

Key Determinants of Satisfaction among International Business Students in Regional Context

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Abstract

Student satisfaction has been one of the core factors in retaining and attracting international business students to educational institutions. The ability to know the level of students' satisfaction and the factors affecting it can add a competitive advantage and is considered an opportunity to act proactively in education business. While this information has substantial impact on institutional marketing strategies, there is a dearth of information about the level of satisfaction of business students in Northern Ontario, a vast geographical area representing only a small percentage of the Canadian population. This study aims to fill the gap in existing knowledge about international business students in a regional context. The study addresses the following questions: 1) What is the level of satisfaction of international business students studying in this northern Ontario region? 2) What are the perceived factors that affect the level of satisfaction of international business students in the region? Data were collected from international business students at Laurentian University using the Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL) to develop the conceptual framework guide. The model provided an explanation for the relation between the quality of service and customer expectations. The results of this study showed a satisfaction level that was lower than expected for international business students. This was evident particularly for females who had taken fewer courses with limited work experience and for graduate students. However, students-especially females-with more work experience were more satisfied. The findings lead to a number of implications for future research related to the formulation of curriculum and administrative policy.

Keywords: international students, Northern Ontario, satisfaction, SERVQUAL

1. Introduction

Business education is considered a competitive market. Canada is ranked seventh, hosting about 5% of the worldwide international student population. Of note, there was a 10% increase in international students in Canada between 2012 and 2013 (Project Atlas, 2013). International students make up 21.8% of the total advanced research program students in Canada (OECD, 2013). The province of Ontario had the highest number of international students with more than 39% of total international students in Canada (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2010).

According to Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada (2010), international students have a positive impact on the Canadian economy. Additionally, international students helped in providing more than 70,000 employment opportunities and almost \$Can400M as direct government revenue. Equally important, they contribute almost 4.9 billion dollars to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Student satisfaction is a key determinant for attracting more customers to educational providers (Arambewela, Hall, & Zuhair, 2005; Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). Student expectations are highly related to the level of satisfaction, as different cultural diversity backgrounds, countries of origin and individual service quality also have a significant relation to satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2006). By identifying the factors that are affecting the level of satisfaction of international students, higher education institutions are better prepared to develop proper strategies in their recruitment efforts.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Student satisfaction has been one of the main factors in retaining in and attracting international business students to educational institutions (Arambewela et al., 2005; Kamil Anil & Eti Icli, 2013). The ability to know the level

of student satisfaction, along with the promoting and alleviating factors can add a competitive advantage, which is considered a prime opportunity to act proactively in business education. While this information has substantial impact on institutional marketing strategy, there is little information about the level of satisfaction of business students in Northern Ontario. Such information has considerable consequences on learning, teaching and on the marketing strategy of educational institutions.

This study aims to fill the gap in existing knowledge about international business students in Northern Ontario and will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of satisfaction of international business students studying in this northern region?
- What are the perceived factors that affect the level of satisfaction of international business students in the region?

2. Literature Review

The scholarly literature shows that there is an abundance of definitions for ‘international students’. For instance, Statistics Canada (2011) definition of international students is the following:

International students include students in Canada on a visa or refugees, neither of which have a permanent residency status in Canada. International students also include both those enrolled in a Canadian program from a Canadian institution that is not located in Canada as well as non-Canadian students studying via Internet. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010006/def/intlstudent-etudiantetranger-eng.htm>

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed from the Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL) created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) to evaluate service quality and to provide an explanation for the relation between quality of service and customer expectations. The model is built on the assumption that when the expectations of customers are greater than their perceptions of received delivery, service quality is deemed lower (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994). According to this model, satisfaction was defined as “the extent of discrepancy between customers’ expectations or desires and their perceptions” (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). SERVQUAL has been widely used by many businesses to measure and manage the quality of service. For instance, it was used in banking, insurance and telecommunication industries (Akbari & Darabi, 2014; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). As well, it was used by health service providers to measure the perceived service quality in hospitals (Altuntas, Dereli, & Yilmaz, 2012; Altuntaş & Yener, 2012; Gogos, Itskara, & Itskara, 2015). Similarly, several researchers used it to evaluate the quality of service in higher education (Atrek & Bayraktaroğlu, 2010; Nasseef, 2014; Sopon & Cuza, 2013).

This study is using a modified version of the model to address the needs of international students and guide this study. The modifications focus on the level of adjustment of international students to their new educational experience (see figure 1).

