

STUDENT SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPATHY IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM

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Abstract:

The internationalization in university education represents a consequence of globalization. Nowadays, higher education institutions want to become bigger, to develop more and more their research programs, to attract as many well prepared students to cope with increasing competition coming from big universities outside the country.

The students' possibility to choose a university from a variety of offers determines them to be very critical on the educational and material offer that is presented by the higher education institute. Therefore, during the last years, universities have made substantial efforts in developing an elaborated relational system based on the degree measurement of student satisfaction or dissatisfaction, in order to allow them to make optimal decisions in which to ensure their future success.

Key words: leading students, satisfaction, quality, loyalty, empathy

Jel Classification: M31, M39

Introduction

The aim of this article is to outline students' satisfaction in higher education process. Satisfaction can be defined as the result of a psychological process in which a customer makes a comparison between the imagined performance level of a product or service and the real performance faced after receiving the goods or the service. If the satisfaction achieves the level of expectations, the customer will be pleased, if it exceeds that level, enthusiasm can be reached, and if the satisfaction is inferior to expectations, the phenomenon of dissatisfaction appears. For the higher education institute to provide maximum satisfaction to the students is necessary to have it fixed in empathy with them because this is how their expectations can be comprehended and new needs can be sensed to ensure their retention for subsequent cycles: MA, PhD.

1. Attracting students in higher education

University appears to be an intermediary between supply and demand of education, between high school graduates and other categories willing to follow university courses, and bidders jobs for those who have university. It follows that any school operates in multiple markets. It has to draw a number of young people to have an "object" of activity, to provide and "sell" education services. This force of attraction will be stronger the more graduates are able to enter collages in greater numbers, or find bidders' provided jobs more easily according to their expectations and requirements. (Alexandru Nedelea, pag.

97) High school graduates represent a potential market for universities, from where a number of candidates is selected by the criteria established for the entrance exam. Twelfth-grade students represent the main “client” of a university, being prospective students.

To draw the high school graduates, I believe that the first step is to talk directly with them. In an open conversation, they are able to ask questions and receive answers to clarify uncertainties and get rid of some doubts. It also facilitates the approach between the sender of the message and its receiver. A second step would be to offer educational presentation focusing on those items that the student desires – these are assumed to have been in the previous dialogue with the student. It is necessary to make the presentation of educational services in a dynamic way to awaken the student's enthusiasm, because enthusiasm at that age plays a determining role in a future choice. There must not be avoided inviting high school students at the university; this first contact with academia awakens unforgettable feelings. Also notes the need to hand out some flyers, posters or other promotional items, contact addresses, the student having the opportunity to carefully study them at home, or send an email, after the advance has created a pleasant memory thanks to the visit at the high school of a delegation sent by the university.

2. Student satisfaction in higher education process

Higher education institutions, as companies, provide a product, but here it is an educational product that can be defined through a teaching process in which students are considered first stakeholders of the higher education institution, (Steven A. Taylor, 1996, p. 207), consisting success in ability to satisfy your “customers” . Student satisfaction represents an important marketing activity which arises from their expectations on the university's educational experience, because education, as any other service, is consumed by the beneficiary as it is produced, providing an intangible value. In 1992, Cronin and Taylor argued that service quality represents an antecedent of satisfaction, but the latter is stronger than quality because at higher levels of satisfaction can contribute factors such as convenience, price, availability, customer perception. (Cronin, Taylor, 1992)

When a young man decides to follow certain university courses, first he takes into consideration the future advantages and the professional perspective offered to him by obtaining a diploma in that field. From information obtained through various ways and from staff responsible for counseling, which do not have to manifest a bent for exaggerated promises, the student forms a series of expectations on which further satisfaction or dissatisfaction will depend, because satisfaction in higher education services can be measured only after receiving the benefits of their performance.

In a university, at general student satisfaction contributes a series of elements:

- *Quality of educational product* – expressed by the teachers' power to transmit innovative information, the capacity to communicate with students, their involvement in teaching process with an attitude through which to encourage student participation in various projects, debates, team work, practical works. It is also necessary providing useful documents and bibliographic sources to help them. Students have very different reactions from the same experience. Let's consider the case where two students participate in the same course: one gets out satisfied, the other dissatisfied. What explains such a reaction? Clearly that each of the two students, when entering the classroom, had a certain expectation, the ulterior satisfaction or dissatisfaction depended on the fulfillment of the expectation.

- *The quality of student relationships with teachers and support staff* - expressed by the behavior of the employees in departments that the student gets contact with: cashiers, secretariats, information offices, departments of international relations, etc., and collaborative relationships with teachers, their willingness to offer advice and explanations, supporting and encouraging the student to induce a sense of self confidence.

