

The Involvement, Engagement and Satisfaction of Higher Education Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Students in Higher Education (HE), like academics and support staff members are critical roles players. This study provides insights into how students experience involvement, engagement, and satisfaction in Higher Education institutions. This study is qualitative in nature and the authors examined extant and relevant literature in analyzing, defining, explaining, and understanding the phenomenon of student's involvement, engagement, and satisfaction in Higher Education. The exploration was guided by two critical literary review questions posed, namely: "What are the educational experiences of students in the Higher Educational institutions?" and "How does involvement and engagement of Higher Education students influence their satisfaction?" The databases of the Educational Resources Information Centre, Google Scholar, Springer and Research Gate were used to search for literature online. Search keywords included the following: (a) Educational experience of students from involvement to engagement and (b) student satisfaction. Selections were made on the basis of the abstracts of the different documents found. Based on the discussions, it was found out that students' experiences are grounded in the environment where teaching and learning take place. Effective teaching methodologies support students to become good learners when the necessary environment is created for students to learn. The literature recommended that to attain the educational goals of higher educational institutions, higher educational managers could identify and improve areas of educational environment that affect students' satisfaction levels.

Keywords: Higher Education, Students' Educational Experiences, Student Involvement, Engagement and Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Students' experience could be categorized into varying levels. The first could be observed at the application for admission stage. All universities should recognize this stage and make sure that the process of choosing, and applying for courses is backed up with solid information, advice, and guidance. Transparency over contact time, assessment criteria and teaching staff will contribute to realistic academic expectations, but a range of other information also needs to be made available to prospective students. Beyond this, the application level of the student experience should provide a genuine insight into what life should be expected at the university.

The second level of the student experience is university life itself. Students paying higher fees will have increased expectations of facilities and academic quality, which universities should all work to meet. There is a clear link between levels and quality of support, facilities and resources on offer to students, and how satisfied they are with their experience at university. Potentially working alongside the private sector, improvements to a university's physical infrastructure are key areas required to enhance the student experience. The university experience should be characterized by collaboration between staff and students, with the student voice promoted and listened to. It is important for universities to make clear statements on the reciprocal relationships between students and universities in the development of knowledge and skills.

The final level of the student experience is graduation. Universities should make every effort to ensure graduates can flourish throughout their lives and careers. The graduate employment market is extremely competitive and it is crucial that students are well equipped during their time at university to progress and achieve their potential in the workplace. All graduates should leave university as mature, well-rounded individuals with clearly recognizable skills which will help them perform well on the job after graduation.

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In connection with the varying levels of the students' experiences in higher education we may raise the view of Will (2016), in his examination of Chinese international students, experiences in the United States of America higher education, found out that the perception of a better academic environment, with more academic freedom and independence (i.e. the ability to openly choose a field of study), more resources for their studies, as well as more academic maturity greatly influenced Chinese students' experiences and motivation to pursue higher education in the USA.

The diversity of learners engaging in higher education has grown in relation to the range of provision on offer. The difference and diversity of higher education learners might have been defined between disciplines, and areas of research. It has been noted that this classification seeks an "aura of exceptionality" (Teichler, 2003, p. 34) but cannot easily be measured. The learning environment determines student satisfaction with a university. The quality of an institution of higher education is also influenced by facilities including classrooms and labs, administrative process, and the physical environment such as infrastructure (Mastoi and Hai, 2019). Therefore, higher educational institutions should investigate the factors influencing student satisfaction with the learning environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study seeks to review the existing literature on the experiences of higher education students from involvement to engagement and satisfaction. Two literature review questions were posed to guide the researcher in this research activity. The questions read "*What are the educational experiences of students in the Higher Educational institutions?*" and "*How does involvement and engagement of higher education students influence their satisfaction?*"

There are three methods to review literature: narrative reviews, quantitative methods, and statistical meta-analysis (McGaw, 1988). In a narrative review, the author tries to make sense of the literature in a systematic and creative way (Van Ijendoorn, 1997). This researcher sought to apply a narrative approach in reviewing the literature. Using literature review as a guide (Topping, 1998; Dochy, Segers, Gijbels & Vandenbossche, 2002), the central characteristics to this review were defined, and analysed to give a meaning to the discussions of the literature according to the characteristics.

