Assessing Students' Satisfaction: An Approach to Help Improve Services Rendered to University Students

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Abstract

Knowing student's level of satisfaction is of vital importance in this current competitive environment where as many as fifty six (56) private universities have been established in Ghana within the last fifteen (15) years with each assertively looking for students. The study adopted a descriptive survey approach to conduct the study in Methodist University College Ghana, which is a private university. A modified Penn State Student Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to collect data from 428 respondents who were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Generally, students satisfaction with the various facilities and services require attention especially student services [Eta = .522, Sig = .056]. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the following should be put in place to improve students' satisfaction: more lecture halls, improvement in the sanitation facilities, improvement in the lecturer-student relationship and online registration among others. Implications of these findings and future research directions are also discussed.
Keywords: Students' Satisfaction, Quality of Service, Private University Students

1. Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, several private university colleges have emerged in Ghana with the aim of developing Ghana's human capital. For this to be achieved there is the need for some basic facilities and services that would facilitate teaching and learning and ultimately students' satisfaction. Getting the right number of students and providing quality services in order to retain them and attract new students are core towards the survival of educational institutions (Schalkwky & Steenkamp 2014; Faruky et al., 2012) and for gaining competitive advantage (Hanaysha, Abdullah & Warokka, 2011; Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

Even though the successful completion and enhancement of students' education are the reasons for the existence of higher educational institutions, college administrators tend to focus disproportionately more time on programs for attracting and admitting students rather than ensuring their satisfaction with services provided (Kara & Deshields, 2004; Gruber, Reppel & Voss, 2010). There are many stakeholders as well as customers of higher educational institutions. The concept of stakeholder have been explained as any individual or group of individuals who either are impacted upon by the company or able to impact on the achievement of the company's objectives (Freeman, 1984). According to Alves, Mainardes and Raposo (2010), it is important that higher education institutions identify these stakeholders and their needs before defining relational strategies for each entity. Some of these stakeholders in the higher educational system include; students, staff, faculty, alumni, and donors. From the perspective of students as stakeholders, ensuring their satisfaction with facilities and services provided by university should be a major concern for university administrators (Banwet & Datta, 2003) and considered as an important competitive factor (McClung & Werner, 2008). This has caused a number of researchers to study different aspects of student satisfaction (Crumbley, Henry & Kratchman, 2001; Pounder, 2007; Dalton & Denson, 2009; Tessema, Ready & Yu, 2012).

Since the services offered by universities largely impact students' level of satisfaction, studies on students' satisfaction should be of great importance to all authorities in education especially private universities who must be able to attract, recruit and retain the right number of students to ensure their survival (Webster, 2012; Poturak, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

Because globalization has driven universities to be more business-like in nature, students have become the main customers, who must be satisfied with the product for which they are paying just as happens in the case of profit making institutions that would as part of their retention strategy ensure that they meet and exceed the expectations of their customers. Getting the right number of students, retaining them and also satisfying them are therefore very important. Stoltenberg (2011) has indicated that students' satisfaction and students overall experience with university is highly debated topic in the academic literature. Kara and DeShields (2004) had earlier intimated the relevance of studies on student satisfaction with university facilities and services which invariably influence their intention and retention. This is why student satisfaction analyses is an important area of focus for every university to obtain feedback that will enable them improve upon the quality of education and campus facilities required by students.

Universities are currently competing for students at both the national and international levels. To get

the required number of students and retain them, managers of universities should engage in actions that increase student satisfaction and reduce dissatisfaction. This is because poor retention rates may have adverse funding consequences for the institution (Rowley, 2003a). The satisfaction can only be achieved if one knows what contributes to student satisfaction and provides it as such. Information on students' satisfaction can be obtained through the collection of feedback from surveys similar to this. One of Rowley's (2003b) four main reasons why it is necessary to collect feedback from students is to provide students, as customers of the institution, with the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with a learning experience. Again, students' satisfaction assessment is vital in determining service quality at higher learning institutions (Hanaysha, Abdullah & Warokka, 2011). The significance of this research lies in the fact that, it helped to collect feedback from students that helped to identify the extent to which students were satisfied or not with the facilities and services provided by the university college so the needed changes and improvement could be made to ensure their satisfaction. Again uunderstanding students' experiences and satisfaction is also important in order to ensure and enrich their experiences and make university education more students/customer centred. Results of the study could also serve as a diagnostic tool for universities to identify gaps and make improvements in programs and services offered to students in order to improve on their level of satisfaction.

