
Student Satisfaction Levels at NUCB

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Abstract

The present study reports on the results of the survey conducted two times in 2013 among the students of different departments with the aim to find out more about students' opinions regarding their school life at NUCB and to identify some of the factors which affect their levels of satisfaction. The study analyzed the fluctuations of students' satisfaction levels from their freshman year and up to their final year at NUCB, aiming to determine some of the factors which may significantly influence changes in student satisfaction by year, gender and department.

Introduction

Life satisfaction has long been considered a predictor of success. Research has shown that, generally, individuals that are happier with their life live longer, have better health, and enjoy more success and satisfaction in their chosen profession (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a & b). Academic success could also be associated with relatively high levels of student satisfaction (Huebner & Gilman, 2006; Elmore & Huebner, 2010; Lewis et al., 2011). By analyzing the GPA and life satisfaction of a group of university students who solicited university counseling, Frisch et al. (2005) showed that it was possible to predict from one to three years in advance the percentage of students who would drop out of school.

On the other hand, there are researchers who found that, in some cases, levels of academic success are inversely proportional to those of student happiness (Suldo, Shaffer, & Riley, 2006; Vyvermann & Vettenburg, 2009). A comparison between U. S. and Korean students showed that, despite a higher academic achievement level, Korean students had lower global life satisfaction as well as lower life, school, family and friends satisfaction than U. S. students (Park, 2005).

Another important factor in understanding student satisfaction is its connection to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is regarded as the positive force which enables high quality learning and academic success, and is the result of high levels of student satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation is related to other than pleasure and satisfaction motives, and refers to learning which occurs due to obligation, coercion or other external reasons, and is often seen as breeding resentment, resistance and disinterest (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An interesting point is that, although most educational tasks are not intrinsically motivating, employment of active and volitional strategies by educators should make them interesting and enjoyable for the students (*ibid.*, p. 55). Since motivation and student satisfaction are important factors, which contribute to successful academic performance, it can be said that motivated students that are happy with their

school are more likely to perform better in school than those who are unhappy and dissatisfied. Dörnyei (2014) considers that there is a close relationship between learner satisfaction and motivation in a L2 learning environment, and that encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation is one of the motivational strategies that lead to a successful acquisition of a foreign language.

Huebner, Ash and Laughlin (2001) define school satisfaction as a cognitive-affective evaluation of the satisfaction with one's experience in school. It entails cognitive judgment and an emotional aspect, that is, a feeling of happiness, enjoyment or fulfillment in relation to school life (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kannas, 1998). According to the Self Determination Theory of Motivation in Education, students are intrinsically motivated to learn (i. e., they find the learning activity interesting or enjoyable) when their needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Student autonomy is expressed through the possibility to take initiative, explore, identify problems and find possible solutions on their own. Competence is experienced through facing a challenge and receiving feedback. Relatedness is expressed by how students relate to their peers, and how they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these needs are met, it is believed that students are more motivated to perform and more satisfied with their student life (APA, 2004).

Methodology

The present study looks at the fluctuations of students' satisfaction levels from their freshman year and up to their final year at NUCB, aiming to identify the factors which determine changes in student satisfaction by year and department, and to investigate possible issues which may cause dissatisfaction among students. Moreover, the study seeks to find possible differences in levels of satisfaction between male and female students according to various years of study and their respective departments.

The study examined two cohorts of NUCB students: a sample of English majors from the Communication Department and another one, consisting of Business majors from other departments of NUCB. As a study instrument, a 15-item survey in Japanese was administered in paper form to English majors and Business majors taking English as an elective course. The survey was administered two times in 2013, in June and December, before the beginning of a common on-campus TOEIC test. Out of the 15 items of the survey, 14 were Likert-scale questions, with answers ranging from one point ("I agree") to five points ("I disagree").

The survey returned a total of 540 valid responses from the Communication Department (English majors), and 244 responses from Business majors. The responses were analyzed using ANOVA. Correlation and regression analyses were further conducted in order to find to what degree the variables are related, and to predict to a certain extent which variables may determine fluctuations in students' satisfaction levels.

