Exploring Major Predictors of Student Satisfaction: An Input towards a Learning-Friendly School Environment.

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Abstract

The study sought to determine the perceived level of importance and perceived level of satisfaction of college students on 16 areas of student service commonly provided in a tertiary education setting within any university as prescribed and observed by local and international standards of tertiary education.

Each area was tested to determine the existence of a significant relationship between the measured response by respondents on their perceived level of importance and perceived level of satisfaction. The existence of a significant relationship between the two variables indicates that the given area of the learning environment is a major predictor towards student satisfaction. Item analysis was also performed on each area of the learning environment to determine specific indicators of student satisfaction.

The results of this research serves as a benchmark to any university [with similar status as the locale of the study] in identifying particular areas of the learning environment that are crucial in determining student satisfaction and must be focus of university maintenance and development so as to achieve a learner-friendly school environment.

The research was conducted with 399 students enrolled in Saint Louis University distributed in proportion to the population distribution of students in the different colleges within the said University.

Keywords: Student satisfaction; Perceived level of importance; Student services.

Introduction

The 21st Century Educational Goals suggest a reconstruction on the different educational principles which to a degree of urgency include citizenship preparation, inclusion, and the creation of an optimum learning environment (Laguardia and Pearl, 2009).

The degree of citizenship preparation given by a learning institution to its students can be measured by the performance of a student outside the school setting. While inclusion and the type of learning environment by educational institutions are measured in the attitude and services an educational institution affords for its students inside the school.

Inclusion is defined as the approach whereby students with disabilities receive all instruction in a general education classroom while support services, like specialists, are expected to come to the student (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2006).

The Learning Environment, which serves as the subject of this research, pertains to any formal or non-formal setting where students gain knowledge and skills to be used in their learning (UNESCO). Such may take form of schools, colleges, cultural centers, hobby centers and social clubs. It also includes the buildings, infrastructures, machineries, the quality of service, and the efficiency of workforce inside an educational institution.

Assessing a learner-friendly school environment

The learning environment is typically composed of 4 elements: teacher-student relationship, atmosphere of inclusion, school facilities and services, and school departments and bureaucracies (Coll and Draves, 2009; Laguardia and Pearl, 2009; Stebleton, Huesman and Kuzhabekova, 2010; Roberts and Styron, 2009; Johnson, 1997; Umbach and Porter, 2002).

On the other hand, to qualify a learner-friendly school environment, there must be the existence of an effective interplay of the 4 elements of the learning environment (Gulosino and Lubienski,

2011). This means that, aside from the existence of the prescribed student services, student services must operate in high-efficiency.

In the Philippines, the normative practice by which the efficiency of the learning environment of colleges and universities is assessed through the quantity of national citations and accreditations an institution garner, and the civil service examination passing rates by programs within a certain educational institution (Corpus, 2003).

However, these traditional ways of assessing the learning environment are futile as they disregard the way the learning environment operates in normal circumstances. The use of accrediting agencies, civil service examinations and categorical citations allows for ample preparation by universities to give a good impression and attain high scores in such events. This kind of scenario is a common practice in Philippine Colleges and Universities.

Although efforts on measuring the efficiency of a learning environment are performed, such efforts are either focused on measuring the areas of instruction and school facilities. This means that full-scale assessment of the quality of the learning environment is commonly absent.

To address such problem, it is always advocated that students should also be able to have a say on the manner the learning environment operates on all areas to have an honest assessment of the quality of such. This is so since students have a full-knowledge on the learning environment given their direct interaction with such. One of the most common standards used by students in evaluating the learning environment is their satisfaction towards it.

Theoretical and conceptual framework of satisfaction

The theory adopted in this research to explain how major predictors of satisfaction are determined is the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory. The S-O-R Theory states that for any stimulus, an individual is expected to produce a certain response. The degree of the response is determined in accordance to the organism variables upheld by a person such as cognition, emotion, knowledge etc. (Algharabat, 2007).