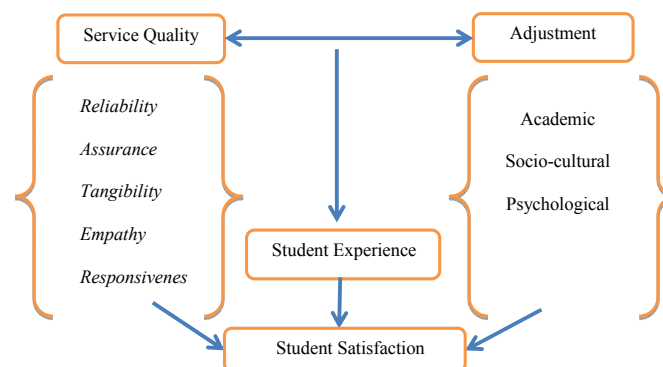


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

2.2 Service Quality and Satisfaction

Quality management is a growing trend in educational institutions. Quality management practices are important

in attracting, motivating and enhancing student satisfaction (Stukalina, 2010). According to Stukalina (2014), the instructional environment, managerial environment, physical and technological environments and the psychological environment affect student satisfaction and motivation. Student satisfaction and motivation can be achieved by different approaches that enhance student experience.

The level of satisfaction of student varies according to different educational environments. For instance, student satisfaction at state-owned universities was affected by the quality of teaching, academic quality and career opportunities. On the other hand, student satisfaction at private universities was affected by the quality of support services and career opportunities (Kamil Anil & Eti Icli, 2013).

International students had an understanding and interpretations of service quality that is different from that of national students where this understanding and interpretations had an effect on their level of satisfaction (Ansary & Jayashree, 2014; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004). According to Humphries, Rauh, and McDine (2013), satisfaction remained high in Canada for international students, showing that 90% of students are either satisfied or extremely satisfied. Yet, between 13%-15% of international students suffer from some type of discrimination on the part of faculty members, based on religion or race (Humphries et al., 2013).

2.3 Culture Unrest and Cultural Shock

Different cultural backgrounds had different impacts on student academic expectations and perception of university experience. In fact, it was found that Canadian accounting students were more socially oriented and, at the same time, more study focused than Chinese accounting students (Bélanger, McCartney, Leonard, Lebrasseur, & Tu, 2013). According to Hart and Coates (2011), the negative experience of international students was shared among fellow students. In addition, international students tend to act proactively and report dissatisfaction to university administration.

Educational exchange provides a good example of intercultural encounter. Vague information about the new culture could negatively affect international students. Under those circumstances, international students endure several life and socio-cultural stressors (Yan & Berliner, 2013). As reported by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004), international students in Canada face a high level of social difficulty which results in cultural shock. According to Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001), encountering unfamiliar environments may result in anxiety, confusion and depression which could be interpreted as an invasion of one's cultural fabric and lead to cultural unrest. Moufakkir (2008) defined cultural unrest as "...underline[ing] the tension that exists between mainstream culture and the culture of a visible ethnic minority group" (p. 85). Consequently, cultural unrest can have considerable impact on the adjustment and satisfaction of international students.

International students are generally sojourners, and hence are exposed to cultural shock during their stay. Oberg (1960) defined cultural shock as a "disease" affecting individuals who transfer to a new cultural environment. Based on Oberg, culture shock results in anxiety, frustration, and helplessness due to the loss of well-known cultural signs and symbols.

2.4 Adjustment and Satisfaction of International Students

Student adjustment to new academic settings affects their performance and satisfaction. International students encounter many cultural and academic challenges. Self-efficacy and support from friends are showed to play a significant role in psychological adjustment and student satisfaction (Yusoff, 2012). Furthermore, social support correlated positively with international students' psychological adjustment, student satisfaction and the quality of college life (Arslan & Akkas, 2014; Yusoff & Othman, 2011). In comparison, the psychological adjustment for gifted international students was almost the same as that of their colleagues of lower ability (Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, & Shaffer, 2006).

Western international students have a higher level of social and academic adjustment in western universities when compared to domestic students. Yet, social adjustment for Western international students was negatively affecting their academic performance. On the other hand, the non-Western international students had a more complex relationship with social adjustment (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012).

Universities are a major player in helping international students deal with academic challenges, social isolation, and cultural adjustment (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Likewise, Cho and Yu (2015) emphasized the importance of university support on the psychological well-being of international students.