The Philosophical underpinnings of this research is grounded in interpretivism. It emphasizes the individual's ability to generate meaning to data. Grix, (2004) advises that researchers need to appreciate the philosophical foundations that inform their choice of "research questions, methodology, methods and intentions" (p. 57). Therefore, how one understands the concepts of social reality and knowledge influences how they will go about finding knowledge of relationships among occurrences and social behavior and how they appraise research.

Crotty (1998) contends that researchers can choose which stage to begin at, ontological, epistemological, methods or methodology. Other authors emphasize that research is first carry out better by considering ontological assumptions. According to Grix (2004) a better approach to research is by: clarifying the relationship between a researcher believes can be investigated (the ontological position) relating it to what we can know about it (the epistemological position) and how to go about attaining it (the methodological approach), one can begin to understand the impact that ontological position can bear on what and how one decides to study (Grix, 2004, p. 68).

In the view of Mack (2004), if ontologists study what we mean when we say something exists then an epistemologist studies what we mean when we say we know something. Crotty (1998) defined epistemology as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (1998, p. 3). Combination of ontological and epistemological assumptions bring up a paradigm. In addition, researcher's ontological assumptions inform the epistemological assumptions which inform methodology and these all give rise to methods employed to collect data. Interpretivism main ideology in the view of Mack (2004), is that research can never be objectively observed from the outside, instead, it must be observed from inside through the direct experience of research participants.

The approach to this research is qualitative in nature. It intends to provide different perspectives and have different assumptions, trying to interpret behaviours in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The researchers believe that, the ontological and epistemological interpretivism provide ideal methodological underpinnings for this research. As recommended by EPPI-Centre (2007) and Davies et al (2013) explained, in conducting systematic literature review, the following steps were adopted:

Scoping the review: It was started by designing explicit criteria for identifying which studies would be included in the review.

Searching for studies: The next step was to find relevant studies in particular types of literature.

Screening studies: To avoid hidden bias, each identified literature was screened against the inclusion criteria.

Describing and mapping link to research questions

Quality and relevance appraisal

Synthesising study findings

Conclusions/recommendation

This flowchart illustrates the systematic review process, as indicated:

