

The Factors in Learning Satisfaction of College's Students and the Relationship with the Willingness of Retention

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Abstract

Both qualitative research and quantitative research are utilized for discussing the correlation between students' learning satisfaction and student retention in this study. From the focus interview with students, six factors in students' learning satisfaction contain out-of-class learning opportunity, teachers' instruction, hardware quality, life function, economic aid, and climate & reputation, where out-of-class learning opportunity, life function, and economic aid are different from the dimensions in reference. From expert advice, the weights of the dimensions in learning satisfaction are sequenced teachers' instruction, climate & reputation, equipment quality, life function, out-of-class learning opportunity, and economic aid. From student survey, the relationship with student retention is sequenced climate & reputation, life function, economic aid, out-of-class learning opportunity, teachers' instruction, and equipment quality. The comprehension and expectation between experts and students present certain difference.

Keywords: college students, learning satisfaction, student retention, focus group interview, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP).

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Introduction

Domestic population structure is changing rapidly in past years; the situation of low birth rate is getting serious. The problem of low birth rate becomes apparent in Taiwan. For instance, less than 33 thousand students attended comprehensive assessment program for junior high school students in 2017 than those in the previous year, 13 thousand students were reduced in 2018, and 15 thousand students were further reduced in 2019, when there were merely 215 thousand students. There were merely 240 thousand freshmen in universities, and it was estimated to leave merely 150 thousand students by 2028. The enrollment crisis of universities was highlighted in 2016, when 23 universities and 203 departments did not enroll adequate students; total 2,953 students were short to appear “oversupply” for the first time. Six universities showed more than 50% shortage, i.e. less than a half of the enrollment. It revealed that universities were encountering the dilemmas of insufficient enrollment and student retention.

Along with the rapid development of industry and business as well as the economic boom, increasing industry shift and changes in international environment have international enterprises become more important, and the required professional knowledge is keeping up with the time.

When diplomaism is prevalent, going for higher education becomes the first choice of every junior high school student. Most junior high school students, when selecting universities, would consider the practical skills and special theories of courses in universities as the learning motivation. Meanwhile, the learning environment is also taken into account, as schools are the major places for students’ learning and the selected departments are the main knowledge sources for students.

Apparently, students’ learning motivation and learning environment of school location, equipment, teachers, administrative resources, and comfort would affect the learning satisfaction. Accordingly, expert advice and questionnaire survey are applied in this study to understand learning satisfaction and student retention of students in the department of International Business in the university.

This study aims to discuss the factors in college students’ learning satisfaction and the relationship with student retention for the reference of university departments related to such an issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aiming at learning satisfaction (LS), factors in learning satisfaction, and student retention, the following literatures are reviewed in this study.

Learning satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to a person’s expectation of anticipated results; when the results equal or exceed the expected feeling, the person would be satisfied. Satisfaction therefore is a feeling, a wish, or the feeling of achieving needs.

Learning satisfaction (LS) refers to students’ feeling of or attitude towards learning. They are satisfied when being pleased or presenting positive attitudes, but dissatisfied when being unpleasant or appearing negative behaviors (Tough, 1978). Long (1985) pointed out the major objectives of learning as learning outcome and satisfaction; satisfaction referred to students’ pleasant feeling of or attitude towards learning. Kuo, Chao, Wu, and Lin (2010) regarded learning satisfaction as learner needs and wishes being satisfied in the learning process or the attitude towards or feeling about various learning activities; such attitude or feeling could present learners’ preference for learning.

Factors in learning satisfaction

From domestic and international research, it is discovered that factors in students' learning satisfaction change with the objects. Selecting two major e-journal databases of Airiti Library and e-resource of Cheng Kung University Library in Taiwan, journal papers with the keyword "learning satisfaction" in 2009-2019 are searched; total 147 Chinese and English journal papers are acquired. With classification, the key factors in students' learning satisfaction contain "teachers' instruction", "hardware equipment", "school administration", and "self-efficacy".

Student retention

Student retention appeared on higher education about 40 years ago for the first time. In the beginning, it appeared to discuss the problem of student loss in higher education, referring to students left before completing the degrees. It was considered that they might present worse learning ability and low learning motivation, and did not believe in acquiring advantages after graduating from universities (Tinto, 2006). The factors in students not continuing the study were therefore understood through psychology.

