

Part 2 – Research Outline

Student Satisfaction with their Learning Experience: Case for Student Participation and Involvement

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In the United Kingdom, the proportion of school leavers entering higher education has increased from 15% in early 1990s to 43% in 2004 (DfES, 2003, cited in Lomas, 2007) and 62% in 2009 (BBC, 2009). These students are paying ever increasing tuition fees from none in 1990s to approximately £3000 in 2003 and close to £6000 in 2012 with an upper limit of £9000 (BBC, 2011a). With the increasing number, composition and mix of students in terms of their mode of education, social, economic and cultural background, experiences, education requirements and demands have also transformed towards “mass system of higher education” (Gordon, 2002, p. 97).

Universities are now run more like businesses, considering students as customer and consumer (Armstrong, 1995; Cheny, McMillan & Schwartzman 1997; Crawford, 1991) competing in local and international markets for students and adopting marketing strategies like commercially run organisations (Salter & Tapper, 2002) such as “strategic planning, mission statements, objectives, action planning and performance indicators” are some illustration of “growth of managerialism in the

academic sector” (Lomas, 2007). It is not only the universities but the students also frequently relate themselves as customers, which in turn broadened the customer satisfaction literature to higher education sector (Desai, Damewood, & Jones, 2001; Gremler & McCollough, 2002).

Meeting the needs and demands of students suddenly became paramount. Universities now develop their marketing strategies with addressing the student expectation very seriously to take competitive advantage against other universities operating within the market (Oscar, Kara & Kaynak, 2005). Student satisfaction became an essential element for successful marketing of higher education (Hermans et al., 2008), similar to what commercial organisation consider customer satisfaction (Appleton-Kapp & Krentler, 2006).

The dominant approach to measure student satisfaction is to collect student feedback using questionnaire and analyse the data quantitatively. The use of questionnaire is widespread (El-Ansari & Oskrochi, 2004) at individual university. Moreover, in 2005, the National Student Survey (NSS) has been introduced asking final year undergraduate student about the quality of their learning experience (NSS, 2007).

A large number of authors used a wide variety of variables both demographic variable and performance variables. In the first category for example, gender, temperament, preferred learning style (Brokaw, Kennedy, & Merz, 2004; Stokes, 2003), age, gender, employment (Fredericksen, Shea, & Pickett, 2000), and grade point average (Porter & Umbach, 2001) have all been found to be significant predictors of student satisfaction. Other issues impacting student satisfaction were university facilities

(Price et.al.2003) class size and compulsory modules (Coles, 2002) contact personnel, physical environment (Sohail and Shaikh, 2004) administrative office and front line staff (Galloway, 1998) quality of the lectures, classroom delivery, feedback and relationship with other student in classroom (Hill et. al 2003).

An equally large body of literature exists focusing on student engagement, mostly from North American and Australian as “in the UK, studies much more often qualitative in nature, based on case studies” and are not robust enough in qualitative term (Trowler & Trowler, 2010, p.3). The literature provide ample evidence that student engagement is positively related to improving outcomes, benefit student representatives in university governance (Trowler & Trowler, 2010) and student satisfaction (Kuh & Vesper, 1997).

Conversely, a very small minority of authors employed attributes related to construct of customer participation to higher education i.e. student satisfaction. Those who made attempts either approach it conceptually (Kotze & Plessis, 2003) or assessed by matching motives of study and organisational socialisation tactics (Bogler & Somech, 2002). Organisational socialisation is defined as “a process by which an individual adapts to and comes to appreciate the values, norms and required behaviour patterns of an organisation” (Schein, 1968 cited in Kelley et. al. 1992; p.198).

Service marketing literature recognised and used models to assess customer participation and its impact on customer satisfaction. Beside marketing literature, pedagogical literature also provides support of student involvement. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education in the UK believe that “an important

feature of United Kingdom (UK) higher education is that students are active participants in their own education and therefore can and should be directly involved in the higher education sector approaches to quality assurance and enhancement” (QAA, 2008). Astin's (1984) presented his student involvement theory which postulates that student involved in social and academic activities experience greater degree of learning experience. However, in spite of recognition of the role of student participation and involvement in their learning experience and ultimately satisfaction, these concepts and models have not been used in higher education sector (Kotze & Plessis 2002).

The studies that used student participation and involvement did find it to be significantly related to satisfaction (Pike, 1991), however the empirical evidence are not conclusive and sometime produce contrasting results (Hernandez et.al., 1999).

Despite evidences from service and marketing literature suggesting the application of customer satisfaction approaches to higher education to evaluate student satisfaction and positive association of the ideas of student involvement and engagement with the student satisfaction, models incorporating constructs of participation, involvement and engagement have not developed. Thus, this research will propose a model that includes student satisfaction, participation and involvement constructs using structural equation model (SEM).

This research is conducted over a two year period at Oxford Brookes University consisting of:

Part 1 – Longitudinal Survey

The longitudinal survey took place from academic year 2007-08 to 2009-10. Overall four waves of data were collected from a cohort of students. A total of 66 first year students from academic year 2007-08 were recruited.

Part 2 – Cross-sectional Survey

The cross-sectional survey took place during academic year 2009-10 covering 147 students from first, second and third year.

Both of these surveys were planned and thought through to complement each other. The longitudinal survey will provide an insight into the effects of time on students' views about satisfaction with their learning experience while cross-sectional will provide in-depth understanding due to a good sample size and spread all over the courses, schools and university.