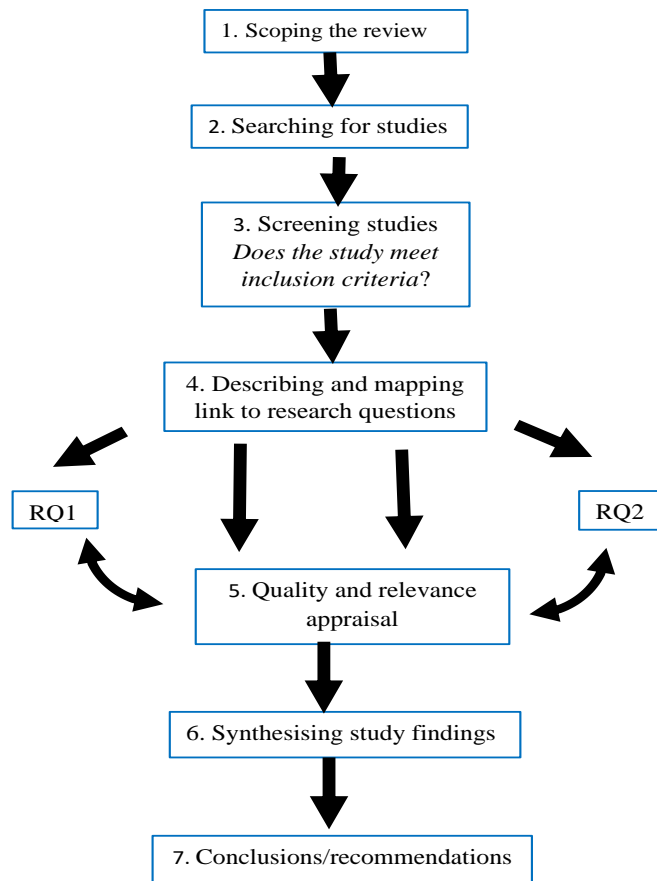


Figure 1: Flowchart showing the systematic review process adapted from Davies et al (2013) and modified

INCLUSION CRITERIA

One of the criteria used was that the literature must relate directly to, at least one of the research questions: “*What are the educational experiences of students in the Higher Educational institutions*” and “*How does*

involvement and engagement of higher education students influence their satisfaction” In addition, the literature should have been published between 2019 and 2024.

SEARCHING FOR STUDIES

A number of relevant databases (Educational Resources Information Centre, Google Scholar, Springer and Research Gate) were used to search for literature online. Search keywords included the following: (a) educational experience of students from involvement to engagement and (b) student satisfaction, hence literature which were not included within these categories were excluded from the review.

SCREENING STUDIES

The review sought to find out whether the study meet inclusion criteria, therefore based on a number of items that emerged from this search, selections were made on the basis of the abstracts of the different documents found. The criteria used for selection was that, studies that concerned educational experience of students from involvement to engagement were first to be considered, and the second selection criteria was on student satisfaction levels.

QUALITY AND RELEVANCE APPRAISAL

In terms of methodological quality and relevance, there should be justification for all decisions taken: e.g. sample, instruments, analysis. There should be clear evidence of measures taken to maximize trustworthiness. In case of relevance, the research questions must be clearly stated and methodology should be relevant to research questions. In addition, the topic should be relevance, and the study should be aligned to one of the key review questions. In this regard selections were made on the basis of the abstracts of published articles. No books nor conference proceedings were reviewed.

SYNTHESISING STUDY FINDINGS

The reviewed literature were gathered into (3) three themes to comprise (a) involvement (b) engagement and (c) satisfaction with student educational experiences. The researcher used mapping to provide results of outcomes from individual studies in structured manner by summarizing research methodology, findings and level of evidence from the mapping exercise and arranging them in themes.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Here, recommendations were drawn in line with the findings as synthesized above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total the search showed that 44, 300 studies from 2019 to 2024 had been published. The search showed that, for research question one (1), educational experience of students from involvement to engagement was 18, 600, while research question two (2), thus, students satisfaction levels was 25, 700. At the end of the screening of the studies, the number had reduced to 1, 720, but after appraising the quality and relevance of the studies, the researchers reviewed 52 studies and based on the review questions, the findings are discussed as shown:

What are the Educational Experiences of Students in The Higher Educational Institutions?

Student Involvement

Astin (1999) proposed five simple postulates for his involvement theory: involvement is investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects; it occurs along a continuum; it has both quantifiable and qualitative features; the extent of student learning and personal growth is directly proportional to student involvement; and usefulness of educational policy and practice is directly related to its capacity to ensure student involvement. He pointed out that the theory of student involvement provided the link between variables underscored in pedagogical theories and learning outcomes desired by the student and lecturers. According to Astin (1999), student involvement theory emphasizes active engagement of the student in the learning process and encourages educators to focus on what students do rather on what they are. Thus, involvement to some extent

is similar to motivation. The theory of student involvement is focused on behavioral mechanisms that facilitate student development rather than on outcomes.

In simple terms, “student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). In consequence, a student who spends substantial time with other students, often interacts with faculty, is engaged in extracurricular activities, and spends considerable time on campus is highly involved. On the contrary, uninvolved students spend limited time with other students, rarely interact with faculty, are not involved in extracurricular activities, and spend insignificant time on campus.