To conclude the review of literature, it was shown that perceptions and perspectives of international students differ from those of domestic students. In general, their adjustment has an impact on their academic performance and on their level of satisfaction. A university's proactive interventions can mitigate the negative influence of

cultural changes and can improve international student adjustment and satisfaction.

3. Method

The target population in this study consisted of international business students in Northern Ontario attending Laurentian University. The inclusion criteria indicate that the participants are international business students, 22 years of age or more, enrolled part-time or full-time in a business program in Northern Ontario, speaking a first language that is other than English or French. The exclusion criteria indicate that Canadian citizens and students with permanent residency were not participants. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit 50 participants. The surveyed participants represent most of the international students joining the business programs at Laurentian University.

3.1 Instrument

The instrument was developed based on the literature review, conceptual framework and type of participants selected. Moreover, the instrument was validated via face validity. A pilot study was conducted and revealed a high degree of reliability with a Cronbach alpha of 0.91. The instrument is composed of three different sections designed to answer the research questions. The first section discusses the demographic data that are related to research variables and correlated to satisfaction in different studies. The second section is designed to include the following five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model:

- *Reliability*: the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
- *Assurance*: the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence;
- *Tangibility*: the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials;
- *Empathy*: the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers;
- *Responsiveness*: the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.

This section is composed of 15 items in rating-scale format with scores ranging from 1 to 7, Where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 7 means “strongly agree”. The third part was designed to explore the level of adjustment of international students to the new educational experience. It is composed of 12 items in Likert-scale format and divided into three parts aimed at assessing academic, socio-cultural and psychological adjustment. Each part consists of four items developed to address specific adjustment aspects.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure spanned over one month with researchers following these steps:

- 1) Approval by Laurentian University’s Ethical Review Board.
- 2) Daily visits to Laurentian University’s main gathering sites to check for potential participants who met the criteria.
- 3) Consent (voluntary, confidential, and rescindable at any time) from participants upon providing relevant information about the study.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

This study used a convenience sampling method to recruit a number of international business students (n=50) at Laurentian University where 38% of the participants were male and 62% were female. The predominant age group among participants ranged from 21- to 24-year olds, representing 48% of the total participants. Of the participants, 40% were undergraduate students and 60% were graduate students. Most of the students had completed 10 courses and had less than two years of work experience. Almost one third of the participants were from Saudi Arabia and the remaining two thirds were from China. Finally, 84% of the participants were full-time students (see Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (n=50)

Character	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	19	38.0
	Female	31	62.0
Age category	20 and below	3	6.0
	21 to 24	24	48.0
	25 and above	23	46.0
Progress level	Less than 5 courses	22	44.0
	6 to 10 courses	21	42.0
	More than 10 courses	7	14.0
Nationality	Saudi	15	30.0
	Chinese	33	66.0
	Others	2	4.0
Working experience	2 years and below	33	66.0
	3-5 years	10	20.0
	6-7 years	2	4.0
	More than 7 years	5	10.0
Enrolment status	Part time	8	16.0
	Full time	42	84.0
Education level	Undergraduate	20	40.0
	Graduate	30	60.0

4.2 Level of Satisfaction of International Business Students

The satisfaction level was measured using a questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL model. The total of the level of satisfaction was calculated by finding the average score gap between expected and perceived score for each of the SERVQUAL dimensions, then taking the average of overall dimensions where the higher the gap, the lower the satisfaction level. Results show that student expectations were higher on every dimension, with an overall gap of 0.89 or 13% below expected level (see Table 2).

For the purpose of this study, the 80% threshold was used to demonstrate a perception level that reflects a relatively high level of satisfaction. The justification for scoring down to 80% takes into account the fact that educational institutions are most of the time creating inflated written expectations among students, domestic as well as international, to a level that is somewhat artificial or unrealistic in a practical context. International students are particularly vulnerable to this marketing and set their expectations accordingly. This 80% standard translates into a score of 5.6 out of 7 in the perceived score for each dimension and the combined dimensions. The results revealed that participants scored less than 80% of the maximum perceived score for the combined dimension and the sub-category dimensions except for the *tangibility* and *assurance* dimensions (see table 2). Additionally, the *empathy* dimension had the lowest perceived score (5.01) while the *assurance dimension* had the highest perceived score (6.0). On the basis of the combined and the sub-category dimensions scores, the participants' expected scores were between 89% and 92% for the sub-category dimensions and 90% for the total combined dimensions. On the other hand, the participants rated university services between 72% and 86% for sub-category dimensions and 77% for total combined dimensions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Satisfaction dimensions differences: scaled item scores (n = 50)

