monthly fees and for a customer to switch from one course to another it monetary terms the switching process does not cost anything (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Threat of new entry

- New players can easily enter into the market as there are no entry barriers in terms of government or any other industry/business specific regulations (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).
- An individual or an organization can commence business with a flexible budget as the minimum requirement for starting up would be a working computer with internet connection (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).
- Gathering academic staff with specialized knowledge can be considered as a challenge however having a single teacher is sufficient to initiate operations (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Threat of substitution

Products and services such as self-study materials, university courses and English teaching social media channels are considered as substitute options (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

- Above mentioned services are available in large number and easily accessible. There are many courses/materials that do not charge the customer (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

- The switching cost incurred for customers is minimum to zero (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

- However the survey results revealed that most of the customers (22 out of 52 respondents) prefer attending classes as opposed to other options which require self-learning efforts. Another 21 respondents expressed that attending classes needs to be done along with self-learning efforts which means that classroom learning (online or physical) is identified as a significantly effective method of learning English.

Competitive Rivalry

- The exact number of English language providers in the market is unknown however it is apparent that that a larger number of players exist in the market including but not limited to:
    - Internally recognized organizations.
    - Locally popular institutes.
    - Popular individual teachers with a large customer base.
    - Less popular institutes and teachers.
    - Sri Lankan based and international YouTube channels dedicated to English language teaching. (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

- The switching cost for customers is minimum to no cost (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

- The survey results revealed that 44 out of 45 respondents found it easy to find a service provider. Further 28 respondents have attended English language classes at some point. This proves that a lot of rival organizations operate in the market and they continuously admit new students.

- It is observed that each service provider has adopted a unique way of delivering the content and some of them utilize it as a factor to keep the crowd attracted (D. P., Personal Communication, 27.04.2024).

Summary and key findings of five forces analysis:

1. The buying power of academic staff stays at a higher level considering the fact that the company is new in business and the teachers have many other options available. However there is no significant negative impact from other suppliers such as learning material and online platforms.

2. Since customers have many options to learn language their buying power remains at a higher level however large potential and low price sensitivity supports to keep the entire force at a moderate impact level.

3. Threat of new entrants is significantly high because of minimum entry barriers in terms of legal and financial aspects.

4. Despite that fact that there are many options available to substitute classroom learning (including online classes), threat of substitution is at a moderate level because the target audience's willingness to depend entirely on a substitute is less.

5. Competitive rivalry is extremely high as there is a large number of players in the industry with their own uniqueness and popularity and the low switching cost raises the competitiveness even further.

7.2   Phase 2 - Objectives

In this 2nd phase of the SOSTAC framework, organization's marketing objectives are identified (Strong, 2014). As included in the thesis literature, Strong (2014) states that the company's desired position in terms of sales and marketing should be reflected in the objectives and they should be SMART (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time bound). The commissioning company's vision and mission statements are stated below as the marketing objectives need to be aligned with the company's future trajectory (Stephenson, 2024; LinkedIn, n.d.).

Vision

"To become the premier choice for English language education in Sri Lanka, setting the standard for excellence in English language proficiency while developing a community of empowered learners equipped for success in an interconnected world."

Mission

"Our mission is to provide comprehensive and dynamic English language education that caters to the diverse needs of our learners in Sri Lanka. Through innovative teaching methods, personalized learning experiences, and a supportive environment, we aim to cultivate language proficiency. By empowering our students with effective language skills, we prepare them to excel academically, professionally, and personally in an increasingly interconnected world."

Each objective has been identified based on a set of business requirements revealed through the situational analysis and indicated in vision and mission statements. As shown in below table 6, three such sets have been identified and each requirement set has been converted into a marketing objective along with a way to measure it.

Background/Requirement	Objective	How to measure
As this is a newly established company it needs to attract new customers. It was identified that the potential customer base is large in number and mass crowd could be addressed since majority of them are willing to attend online classes.	Achieve a target of 100 new customers within a period of one year starting from August 2024 to July 2025.	Number of new student enrolments.
Potential customers need to be aware of the organization if they are to choose this among intense competition.	Increase the brand awareness among the target audience by 40% within a period of one year from August 2024 to July 2025.	Pre and post survey for the target audience.
It was revealed that word of mouth impacts a lot in the customer decision making process. Hence it is important that the customers who experience the service to be satisfied with it. Furthermore, customer satisfaction level	Achieve a student satisfaction rate of 80% within a period of five months from August 2024 to December 2024.	Student feedback survey. Conducted monthly as the perception could change as they progress.

reflects the success of organization's marketing efforts.		

Table 6: Marketing Objectives

7.3   Phase 3 - Strategy

It is elaborated in the thesis literature that the third phase of the SOSTAC framework is known as the strategy phase within which the target market segmentation and positioning is carried out in order to support the established objectives (Strong, 2014).

7.3.1   Market Segmentation

The identified segments of the commissioning organization's potential customer base have been illustrated in the table 7 below. During this segmentation, the most prominent segments related to a particular variable were considered. The non-significant segments were clustered together as "other".

Category	Variables used	Identified segments. (listed from large to small)
Geographical	Residing district	1. Colombo 2. Kurunegala 3. Gampaha 4. Other districts
Demograph-ical	Gender	1. Male 2. Female
	Age group	1. 35 – 44 2. 25 – 34 3. Other
	Marital status	1. Married

		2.	Unmarried
	Job level	1.	Intermediate/Senior Staff
		2.	Middle Management
		3.	First Level Management
		4.	Entry Level
		5.	Other Levels
	Industry of employment	1.	Manufacturing
		2.	Education
		3.	Business and other services
		4.	Other Industries
Behavioral	Purpose of learning English	1.	To have a better career and a work life.
		2.	To be a better communicator.
		3.	For better recognition and acceptance.
		4.	It helps in day-to-day life.
		5.	Other purposes.
	Preferred learning mode.	1.	Online classes
		2.	Not concerned
		3.	Physical classes
	Aspects of English that need to be improved.	1.	Spoken
		2.	Grammar
		3.	Vocabulary
		4.	Other
	Preferred course type	1.	Conversational English
		2.	Business English
		3.	Academic English
	Channels used for information search	1.	Social media
		2.	Word of mouth/other recommendations
		3.	Other
	Channels used for choosing between alternatives	1.	Other people's feedback
		2.	Information on advertisements
		3.	By attending a course

	Willingness to try out free classes	1. Willing 2. Unwilling
	Shares feedback with the service provider	1. Sometimes 2. Yes 3. No
	Shares feedback with third parties	1. Yes 2. Sometimes 3. No
Psychological	Level of English language knowledge.	1. Satisfactory 2. Good 3. Excellent 4. Low
	Level of significance given for learning English.	1. Very Important 2. Important 3. Somewhat Important
	Concerned about teachers' track record.	1. Concerned 2. Not concerned
	Concerned about institute's reputation.	1. Concerned 2. Not concerned
	Price Sensitivity	1. Somewhat sensitive 2. Not Sensitive

Table 7: Market Segmentation

Notes:

- Job title was not considered for the segmentation process as the answers received for the survey question did not indicate any homogeneity.
- Responses received for the question which asked about the perception toward course prices were considered to determine the price sensitivity.