Student Engagement

Engagement is action and as such defines all learning, whether this effort is invested in the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or social domains (Mercer, 2019). Learning requires tangible student attention and participation, over and above the desire to succeed, that will proactively shape their development. Engagement provides a noticeable representation of how a learner reasons, acts, and feels in classroom learning activities (Oga-Baldwin, 2019), further than merely what they desire to achieve or the preliminary forces that strengthen them. Engagement can also be noted as important approach that learners keenly position themselves in classroom settings and enact practices similar to their social and personal characteristics (Hiver, Al-Hoorie, & Mercer, 2021).

Effective learner engagement, for example, is related to several expected learning features and outcomes, such as apt attention and focus, and greater perseverance, work and academic achievement (Fredricks et al., 2019; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). In the view of (Hiver, 2022), if engagement is a mechanism for organising student involvement and higher quality participation, then strengthening the necessary conditions for it to increase can help teaching practices that motivate participation. In this respect, student engagement settings can be a desired by-product of the conditions in the classroom.

Student engagement at the classroom level is intricately linked to student satisfaction, and thereby indirectly, but significantly, influences overall student persistence (progress to degree, regardless of institution) as well as student retention (the institution’s ability to keep students at their particular campus) (Juillerat 1995). Kotler and Clarke (1987) define satisfaction as a state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfill his or her expectation. Satisfaction is a function of relative level of expectations and perceives performance. The expectation may go as far as before the students even enter the higher education, suggesting that it is important to researchers to determine first what the students expect before entering the university (Palacio, Meneses and Perez, 2002). However, Carey, Cambiano and De Vore (2002), believe that satisfaction actually covers issues of students’ perception and experiences during the college years.

As mentioned by Axelson and Flick (2011), the level of student engagement at an institution of higher education is gradually seen as measurement of institutional excellence that is more meaningful than traditional education and has more characteristics as indicators. Student engagement of American students has been studied extensively (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the view of Kuh et al. (2005) “what students do during college generally matters more to what they learn and whether they persist to graduation than who they are or even where they go to college” (p. 4). High levels of student engagement are associated with purposeful student-faculty contact, active and collaborative learning, and inclusive and affirming institutional environments. These factors are related to student satisfaction, learning, and development. Thus, “high levels of student engagement are necessary for and contribute to collegiate success” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 4).

From the institutional perspective, only the strength of relationship with views of student centeredness and overall campus climate were found resilient than instructional effectiveness as interpreters of student satisfaction (Elliott and Healey 2001). In some cases, attendance to students as consumers and the marketization of higher education could result in less desirable outcomes such as reduction in consistency, grade inflation (Baldwin and Blattner 2003; Hartman and Schmidt 1995; but as Centra 2003, explains, finding congruence between expected and received grade make a difference more than higher grades), and above attendance to satisfaction over learning (Grebennikov and Shah 2012; Sabri 2011).

As Kuh (2003) indicated, hundreds of studies demonstrated that “college students learn more when they direct their efforts to a variety of educationally purposeful activities” (p. 25). There are many definitions of student engagement in higher education literature; therefore, it was determined that the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) definition would be appropriate. According to NSSE, student engagement signifies two vital characteristics of quality of higher education: “the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities, [and] ...how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011).

As surveyed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) the influence of university education on learning and cognitive development, personal growth and change, socioeconomic attainment process, and quality of life. They found that “the greater a student’s engagement in academic work or in the academic experience in college, the greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive growth” (p. 608). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that the “impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus” (p. 62), and that the best predictors of whether a student will graduate are academic preparation, motivation, and student engagement. In addition, Irungu (2010) looks at the extent to which these five engagement benchmarks expected various dimensions at research universities (*level of academic challenge; active and collaborative learning; student-faculty interaction; enriching educational experiences; and supportive campus environment*). Results indicated that a supportive campus environment and the level of academic challenge were the best predictors of the self-assessed outcomes. Hence classroom-level engagement can lead to healthier approaches to student satisfaction and learning (Baldwin and Koh 2012; Elliott and Shin 2002; Kendall and Schussler 2013; Putman, Ford, and Tancock 2012; Rundle-Thiele and Kuhn 2009; Sawyer, Braz, and Babcock 2009; Shim and Walczak 2012).