	Expected scaled item mean a	Perceived scaled item mean b	Difference a-b	% Difference (a-b)/c ^a	Expected range (a/c)%	% Perceived range (b/c)%
<i>Reliability</i>	6.20	5.15	1.05	15%	89%	74%
<i>Assurance</i>	6.41	6.00	0.41	6%	92%	86%
<i>Tangibility</i>	6.33	5.71	0.63	9%	90%	82%
<i>Empathy</i>	6.25	5.01	1.24	18%	89%	72%
<i>Responsiveness</i>	6.30	5.18	1.12	16%	90%	74%
Total Satisfaction	6.30	5.41	0.89	13%	90%	77%

Note. ^ac = highest point on the scale (7).

When comparing (Table 2) the expected values of *reliability* (6.2), *assurance* (6.41), *tangibility* (6.33), *empathy* (6.25), *responsiveness* (6.3) and the total satisfaction (6.3) with the perceived *reliability* (5.15), *assurance* (6.0), *tangibility* (5.71), *empathy* (5.01), *responsiveness* (5.18) and the total satisfaction (5.41), the negative differentials were 1.05, 0.41, 0.63, 1.24, 1.12, and 0.89 respectively. Expressed differently, the score gaps represent a deficit of 15%, 6%, 9%, 18%, 16%, and 13% respectively on the maximum point of the scale.

Finally, a two-tailed paired t-test was administered to evaluate the difference between the expected service quality mean and perceived service quality mean as measured by the research questionnaire. The findings show a significant difference ($p < 0.001$ between all expected and perceived dimensions (see table 3).

Table 3. Paired samples t-test for expected and perceived service

			Paired Differences							
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Expected service - Perceived service		.97067	.82238	.11630	.73695	1.20438	8.346	49	.000
Pair 2	Expected reliability	- Perceived reliability	1.04667	.94763	.13402	.77735	1.31598	7.810	49	.000
Pair 3	Expected assurance	- Perceived assurance	.82000	1.12326	.15885	.50077	1.13923	5.162	49	.000
Pair 4	Expected tangibility	- Perceived tangibility	.62667	.83473	.11805	.38944	.86390	5.309	49	.000
Pair 5	Expected empathy	- Perceived empathy	1.24000	1.04771	.14817	.94225	1.53775	8.369	49	.000
Pair 6	Expected responsiveness - Perceived responsiveness		1.12000	1.07909	.15261	.81332	1.42668	7.339	49	.000

4.3 Factors Associated with the Level of Satisfaction

A N-Way ANOVA revealed that gender $F(1, 14) = 8.46$ ($p < 0.05$), working experience $F(3, 14) = 4.257$ ($p < 0.05$), and education level $F(1, 14) = 8.35$ ($p < 0.05$) were significantly associated with the satisfaction level. Further analysis revealed significant interaction effect between gender and working experience $F(1, 14) = 3.00$ ($p < 0.05$) in addition to significant interaction effect between gender and student progress level $F(1, 14) = 16.10$ ($p < 0.05$) (See table 4). Generally, female students were more dissatisfied than male students ($Mean = -1.05$ compared with -0.87). However, females tended to have a significantly lower satisfaction score for the progress level of less than 5 courses and at level of between 5 to 10 courses, while there was no significant gender difference when both males and females had completed more than 10 courses (See Figure 2). It was also found that females who have working experience between three to five years were significantly less satisfied, while males were significantly more dissatisfied when they have working experience between six to seven years. Furthermore, the satisfaction level was not significantly affected by gender when students work experience was less than 2 years (See Figure 3).

Table 4. N-WAY ANOVA significant results

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	29.027(a)	35	0.829	2.823	0.021
Intercept	18.507	1	18.507	63.006	0.000
Gender	2.485	1	2.485	8.461	0.011
Experience	3.752	3	1.251	4.257	0.025
Education	2.452	1	2.452	8.347	0.012
Gender * Progress level	4.729	1	4.729	16.101	0.001
Gender * Experience	3.004	1	3.004	10.229	0.006
Error	4.112	14	0.294		
Total	80.249	50			
Corrected Total	33.139	49			

Note. R Squared = .876 (Adjusted R Squared = .566).