Nonetheless, some researchers considered that it was not simply psychological factors in students not continuing study, but contained environmental factors (Spady, 1971), commitment (Tinto, 1993; Chen, 2007; Chiang, 2015), and economic factors, (Yorke & Thomas, 2003; Zepke & Leach, 2005; Chen, 2007) in student retention. Chiang (2015) indicated that campus experience, school identity, and student retention presented significant differences, and gender would also affect student retention.

METHODOLOGY

In regard to the selection of research methods, literature analysis is first used for collecting relevant data and the theories to deduce some factors in learning satisfaction. Focus Group Interview (FGI) is then utilized for exploring factors. College students are further invited to participate in the interview, which is then compared with the literature analysis results to deduce the research dimensions for successive quantitative research on students' learning satisfaction. Experts are also invited to advice the dimensions deduced from students' focus interview; students, on the other hand, precede questionnaire survey. Finally, Expert Choice is used for the AHP questionnaire analysis, which is further analyzed with SPSS.

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

The effect of college students' learning satisfaction on student retention is discussed in this study. According to literatures and theory discussion, college students' learning satisfaction is divided into six dimensions as shown in Figure 1.

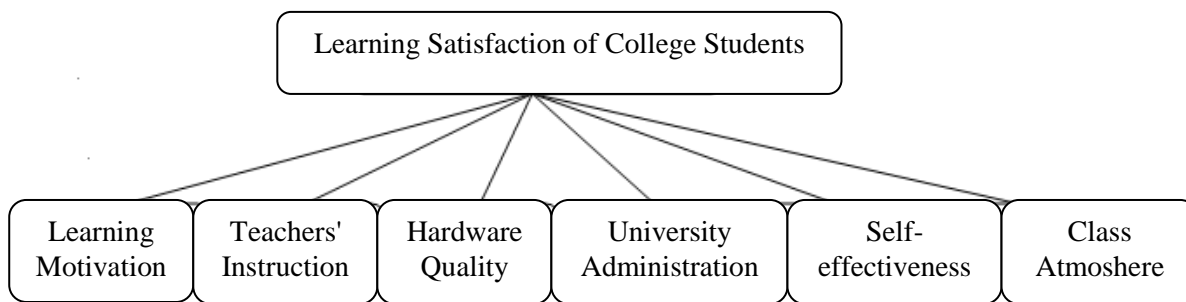


Figure 1. AHP of college students' learning satisfaction based on literatures and theories

Focus group interview sampling

Ten freshmen and senior students of Department of Informational Business in one of the university in the southern part of Taiwan are sampled for the interview, including four freshmen, three sophomores, two junior students, and one senior student.

Data collection

Focus group interview is utilized in this study for the students, in the meeting, brainstorming possible factors in learning satisfaction, deeply inspecting personal and others' points of view, and extracting the most possible factors. The modified factors are eventually applied to design the questionnaire with validity and reliability.

Research object and sampling

Quantitative questionnaire survey is focused in this study. Tutors of Department of Informational Business in Cheng Jung Christian University assist in distributing the questionnaire on site. The research objects would respond to the items listed in this study.

Data analysis tool

With quantitative questionnaire survey, AHP is applied to sequence factors in college students' learning satisfaction with the weights, and SPSS 22 is used for the descriptive statistical analysis, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Both qualitative research and quantitative research are preceded in this study. The following research results are presented qualitatively and quantitatively.

Qualitative Research Results

In terms of students' learning satisfaction, dimensions of "learning motivation", "teachers' instruction", "hardware equipment", "school administration", "self-efficacy", and "class climate" are deduced from literatures. After the collaborative discussion with college students, the dimensions are adjusted as "out-of-class learning opportunity", "teachers' instruction", "equipment quality", "life function", "economic aid", and "climate & reputation" in this study. The research structure is further adjusted as Figure 2.

