

Factors Affecting Students' Satisfaction: A Qualitative Study at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology

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Abstract

Nowadays, education is a service directly provided by the college. Student satisfaction has become an important issue directly or indirectly faced by colleges and management itself. Since the enrolment expansion of higher vocational colleges, the issue of students' satisfaction becomes the focus in China. The objective of this research was to investigate the factors affecting the students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology. This study used qualitative methods to collect data. The participants were 100 respondents, including male and female students. A semi-structured interview was used as a research instrument to collect the qualitative data. A focused group discussion was conducted to find out the answers of research questions. The qualitative data through the focus group discussion was analyzed through thematic analysis. Research findings reveal that curriculum setting, campus environment, teaching level, humanistic information service, physical facilities and management of the college were the most important factor which had an impact on students' satisfaction. The study also explored that female respondents are not much satisfied with the service by the college due to their high expectation in a polytechnic of Science and Technology. Recommendations have been provided to overcome the factors which affect the students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China.

Keywords: factors, students' satisfaction, education, service, Polytechnic of Science and Technology

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, education is a service directly provided by the college. Students are the direct recipients of college services (Aghamolaei & Zare, 2008). Student satisfaction has become an important issue directly or indirectly faced by colleges and management itself. As colleges continue to become more students oriented, student perceptions of higher education services are becoming more important (Anci, 2006). Higher education colleges are placing greater emphasis on meeting students' expectations and needs. The concept of Students' Satisfaction has been attracted much attention in recent years and become one of the major goals of all educational institutions (Temizer, & Turkyilmaz, 2012). And he also showed that services provided by a college affected students' satisfaction.

The MOE of China has pursued the development of vocational education as a way to facilitate national development and boost employment, following a path with unique Chinese characteristics, and making unprecedented progress in various areas. Since the expansion of higher education enrollment in 1999, China has introduced more than 30 policy initiatives for enhancing higher vocational education. These policy initiatives have served as the institutional foundation. The current stage places equal emphasis on expanding the scale and improving the quality of higher vocational education. This intention is marked by the planned expansion of enrollment by one million students, as well as the initiative to develop the higher vocational education sector through institutional types and major clusters (Fan, 2019).

China now has the world's largest vocational education system. According to figures from the Department of Statistics China in 2019, the number of higher education institutions was 2688 in total, of which has 1265 undergraduate universities and 1423 higher vocational colleges, the number of students has 30.3153 million in total, the number of higher vocational colleges was to 52.94% of the total number, the number of higher vocational college students has 12.8071 million, accounting for 42.25% of the total number. Although higher vocational

education in China starts relatively late, but now it occupied half in the field of higher education. Higher vocational education, on the one hand, has met the diverse needs of different people for education, and has become an important form of higher education popularization. On the other hand, it has also provided a large number of high-quality talents for the development of the economy and society, and strongly promoted the development of the economy and society. In view of this, it was necessary to strengthen the students' satisfaction of China's higher vocational education.

Having recognized these problems, The Ministry of Education in China is currently engaged in a highly motivated effort to reform the country's higher vocational education.

The Chinese government has published a series of guidelines and policies to promote the development of vocational education in recent years. In particular, with the implementation of "the dual high college plan" in 2019, higher vocational education has received unprecedented attention from the Chinese government and has been raised to an unprecedented strategic height. Colleges are facing unprecedented challenges and change. The main purpose of higher vocational education was to provide students with professional and technological education and occupational skills, thus allowing them to possess the competencies required by industries. They should adopt new management mechanisms, strengthen educational functions, to develop innovative instructional characteristics, to improve education service quality. It was one of the effective measures to increase the competitiveness of the college to know the advantages and disadvantages through the semi-structured interview of students' satisfaction with the college, and then make targeted improvement.

However, in the past, the assessment of education quality was often carried out by the administrative departments of educations, which ignored the important stakeholders of students. There are many factors affecting students' satisfaction on the college. For example, personal and social factors, organization environment, economic status, colleague's behavior, reward and self-confidence, etc. As such, the study explores the factors which effected students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China. The reason for the choice of this college was due to the fact that the college is the biggest college in Guangdong region in China, and the college was committed to building a national first-rate and internationally known leading

vocational college that produces quality talents well-accepted by the society, provides satisfactory social services and plays a more eminent exemplary role in China.

The objectives of this research were to investigate:

1. To identify the factors affecting students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China.
2. To suggest the strategies to overcome the factors which affect the students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China.

Based on the research objectives, two research questions were formulated:

1. What are the factors affecting students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China?
2. Which suggestions are effective for students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the development of higher education in the world, the importance of students' satisfaction was emerged in the literature of higher education (Weerasinghe, Lalitha, & Fernando, 2017). It is very important to satisfy student's needs in schools of any country, students' satisfaction has remained under discussion over the two decades. The previous studies of scholars on student satisfaction are the basis of this study.