In parallelism to the act of assessing the learning environment, the areas of service, and its specific indicators, is determined as the stimulus while the level of satisfaction to each area of service is seen as a [possible] response by students. The organism variable can be seen of a significant role when one tries to make a sense out of the satisfaction response by students to the areas of the learning environment.

In this research, the attempt of determining major predictors of student satisfaction used the organism/student variable of perceived level of importance for each area of the learning environment. In concept, the existence of a direct relationship between the perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction by students on the areas of the learning environment is indicative to such area as a major predictor to student satisfaction.

By knowing the areas of the learning environment that serves as major indicators to student satisfaction, the school will be able to know what areas of the learning environment can promote a learner-friendly environment.

Purpose Statement

This study aims to identify the major predictors affecting student satisfaction along the areas of the learning environment, particularly its locale that is Saint Louis University.

Knowledge on the specific indicators of learner-friendly environment allows for any university administration or management to determine which area of the learning environment needs crucial focus to sustain student satisfaction. It also lessens the non-strategic spending by schools by determining what areas really need improvement.

Over-all, this serves as a guide on how to create a learner-friendly environment by identifying specific areas of the learning environment that highly affects student satisfaction. Needless to say, satisfaction of the students translates to the friendliness of the school.

Problem Statement

Since the research aims in determining major predictors of student satisfaction by using the level of satisfaction and perceived level of importance on the student services by the students of a school environment, the essential questions of this research are identified as:

- What is the perceived level of importance of students along the sixteen identified areas of the learning environment?

- What is the level of students' level of satisfaction along the sixteen identified areas of the learning environment?

- Is there a significant relationship in the students' perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction along the sixteen identified areas of the learning environment?

Extension to these questions is the task of identifying specific indicators for each area of the learning environment that serve as a major predictor to student satisfaction.

Method

Locale of the study

This research, centering on knowing the variables that determine a leaner-friendly school environment involved the assessment of all the 9 colleges present at Saint Louis University as its study locale.

Respondents included the population of Saint Louis University in the 3rd, 4th and 5th year levels. Respondents were limited to such because of the assumption that students on these year levels have a full knowledge and a maximum interaction with all the areas of the learning environment given their years of stay in the university

Data gathering method

Population sampling was used to get the total number of respondents as the representative figure of the entire population. The calculated number of respondent totals to 399 students distributed in proportion to each college of the university.

The administration of questionnaires was held using random floating of questionnaires in cooperation with the respective deans of each college.

Data collection tool

A questionnaire was used to gather data. The questionnaire is a three-column survey questionnaire that required student respondents to rate their perceived level of importance and their level of satisfaction from a scale of 1 to 5.

There are 267 items contained in the questionnaire which were distributed among the 16 different services/facilities which were identified as Instruction (22 items), Admission (10 items), Guidance Office (13 items), Accounting Office (13 items), Dean's Office (20 items), Bookstore (14 items), Library (30 items), Food Services (15 items), Computer Laboratory (20 items),

Science Laboratory (26 items), Students Affairs Office (16 items), Campus Security (10 items), Janitorial Services (10 items), Audio-Visual Rooms (8 items) and Over-all Facilities (30 items).

The areas of the learning environment, and their corresponding items/specific indicators, were determined in accordance to the generally existing areas of the learning environment existing in most tertiary education institutions nationally and internationally.

Statistical tools

Statistical formulae that were used include the Weighted Mean (WM) and Regression Analysis (r).

In answering problem number 1 and problem number 2, the general weighted mean (WM) of items were used to which results were interpreted in the following manner: 1.00-1.74: Not Important (NI)/ Dissatisfied (D), 1.75-2.49: Slightly Important (SI)/Slightly Satisfied (SS), 2.50-3.24 : Important (I)/ Satisfied (S) and 3.25-4.00: Very Important (VI)/Highly Satisfied (HS).

In treating question number 3, Regression Analysis (r) was used to derive the possibility of an existing relationship between the items and the significance of the relationship was validated by using a P-value of .05.

After deriving the existence of relationship between areas, item analysis was conducted using Regression Analysis (r) to identify items that serve as major predictors of student satisfaction in line with student services.