Figure 31 below contains an overview of the above mentioned segmentation categories, variables along with identified key market segments. The size of the boxes shown represents the relative size of the respective segments in the same category.
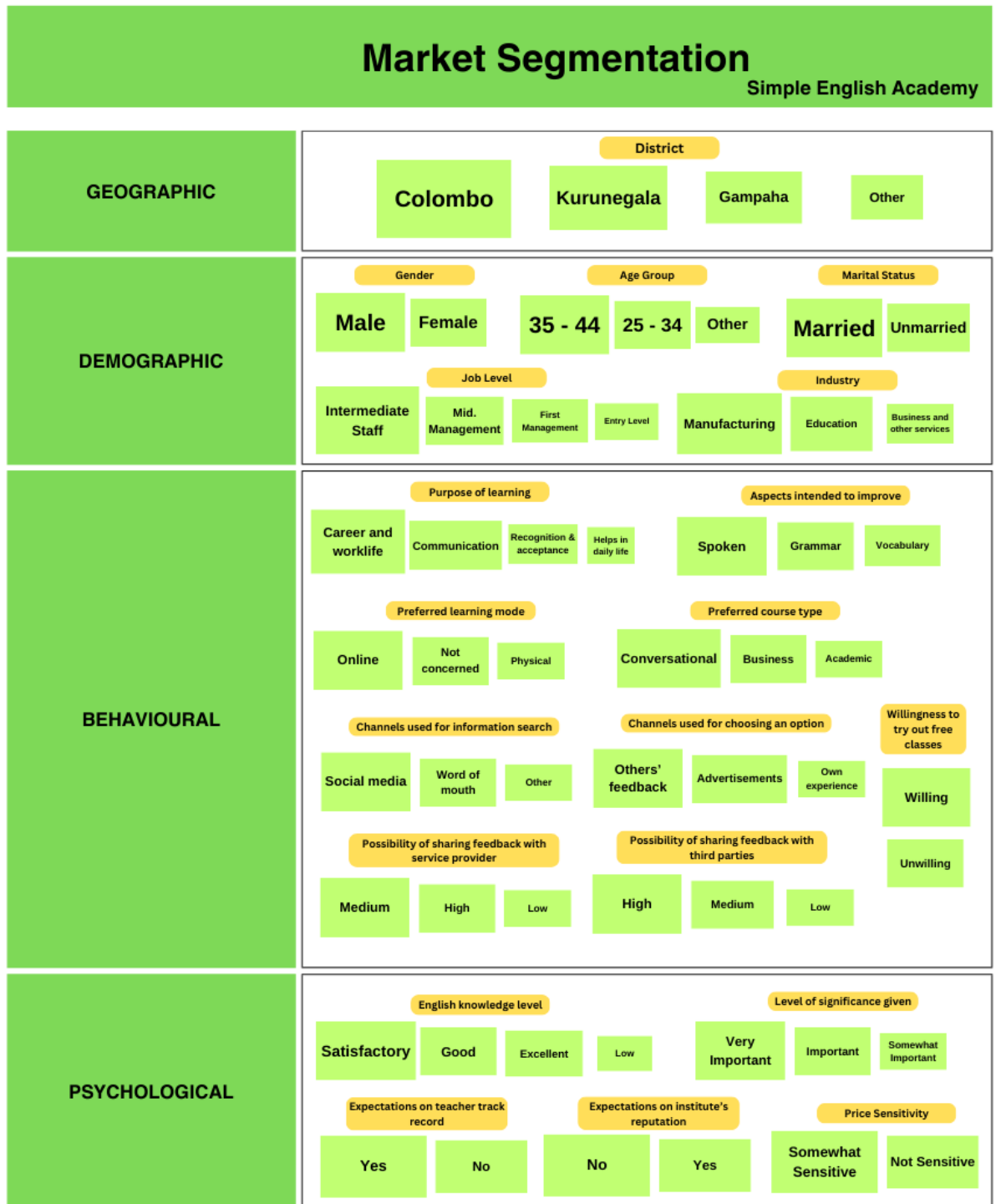
Figure 31: Market Segmentation Overview

7.3.2   Targeting

As discussed in the thesis literature, it is illustrated by Ruskin – Brown (2006) that, once the market segments are identified, specific groups of the identified segments need to be selected in order to direct the business focus towards them. The literature section includes three targeting strategies identified by Camilleri (2008); undifferentiated marketing, differentiated marketing and concentrated marketing.

According to Camilleri (2008), the concentrated marketing is focused on one or few identified subgroups and the failure within the identified cluster would result in a failure of the entire business operation which is a risk that the organization is not willing to take. Furthermore, Camilleri (2008), has elaborated that undifferentiated marketing demands higher costs which is not a luxury that company can afford. Being a newly established organization, the resource limitation also acts as a constraint to employ multiple marketing strategies and plans for several market segments. Hence undifferentiated marketing, which is identified by Camilleri (2018) as the process of offering a single market offer to all customers, has been selected as the most appropriate targeting strategy for the organization. It is further explained by Camilleri (2018) that the diverse requirements of the market needs be addressed by this single product. In order to fulfil this requirement, the largest market segments will be considered. By addressing the segments with largest number of potential customers, it can be assumed that the organization's product offer addresses the majority of the target market thus increasing the possibility of attracting new customers.

With the intention of effectively understanding the attributes and characteristics of consumers who represent majority of the potential market, the most significant customer segments will be considered when developing the organization's marketing strategy.

Below demonstrated (figure 32 and figure 32) are two customer personas each developed considering the two largest segments identified under each segmentation variable. While one persona contains the attributes of the largest identified segments the other persona contains details regarding the second largest segment identified under same set of variables. Hence the below two persons ideally represent a significant portion of the potential customer base.