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive research study which investigated the level of students' satisfaction in private universities in Ghana, using MUCG as a case. The study was conducted during the 2012/2013 academic year and was limited mainly to students taking courses in the Faculty of Business Administration - the faculty that has the highest student population. The total population of the faculty was three thousand, seven hundred (3,700) as at 2013 academic year. Out of the total population, simple random sampling technique was used to select 428 respondents from levels 100-400 and MBA first and second years. A modified Penn State Student Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to gather data to enable the researchers address the research questions. The respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and the questions explained where necessary after which they were given 20 minutes to respond.

Data gathered was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS) (Version 16). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis. Results are presented in relation to the stated objectives.

4. Conceptual Issues

Student's satisfaction is a complex construct influenced by a variety of characteristics and institutions (Thomas & Galambos, 2004). The concept of student satisfaction can be viewed as customer satisfaction because of the relationship that exists between the two parties; where the existence and survival of the universities depend on the continuous patronage by students of the services provided by the university. Student satisfaction is defined by Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Grogaard (2002) as the overall response not only to the learning experience of a student but as a student's assessment of the services provided by universities and colleges. Elliot and Shin (2002) also define student satisfaction as "the favorability of a student's subjective assessment of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education". There is still an obvious lack of consensus on how satisfaction should be defined and measured, and how its determinants can be assessed.

The determinants of satisfaction are undoubtedly multi factorial, and vary from person to person, as well as from institution to institution (Stoltenberg, 2011). Nevertheless, as stated by Lee et al. (2000), analysis at each institutional level is defensible given the importance of student satisfaction as an outcome in its own right. Ensuring student satisfaction is an inevitable component in the mix that will ensure attracting and retaining high achievers, who, in turn, improve the reputation and standing of the university. Student satisfaction is a dynamic process that requires clear and effective action of an institution listening to its students. Student satisfaction is also a complex construct influenced by a variety of characteristics of students and institutions (Thomas & Galambos 2004 as cited in Stoltenberg, 2011)

There are also varying views from authors with regard to what student's need which when provided will make them satisfied. As a result, some researchers have advocated what they call the "managerial dimension" of student satisfaction where the university is regarded as an enterprise and the students as the customers. Therefore in order to satisfy students, the customer approach which Giroux (2012) calls 'corporate pedagogy' should be applied in the universities. Satisfied students perform better in their studies, and have lower drop-out rates. (Stoltenberg, 2011).

Similarly, Petruzzellis, D'Uggento, and Romanazzi (2006) after an analysis of common factors such as: lecture halls, laboratories, equipment, library, dining hall, dormitories, leisure activities, language courses, scholarships, internet access, contacts with teachers, administrative services, tutoring, counseling, internship, international relationship and placement concluded that students should be regarded as customers of universities and that universities need to adopt a customer centric approach. Results of a study by Penn State Student Affairs

(2007) indicate that an understanding of student's experiences and satisfaction is important in order to be able to design systems and put structures in place in order to ensure that their practices are student centered. Hill (1995) as cited in Stoltenberg, (2011) study of international students' satisfaction in University of Oslo (UiO) also suggests that the primary customers of the universities are the students, and so higher education should be regarded as a service industry thereby placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students in order to satisfy them. Kara and DeShield, (2004) in a study using empirical data and conceptual model proved that students' college experience is positively related to their satisfaction and intentions to stay at the college or university. Allen et al. (2002) and Wang (2003) argue that in any educational institution, satisfaction of a student can be determined from his level of pleasure, as well as the level of education that the student experiences.

When the level of satisfaction is known it enables universities to re-engineer their organizations to adapt to student needs, and also allows them to adopt consumer-oriented principles by developing a system for continuous monitoring of how effectively they meet or exceed student needs (Kara, & Deshield, 2004). Stoltenberg (2011) intimated that some ways of attracting students to universities include designing world class libraries, classrooms, computer laboratories, and other facilities because these are the services on which students spend a lot of their time, thus providing potential opportunities to influence student satisfaction.

Results of a study conducted by Stoltenberg, (2011) at the Uio on satisfaction of international students show that the social dimension of the educational process is important for students regardless of their ethnical background and study program. Since academic and social dimensions seem to be intertwined, the dissatisfaction with the social dimension can lead to dissatisfaction with the academic dimension and vice versa. Hence, social aspect as well as academic aspect of the educational process should not be underestimated when trying to improve student satisfaction with university.