Interviews

Also, since this research concerns students' perspective of the learning environment, perceptions by the respondents of this research were also incorporated in interpreting results.

Research limitations

The results, and even the suggestions, in this research may prove irrelevant to some schools that may uphold a different learning environment as compared to the research's locale.

This research only took into full account the areas of the learning environment present in the research's locale. Hence, the results of this research may be applicable to educational institutions with a similar profile as Saint Louis University.

What is the perceived level of importance of students along the different services of the school?

In the given table, it can be seen that all of the areas of the learning environment were considered as "very important" by respondents. Results suggest that all the given areas of the learning environment play an important role the development of college students.

This is furthered by a student interview stating that the presence of such areas of the learning environment allows for students to address their personal needs in the varying aspects of being a student—psychological needs, health needs, academic assistance support needs etc.

In a nutshell, the importance of such areas of learning environment only prove that holistic development of students can only be made possible by the existence of facilities, services, program supports etc. that are directly present to cater to such needs of students.

What is the level of satisfaction of students along the different services of the school?

From the table below, it can be seen that respondents expressed varying satisfaction rating for each area.

Results and discussions

Areas of the Learning Environment	Level of Importance		Level of Satisfaction		r
	OWM	DE	OWM	DE	
A) University Instruction	3.63	VI	2.72	S	.021
B) University Admission	3.50	VI	2.83	S	.074

C) Guidance Office	3.57	VI	2.71	S	.103*
D) Accounting Office	3.59	VI	2.60	S	.003
E) Dean's Office	3.62	VI	2.85	S	.074
F) Bookstore	3.53	VI	2.63	S	.047
G) Library	3.59	VI	2.65	S	.091
H) Canteen Services	3.62	VI	2.41	SS	.027
I) Computer Laboratory	3.58	VI	2.58	S	.122*
J) Science Laboratory	3.44	VI	2.61	S	.380*
K) Student Affairs Office	3.57	VI	2.59	S	.062
L) Campus Security	3.64	VI	2.69	S	.150*
M) Clinic	3.57	VI	2.70	S	.109*
N) Janitorial Services	3.59	VI	2.81	S	.101*
O) Audiovisual Services	3.63	VI	2.47	SS	.023
P) Overall Campus Facilities	3.58	VI	2.49	SS	.013
*r value is significant; P-value ≤.05					

Table: A table presenting the score results and corresponding interpretation on the respondents perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction on the areas of the learning environment and the existence of significant relationship between the two.

It can be seen that there are three areas which garnered a "Slightly Satisfied" response. It includes the Canteen Services, Audiovisual Services and Overall Facilities of the University. Reasons given by respondents for their rating for each area includes a) canteens in the university don't consider the suggestions of students in coming up with the daily menu, b) there are shortages of units and rooms for audiovisual services and c) miscellaneous services like elevators, online enrollment and vending machines are not present within the university premises.

Also, students identified that areas that garnered a plain satisfied response are due commonly to a) the absence of such areas of learning environment on all or some of the campuses, b) the use of out-dated materials and c) some issues concerning the approachability of staffs for certain areas.

Clearly, all the areas of the learning environment require constant improvement, monitoring, and maintenance to ensure the increase of student satisfaction response to such. Is there a significant relationship in the respondent's perceived level of satisfaction and their level of importance for the areas of the learning environment?

The importance of knowing if a significant relationship exists between the level of satisfaction and perceived level of importance by students is to determine the major predictors of student satisfaction. By this, areas of the learning environment that highly contributes to student satisfaction can be identified, thus, allowing educational institutions to determine the areas that should be a) maintained to sustain a learner-friendly school environment and b) that should be improved to achieve a full learner-friendly school environment

In the given table, there are only 6 out of the 16 areas of the learning environment which were identified with an existing significant relationship between respondents' perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction. Hence, these areas are seen as major predictors to student satisfaction. These include the guidance office, the computer laboratory, the science laboratory, the campus security, the clinic services and the janitorial services.

In an item analysis, it was found out that in each area with existing significant relationship, specific indicators per area manage to qualify as specific predictors of student satisfaction.