Nuwan Perera

Age: 37 years	**District: Colombo**
Gender: Male	**Occupation: Intermediate/Senior Staff**
Marital status: Married	**Industry: Manufacturing**

PURPOSE OF LEARNING ENGLISH:

To have a better career and a worklife.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- Enhance spoken English skills.
- Learn conversational English.

ENGLISH KNOWLEDGE LEVEL:

PREFERENCE GIVEN FOR ENGLISH LEARNING:

PRICE SENSITIVITY:

PREFERRED LEARNING MODE:

Online ☑

Physical ☐

Not concerned ☐

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Experienced Teachers: ☑ Yes ☐ No

Institute Reputation: ☐ Yes ☑ No

CONSUMER HABITS:

Uses social media to search information regarding English courses. Comapres available alternatives by hearing other's expereinces.
If provided free of charge, Nuwan is willing to attend first few classes to experience by himself and decide on continuing.

POST PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR:

Most of the time shares his experiences with other people and sometimes shares feedback with the service provider.

Figure 32: Persona 1 – created with largest market segments. (image retrieved from: freepik.com)

Sanduni De Silva

Age: 29 years	**District: Kurunegala**
Gender: Female	**Occupation: Middle Management**
Marital status: Unmarried	**Industry: Education**

PURPOSE OF LEARNING ENGLISH:

To be a better communicator.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- **Enhance grammar knowledge.**
- **Learn business English.**

ENGLISH KNOWLEDGE LEVEL:

PREFERENCE GIVEN FOR ENGLISH LEARNING:

PRICE SENSITIVITY:

PREFERRED LEARNING MODE:

Online ☐

Physical ☐

Not concerned ☑

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Experienced Teachers: ☐ Yes ☑ No

Institute Reputation: ☑ Yes ☐ No

CONSUMER HABITS:

Uses other people's feedback and opinios to search information regarding English courses. Comapres available alternatives based on the information stated in course adverts.
Even if provided free of charge, Sanduni is not willing to attend first few classes to experience by herself and decide on continuing.

POST PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR:

Sometimes she shares her experiences with other people. However most times she makes sure that her feedback is conveyed to the service provider.

Figure 33: Persona 2 – created with second largest market segments. (image retrieved from: freepik.com)

In addition to the above personas, the five stages involved in the consumer decision making model by Panwar et. al. (2019) have been related to the largest market segments of the organization's potential customer base. The table 8 below specifies the stages, attributes considered to identify its behavior within the target audience and the most possible scenario generated for each stage. This information has been prompted through the survey questions and the scenarios have been developed using their result analyses.

Stage	Identified through	Scenario
Need recognition and problem awareness	• Purposes of learning English language. • Significance given for the learning purpose. • Impact of family commitments.	The requirement for English language knowledge has been emerged due its need in performing occupational duties and communication purposes. It is considered as an important task among other things in life which is slightly impacted with family related commitments.
Information search	Channels used for information search	Customers mainly browse social media to search for a suitable English language course and other people's opinions and experiences are also heard.
Evaluation of alternatives	Channels used to choose between available alternatives	Once few courses are shortlisted, other people's feedback and reviews are mainly considered to compare the attributes of available options. The information available in the course adverts are also considered when deciding to select the ideal English course.
Purchase	Target audience's perception on below attributes. • Teachers • Institute • Course type	The purchasing decision would be made on a product that fulfils following requirements. ✓ Taught by an experienced teacher.

	• Course content • Price	✓ Fun and effective learning experience. ✓ Targets to improve spoken English and grammar rules. ✓ Includes business related subject content along with conversational English. ✓ Taught from the basics. ✓ Individual attention is provided. ✓ Priced according to the market rates. ✓ Charges a monthly fee.
Satisfaction	Tendency of sharing comments.	The satisfaction could be expressed through the feedback which may be shared with the institute staff but would most likely be shared among others.

Table 8: Stages of decision-making.

7.3.3 Positioning

The thesis literature discusses positioning as the process of determining how the business wants to be perceived in the minds of its customers relative to the competition (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017). As discussed in the literature, according to Camilleri (2018), this can be articulated by developing "positioning statements". Table 9 below illustrates the development of the positioning statement for the commissioning organization based on the characteristics of a positioning statement indicated by Camilleri (2018). The table contains:

1. Each characteristic.
2. What needs to be conveyed under each characteristic to ensure that it is addressed by the positioning statement.

3. Part of positioning statement developed to convey the intended information.

Characteristic	What needs to be conveyed	Statement
Benefits	• Customers' ultimate purpose of learning English will be fulfilled. • Their intended aspects (eg: spoken, grammar etc:) will be improved. • Courses are equipped with effective content where customer preferences regarding the course type (conversational, business etc:) considered.	Our programs are designed to make sure that our students' ultimate expectations in learning English are met. Whether your focus is on improving spoken language, mastering grammar, or enhancing other specific skills, our courses are equipped with effective and targeted content to ensure comprehensive improvement.
Differentiation	Ineffective lesson delivery and course content that had been experiencing with competitors, will be avoided.	What sets us apart is our exceptional lesson delivery and carefully developed course content.
Skills, Resources and Credibility	Assurance provided regarding the knowledge and flexibility of teaching staff. Indicate that effective teaching materials and technology will be used.	Our knowledgeable and flexible teaching staff equipped with highly effective technology ensure an enriching journey for every student.
Defensibility	Achieved by incorporating following customer expectations to the institute's product offer. • Taught from basics. • Fun and effective learning experience. • Frequent use of language is encouraged. • Individual attention is provided.	Our product offering has been crafted ensuring that it is taught from the basics in a fun and effective way while providing individual attention to the students and encouraging the frequent use of language.

Table 9: Positioning statement development

By combining the parts of statement developed in the above table, the organization's positioning statement can be constructed as follows.

"At Simple English Academy, we make sure that our students achieve their ultimate expectations in learning English. Our carefully crafted course content combined with exceptional lesson delivery carried out by highly knowledgeable and flexible academic staff equipped with effective technology, ensure that every student's focused language skills are enhanced through an enriching journey which is taught from the basics in a fun and effective way while providing individual attention and encouraging the frequent use of language."

7.4   Phase 4 - Tactics

As discussed in the thesis literature the fourth stage of the SOSTAC framework involves figuring out the marketing tactics mainly by identifying the organization's marketing mix elements (LinkedIn, n.d.).

7.4.1   Marketing Mix

The thesis literature discusses that marketing mix generally consists of seven elements which are known as 7Ps. The 7Ps model includes Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process and Physical evidence (Kotler et. al., 2022; Zeithaml et al., 2006). The discussion below identifies the attributes that needs to be considered when developing the commissioning organization's marketing mix elements.