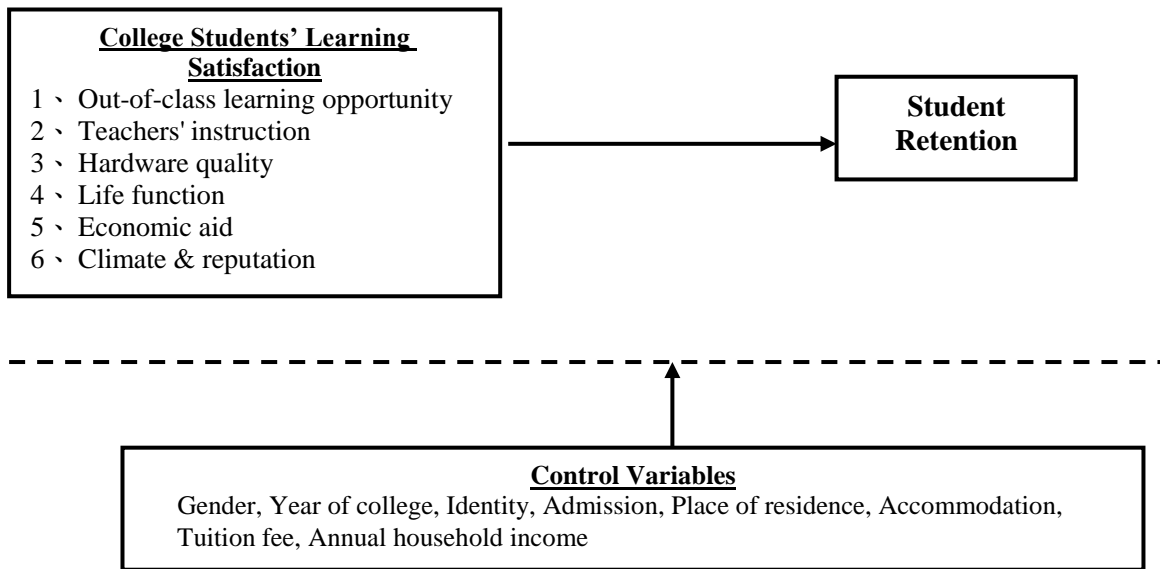


Figure 2. Adjusted research structure of factors in learning satisfaction and student retention.

Quantitative Research Results

1. Expert Interview

Five scholars with experience in university enrollment and head of department are invited for the expert advice and AHP questionnaire responses. Six factors in learning satisfaction are sequenced teachers’ instruction (39.5%), climate & reputation (26.3%), equipment quality (17.0%), life function (6.5%), out-of-class learning opportunity (6.4%), and economic aid (4.3%), where life function and out-of-class learning opportunity show close weight, Figure 3.

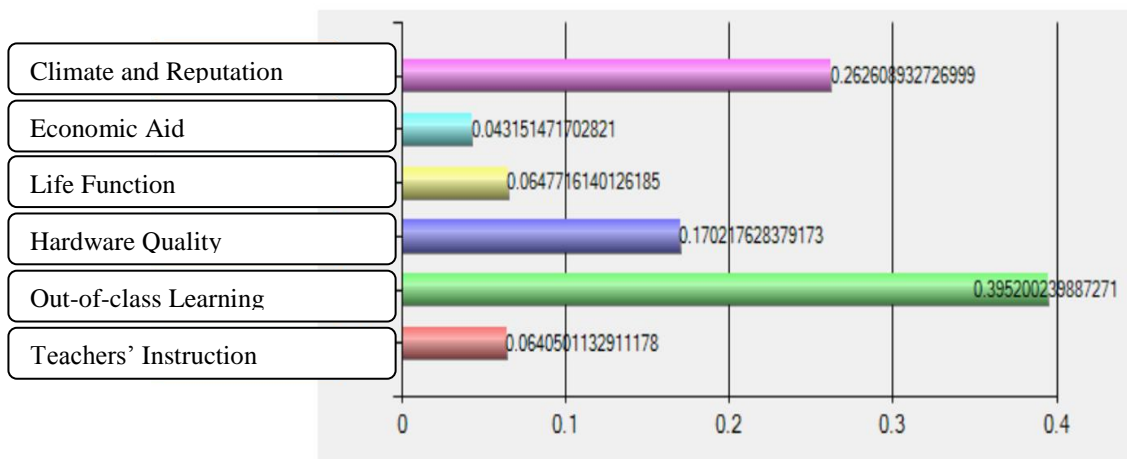


Figure 3. Learning satisfaction constructs’ weights of expert interview.

2. Student Questionnaire

2.1 Basic data analysis

In regard to the “questionnaire survey of students of Department of Informational Business” for the “quantitative research”, total 277 students respond to the questionnaire, including 74 freshmen, 38 sophomores, 79 junior students, and 86 senior students. A total of 232 valid copies was retrieved, with the retrieval rate about 84%, Table 1. The “questionnaire survey of students of Department of Informational Business” is analyzed with SPSS, and the “expert AHP” is analyzed with Power Choice.