- *Perception of price* - both university fees and expenses during the university course.

The reputation of the higher education institution puts its print significantly over the satisfaction and loyalty of a student. Reputation can be defined as a general perception on a company, what represents, which is associate with, what is assumed you become when you get benefit of its services. (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; MacMillan, Money, Downing, & Hillenbrand, 2005). The reputation of a company forms when it interacts with stakeholders, (Fombrun, 1996; Schuler, 2004), representing a mirror of its past actions. (Yoon, Guffey, & Kijewski, 1993) Next to students, from stakeholders take part also the parents who support their children moral and financial for a successful closure of the university cycle, their relatives, various local communities, employees of the university that provides the educational product, the companies where the future graduate will hire and the society that will benefit of a high- competitive level in world economy progress. (Steven A. Taylor, 1996, p. 208)

Satisfaction leads to loyalty, a phenomenon influenced by financial, psychic and social factors. (Audhesh K. Paswan, Gopala Ganesh, 2009, p. 73) Satisfaction plays a key role in students' retention, those who have become licensed but will enroll in masters or doctoral degrees.

3. Empathy in relationship with student

To generate maximum satisfaction, it is necessary for people with responsibility in working with students to develop with those an empathic relation. Empathy is the ability to share other's thoughts and feelings in a given situation, a way to act as if you were another person.

First of all, empathy suggests few elements:

- an open behavior
- habitual interpretations of language, gestures, actions
- listening
- interest
- impartation
- attempt to understand
- attention
- sharing information

Empathy can define a word which means *to listen*, or can be fully involvement in understanding the inner world of the person they relate.

Trying to understand the inner world of another person means putting away something from your own person, from your personal values and attitudes, to try assuming another's person attitude. And to answer another person's world, any response is a personal check. (Franco Perino, Cristina Andreolli, 2003, p.5)

The ability to feel empathy involves understanding what the person next to you lives like you live in his place. This means deep respect in a profound dimension to that person, without trial or different conditionings. Empathy is also an expression of the

intellectual dimension of a person, integrating communication, transparency at some standards. Transparency in communication does not mean that two persons who communicate empathy to fully reveal to one another without any reserve, but requires a greater capacity for getting on the inner side to the other so you can share his feelings, to grant support, to exist a certain emotional fusion but also differentiation while it is necessary to recognize the other as a person with values. An empathic person is one who knows how to find common points in differentiation through effective communication so that you give the person in front of you the possibility of entering into a constructive development in harmony with mind and heart, understanding other's needs. Empathy is different from sympathy while sharing the ending "pathy". If sympathy means "feeling with" empathy means "to feel in". Both presuppose the existence of at least two people and an emotional reality. (Ferdinando de Muro, 2005)

In higher education as in other educational levels, there is a well-developed communication system between student, as transmitter of a message, and teacher as the receiver of the message transmitted by the student. An emphatic teacher must understand the student's psychology, must be close to him, to manifest interest in his concerns, to project himself into the student's person, that is how he will gain the student's trust, as the ability of the teacher is more developed, the empathic ability of the student will also develop, which means that between the two an optimal relationship of cooperation will grow. J.P. Guilford says that empathy is "an ability to predict, to recognize the psychological moods of another person, perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings as manifestations of his traits".

An emphatic teacher can anticipate the behavior of student, empathy materializing in this case on the ability "to read" his thoughts, desires and emotions encountered. Empathy has in such case an anticipatory function and a communicative function, having as basis an efficient communication between teacher and student, both verbal and nonverbal.

I believe that in an educational institution is necessary for teachers to develop awareness and interest in students, in their living conditions at a time, in their experiences. In fulfilling this goal, communication skills are essential.

Conclusion

Oliver (1993b) argued that consumer satisfaction can be interpreted through emotional and cognitive elements. In higher education this includes a sum of consumer's feelings about the university services, and also the perceptions on the academic performance, in comparison with international standards. (Steven A. Taylor, 1996, p. 211) For understanding if a consumer is really satisfied, is necessary to make a measurement of the actual conduct of its perception, a measurement in his expectations on the performed educational service and the confrontation between the values expected and the ones provided. If perceptions value is superior to expectations this can be considered an indicator of consumer satisfaction. (http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soddisfazione_del_cliente) Empathy with consumers can lead to the appearance of long-term trust in the service providing institution; universities that succeed in developing such a empathic relation can usually be pleased by the students' retention in the subsequent cycles: MA, PhD, and that is because practice has demonstrated that is much easier to keep an old client than to draw a new one,

this thing being more difficult for an university because many times habitude appears among students and because change, dealing with something new can often be frightening.

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