A study done by Haque et al. (2001) identified independent factors that can affect student satisfaction based on services offered by universities. These include quality of teaching, student research facilities, library book collections and services, campus infrastructure, canteen facilities, space for group discussions, sport programs, ICT facilities etc. Numerous studies have addressed the issue of service quality and student satisfaction, for example, Hanaysha, Abdullah and Warokka (2011) have observed service quality dimension, that is, tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy as positive contributors towards student satisfaction.

The other benefit of highly satisfied students is that they engage in favorable word-of mouth publicity (Kau & Loh, 2006; Alves & Raposo, 2010; Poturak, 2014). Word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied students lower the cost of attracting new students and in retaining existing students. Also, they can return as graduate students, recruit prospective students or regularly donate as alumni. The most mentioned relationship-building practices are referrals, testimonials. (Kara & DeShield, 2004).

In the educational context, satisfaction may be considered as what students expect from their universities to enable them achieve their objectives for attending that educational institution. Generally, one of the reasons why people attend universities is to acquire the needed knowledge and skills to enable them earn a living and this can be obtained through lectures, tutorials offered (Poturak, 2014) and these according to Douglas, Douglas & Barnes (2006) are the core services provided by the university. One of the cconclusions from a study carried out by Douglas, Douglas and Barnes (2006) indicate that even though aspects of facilities and others are used to attract students, once a student enrols, it is the quality of the teaching and learning that will cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The university campus environment can be seen as a web of connected happenings that influence student satisfaction but faculty continues to be a significant influence on student satisfaction with education in universities (Umbach & Porter, 2002). In this regard, universities have adopted student evaluation of teaching effectiveness to enhance student satisfaction. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is among the most frequently used performance measurement instrument used by higher education institutions across the world (Pounder, 2007). SET questionnaire is a control device used to measure teaching effectiveness (Crumbley, Henry & Kratchman, 2001) and an important tool for getting feedback.

As many universities plan for the twenty-first century, numerous challenges are emerging. Declining enrolments, increased competition, and a general public demanding more accountability are seemingly some of the more pressing issues of most universities today (Elliott & Shin, 2002).

In a learning environment, there are many factors that contribute to students' satisfaction, where students see its relationship with their personal growth and social development (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002). Student's satisfaction may be influenced by poor classroom facilities of which an instructor may have limited resources to change. (Elliott & Shin, 2002).

Dalton and Denson (2009) identified after a study that while student characteristics and reasons for enrolling in a course are predictors of overall satisfaction, it is the evaluation questions that predict the majority of the variation in course satisfaction Elliot and Shin (2002). Dalton and Denson (2009) again stated that, at the

institutional level, the majority of factors which predicted student satisfaction related to course and teaching quality; experience of instruction; ability to get to classes (or convenient timetabling) knowledgeable faculty, quality of instructions, clear and reasonable requirements for each major, fair and unbiased staff and access to information.

Price et al. (2003) in a study of the impact of facilities on undergraduate student choice of university identified the top ten reasons being; right courses, availability of computers, quality of library facilities, good teaching reputation, availability of 'quite' areas, availability of areas for self-study, quality of public transport in the town, friendly attitudes towards students, quality lecture theatres and diversity of shops available. Douglas, Douglas and Barnes (2006) concluded after a study that many physical facilities of university services are not important with regard to student satisfaction as identified by Banwet and Datta, 2003 and Hill et al. 2003 who found that the most important aspect of a university's service was related to quality of teaching; the core service provided by the lecturers. Surveys for obtaining feedback on the quality of teaching from students in tertiary institutions have therefore become important (Webster, 2012).

Besides academic quality, Wiers-Jessen, Stensaker and Grogaard (2002) assert that the quality of university support facilities is very important in achieving student's satisfaction. Outcome of a study by Abbasi, et al. (2011) on student satisfaction in Pakistani University point to the fact that the overall satisfaction level of students is alarmingly low with specific dissatisfaction with educational services offered. They found that students' dissatisfaction was with many core services and facilities like teaching, administrative support, library, laboratory, accommodation, medical, and sport facilities. They identified however that they were satisfied with three augmented areas like transportation, classroom and prayer facilities. The study identified no significant differences of opinion among male and female respondents. According to Banwet and Datta (2003) satisfied customers are loyal implying satisfied students are loyal.