How does involvement and engagement of Higher Education students influence their satisfaction?

Student Satisfaction

Previous studies of student satisfaction have identified some emerging research themes which are presented as follows: (1) range of learning support services, (2) quality of teaching, (3) course outcomes especially as related to future job-requirement skills, (4) assessment via timely and constructive feedback, and (5) online learning technology and easiness of its use (Douglas, Douglas, and Barnes 2006; Grebennikov and Shah 2012; Hemsley-Brown et al. 2010; Nair and Shah 2012; Shah and Widin 2010).

Billy W, Jennifer DeWitt and Yuan-Li T. C (2023) mention that marketization has influenced the focus of higher educational institutions and policies on provision of student support services that enhanced students’ experiences and value. According to (Ali, 2019), a student’s level of satisfaction with their educational institution is believed to be influenced by factors including the quality of the facilities available such as library and laboratories, as well as their accessibility to a number of systems of communication. Similarly, Ikram and Kenayathulla (2023) explain that, education quality has a direct and significant positive impact on student satisfaction with teaching and learning resources, support, teaching space facilities and equipment.

Perrucci & Hu (1995) theorized that the ‘*Social Context (e.g. perceived discrimination)*’ could be classified as one of the factors affecting satisfaction among international graduate students in a University. The findings of their quantitative analysis however revealed that Social Satisfaction had no relation to students’ satisfaction. This was thus, contrary to the earlier theoretical thinking they postulated. In a similar study conducted in South Africa by Botha, et’ al (2015, chapter 2), direct and indirect prejudices were identified as predictors of students’ satisfaction. In the survey, when presented with video tapes, it was found that students who witnessed a sexist episode are 26.7 % more likely to report a satisfaction score of eight or higher when compared to those who did not witness such an incident. The research therefore concluded that, being a witness to unfair incidents is more strongly related to student satisfaction than actually directly experiencing a form of unfairness.

In their study, Sevda and Ozlem (2014) attempted to determine the satisfaction with student life by including the variables of student life quality (social, scientific and service factors), life satisfaction, and identification. The

study also tried to appraise the effect of the academic program of the chosen study, social life, and facilities and services provided at the faculty on the quality of student life as compared to other similar faculties in Turkey and other countries. Life satisfaction is the top priority of man in relation to the satisfaction with his society, family, friends, school, faculty, and health. According to the “bottom-up spillover” theory (Sirgy, 2010), all the mentioned variables affect life satisfaction. Satisfaction with student life affects life satisfaction. Based on this information, a study was conducted on how student life impact the satisfaction with life in general (Sevda, Ozlem, 2014).

It was also noted that, learning outcomes in contemporary times include skills and competencies a learner should imbibe. Information Technology skills; Oral and Written Communication Skills; Data/Situation Analysis skills; Leadership & Innovative Skills; and Research Project skills cannot be ignored. Hardly does one go for a job interview without being asked of their skills and competencies. Some interviewers even go to the extent of getting the interviewee to demonstrate their competence practically. Graduate recruitment often focuses on the graduates skills, aptitude and competencies. Therefore graduates find possible avenue of getting a job by exhibiting these qualities as evidence. As a basis for this researcher’s view we may mention the opinion of Mai (2005) on studying the student satisfaction in higher education and its influential factors. Mai (2005) found out that the overall impression of the school, overall impression of the quality of the education, teachers’ expertise and their interest in their subject, the quality and accessibility of IT facilities and the prospects of the degree, furthering students careers were the most influential predictors of the students satisfaction