Students' satisfaction as a short term attitude, resulting from an evaluation of a students' educational experiences (Elliott & Healy, 2001). Students' satisfaction is a multidimensional process which is influenced by different factors (Weerasinghe, Lalitha, & Fernando, 2017). Wilkins & Balakrishnan (2013) identified quality of lecturers, quality of physical facilities and effective use of technology as key determinant factors of student satisfaction. "The concept of Students' Satisfaction has been attracted much attention in recent years and become one of the major goals of all educational institutions" (Temize & Turkyilmaz, 2012).

Globally, many studies have been conducted to measure students' satisfactory in higher education institutions. In Africa, the

study in South Africa measuring service quality in higher education found that customers had expectations in tangibles, reliability and assurance dimension (Green, 2014). In Malaysia, this study indicated that majority of the respondents were satisfied with the teaching, learning and assessment aspects, which was participated by 401 respondents from a university in the East Coast region of Malaysia (Wan, Mohamad & Khairul, 2014). In Nigeria, the study examined the demographic factors that determine students' satisfaction with academic facilities in private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria (Oluwunmi, A.O. et al, 2016). In Lebanon, the study showed the importance of having high emotional intelligent teachers in the universities to increase students' satisfaction (Maamari & Majdalani, 2018). In Finland, A study on students' satisfaction found that core university activities, such as research and teaching facilities, have greater impacts on overall students' satisfaction than supportive facilities (Karna & Julin, 2015). In Armenian, the study examined the impact of selected variables on students' satisfaction and identified reasonable curriculum and faculty services as key determinants of student satisfaction (Martirosyan, 2015). In Spain, the study indicated that teaching staff, teaching methods and course administration have significant effect on students' satisfaction in Spanish University System (Navarro, Iglesias & Torres, 2005). In Pakistan, the study indicated that except tangibility, other dimension of service quality have a significant impact on students' satisfaction at Heailey College of Commerce, (Khan & Nawaz, 2011).

However, there were some differences between Chinese and foreign colleges in terms of teaching system and public cognition. And also there was limited literature about students' satisfaction in higher vocational colleges. In South Africa, a study indicate that the various demographic factors do not have a major influence on TVET students' attitudes and opinions regarding the service they provided by their colleges (Mason, Mbambo & Pillay, 2018). In Pakistan, A study indicated a difference between expectation and perception of the students regarding the service quality of education delivered them by the higher public education institutions of Lahore (Ali, Ali, & Ahmad, 2019). In Indonesian, A case study was carried out in Politeknik ATMI Surakarta which involved 423 students as the respondents. The result of the case study indicates negative gaps in all of the SERVQUAL dimensions (Rinato, Pujiyanto, Rosyidi & Prasetyo, 2019).

These empirical studies show that the students in different regions, different country have a bigger difference to the evaluation of students' satisfaction, and finding that most of research used quantitative methods to measure students' satisfaction. Therefore, based on the inadequacy qualitative research in coverage of the effect on students' satisfaction in higher vocational colleges, this study tries to cover this gap in the context of China. Due to this reason, this research prompted to conduct qualitative study about factors affecting students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher employed a qualitative method using interviews to collect the data. The basic objective of the study is to investigate the factors affecting students' satisfaction at a Polytechnic of Science and Technology. For this study, the participants were students from a Polytechnic of Science and Technology. The college has a population of 20000 students from grade one to grade three. The sample of the study was 50 male and 50 female students of the college. The major instrument of the study for data collection was a semi-structured interview. The qualitative data for this study was gathered through the focus group interview sessions. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The data were then analyzed, following themes were emerged.

Theme 1: Satisfaction Level

The focused group discussion revealed that satisfaction of students were more found in male rather than female because female students had higher expectations in a Polytechnic of Science and Technology.

Theme 2: Curriculum Setting

In the curriculum setting, 80% respondents pointed out that they hoped to have more practical courses, increasing practical training courses and improving their professional skills.

Theme 3: The Campus Environment

It seemed that 60% respondents were satisfied with their learning environment and 40% are not. According to the respondents, due to the expansion of enrollment in recent years, the teaching conditions and facilities of the college were relatively tight, especially the scheduling of classes in classrooms. The utilization rate of some laboratories was relatively low, and some courses were arranged on weekends. Some

students also noticed that the college is making great efforts to improve the campus environment, such as building new dormitories, new teaching buildings, new basketball courts and installing air conditioners. The college was becoming more suitable for students' study and life. It has also been approved and affirmed by most of students.

Theme 4: Improvement of the teaching level

Some students pointed that some teachers have rigid classes and single teaching method. And some students showed that some teachers were lack of affinity and communication with students, which ignored students' opinions and affected the enthusiasm of students and the relationship between teachers and students.