5. Results and Discussion

The study explored students' satisfaction with services rendered by the university college. Data gathered was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS) Version 16. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis. Results are presented in relation to the stated objectives.

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Results in Table 1 show that the sample consisted of 289 (67%) day and 139 (33%) evening students. Younger students (30 years or below) were 213 (49.8%) and those above 30 years (older students) were 215 (50.2%). There were more female participants compared to their male counterparts. Students offering human resource management dominated (369) representing more than half of the sample. The participants reported varying academic goals such as to have excellent academic performance/to have first class (118), second class upper (10), become a professional and positive person in life (62), acquire more knowledge (39), attain masters degree (8), upgrade my academic level (26), attain a doctorate degree (8).

Results on demographic background of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Day Students		Evening Students	
Variables	**n**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Age				
Young (30 or below)	159	55	54	39
Old (31 and above)	130	45	85	61
Total	**289**	**100**	**139**	**100**
Gender				
Male	89	31	56	40
Female	200	61	83	60
Total	**289**	**100**	**139**	**100**
Course				
HRM	189	65	67	48
Management Studies Accounting	23	8	11	8
Banking and Finance	17	6	8	6
Marketing	16	6	10	7
MBA	44	15	16	12
Total	-	-	27	19
	289	**100**	**139**	**100**

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5.2. Satisfaction with Various Services

A number of academic services are rendered by the university to help students achieve their goals. Participants' satisfaction with each of the services was assessed and relevant information on this is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of Satisfaction with the Various Services on Campus

Students (n=428)								
Satisfaction	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	T	Sig	H
General Satisfaction	6	30	19.99	3.57	427	5.950	.043	.671
Academic Experiences	6	30	20.82	3.51	427	6.844	.039	.693
Academic Support Service	11	55	31.64	6.63	427	3.877	.049	.586
Students Services	6	30	15.51	3.73	427	2.622	.056	.522

Results in Table 2, revealed that students' general satisfaction was significant but moderate [Eta = .671, Sig. = .043]. Satisfaction with academic experiences was slightly higher than general satisfaction. However this is also moderate though significant [Eta = .693, Sig. = .039]. Moderate but significant level of satisfaction with academic support services was recorded. This is slightly weaker [Eta = .586, Sig. = .049] compared to level of satisfaction with academic experiences and general satisfaction respectively. Satisfaction with students' services is the weakest level of satisfaction observed. This is not significant [Eta = .522, Sig = .056]. As a result of moderate satisfaction with almost all services (including general satisfaction) except satisfaction with students' services, a sizeable number of participants will change their university if they were starting all over. Relevant information on this is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Response on Choosing MUCG if Starting University

Students (n=428)						
Session	Yes	No	Do not Know	Df	χ^2	Sig
Day Students	106	88	95			
Evening Students	46	48	45			
Total	**152**	**136**	**140**	**2**	**2.587**	**.460**

Table 3 revealed that no significant differences exist between the number of participants who will choose MUCG if they have to start university again 152(35%) and those who would change the university 136(32%) [$\chi^2_{(2)}$ = **2.587, p<.05**]. Undecided participants on whether they would choose or change MUCG if they are starting university education again were 140 (33%).

A number of suggestions to improve services and students satisfaction were reported. These include: more lecture halls should be built (60), lecture halls should be kept clean always (7), the school should provide more plants/generators (5), improvement of sanitation in the washrooms (27), late release of results should be resolved (6), some lecturers who are boring and always insulting and threatening students should be called to order (56), high school fees should be reduced (3), the library should be moved to the campus (37), noise making by the non teaching staff should be controlled (2). The others include: more dust bins should be provided (7), water must always be provided in the washrooms (12), the school should improve on healthcare (4), having lectures on Saturday for those on the day program should be stopped (3), online registration of students should be introduced (14), classrooms should be opened for use of students for revision during exams (12) and the school should improve on security (4).

Students experiences on harassment or discrimination was also assessed. Results on this are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Harassment/Discrimination Based on Demographic Characteristics

Students (n=428)						
Areas of Harassment	Yes	No	Do not Know	df	χ^2	Sig
Age	18	396	14	2	674.823	.000
Disability	3	410	15	2	751.191	.000
Ethnic Background	13	400	15	2	696.054	.000
Religious Affiliation	7	409	12	2	745.883	.000

Results in Table 4, showed that majority (at least 93%) of the participants were not harassed on age, disability, ethnic background and religious affiliation. However, 18, 3, 13 and 7 claimed they were harassed based on age, disability, ethnic background and religious affiliation. Only 7% brought to the attention of the school authority issues of harassment/discrimination. Findings further revealed that a sizeable number of participants were satisfied with the manner in which issues on harassment were handled. Relevant information on this is presented

in Table 5.