Product

According to Ruskin – Brown (2006), product represents the bundle of advantages customers could purchase from the company either as goods, services or both. In the context of educational services Raj et. al. (2013) elaborates that, the product of an educational institute refers to its

students while services refer to the intangible offerings such as courses and quality of teaching. This it was identified that this combination of services ultimately shapes the students' experiences making it the commodity which could be altered through marketing and other related activities. During the strategy stage of SOSTAC framework it was identified that the organization intends to offer a single offering to the market aiming to fulfil the needs of the majority. Hence it is essential to identify the attributes of the company which could be divided into three categories.

1. Course content.
2. Nature of the content.
3. Course delivery.

7.4.1.1.1 Course content

When considering the course content, the survey results received for course type and the aspects that need to be improved, provide a clear indication regarding how the course content should be shaped. As per the result analyses the primary focus should be given for conversational and spoken English followed by business English and grammar rules. The significance of spoken English and grammar was also highlighted while expressing customer feedback regarding previously attended courses. The other options such as academic English, vocabulary should also be considered according to the significance provided by the potential audience.

7.4.1.1.2 Nature of the content

With regards to the nature of the content it is essential to identify the nature of students who would most likely purchase the organization's offerings. The demographical data of the target customer audience provides an indication regarding this. Therefore the customer age, job level, industry of employment could be considered when developing the course content. In addition to this, the knowledge levels of the customers and their main purposes of learning English could provide an inspiration for the course content development process. Furthermore, the free form comments received by the potential customers reveal that the course content should be constructed from the basics.

7.4.1.1.3 Lesson delivery

While analyzing the respondent feedback received regarding the competitor performance, it was revealed that the customers are concerned about the effectiveness of lesson delivery. Therefore, it is important to employ effective teaching methods when conveying the subject matter to the

students. Moreover respondents had stated that the learning experience needs to be fun while frequent use of language should be encouraged.

Price

As mentioned in the thesis literature, Avlonitis and Indounas (2005 as cited in Amir et. al., 2016) has identified three pricing strategies that could be applied by educational institutes; cost based, competition based, and value based. As revealed through the survey results, the majority of the customers prefer the institution's course price to be in the similar range as other courses which means the competition. Therefore, the competition based pricing strategy can be identified as the most suited strategy to be employed when determining the course pricing. Additionally, the course price does not necessarily need to be below the market average as the potential customer base was revealed to be less price sensitive.

When considering the payment plans that had been identified by James (2019) which were elaborated in the literature, charging a monthly fee was seen as the ideal option since a large portion of potential customers conveyed that they prefer to pay a monthly fee than other available options. However the organization has the opportunity to introduce "try before you buy" option to its customers as a measure of attracting new customers (being a relatively new company) since the target audience revealed their high willingness to attend initial classes if offered free of charge.

Place

As included in the literature section, Raj et. al. (2013) indicate that in the context of educational services, place refers to the location where it delivers its offerings to the students while interacting with them. The survey results revealed that the potential customers primarily prefer to participate in online classes or they are not concerned about the delivery mode. Only a very few respondents strictly preferred a physical classroom environment. Therefore with regards to the lesson delivery place, online classrooms could be identified as the most suited option for the commissioning organization. Moreover this will enable the organization to be operated with a minimum number of resources and associated costs such as rent, chairs and tables, physical study

material, cleaning etc: Furthermore having a virtual setup will provide the organization to cater students located anywhere in the country thus lifting all the limitations related to their geographical location. For instance, the students from Colombo, Kurunegala and Gampaha which were revealed as the three main locations where the potential customers reside, cannot practically participate in a physical classroom at the same time considering the distance between the districts. However online classes will not only make it possible but also will enable students from all other locations to participate at the same time.

Promotion

The thesis literature states that according to Raj et. al. (2013) promotion refers to all sorts of efforts carried out by a service provider. When deciding on the promotional activities to be undertaken by the institute, it is important to consider the consumer behavior highlighted that at the stages of information search and evaluation of alternatives in the decision making model suggested by Panwar et. al. (2019). The survey results revealed that the consumers mainly utilize social media for information search and the advert information is significantly referred when deciding between available alternatives. Therefore the organization would have to utilize social media platforms to promote its offerings to the target audience. In order to effectively maximize the reach of the social medial promotions, the organization can refer the demographic information received through the survey results. Furthermore, as word of mouth and hearing to others voice was revealed as a prominent mode which consumers use for information search and evaluation of alternatives, the organization can indirectly capitalize on this by presenting customer reviews and insights as a part of their promotions.

People

According to Raj et. al. (2013) it was highlighted in the literature that an educational institute's academic and non-academic staff represent the people element. With regards to the commissioning organization, when considering the people aspect it is vital to focus on the quantity as well as quality aspects of the staff. As illustrated in the situational analysis, the academic staff in the organization is limited in number however is sufficient enough to cater the existing customers. Moreover, being a new player in the market both retaining the staff and attracting new staff

were seen as challenging tasks. It was also revealed at the internal analysis that the company staff is adequately knowledgeable and highly adaptive. Therefore the organization could ideally continue with its staff and as the customer base continues to grow along with the marketing efforts, it can look forward to increase the numbers thus utilizing the newly generated revenue for the new staff. However, since the target audience had emphasized on effective content delivery, it is essential to educate the staff regarding the customer expectations and identify any gaps which should be narrowed down using mutual efforts (both organization and staff). Furthermore, the survey results revealed that potential customers prefer their teachers to have a proven track record which they perceive as an indication of their teaching quality. However since the internal analysis revealed that the majority of staff lacks this, the organization can encourage and support its academic staff to obtain English language related certifications such as TOEFL which they can utilize to build confidence among the potential customers. With regards to the non-academic staff, the organization can continue to operate with the existing staff and decide on recruitments depending on the size of the customer base and other requirements.

Process

As indicated in the literature section process involves the execution of activities that increase the value and reduce the costs of a company's offerings and the process management is vital for companies that offer services (Muala & Qurneh, 2012). Since the commissioning institute offers a service that is delivered utilizing the technology, the organization needs to make sure that the customers can experience its services in an effective, simple and a hassle-free manner. This the organization should identify their main and sub processes, people involved in executing them (responsibility allocation) and the time frame/timeline within which they operate. It is equally important to implement a management system that administers the company's processes ensuring its smooth running and effective troubleshooting.