Theme 5: Humanistic information service

The study observed that most of the respondents found that they hoped to construct the humanistic information service environment, and some measures had been given for constructing the humanist information service environment in library and dormitories. The respondents also they hoped that the college can provides individualized guidance such as professional understanding, psychological counseling, social practice, career planning and employment guidance. Especially, 60% respondents mentioned the importance of employment guidance.

Theme 6: Related to Physical Facilities

Some respondents pointed out that basic facilities should be provided to every students by the college, including Well equipped-classrooms with modern facilities, well equipped-labs, library with adequate resources and web services to meet learning needs, and other basic needs such as dormitories, cafeterias, clinics and entertainment centers. The Physical Facilities effected the students' study and life directly.

Theme 7: The management of college

There is lack of team work among teachers and head-teachers. Some respondents were satisfied with the working attitude of teacher. Some respondents were satisfied with the working attitude of the head teacher. Some respondents thought that other staff provided services properly all the time and tell them exactly to solve the problem at the college. And also other students were not satisfied with this aspect, and they thought the attitude of the head teacher and teachers was not good on them and deeply affected them.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study showed the majority of the respondents agreed that the importance to improve the service which was provide by the college. Higher vocational colleges are institutions that provide students with educational services. Students can continuously improve themselves through study and life in the college, practical training and practice, and various educational services provided by the college, and finally get employed. The good services in the higher vocational college were provided, including Curriculum Setting, Campus Environment, Teaching level, Humanistic information service, Physical Facilities, Management of college towards students. It means, these are the key factors that motivate the students' satisfaction on the college.

5. CONCLUSION

The research concluded that the main factors that students were concerned about and affected through this interview. The study find that the above six themes were the factors affecting students' satisfaction at a polytechnic of Science and Technology in China, which can provide direction for future efforts in relevant aspects. The study also explored that female respondents are not much satisfied with the service by the college due to their high expectation in a polytechnic of Science and Technology. They also agreed that there are some factors affecting their satisfaction. Half of the respondents felt that conducive campus environment plays a important role in their study and life. The majority of the respondents agreed that the necessity of humanistic information service and the attitude of teachers on students. Autocratic mode of administration prevailed in higher institutions, which needs to be replaced with democratic and participative one. In China, higher vocational education is expanding very rapidly, this is a crucial area for research, the findings can help to provide a direction to the study of students' satisfaction in higher vocational education in this country.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the improvement of the service quality of the education, there has room for continuous improvement at the college.

In Curriculum Setting, the college should combine with enterprise, industry and government agencies, to strengthen the cooperation with enterprises, and to make the college set up course closely connected with social position. Therefore, the college can satisfy the demand for talent, and developing information update to the practice of training course, give students practice opportunities as much as possible, focusing on the improvement of the students' professional skills and the ability of employment.

In campus environment, the college should continue to strengthen the infrastructure construction and optimize the learning and living environment, especially to solve the problem of insufficient resources caused by the recent expansion of enrollment. The hardware conditions of the college had a great impact on the quality of life and study, including the teaching, accommodation, entertainment, sports and other aspects, which is the basic guarantee for students to be satisfied with the service level and quality of higher vocational education.

In teaching level, the college should deepen educational and teaching reform and improve the teaching level of teachers. Teaching quality is the fundamental problem related to survival and development of the college. From the attention of students, the teaching attitude and teaching methods are the most concerned by students. Therefore, it is particularly important to deepen educational and teaching reform and improve teachers' teaching level.

In humanistic information service, the college should care for students with family difficulties and illness. In terms of employment guidance, although the college has established a relatively complete vocational guidance system, there was still a relative lack of targeted guidance for different majors and students. Therefore, the college should focus on strengthening employment and entrepreneurship guidance services. And also the college should strengthen policy publicity, encourage teachers to participate in employment and entrepreneurship research projects.

In physical facilities, the college should facilitate the students in term of basic facilities and necessary resources such as drinking water in teaching building, well equipped laboratory, comfortable dormitory and playground.

In management of college, good and effective administration played an important role in making favorable environment for teaching

and living. The team work among teachers and head-teachers should strengthen. For the teacher's good performance, reward or any appreciation certificate should be provided to the excellent teachers, such as care for students and guide students. In addition, the college offers the evaluation of scholarships and grants fairly, and gives a channel for feedback to students. Therefore, teachers and other staff of the college must put more effort and commitment.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of this study are concerned with the scope of the research which only covers a sample of 100 students from a Polytechnic of Science and Technology in China. There could also have been potential bias from respondents who may have misunderstood the questions or may have exaggerated their answers. The object of this study is a public vocational college in China, so the research results cannot fully reflect the overall situation of higher vocational education. So this area for research will be provided a further study.

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