Table 5. Satisfaction with Handling of Harassment Issues

Students (n=428)						
Areas of Satisfaction	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	df	χ^2	Sig
Age	27	252	149	2	177.846	.000
Disability	35	252	141	2	165.060	.000
Gender	22	235	171	2	167.444	.000
Ethnic Background	11	255	162	2	212.540	.000
Religious Affiliation	18	238	172	2	178.673	.000

Results in Table 5 revealed that a significant proportion of participants (33-40 %) were satisfied with how harassment issues were handled or addressed though more than half of the participants did not indicate whether they were satisfied or not (at least 55-60 %). Those who were dissatisfied represented 3-8% of the total sample.

6. Discussion

This paper sought to identify the level of satisfaction with the facilities and services provided by the university. Results from the study showed that students' general satisfaction was significant but moderate. One interesting finding in this study is that students' satisfaction with academic experience is moderate even though it is slightly higher than general satisfaction. This is very important because it implies students may not be very satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning because according to Douglas, Douglas and Barnes (2006) even though aspects of facilities and others are used to attract students, it is the quality of teaching and learning that causes satisfaction.

Results of this study show that students in this university are moderate but have significant level of satisfaction with academic support services which contradicts results of a study by Abbasi et al. (2011) in a Pakistan University and therefore the university should maintain and also put in place other measures to ensure the level of satisfaction increases since according to Wiers-Jessen, Stensaken and Grogaard (2002) university support facilities is very important in achieving students' satisfaction.

Results from the study show that 32% of the respondents would change the university if they are starting university education again should be of interest to the MUCG since this may be because they are not satisfied because according to Kara and DeShields (2004) students' college experience is positively related to their satisfaction and intentions to stay at the university and therefore if they are not satisfied they are likely to quit. Again it is very relevant because according to Anderson et al., (1997) empirical work suggests that providing superior service quality and higher levels of satisfaction lead to greater customer loyalty, secure future revenues, reduce the costs of future transactions through positive referrals, decrease price elasticity and ultimately affect company's bottom line. Thus, if student are not satisfied as a result of services rendered and facilities available they are not likely to recommend the university to other people and therefore the future source of revenue of the university is not secured.

7. Conclusion

With the need for increase in the student population, it is imperative for the MUCG to put in place appropriate measures to ensure students are satisfied since according to Banwet and Datta (2003) satisfied customers who in this case are students become loyal and therefore likely to be retained.

The research sought to identify students level of satisfaction with the facilities and services offered by the university and make appropriate recommendation to help improve the level of students satisfaction. The analysis and findings provide the university with relevant information on areas to focus on to ensure students are satisfied with services provided.

Based on the results of this study on student studying within the faculty of business administration in the university, it can be concluded that students' satisfaction with student services is the weakest as compared with academic experiences and academic support services offered with academic experiences being slightly higher than the general satisfaction. Academic experience/lectures is one of the core services provided by the university and what goes on in the lecture halls goes a long way to influence student satisfaction. Thus since their level of satisfaction with this aspect is not high the university needs to put in place measures to ensure students satisfaction with academic experiences move to be high as well as student services and academic support services.

With as much as 32% of respondents not being satisfied and therefore not choose the university if they had another opportunity and 33% of respondents undecided, the University should be interested in this findings. Universities are now competing for students both at the local and international level to ensure it continuous existence. It is therefore important to attract, recruit and retain the enough students and this can be achieved if

the existing students are satisfied. It is therefore recommended that frequent surveys be carried out to identify the factors that influence student satisfaction so these could be put in place.

8. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

The sample involved in this study does not allow assuming the results can be definitive. A confirmatory research involving students from all the faculties can be carried out. However the results of this study are relevant as the sample was chosen from the faculty with the highest number of students.

The quantitative nature of the research inherently represents one of the main research limitations. It is thus recommended that further study can be carried out and both quantitative and qualitative methods used. Further studies can be carried out using students from all the faculties, by looking at satisfaction among students in different faculties as well as those in the different areas of specialization within the faculties. In addition a comparative study could be carried out between two private universities and between private and public university to identify differences in the levels of student satisfaction.

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