Findings and Data Analysis

Some of the survey questions are related directly to the students' opinion of their studies and school life, whereas others elicit responses regarding their relationship with their teachers and peers. These items of the survey seek to identify how the students' needs for competence (items 8, 9, 11, 14, 15), autonomy (items 2, 3, 6, 10, 12, 13), and relatedness (items 4, 5) are fulfilled.

As seen in Table 1, a comparative analysis of the two cohorts reveals a number of statistically significant differences. Items 8, 9 and 10 indicate that English majors feel more at ease around their foreign teachers and when using English to communicate, compared to their peers from other departments. This relative ease around foreigners is accounted for by the multicultural composition of the teaching staff in the Communication department, as opposed to the relative homogeneity of the teaching staff in business depart-

ments. On the other hand, non-English majors considered that their autonomy and competence needs are better fulfilled as they thought they participated more actively in class (item 3) and that this school gives them more opportunity to grow as full-fledged mature persons (item 14).

Table 1. Comparison between English majors (FOC) and Business majors (Others)

Items	FoC	Others	F value
	(N = 540) Average (SD)	(N = 244) Average (SD)	
1. I'm satisfied with school life.	2.54 (1.14)	2.47 (1.05)	0.59
2. It is interesting to have new experiences.	1.52 (0.71)	1.39 (0.61)	5.47*
3. I participate in class rather actively.	2.11 (0.99)	1.97 (0.87)	3.98*
4. I'm friendly with the people around.	1.94 (0.91)	1.94 (0.85)	0.00
5. To communicate with other people is interesting.	1.77 (0.83)	1.73 (0.79)	0.37
6. It is fun working as a group.	2.28 (1.08)	2.15 (0.95)	2.53
8. I'm friendly with the teachers here.	2.08 (0.84)	2.71 (1.16)	72.89***
9. It is easy to communicate with foreigners.	3.09 (1.10)	3.58 (1.13)	32.83***
10. It is interesting to learn English.	1.98 (0.92)	2.41 (1.10)	31.43***
11. Speaking English is important for the future.	1.46 (0.74)	1.39 (0.73)	1.40
12. It is interesting to communicate in English.	1.74 (0.86)	2.10 (1.01)	25.32***
13. The school is interesting.	2.19 (1.11)	2.30 (1.05)	1.42
14. I feel I can develop as a person in this school.	2.44 (1.04)	2.24 (0.95)	6.66**
15. I feel my English is improving thanks to learning in this school.	2.43 (1.04)	2.81 (1.11)	20.65***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

A comparison between the values obtained from male and female English majors yielded statistically significant differences at items 4, 8, 11, 14 and 15 (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison between male and female English majors

Items	male	female	F value
	(N = 242) Average (SD)	(N = 298) Average (SD)	
1. I'm satisfied with school life.	2.55 (1.24)	2.53 (1.06)	0.05
2. It is interesting to have new experiences.	1.55 (0.75)	1.49 (0.69)	0.93
3. I participate in class rather actively.	2.09 (0.98)	2.14 (1)	0.35
4. I'm friendly with the people around.	2.04 (0.99)	1.86 (0.83)	5.15*
5. To communicate with other people is interesting.	1.80 (0.88)	1.75 (0.79)	0.55
6. It is fun working as a group.	2.23 (1.11)	2.32 (0.06)	1.03
8. I'm friendly with the teachers here.	1.93 (0.86)	2.21 (0.82)	15.59***
9. It is easy to communicate with foreigners.	3.00 (1.16)	3.15 (1.06)	2.37
10. It is interesting to learn English.	1.92 (0.92)	2.03 (0.92)	1.87
11. Speaking English is important for the future.	1.57 (0.80)	1.38 (0.69)	8.81**
12. It is interesting to communicate in English.	1.71 (0.83)	1.77 (0.90)	0.75
13. The school is interesting.	2.19 (1.14)	2.20 (1.09)	0.00
14. I feel I can grow as a person in this school.	2.32 (1.06)	2.54 (1.03)	6.06**
15. I feel my English is improving thanks to learning in this school.	2.27 (1.04)	2.56 (1.04)	10.5***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

While more male students expressed positive opinions of their interactions with foreign teachers (item 8), and were more appreciative of the school's contribution to their English skills (items 14, 15), female students appeared more critical of their relationship with teachers, school and English, which might suggest that female students do not easily get carried away by a friendly atmosphere and various class activities, involving fun and games, and tend to be more goal oriented than their male peers. This is demonstrated by the statistically significant difference between males and females' responses at item 11, which suggest that female students focus more on the acquisition of foreign language competence than on how they relate to their teachers or peers.