Physical Evidence

It is elaborated in the thesis literature that according to Raj et. al (2013), the physical evidence element in the marketing mix refers to the physical environment and the infrastructure created by the company. However as the commissioning organization is currently operating in a virtual

environment an intends to continue its operations virtually, the online presence and the atmosphere could mainly be considered under this element. The efficient process identification and management discussed under the process element would result in optimized virtual environment and infrastructure.

7.5   Phase 5 – Actions

It is mentioned in the thesis literature that during the Action stage of the SOSTAC framework, the tasks that need to be performed in order to execute the organization's marketing strategy should be outlined along with the responsibilities and timelines (Strong, 2014).

As mentioned in the table 10 below, the tasks related to the commissioning organization's marketing strategy have been identified under five key areas. Since the marketing objectives in phase 2 aim to initialize by August 2024 all key tasks mentioned below intend to complete their first cycle by the end of July. However it is important to note that all identified tasks are continuous processes which needs to be reviewed on continuous basis and take any necessary actions to ensure sustainability and consistency. When considering the responsible personnel, since the organization is operating in a small scale without a structural hierarchy, the responsibilities have been divided between the academic and administration staff categories.

Related Area	Tasks	Responsible staff category	Timeline for the first cycle
Course content	Analyze technical requirements (types and aspects) and develop the core content structure.	Academic	20th June 2024
	Analyze demographics along with other customer related attributes and	Academic	10th July 2024

	develop the curriculum accordingly.		
	Incorporate consumer expectations into the curriculum and develop lessons.	Academic	20th July 2024
Pricing	Analyze the pricing models of the competition.	Administration	30th June 2024
	Benchmark the findings of the competitor prices, compare against the cost structure and finalize the course fee.	Administration	15th July 2024
Promotional activities	Analyze and decide on social media platforms.	Administration	15th June 2024
	Design and develop the content.	Administration	15th July 2024
	Schedule the adverts and publish.	Administration	20th July 2024
Academic Staff	Analyze consumer expectations regarding the lesson delivery and identify knowledge gaps.	Administration and Academic	30th June 2024
	Identify resources containing the required knowledge and create a plan to obtain that knowledge.	Administration and Academic	15th July 2024
	Search for the related certifications for English teachers and create a plan to obtain them.	Administration and Academic	15th July 2024

	Review the staff workload and develop a recruitment plan.	Administration	20th July 2024
Online classes	Review the existing technology and platforms used and ensure its smooth functionality.	Administration	10th July 2024
	Create a plan to deliver technical support when and where necessary.	Administration	31st July 2024
Process management	Identify all key processes related to the business operation and create SOPs covering related main and sub tasks.	Administration	31st July 2024

Table 10: Action Plan

7.6   Phase 6 – Control

It is discussed in the thesis literature that according to Strong (2014), during this phase of the SOSTAC framework, systems must be established to obtain and analyze the performance data in order to identify any gaps between the expected and actual outcomes which highlight the need to incorporate changes into the plan/strategy.

In the context of the commissioning organization, the KPIs can be derived from the marketing objectives outlined during the phase 2 as they indicate the ultimate results of a successful marketing strategy. Thus the key KPIs can be identified as follows.

7.6.1 Number of new student enrolments.

This is an internally measured KPI which indicates whether the organization's marketing efforts have successful enough to attract new customers. This can be further extended to calculate the:

a) Monthly growth in new enrolments. – This KPI would indicate the consistency and direction of the organization's marketing activities. If the growth is a positive figure, it would mean that the marketing efforts continue to be successful whereas a negative growth would signal the team for a review.

b) Student conversion rate. – As the marketing strategy's intention is not only to attract students but also to retain them, the conversion rate would indicate whether the strategy is effective in such a way that newly enrolled students complete their journey with the organization. A negative result would indicate that the target audience's requirements may have not been met in terms of course content and lesson delivery (including the online infrastructure)

7.6.2 Awareness survey results.

The results of the pre and post surveys conducted with the target audience will provide an indication mainly regarding the promotional element of the marketing mix. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding these surveys will have to be conducted periodically and compare with the previously conducted survey thus revealing how well the organization has been positioning in the minds of the potential customers relative to its competitors.

7.6.3 Student satisfaction rate.

Measured through the satisfaction survey feedback, this can be identified as the most effective KPI which enables the organization to measure the success of all elements of the marketing mix. Therefore any underperforming area can be isolated and thereafter identify which of the tasks mentioned in the action plan need to be reviewed and revisited. However it is essential to make

survey questions in such a way that it tackles all areas of the marketing strategy, and it is equally important to repeat the survey periodically, to identify the trends.

8   Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to develop a marketing strategy which includes a marketing plan, for Simple English Academy. The purpose of the thesis was to explore the target market to identify customer requirements and recognize the aspects that need to be considered when developing an effective marketing strategy. At the same time, the attributes of the consumer behavior, service marketing and features of strategic marketing were researched thus employing the findings to construct the marketing strategy. The main research question of the thesis was "how can an effective marketing strategy be developed for Simple English Academy?" In order to figure out the most fitting answer to this question it was divided into five sub questions.

The first sub question is "What aspects need to be considered when constructing a marketing strategy for a service offering?". Primarily the gap between the existing status and expected status of the marketing mix needs to be identified and necessary measures need to be taken to narrow it down. Further the dynamics of the internal and external environments need to be taken into consideration. Most importantly as the market is filled with competitive players, executing effective promotional activities emerged as a significant aspect since raising awareness is considered as a crucial factor for a newly established organization. Thus the promotional content needs to be carefully developed and customized according to the market demographics. Implementing measures to monitor performance was also crucial to ensure that the marketing strategy remained aligned with customer expectations and market dynamics.

The second sub question was "who are the potential customers of the organization". The survey responses primarily filtered the audience based on their willingness to learn English followed by their preferred learning methods. This revealed that many of the audience came through the filters confirming that the market is large in size. Subsequently the market the prominent market segments were identified based on geography and demographics. The English knowledge level also supported answering this question which revealed that most of the customers believe themselves to be in the satisfactory level.

When considering the third sub question; "What are the top priorities and preferences of the identified potential customers?", it was revealed that the majority of them consider learning English as a high priority task in their lives which is slightly affected by family commitments. It was

also discovered that consumers mainly have career related objectives in learning English followed by communication and social purposes. Speaking skills and grammar knowledge were the main aspects that consumers wish to improve by attending English classes. Conversational English was proved to be the course type preferred by the most followed by business English. With regards to course expectations, majority of customers preferred online classes and had revealed to have high expectations of teachers. However expectations of institute reputation were not prominent.