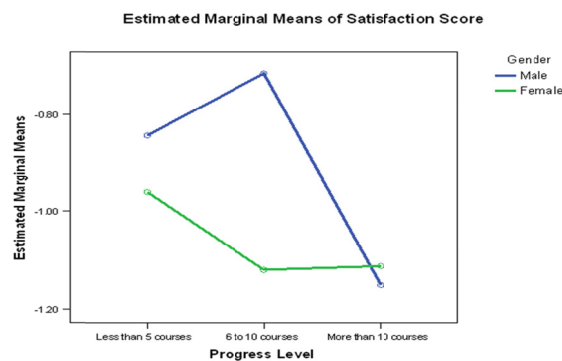


Figure 2. Interaction effect between gender and progress level



Figure 3. Interaction effect between gender and working experience

Regarding the educational level, graduate students had a higher level of dissatisfaction when compared with undergraduate students (Mean = -1.02 compared with -0.94). Further analysis with Tukey's HSD post hoc test showed that the participants with work experience between six to seven years were more satisfied (Mean = 0.17) compared to participants who had less than two years' experience (Mean = -1.07) and participants who have three to five years' experience (Mean = -1.12).

4.4 Level of Adjustment of International Students

Adjustment was assessed by the perceptions of international students on the basis of the three identified adjustment needs, i.e., academic adjustment, social adjustment and psychological adjustment (see Table 5). Regarding academic adjustment, almost 90% of the participants confirm that they are quite satisfied with their

academic performance in the business program. Also, 70% of the participants believe that their academic performance is similar to their performance in their homeland. Two thirds (66%) of the students believe that the course outline takes into consideration the international aspect of the students while 78% trust their ability to use university services to improve their performance.

Table 5. Adjustment scale results

	Disagree/ disagree	Strongly	Agree	/Strongly
	Count	%	Count	%
I am quite satisfied with my academic performance in the business program.	1	2	44	88
I can achieve course requirements as I was doing in my homeland.	2	4	35	70
The courses outlines take into consideration the international aspects of the students.	3	6	33	66
I can use the university services to improve my academic outcome.	2	4	39	78
I am feeling that I fit in well in the university environment.	3	6	35	70
I am meeting as many people and making friends as I would like.	4	8	26	52
Encouragement and support from friends help in achieving the requirements of your study program.	1	2	40	80
I find it easy to seek help from colleagues in the program.	2	4	35	70
I am feeling tense and nervous after joining this program.	17	34	19	38
I try to be positive about my future education.	3	6	39	78
I get angry with others easily.	33	66	10	20
I feel nervous about mistakes that could affect my study progress.	14	28	29	58

From the social adjustment perspective, 70% of the participants believed that they fit well in the university environment. On the other hand, only 52% of the participants believed that they can easily establish friendship. Additionally, 80% of the participants recognized the importance of friends in achieving study program requirements, and 70% thought that they can seek help from friends in the program.

From the psychological adjustment vantage point, 38% of the participants indicated feeling tense after joining the study program, and 78% of the participants tried to be positive about their future education. Surprisingly, 66% of the participants indicated that they get angry with others easily. Finally, 58% of the participants indicated feeling nervous about mistakes that could affect their study progress.

5. Discussion and Analysis

The findings revealed that international students have a level of satisfaction that is lower than what they anticipated. Additionally, the results showed a significant difference between the dependent variables, i.e., the level of satisfaction, and each of gender, education level and work experience.

5.1 Level of Satisfaction of International Business Students

The first research question tried to identify the level of satisfaction among international business students. The overall findings revealed lower levels of satisfaction with the exception of the *tangibility* and *assurance* dimensions. The lowest level of satisfaction is related to a difference between consumer expectations and the assessment of current services that remain unmet (Parasuraman et al., 1991; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1990). According to Roberts and Dunworth (2012), service providers need to be more aligned with the expectations of international students for the provision of services, and focus on their real needs in order to increase the levels of satisfaction.