The findings of the comparison by years of study point to a general tendency of freshmen to be more enthusiastic and motivated in regards to their school life. However, students tend to gradually lower their enthusiasm by their second year, and appear most unmotivated in the third year, to recover somehow in their fourth, and final, year as students. First year students declared themselves reasonably happy with their school life, considered they were active in class, and thought that learning English is interesting. Their responses are overall more positive than those of their older peers, suggesting that they approach the new challenges of student life with more anticipation. However, as routine sets in with homework, reports, tests and final examinations, all on top of a part time job most of the students hold, the novelty of learning a new language wears out, to be replaced by the third year by a significantly increased negative attitude. Third year students are thought to feel the stress of student life the most, partly because of the pressure to acquire graduation credits in preparation for the daunting process of job search in the fourth year, which would keep most of the students busy for more than six months. A slight recovery is seen, however, in the fourth year, as the students tend to relax after securing a job, and seem determined to make up for the lost time and enjoy their student life for the last time before graduation.

A correlation analysis was conducted in an attempt to find out how the items of the survey were correlated (Table 3) and showed that all items of the survey are intercorrelated, meaning that positive increases in the value of one variable tend to be accompanied by positive increases in the values of other variables as well. A linear regression analysis attempted to find the causal link between the items (Table 4).

Considering Item 1, *I'm satisfied with school life*, a constant, the variables which might influence students' satisfaction were identified. Four variables were found to possibly cause significant fluctuations in student satisfaction. In the order of their importance, these are enjoyability, personal development awareness, English improvement awareness and active class participation, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 3. Intercorrelation Analysis

Intercorrelation Matrix Among the 14 Questionnaires														
Variables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15
Q1 I'm satisfied with school life.	—													
Q2 It is interesting to have new experiences.	.255**	—												
Q3 I participate in class rather actively.	.374**	.320**	—											
Q4 I'm friendly with the people around.	.436**	.319**	.418**	—										
Q5 To communicate with other people is interesting.	.303**	.470**	.387**	.590**	—									
Q6 It is fun working as a group.	.324**	.223**	.269**	.480**	.499**	—								
Q8 I'm friendly with the teachers here.	.336**	.311**	.429**	.480**	.444**	.345**	—							
Q9 It is easy to communicate with foreigners.	.177**	.111*	.179**	.195**	.220**	.196**	.408**	—						
Q10 It is interesting to learn English.	.287**	.400**	.412**	.287**	.403**	.259**	.490**	.359**	—					
Q11 Speaking English is important for the future.	.175**	.411**	.284**	.254**	.360**	.199**	.361**	.132**	.410**	—				
Q12 It is interesting to communicate in English.	.243**	.449**	.369**	.287**	.467**	.253**	.480**	.307**	.672**	.538**	—			
Q13 The school is interesting.	.688**	.335**	.375**	.564**	.425**	.437**	.436**	.192**	.367**	.201**	.310**	—		
Q14 I feel I can develop as a person in this school.	.605**	.341**	.413**	.402**	.389**	.373**	.387**	.296**	.380**	.200**	.347**	.604**	—	
Q15 I feel my English is improving thanks to learning in this school.	.473**	.339**	.416**	.291**	.351**	.342**	.459**	.359**	.515**	.254**	.478**	.472**	.662**	—

Note N = 540 **rs, p<.001. *rs, p<.005

Table 4. Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a					
Items	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.556	0.132		4.218	0
Q2	-0.034	0.058	-0.021	-0.587	0.558
Q3	0.093	0.041	0.081	2.239	0.026
Q4	0.092	0.054	0.074	1.714	0.087
Q5	-0.089	0.058	-0.065	-1.517	0.13
Q6	-0.017	0.038	-0.016	-0.447	0.655
Q8	-0.037	0.054	-0.027	-0.674	0.5
Q9	-0.007	0.035	-0.007	-0.207	0.836
Q10	-0.035	0.054	-0.028	-0.646	0.519
Q11	0.056	0.056	0.037	1.009	0.313
Q12	-0.043	0.06	-0.033	-0.72	0.472
Q13	0.502	0.044	0.489	11.542	0
Q14	0.273	0.049	0.251	5.615	0
Q15	0.101	0.048	0.093	2.096	0.037