The five stages in the consumer decision making model of Panwar et.al. (2019) were analyzed in order to answer the fourth sub question; "What is the decision making process followed by the customers before finalizing a purchase?". While the consumer objectives of learning English provided an indication regarding the need recognition stage, it was revealed that consumers mainly use social media platforms to search for a suitable English course followed by hearing other's experiences. It was also revealed that word of mouth plays the most vital role when consumers evaluate the options that they have shortlisted.

The fifth sub question is "what factors affect the purchasing decisions of potential customers?". The study primarily proved that the consumer expectations identified as answers to the second sub question needs to be addressed when developing the course content and organizing other resources. This was further confirmed as the results analysis revealed the potential audience is not highly sensitive to the course price. However the customers had expressed their strong focus towards effective course content and lesson delivery through the comments stated regarding their previous experiences.

In conclusion, this thesis provided the opportunity to effectively research the potential consumer market in order to identify its attributes while recognizing other related factors in internal and external environments. The literature review provided the guidance to see through the findings of the collected data and convert them into meaningful information which were ultimately utilized to construct and effective marketing strategy for Simple English Academy.

9 Discussion

This section includes an elaboration regarding the reliability and ethical considerations of the research. It also includes the limitations of the study along with possible future research topics. The reliability of this study has been achieved by several key factors. Firstly, effective data collection methods were employed to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the information gathered. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of customer requirements and preferences. The use of validated survey instruments and standardized interview protocols minimized the risk of bias and enhanced the study's credibility. Additionally, a representative sample of participants was selected to ensure that the findings are generalizable to the broader population of Simple English Academy's potential customers. The credibility data collected through interviews was achieved by relying on interview data only for selected areas and choosing the most appropriate resource personnel who possess that information.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout this study to ensure the integrity and ethical aspects of the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (of surveys and interview), ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with all data being anonymized to protect the identities of the participants. Additionally, care was taken to avoid any potential harm to participants by ensuring that questions were respectful and non-intrusive. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study not only safeguarded the wellbeing and rights of the participants but also enhanced the credibility and ethical standing of the research findings.

The study encountered several limitations during the process. One significant limitation was the limited availability of industry specific and Sri Lankan market related literature sources. The scarcity of existing research and data in the specific niche of English language academies restricted the breadth of secondary data that could be analyzed. Additionally, obtaining company related internal data posed challenges, as such information could only be acquired through staff interviews. Further, comprehensive competitor related data was not readily available through secondary sources.

Looking forward, several compelling avenues for future research arise from the insights gained from this study. Further research into the dynamics of customer journey mapping could involve studies to track changes in consumer behavior over time. Additionally, investigating emerging trends in language education holds promise for developing innovative marketing strategies. Moreover, exploring strategies for expansion into international markets within the language education sector presents a rich area for future inquiry.

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Appendix 1 - Survey Questions

Exploring Interest in English Language Learning

Unveiling Customer Needs: A Comprehensive Survey to Understand Preferences and Desires

This survey is conducted solely for educational purposes, and your personal details will not be collected or shared. We do not request your email or name, ensuring complete anonymity. Thank you for participating.

Which district do you currently reside in? *

Choose ▾

Gender

◯ Male

◯ Female

Age Group *

◉ Less than 17

○ 18 - 24

○ 25 - 34

○ 35 - 44

○ 45 - 54

○ 55+

Marital Status *

○ Married

○ Unmarried

○ Prefer not to disclose

◉ Other:

No. of children *

Your answer

Job Level *

○ Entry Level

○ Intermediate/Senior Staff

○ First Level Management

○ Middle Management

○ Senior Management

○ Full Time Student

○ Unemployed

Job Title (if employed)

Your answer

Industry of employment (if employed)

Agriculture ▼

How would you rate your current English Knowledge*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Poor	●	○	○	○	○	Very Good

Would you be interested in learning English language? *

(●) Yes

(○) No

(○) Maybe

If you are, how significant is the importance of learning English for you at this time?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very Important

Which of the following best describes your main purpose for learning English? (select all that applies)

☐ To have a better career and worklife

☐ It's needed for my education/higher education

☐ It helps me to be a better communicator

☐ It helps in my day to day life

☑ It gives me better recognition and acceptance

☐ It uplifts my social status

☐ Other:

How would you like to learn?

○ By attending classes

○ Self learning

○ Both

○ It does not matter

When attending English classes I prefer:

○ Online Classes

○ Physical Classes

○ It doesn't matter

If you wish to attend classes do you expect the teacher to have a solid reputation?

○ Yes. He/she should have a proven track record.

○ No. It doesn't matter as long as he/she teaches well.

Do you expect the teacher to be employed by a reputed institute?

○ Yes. It reflects the quality of education.

○ No. I am only interested about learning the language.

Which aspect(s) in English language you think you need to improve by attending a course? (select all that applies)

☐ Writing

☐ Reading

☐ Speaking

☐ Listening

☐ Grammar

☐ Vocabulary

☐ Other:

What type(s) of English courses would you like to take? (select all that applies)

- [ ] Business English
- [ ] Academic English
- [ ] Conversational English
- [ ] Other:

How easy is it for you to find an English course in your area?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Hard	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Easy

Have you been attending an English course earlier?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If Yes, what did you like or dislike in that course?

Your answer

Which of the following channel(s) you normally use in order to search for an English course that suits you? (select all that applies)

- [ ] Social Media
- [ ] Paper Advertisements
- [ ] Promotional activities (eg: leaflets)
- [ ] Word of mouth/Other people's recommendations
- [ ] Other:

How would you choose which course suits you best? (select all that applies)

- [ ] By analysing the information given in advertisements
- [ ] By hearing other people's feedback
- [ ] By attending to a course for some time
- [ ] Other:

If we are to introduce you a course, how do you perceive the pricing of our courses?

- ( ) The price of the course should be lower than other similar courses.
- ( ) The price needs to be in a similar range as other courses.
- ( ) I am not concerned about the price as long as it serves my purpose.
- ( ) Other:

Once you choose a suitable English course, which one of below stated payment plans would you prefer?

○ Pay a onetime fee for the entire course

○ Pay the entire course fee in 2-3 instalments

○ Pay a monthly fee

○ Other:

If a course provider gives me the option to take first 2 classes free of charge, I will definitely try it out. True or False?

○ True

○ False

I usually share my experience regarding a product/service with the service provider.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

I usually share my experience regarding a product/service with others.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

Feel free to share any suggestions or opinions you may have regarding your current level of English proficiency and your search for a suitable language course.