Another explanation could be related to unrealistically high expectations on the part of international students. Kondakci (2011) argued that the satisfaction of international students with universities abroad is affected by different factors related to the country of origin. In this study, the majority of participants were young, with little experience, having lived in non-democratic countries, and raised and educated in a different value system. These students came to Canada somewhat “brainwashed” by high expectations based on what they heard from friends,

media, and documentation. However, these students are faced with a learning environment different from what they were used to. For example, they are not simply memorizing subject matters and professors' lectures, they are expected to participate actively in the classroom. This new reality is a shocker for students when they realize that pedagogical approaches leave 'connecting the dots' up to the students who have to come up with ideas in a participatory environment. It takes some time to adjust to a teaching mode that is more open mode in and out of the classroom. Somewhere along the way, this difficult transition is translated into a lower level of satisfaction since what students experience does not correspond to past patterns in their country of origin.

Notwithstanding issues related to international students adjusting to the new environment, educational institutions cannot be totally absolved from border-line marketing practices. As expressed in the review of literature, the business of attracting international students has become an economic lifeline for most institutions. In such a competitive prospective market, it is tempting to oversell institutional branding by aggressively showcasing academic excellence through faculty's achievements, research, and other characteristics. In today's digital world of Twitter and Facebook, universities must understand that '*always brand from the consumers*' is taking its full meaning in a social media environment. In that sense, "perceived" levels of satisfaction are a "reality" that will be transmitted across the world in minutes (Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2013).

To gain more insight, dimensions scores for *tangibility* and *assurance* showed a higher level of satisfaction. This result could reflect that the university demonstrates particular interest for the physical appearance of building facilities and equipment in addition to how employees look and show courtesy to meet the expectations of international students. The lowest satisfaction scores were related to the *empathy* dimension. This finding could be explained by inadequate individualized attention to the needs of international students. Similarly, the other satisfaction dimensions were also below the expectations of the participants. This could be related to several factors, including: An inadequate level of employee performance, an unwillingness to help the students or an inability to accomplish expected services (Zeithaml et al., 1990). On the other hand, these results could also be explained by the different values of the two main cultural components of international students who were surveyed.

5.2 Factors Associated with the Level of Satisfaction

The second research question tried to find out which factors were associated with the level of satisfaction. Based on the results of this study, there was a significant main effect and there were significant interaction effects.

Results found in the literature relative to the level of satisfaction of female students are generally mixed where some students indicated a higher level of dissatisfaction (Arbaugh, Bento, & Hwang, 2010), while others conclude that female students were more satisfied with academic curriculum (Tessema, M, Ready, K, & Malone, C, 2012). Generally, females have expectations that are different from those of male students (Maceli, Fogliasso, & Baack, 2011). In comparison to male students, this study showed that international female students were less satisfied except when they have work experience or academic experience. There could be several explanations for this, including the more marked cultural differences in gender associations and in dress codes, for instance. Cultural factors can create considerable stress in adaptation as studies have already shown that, by and large, female students have a higher level of anxiety (Misra & McKean, 2000). Moreover, females have been found to give more attention to the educational benefits of college, and to have greater interest in social activism and participation (Sax & Harper, 2005). The need of female students to adapt quickly to an environment that uses a foreign language, new pedagogical approaches, and a distant support system, may explain why the expectations of these students are not completely met.

According to Misra and McKean (2000), senior students tend to have less anxiety and better coping strategies than freshmen. It could be argued that female students with lengthier academic experience may have better coping skills resulting in less anxiety and better satisfaction. This could explain why both senior females and senior males have similar levels of satisfaction.

Female students came to Canada from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with different expectations. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, women have several barriers related to work. Due to the nature of cultural constraints, working women are more dedicated and have a higher demand for success. Furthermore, a lengthier work experience could prepare female students to take on more challenges during their studies abroad. This could be reflected into a better level of satisfaction as female students with more experience tend to deal better with stressors and set more realistic expectations.

Graduate students demonstrated more dissatisfaction when compared to undergraduate students. This result is consistent with the largest international student survey performed by the International Graduate Insight Group (Garrett, 2014). One possible explanation is the nature of the demands and expectations of international students.

Generally, graduate students are older and have demanding non-school related activities such as family or work requirements. International students also need to resolve various social and cultural tensions. This combination leaves international students with higher expectations for service quality and with less tolerance for any activity that they may perceive as a waste of time. On the other hand, undergraduate students have learning objectives that are less developed, and have fewer activities that are non-school related which allows them to explore and socialize more fully.