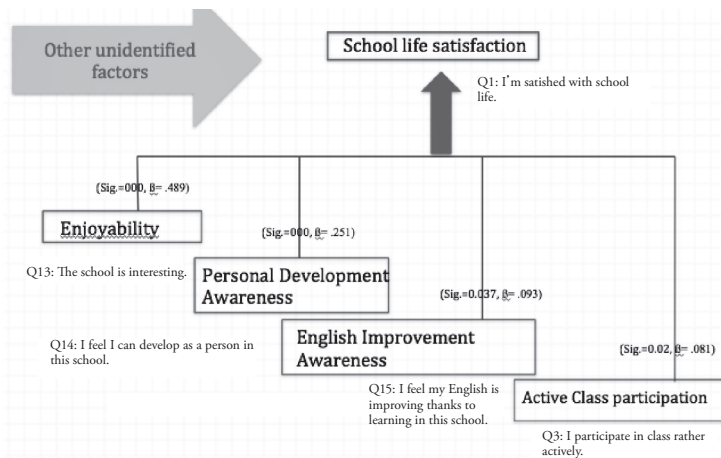


Figure 1. Factors influencing student satisfaction

Study Limitations and Implications

One of the most significant conclusions drawn by the researchers from this study is that the third year students are the least satisfied with their school life at NUCB. This disturbing finding is, however, significantly mitigated by the limitations of the reported research. The first limitation is that there has been no previous study of other comparative cohorts of students, which could allow confirming or dismissing the detected trend in the dynamics of student satisfaction. Analyzing the peculiarities of the study population, the researchers paid special attention to the cohort of 2011 entrants, who were in their third year of study and who demonstrated the least satisfaction with student life. The major focus was on participants' decreased satisfaction on such variables as interest towards English, class participation and friendliness with teachers. It was noted that this particular cohort were those who experienced the most significant faculty turn-over during their study at NUCB. Thus, more than a half of the teachers of the Communication Department (13 out of 22), with whom the subjects had possibly forged some friendship during their first two years of study, left the university.

Second, the study did not explore other variables potentially linked with students' satisfaction, such as credit accumulation or degrees of the respondents' part-time job involvement or club participation. Neither did it test other variables of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction related to particular university policies, courses or teachers. Among other variables left behind in this study one may consider important possible transformation (maturing) of students' expectations from the job market or other socio-economic factors, which might turn out instrumental for students' perceptions of their life satisfaction.

Still, leaving aside these unidentified factors (i. e., club activities, part time job, money concerns, etc.), the four elements shown in Figure 1 were found to determine significant changes in the values of item 1 – School Satisfaction. With the exception of the “fun factor” (enjoyability), the others were actualizations of the three elements, which determine student motivation and satisfaction: autonomy (active class participation), competence (English improvement awareness) and relatedness (personal development awareness). This means that, in order to be motivated to learn, our students need to be aware that these three basic needs are fulfilled. Moreover, if we extrapolate these findings to the earlier discussion of extrinsic and

intrinsic motivation, we could conclude that students' expectations regarding "enjoyability" might, to a certain extent, relate to the ability of educators to help extrinsically motivated students turn studying into a more exciting and spiritually rewarding experience. To put it simply, students need classes that make them feel they have actually and actively learned something, and give them confidence that they will become more mature and autonomous learners.

Recommendations

On June 16th, 2015, the researchers reported the results of the study to the staff of the Department of Communication at the Faculty Development meeting. After presenting the findings, the researchers encouraged the participants of the meeting to reflect on the four main significant factors connected with students' decreasing satisfaction with life at NUCB, specifically enjoyability of school life and studies, their awareness of personal development, improvement in English, and class participation. Four stations were created to probe into different ways of how low satisfaction of students can be addressed through our teaching methods and practices. The summary of the discussion dealing with the above mentioned four instrumental factors is presented by the researchers of the current study in the following conclusion.