Your answer

Appendix 2 – Survey Analysis Illustrations

```
RANK VARIABLES= No._of_children (A)
        /PRINT = NO
        /TIES=MEAN.

RANK VARIABLES= If_you_are_how_significant_is_the_importance_of_learning_Englis (A)
        /PRINT = NO
        /TIES=MEAN.

CORRELATION
        /VARIABLES =  RNo._of_  RIf_you_
        /PRINT = TWOTAIL SIG.
```

Correlations

		RANK of _of_childr	RANK of s_the_imp
RANK of No._of_childrer	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.349
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.019
	N	45	45
RANK of If_you_are_hov	Pearson Correlation	-.349	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	
	N	45	45

Figure 34: Spearman Rank Correlation Efficient

Response	Like/Dislike	Category
Clearly explained grammar	Like	Course content
Friendly Teacher	Like	Lesson Delivery
Like to learn songs and dislike to speak	Cannot Say	N/A
Need more grammar and speaking	Dislike	Course content
Should have more practical activities than theoretical aspects.	Dislike	Course content
In class, the students are given opportunities to come forward and speak and the teachers are very friendly and always encourage the students.	Like	Lesson Delivery
About group activities, listening program, speaking lessons	Like	Course content
English literature	Cannot Say	N/A
English was taught in Standard level	Dislike	Lesson Delivery
Like	Like	Cannot Say
Spoken English was not practiced	Dislike	Course content
Speaking skills were not developed	Dislike	Course content
Business aspects were not covered	Dislike	Course content

Teaching was not effective	Dislike	Lesson Delivery
Simple lessons	Like	Course content
Difficult to understand	Dislike	Lesson Delivery
It was good	Like	Cannot Say
Speaking was not practiced	Dislike	Course content
Writing skills were improved	Like	Course content
Not very effective	Dislike	Cannot Say
All areas were not covered	Dislike	Course content

Table 11: Answer analysis – Question 21

Answer	Valid for future analysis
Should teach from the basics.	Yes
Need to use the language more often in order to achieve fluency.	Yes
Need to develop spoken English.	No
Self efforts should also be there.	No
Grammar rules are essential to learn.	No
Self learning is the best option.	No
Need to learn grammar rules and speaking ability.	No
Learning should be fun and effective.	Yes
I am trying to improve my spoken ability than other three skills. So it is better to follow a good spoken English course. I think this is the most importantskill than others.	No
learning business English skills is important.	No
Searching for spoken English class.	No
My English language level is middle and like to attend online classes.	No
Individual attention is required.	Yes

Table 12: Answer validation – Question 29

Appendix 3 – Semi Structured Interview Questions

Introduction

Could you please provide a brief overview of the current status of operations at Simple English Academy?

Academic staff

1. Given that academic staff is a key resource for an educational institute, what are the notable strengths and weaknesses of the academic staff?

2. Could you provide insights into the past teaching experience and track record of the academic staff?

3. How easy or difficult is it for you to recruit new academic staff, and what challenges do you face in this process?

Lesson delivery and costs

4. How are lessons currently delivered by the institute?

5. Could you elaborate on the platforms and materials utilized for lesson delivery, and could you also provide insights into the associated costs?

Competition

6. How many competitors are present in the market, and what types of competitors are they?

7. What is the likelihood of losing a potential customer to competitors, and what factors influence this possibility?

8. Is it easy for customers to switch between different players in the market, and what factors facilitate this process?

9. Is it challenging for a new player to enter the market, and what barriers or obstacles might they encounter in doing so?

Substitutes

10. What potential substitutes exist for the institute's current offerings?

11. What is the presence of these substitutes in the market, and what is the likelihood of losing a potential customer to them?

Appendix 4 – Timetable

Task	December				January					February				March				April				May				
	W49	W50	W51	W52	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19	W20	W21	W22
Research Topic Development	■	■	■																							
Literature Review			■	■	■																					
Discussion with supervisor						■																				
Thesis Plan Draft							■	■	■																	
Supervisor Review										■																
Updated Thesis Plan Submission											■															
Thesis Plan Presentation												■														
Thesis Improvements														■	■	■	■									
Survey Development																		■	■							
Draft Survey Submission for Approval																				■						
Data Collection																					■	■				
Data Analysis																						■				
Supervisor Review																						■				
Development Plan																							■			
Draft Thesis Submission																								■		
Supervisor Review																								■		
Final Thesis Submission																									■	
Final Thesis Presentation																										■

Appendix 5 – Literature Table

Source information (Author, Year)	Research Problem And/or Questions addressed ?	Research gap (s) addressed ?	Theories/ Models	Research Methodologies	Research Findings /conclusions?	Research Limitations ? Suggestions for future research?
Explaining the Consumer Decision-Making Process: Critical Literature Review. Author: Alina Stankevich Year: 2017	Consumer buying behavior and the factors influencing the consumer decision-making process	The lack of understanding of the detailed process between information search and post-purchase behavior in consumer decision-making	Simon Model (1960) Nicosia Model (1966) Engel, Kollat & Blackwell Model (1968) Theory of Buyer Behavior (Sheth & Howard, 1969)	A iterature review that analyzes academic publications, journal articles, reports, and marketing books to evaluate and discuss existing models and theories related to the consumer decision-making process	Understanding the "moments that matter" and the factors influencing them can significantly enhance marketing strategies.	Limitations: The reviewed articles indicated a need for larger sample sizes. There is also a need to differentiate between types of consumer goods and services. Future Research: investigate the differences in consumer behavior across generations and cultures, explore the impact of information flow in online environments.
Segmentation of the Educational Market Author: George Niculescu Year: 2019	How can educational institutions effectively segment their markets to better meet the needs of diverse student groups? What are the main strategies and bases	The gap in applying market segmenta-tion princi-ples specif-ically to the educa-tional sec-tor. The need for educa-tional insti-tutions to distinguish them-selves through	Strategic marketing and market segmentation	Theoretical analysis of market segmentation principles and their application to the educational sector. Case studies of universities employing various segmentati	Effective market segmentation in higher education requires identifying specific target groups and tailoring educational offerings. Universities should focus on distinctive qualities and missions to attract and	Limitations: Lack of empirical data to support theoretical conclusions. Future research: Empirical studies to validate the effectiveness of different segmentation strategies in various educational contexts.