Students who have more work experience were more satisfied compared to students who have a lesser or moderate level of work experience. Work experience could help students utilize their field experience to put events and activities into perspective and to gain more in experiential learning. For example, it was found that students with prior experience were more likely to learn by listening to their peers (Long, Hallam, Creech, Gaunt, & Robertson, 2011). This ability to learn faster will diminish the need to rely on school services, and mitigate the level of satisfaction about service.

5.3 Adjustment of International Students

The results showed that more than one third of international students believed that the program courses did not take into consideration that some of the students came from outside of Canada. Results also indicate that a lack of familiarity with patterns of classroom interaction and differences in academic norms and conventions escalate the urgency of academic adjustment for international students. Interestingly, the results showed that international students were very satisfied with their academic adjustment. This finding could suggest that international business students in Northern Ontario had proper access to university services for improving their academic adjustment and, consequently, their academic performance.

Social adjustment presented more challenges for international students. The language barrier could be a main factor in achieving such adjustment. Yet, the study revealed that almost three quarters of international students perceived that they adjusted well in the university environment and that they could ask their friends for help. These results make sense as the majority of participants were from Saudi Arabia or China and were students who have good peer support from their colleagues from the same nationality, in spite of a weak representation in the larger ethnic community of the region. For example, students from Saudi Arabia have their own club and can practice their religious beliefs freely in a regional mosque. That being said, almost half of the international students had difficulty in initiating new friendships. This is consistent with Gallagher (2012) who discussed the importance of communication in establishing new friendships. It seems that international students can get along with the students of the same nationality but have difficulty in initiating new friendships with domestic students. There is no doubt that linguistic skills and different cultural practices can create some uneasiness and challenges on the part of international as well as domestic students.

Psychological adjustment scores revealed the least favourable adjustment picture. The results showed that a significant number of students feel tense, get angry easily and sense anxiety about their future academic path. According to de Araujo (2011), the experiences of international students are often characterized by feelings of isolation, confusion, frustration, and a great deal of stress. Also, the new experiences that international students undergo are automatically bound to heighten difficulties of psychological adjustment due to a number of factors, including the language, the difference in administrative system, the weaker support system, and the obligation to perform academically under a totally new teaching regime.

5.4 Implications

From the perspective of globalization for higher education, there is an increase in the competition for the recruitment of international students. Institutions should provide service of a high quality in order to enhance the level of satisfaction of international students, and raise the perceived quality (Russell, 2005). The results of this study could affect the pedagogical strategies of business programs in Northern Ontario in order to be in greater harmony with the expectations of international students. Generally speaking, new paradigms of organizational culture could be implanted to raise staff awareness about the role staff plays in establishing a good educational experience and in improving satisfaction. These findings provide a base for future studies to validate the results and to explore more related topics such as diversity management and student retention. It could also be a starting point to establish a comparison with domestic students. From a strategic perspective, the findings can help university administration, as well as faculty, in preparing a wide-range action plan for the educational service environment in terms of quality assurance to improve student satisfaction and marketability of university programs. However, now they should take into consideration the specific nature of international students. Finally, the outcome can also be used, at least, to raise the level of satisfaction of less satisfied students by providing better services by taking into consideration the different cultural backgrounds.

This study has a few caveats regarding its generalizability. The language barrier was a handicap for a few students because English is not their first language; so filling out the questionnaire may have been affected by the inability to fully understand the nuances of some of the questions. The geographical area covered in the study is limited. It includes only the business program at Laurentian University. Furthermore, the sample size of the present study is limited to 50 international students, virtually all from Saudi Arabia and China. Nevertheless, this limited number is a strong representation of the nationality of the overwhelming majority of international business students currently studying at Laurentian University.

6. Conclusion

The complexity of the phenomenon of the satisfaction of international students translates into a marketing challenge for university administrators. This paper aimed to find a more comprehensive understanding of the level of satisfaction of international business students in Northern Ontario. The research has revealed that international business students have higher expectations than what the university provides. The business school's service strategy seems to focus on the *tangibility* and *assurance* part of the service, while its action plan falls short for the other service quality dimensions. The study also found a significant difference in the level of satisfaction between genders, level of education and work experience. Understanding the differences between domestic and international students with respect to student expectation and experience can help university administrators prepare a global approach to academic quality without minimizing the need for a more segmented strategy in managing service quality in a culturally diverse context. The findings of this study could be instrumental in customizing a business program in a regional institution with the view of raising satisfaction, increasing retention, and managing cultural diversity in a responsible way.

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