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The search revealed that academic facilities including classrooms/lecture rooms/lecture theatres, laboratories serve as one of the students learning environment. A well-stocked library which addresses the information needs of students contribute greatly to good academic performance. Students’ experience with the facilities at their hall of residence is crucial. The incessant supply of electric power and continuous flow of water and its effect on effective time management in the life of a student and health condition of student’s student cannot be over-emphasized. University hospital provides, in addition to general services, provides specialist services such as dentistry, optometry, Eye Nose and Throat treatments for students to experience a good health in the university. Existence of sporting facilities has become necessary in our universities. The active involvement in sports builds the physical body for good health condition. Good health is one of the major functions of good academic performance. In his study assessing the factors affecting international students' satisfaction, Asare-Nuamah (2017) found that students have high satisfaction for library, contact with teachers, class size, course content, reading materials and administrative services of the University.

It was discovered that good educational policies can ensure the success of higher education teaching-learning and assessment thereby enhancing student experiences. In this regard there is the need to develop direct measures of learning outcomes to overcome the limitations of the quality teaching, learning and assessment in higher educational institutions. To achieve a success for the future in this regard is to embark on co-curricular activity and awards, run in parallel to degree programmes. These notwithstanding enhance the overall experiences of students, but should be tailored to meet employers’ demand for skills obtained outside the academic curriculum.

Recognizing students as customers cannot be ignored. Good customer care is all about bringing clients back and sending them away happy-happy enough to pass positive feedback about your business along to others, who may then try the product or service. The essence of forming a good relationship will be to make students feel that their expectations have been met. Good customer care, which the university should demand from its staff, should include listening to students and handling their complaints and being courteous towards students and knowledgeable in their field of work. Close personal relationship of students with staff helps in dealing with emotional challenges of students. As stated by Morris & Miller (2007), when faculty use technology to support teaching it enhances motivation to learn, thus assists in dealing with stress.

The relationship between lecturers approach to teaching and how their students learn has implications for continuous training and development of pedagogical skills of Academic staff in higher education so as to

increase lecturers' awareness of their students' experiences of learning. Constructive teaching methods including problem based learning, teamwork, self- study, tutor groups encourage students to transform information, to vigorously and critically interact with the subject matter and relating ideas to previous knowledge and experiences in order to 'understand', rather than to simply reproduce parts of the content. Educators have the responsibility of making students perform their shared role in the education process for improving the quality of learning. This could be associated with other scholarly works which maintain that students satisfaction levels are influenced by attitude of teachers towards teaching (Osterman, 2000; Thomas & Galambos, 2004; Ang, 2005; Siming, Gao, Xu, & Shaf, 2015).

Available evidence suggests that disadvantaged students are not only less likely to desire for higher education and to access higher education programmes, but they are also more prone to dropping out, thereby reinforcing inequality (Mateju et al., 2003; Koucky et al., 2008, OECD, 2008; Brock, 2010). Efforts to improve student completion rate and institutional efficiency must cautiously be carried out so that they do not further obstruct access and accomplishment for other people who are yet to attend higher education. Of particular concern to policy makers is the extent of non-completion of course of study, often perceived as a waste of financial and human resources. Some students drop out without obtaining at least a first Degree. Indeed, in spite of the establishment of quality assurance systems in most countries some years now, challenges and inadequacies in the learning process have not been eliminated completely.

CONCLUSION

This study reviewed the existing literature on the experiences of higher education students from involvement to engagement and satisfaction. Two literature review questions were posed to guide the researcher in this research activity. The questions read "What are the educational experiences of students in the Higher Educational institutions?" and "How does involvement and engagement of higher education students influence their satisfaction?" Based on the reviewed literature, it can be mentioned that student satisfaction are based on the environment where teaching and learning take place. It was noted that effective teaching approaches support students to become good learners when the necessary environment is created to increase students' satisfaction levels.

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