Firstly, for the area of guidance services, the major predictors of satisfaction includes a) the presence of extension services like scholarships, exchange student programs and student organizational networking, b) the issuance of printed results of tests and c) the availability of staff during working hours.

Secondly, for the computer laboratory area, respondents identified a) the adherence of computer laboratory instructors to school policies regarding computer use and ethics in accessing information, b) the giving of manuals on rules and policies regarding computer use and reservation and c) the presence of monitoring and inspection on laboratory facilities were considered as the major indicators of satisfaction in the area of computer laboratory services.

Thirdly, for science laboratory services, a) the conduct of experiments that are only authorized by the school, b) the proper explanation of written laboratory directions to student before execution of any activity and c) the presence of enough water supplies and faucets in the laboratory were determined as the major indicators of student satisfaction.

Fourthly, for the area of campus security, indicators that serve as major predictors to student satisfaction include the assurance that security guards are a) equipped with protective skills, b) well-groomed and c) well-disciplined.

Fifthly, major indicators of student satisfaction on the area of clinic services include a) the sterilization and cleaning of clinical equipments, b) the availability of doctors in the clinic at anytime of the day and c) the approachability of staff.

Lastly, for the area of janitorial services, a) the friendliness, honesty and approachability of janitors, b) the presence of cleaning materials and tools inside the classroom and c) the presence of janitors in all areas of the school were identified as major indicators to student satisfaction.

In a close analysis, areas and specific indicators that serve as major predictors of student satisfaction includes those that are considered most crucial to promote student safety and classroom order (like that of the computer and science laboratories), to promote a pleasing school environment (like that of the security and janitorial services) and to cater to the student personal needs like health and wellness (like that of the guidance and clinic services).

The simple interpretation to such result is this: among the 16 areas of the learning environment presented, the most crucial areas that predict student satisfaction only include 6 areas of the learning environment. Such result means that 6 offices are only seen as predictors to a learner-friendly environment (of course, as per the indicators provided in the research questionnaire).

This implies that the core focus of any learning institution for development and maintenance of the learning environment should be directed towards the identified six areas of the learning environment. Such is so as to lessen the unstrategic use of resources in trying to improve all areas of the learning environment while achieving less in meeting student satisfaction.

In conclusion, to achieve maximum learner-friendly environment while using less resources, educational institutions must focus on developing the areas, and the specific indicators per area, of the learning environment that serves as major predictors of student satisfaction.

Result limitations

The result of the hypothesis on determining the major predictors of satisfaction was dependent on the values upheld by the respondents of the research. Therefore, areas of the learning environment which are deemed as major predictors of student satisfaction can vary from one school to another. Also, results cannot be automatically applied to any tertiary institution due to the difference on functions observed for each area of the learning environment. The research recognizes that each institution upholds additional/specialized roles and transaction orders for each area.

Suggestion and recommendations

What suggested programs should be implemented to further enhance the university's student services?

A) Creation of a manual on the areas of the learning environment

In any tertiary education institution, it would be student-friendly if the school issues a manual identifying the various areas of the learning environment and the specific services provided in

each area of the learning environment. Such manual would help students to be informed more on the existing programs and student support systems to intensify the awareness of students to such and to maximize the use of such areas of the learning environment by students.

B) Survey on major predictors of the learning environment

This includes the simple act of constructing a data collection tool that would measure the perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction of students on the learning environment they are situated. Following the same methods of this research, educational institutions will be able to pin point which areas of the learning environment are most important and are in need of a degree of maintenance and development by the institution's management.

What are some recommendations by researchers related to the research?

The researchers recommend for future researchers of the same topic to make a cross-sectional study along various institutions to determine whether there exists a significant difference in the areas of the learning environment that are seen as major predictors to student satisfaction.

Conclusion

From the research, it can be concluded that not all areas of the learning environment are considered as major predictors of the student satisfaction.

Although, this doesn't mean that no efforts or whatsoever should be afforded to improve those areas which are not considered as major predictors of student satisfaction.

Through identifying the major predictors of satisfaction, it allows university administration to determine specific areas that require much focus for maintenance and development.

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