	for market segmentation in the context of higher education?	specific qualities,		on strategies.	retain students. Segmentation can be based on geographic, demographic, behavioral, and psychographic factors, each providing different insights into student needs and behaviors.	
Marketing of Educational Services: Research on Service Providers Satisfaction Authors: Nataliya Kalenskaya, Ilshat Gafurov, Aida Novenkova Year: 2013	Increasing competition in the educational sector due to demographic decline and the rising number of institutions	The gap in understanding the application of marketing principles in the education sector.	Characteristics of services (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability) and discusses their implications for marketing educational services.	A review of existing literature on marketing in education and an analysis of the competitive landscape of educational services.	Educational institutions need to focus on customer (student) needs, enhance service quality, and adopt marketing strategies to remain competitive.	Limitations: The focus on Russian educational institutions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research: The application of marketing strategies in educational institutions in different cultural and economic contexts and examine the long-term effects.
Marketing of Educational Services: A New Strategy for Customer Satisfaction Authors: Dr. D. Maria	How can educational institutions design and implement marketing strategies to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty in a highly	The need for educational institutions to recognize and adopt marketing principles to remain competitive,	4A's framework for educational services marketing Marketing mix (7 P's) specific to educational services	A theoretical and conceptual analysis of existing literature on marketing in the education secto	The success of educational institutions hinges on their ability to adopt a student-centric approach and integrate marketing strategies. Institutions need to	Limitations: The study's theoretical nature and lack of empirical data limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research: Empirical studies to validate the

Antony Raj, Dr. M. Raguraman, Prof. R. Veerappan Year: 2013	competitive market? What are the key components and strategies for effective marketing in the educational sector?	particularly with the increasing presence of private and foreign educational entities.			develop strong relationships with current and former students, ensuring that services are relevant, fresh, and managed effectively to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty.	proposed strategies. Long-term impact of marketing strategies on student satisfaction and institutional success.
Consumer Decision Making Process Models and their Applications to Market Strategy Authors: Diksha Panwar, Swati Anand, Farmaan Ali, and Kanika Singal Year: 2019	Understanding the various steps in the consumer decision-making process and how these models can help organizations improve their marketing strategies	The gap in understanding the detailed differences between various consumer decision-making models and their applicability in real-world scenarios	Anderson Model of Decision Nicosia Model of Decision Process Gilbert's Consumer Decision-Making Framework Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behavior A proposed Five-Stage Decision-Making Model	A literature review methodology to evaluate and compare various consumer behavior models.	The classic five-stage model of consumer decision-making is the most popular in both theory and practice. However, it is noted that while several models exist and offer insights, none are entirely comprehensive for all types of consumer behavior	Limitations: The study's reliance on existing models may not fully capture the complexities of modern consumer behavior.The limited scope of models to specific situations or products. Future Research: More diverse and comprehensive models that account for the digital transformation in consumer behavior.
Market Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning Author: Mark Anthony Camilleri Year: 2018	The difficulty businesses face in meeting the exact requirements of each individual customer due to varying	Gaps in understanding how businesses can effectively segment markets, target the most profitable segments,	Three stages of target marketing: market segmentation, market targeting, and market positioning	A detailed literature review and theoretical analysis of market segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies	Effective segmentation allows businesses to tailor their marketing activities more accurately to customer preferences.	Future Research: Developing more precise segmentation techniques and exploring the impact of emerging technologies on market segmentation.

	preferences.	and position their offerings.				
A MODEL OF STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIOR Authors: Ionela Maniu, George C. Maniu Year: 2014	The research aims to understand the decision-making process of students when choosing a university.	The gap in understanding the student university decision-making process specifically in the Romanian context	Economic Models Status-Attainment Models Combined Models	A literature review to explore existing models and theories of student decision-making in higher education.	Students rely on university websites and peers for info, with employment prospects and program content as key. Gender differences show females prioritize financial factors, while males focus on career opportunities. Financial considerations impact decision-making at each stage, with higher support reducing family influence and increasing peer/media influence.	Limitations: Limited empirical data specific to the Romanian context. Future Research: Conduct empirical studies to test and refine the proposed model. Explore the decision-making process in different cultural and economic contexts.

Appendix 6 – Data Management Plan

Thesis material management plan

1. General description of the material

The thesis primarily utilizes surveys as its primary research material. These surveys are targeted towards a diversified set of respondents, likely to gather a broad range of perspectives or insights related to the research topic. Additionally, secondary data sourced from academic literature or other credible sources is also utilized with interviews employed as a supportive data collection method.

2. Documentation and quality of the material

The research data in the thesis is carefully documented with a focus on maintaining respondent anonymity and confidentiality. Personal information such as names and home addresses are excluded from survey responses, while demographic data like age group, education level, and employment status is collected to support research objectives, ensuring the anonymity of respondents. Quality assurance measures are implemented throughout the research process, including the design of clear and unbiased survey questions, systematic data collection procedures, validation checks for completeness and accuracy, and secure storage of data. Secondary data from academic sources is obtained from reputable and reliable sources, such as peer reviewed journal articles, to uphold the credibility and validity of the information used. Proper citation and referencing protocols are followed to give credit to original sources and maintain academic integrity. Additionally, interviewees were selected based on their relevance to the research topic to provide the most accurate and insightful information.

3. Storage and backup

The material is saved using a combination of cloud-based storage and backup on a personal computer. This approach ensures redundancy and protection against data loss. Data security is

maintained by limiting access to the material solely to the researcher. This means that only the individual conducting the research has access to the stored data. However, if requested by supervising staff to ensure the credibility of the research, access to the raw data may be provided. It is important to note that the data will not contain any personal information that could identify respondents.

1. Ethical and legal issues related to storage.

The approach taken for storage of survey data addresses several ethical and legal considerations related to sensitive personal information and access by others. By storing the survey data exclusively in the researcher's personal cloud storage account and personal computer, access is strictly limited to the researcher alone. This mitigates the risk of unauthorized access or misuse of sensitive information by others. Regarding ownership and user rights, the researcher retains sole ownership of the material stored in their personal accounts. Researcher has full control over who can access the data and how it is used. Additionally, as the individual responsible for the research project, the researcher is accountable for ensuring that ethical and legal standards are upheld throughout the process. This includes safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of survey respondents, adhering to relevant data protection regulations, and addressing any ethical concerns that may arise. Similarly, interview data is securely stored and managed with strict protocols to ensure the confidentiality of information, further reinforcing the ethical integrity of the research.

5. Opening the material and long-term storage

It would be possible to use the material later for future reference or research purposes. The material is stored using the same storage options, primarily in the researcher's personal storage, ensuring continuity and accessibility over the long term.

In the event that a third party researcher requests access to the data for future study purposes, certain protocols are followed to enable further use of the material. Specifically, only the analyzed information derived from the raw data will be provided to the third party researcher, not the raw data itself.