Table 1. Retrieval of questionnaire survey

	Respondents	Valid Copies	Ratio (%)
Freshman	74	64	86.49%
Sophomore	38	34	89.47%
Junior	79	66	83.54%
Senior	86	68	79.07%
Total	277	232	83.75%

In the basic data, the female-male ratio is about 62:38; the ratio of star recommendation, individual application, and advanced subjects test placement appears 9%, 53%, and 28%, respectively; and, the ratio of north, central, south, east, and offshore islands reveals 15.5%, 15.5%, 66.3%, and 2.6%, respectively. Among such students, about 50.4% students show rental housing outside school, 55.2% students are supported the living expenses by the family, and 66.9% students reveal the annual household income lower than 1 million dollars. Accordingly, most students of the department are economically disadvantaged, Table 2.

Table 2. Basic data of samples

Backgorund Variable	Type	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	male	89	38.4
	female	143	61.6
Year of college	freshman	64	27.6
	sophomore	34	14.7
	junior	66	28.4
	senior	68	29.3
Identity	general students	228	98.3
	indeginous students	2	0.9
	overseas students	2	0.9
Admission	star recommendation	21	9.1
	individual application	123	53.0
	advanced subjects test placement	66	28.4
	others	22	9.5
Place of residence	north	36	15.5
	central	36	15.5

	south (Yunlin, Chiayi)	36	15.5
	south (Tainan)	46	19.8
	south (Kaohsiung, Pingtung)	72	31.0
	east/offshore islands	6	2.6
Accommodation	university dormitory	66	28.4
	rental housing outside school	117	50.4
	living at home	49	21.1
	others	0	0.0
Living expenses	family support	98	42.2
	partially family support	128	55.2
	others	6	2.6
Annual household income	less than 0.5million	63	27.2
	0.51-1million	92	39.7
	1.01-1.5million	50	21.6
	1.51-2million	20	8.6
	2.01-3million	3	1.3
	more than 3million	4	1.7

2.2 Correlation analysis

The six dimensions for learning satisfaction, acquired from student questionnaire, present significant correlations with student retention, with the sequence of climate & reputation, life function, economic aid, out-of-class learning opportunity, teachers' instruction, and equipment quality, Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of constructs/dimensions

Dimension/Construct							
Out-of-class learning opportunity		.571**	.566**	.424**	.431**	.555**	.503**
Teachers' instruction	.571**		.550**	.516**	.476**	.578**	.497**
Equipment quality	.566**	.550**		.510**	.471**	.549**	.482**
Life function	.424**	.516**	.510**		.693**	.663**	.579**
economic aid	.431**	.476**	.471**	.693**		.690**	.523**
climate & reputation	.555**	.578**	.549**	.663**	.690**		.696**
student retention	.503**	.497**	.482**	.579**	.523**	.696**	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ **

From above two points, it is inferred that the correlation between life function, economic aid, out-of-class learning opportunity and student retention, in student questionnaire, is prior to school teachers and equipment.

2.3 Comprehensive conclusion

According to scholars, factors in learning satisfaction are sequenced teachers' instruction > climate & reputation > equipment quality > life function > out-of-class learning opportunity > economic aid, while the relationship with student retention acquired from students appears climate

& reputation > life function > economic aid > out-of-class learning opportunity > teachers' instruction > equipment quality. Comparing the two results, the sequence of factors, except "climate & reputation" is distinct. Meanwhile, students stress more on living and economic factors than traditional factors of teachers and equipment. Such a research conclusion is seldom discovered in past research.

From students' background data, it is discovered that more students with low household economic ability might result in students affording the living expenses and tuition fee by themselves or conducting student loans. In this case, student retention appears higher correlations with the life function and economic aid.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The important conclusion of this study is summarized as followings:

1. Universities positively activating campus climate and enhancing school reputation in past years conform to the conclusion of high correlations between "climate & reputation" and student retention in this study.
2. The research conclusion reveals that students' "living economic conditions" could possibly affect student retention. It is therefore suggested that universities could provide more opportunities for students acquiring "economic support" or more part-time jobs to reduce students' suspension, dropping out, and transfer.
3. The dimensions for learning satisfaction deduced from literatures appear large difference from the items acquired from students' focus interview. Besides, learning satisfaction sequenced by scholars also appears large difference from students' sequence in the relationship between learning satisfaction and student retention. To effectively prevent students from suspension, dropping out, and transfer, it is suggested that universities should precede deep questionnaire survey of students every 2-3 years to understand students' needs as early as possible.

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