Enjoyability Factor. At Station 1, which explored the question of how we can help our students enjoy school life and studying better, the following suggestions were offered:

1. The classroom activities should have rich real life input.
2. Teachers should help students to transfer normal identity from their own language and culture to the language they learn.
3. The English learning should be humanized, in other words, students should be able to connect personally to the situations and tasks they are involved in in English.
4. The specific characteristics of the group should be taken into account (i. e. level of English proficiency, the group dynamics, etc.).
5. More content courses in English should be offered.
6. Sharing some personal experiences with students related to the subject or topic of the study is perceived to be helpful.

Personal Development Factor. At Station 2, which explored the ways to help our students achieve personal development and become aware of it, most of the faculty agreed on the following ways:

1. Benchmarking. Teachers should give students feedback and the possibility to reflect on their progress.
2. Teachers should talk to students in the out-of-class environment (e. g., office). Individual attention is important to let students voice out their concerns and to take care of their problems.
3. Students should be made aware of their individuality and their own responsibility for their progress with studies. It is also important to teach students challenge their own beliefs and choices to help them become an independent learner.
4. Similar to the previous objective, students should be helped with their goal setting, be exposed to various career choices and be helped with acknowledging their interests, strengths, and weaknesses.
5. Students should be helped to grow – be able to reflect upon their past, what they want to achieve in future, and find their priorities. Teachers can help with students' goal setting and exploring the available opportunities to achieve those goals (e. g., study abroad or participation in overseas programs, international internships, volunteer projects, etc.)

Awareness of Improvement in English. Since language competence and awareness of their progress in English was listed among the factors positively contributing to students' motivation and satisfaction,

the discussion at Station 3 focused on the ways to help our students increase their awareness of English improvement. The following measures were suggested by the discussants:

1. Attention to TOEIC scores should be heightened. This could be done through encouraging students to keep track of their TOEIC scores as an indication of their ESL competence. Also, students should be made aware of TOEIC score requirements in different companies and in different jobs.
2. Besides exposure to the new materials in teaching English, recycling of the previously learned material (vocabulary, skills, topics) is recommended to allow students to appreciate their growing competence.
3. Students should be encouraged to use recording when doing a speaking task and to listen to it for self-assessment; all recorded files should be kept in the portfolio and referred to at a later stage.
4. Writing without erasing mistakes might be effective, with analyzing mistakes as a learning tool.
5. Students should be helped with setting goals in language learning and making it a self-regulatory system.

Increasing Class Participation. Discussion at Station 4 addressed ways to boost class participation. Different suggestions of the faculty are presented in the summary below:

1. Teachers need to run needs analyses through interviewing, peer interviewing, survey, and peer feedback.
2. Students should be given “voice and choice” in optional and supplementary activities offered by the teacher.
3. Teachers should control group dynamics and change it if necessary by shuffling (varying) group formation.
4. Personal approach was recognized as effective, with teachers knowing students’ names and making sure that everyone is asked during the class time or involved in all classroom activities.
5. Personal connectedness was recommended through relating material to teacher’s own experience, as well as that of the students.
6. Class routine needs to be broken. Teachers should utilize a variety of class activities, movement, changing pitch and tone of teacher’s voice, alternating different modes of class work from explanation and instruction to group work, pair work, “escalator” group work, contest, and so on.
7. Difficult content that might set off students’ motivation should be addressed through visualization (multimedia), peer teaching, and team learning.

Conclusion

Students come to NUCB enthusiastic about their new academic environment, they appreciate contact with teachers and have high expectations about mastery of English. However, over the following years their motivation to study and satisfaction with school life wanes, with the third year being the lowest on all factors contributing to life satisfaction.

There are numerous ways to fulfill students’ initial expectations and to keep students motivated about their studies, and most of the teachers are aware of these ways. Through these and many other ways teachers should aim at active class participation and helping students continue to perceive the importance of English in their future lives, as well as to be aware of their personal development and enjoy their life at the university in general. Irrespective of many mitigating socio-economic and institutional policies, motivating students is still left, to much extent, with the teachers, who through their experience, knowledge and enthusiasm can keep students’ satisfaction with their four-year university life at a high level.

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