Aspects of Life-quality among International and Native Students

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Aspects of Life-quality among International and Native Students

Abstract:

This paper explores the role of social network, sleeping quality and stressor in international and native students' life-quality at a European institution, and how these basic elements are connected to each other. Internationalization is a crucial procedure for European universities. However, they have considerable results acquiring international students from many countries, especially for bachelor studies, they still have difficulties retaining and persuading them to continue their studies at the first institution. The findings of our research suggest that international students' problems related to their life quality have a strong impact on changing institution. By using the results, we can improve the quality of life of our students, thereby retaining them, ultimately we will be able to extend students lifetime value.

1. Introduction

Our country is a fascinating place attracting many students to study every year. No matter the student's status is exchange, full-time or Erasmus, there are plenty of options to choose from.

1.1 Reasons and difficulties of studying abroad

The reasons why students choose to study internationally are well known. These include discovering another culture, learning another way of behaving and thinking, making new friends, and developing intercultural knowledge and skills (Andrade, 2006; McClure, 2007). However, for institutions that do not pay sufficient attention to the special needs of these students, students may become frustrated and dissatisfied. Earlier researches have shown that international students face many challenges: language problems, cultural differences, study and funding issues, interpersonal issues, racial discrimination, lack of social and community support, alienation and homesick (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

International students are often lonely. This loneliness means not only the lack of family and friends at home, but also the lack of a familiar cultural and / or linguistic environment (Adelman, 1988; McClure, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia, 2008; Zhao, Jindal-Snape, Topping and Todman, 2008; Ip, Chui and Johnson, 2009). Therefore, community support and community networking are very important for ensuring international students to be successful in the new environment. The number of friends of an international student in a new environment is a significant factor in success (Furnham and Alibhai 1985; Sam 2001). There is a strong need to be aware of such problems in order to provide international students and their host institutions with effective and enriching experiences.

2. Satisfaction with life among international students

Life satisfaction (SWL) is one of the three components of subjective well-being (Andrews and Whitney, 1976) and embodies the subjective aspect of well-being (Neto, 1995). It does not match happiness, which is part of the affective / emotional dimension of well-being. Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) suggest that although some components of well-being are closely correlated with each other, each component should be examined in its own right.

According to some researchers, problems are very similar to those of domestic students, and that in fact international students are much more "students" than "foreigners" in their ways of adapting (Walton, 1968). Other researchers maintain that these problems are unique to foreign students. Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) identified four main sources of problems: (a) cultural shock (b) the role of 'ambassador' (acting as an informal representative

of the individual's country); (c) adolescent emancipation (the process of becoming an independent, self-reliant member of society); and (d) academia stress (stress arising from higher education requirements). The first two problems are unique to international students, the third is present in the lives of every young adult and the fourth is present in the lives of all young adults in higher education.

2.1. Additional factors influencing students' life-quality

However, it is clear from former research that students do not just spend their days inside the institution. In addition to studying, fun and leisure activities are important for a well-balanced study, so it is not the same as the effects that students experience outside of university during their stay. This question was investigated by Keri (2018) with her colleagues at their university. They found, satisfaction with factors outside the university has a greater impact on loyalty to the university, and thus to the particular settlement, than satisfaction with the university itself. From our point of view, this means exploring and improving the quality of study-related and out-of-university quality of life, students are more likely to pursue their studies in our institution.

International students cannot live without social networks, they are truly important for international students' life. They are characterized by multi-dimension and complexity in the host countries, the impacts of social networks on international students are not distinct and obvious (Pusztai, Rozmann, Horvath, Szunomar and Fusz, 2019). In the adjustment process, international students establish social networks with other persons with a similar cultural background or nationality and form ethnic communities within the context of the university (Al-Sharideh and Goe(1998)). Adjustment, identity crisis can result psychological stress. It may occur when students are far from home. According to Young-Chul (1996) suffering from all the psychological feelings and struggling with cross-cultural adjustment, expatriates may fail to fulfil their tasks and, depending on individual personality factors, become depressed.

Social interactions can have positive impact handling the stress and increase a further element of life-quality influenced by stressors: quality of sleeping. Sleeping quality is an important factor in determining life-quality, and it can be measured by the sense of coherence, which is an inner sense of safety against internal and external stressors. In the early months, due to the adjustment of native global time zones and adaption of a new environment, international students fall into with trouble of low sleeping quality. However, if it lasts longer, gradually they will suffer from insomnia. As a result, the student's performance diminishes and the person becomes irritable, which has an impact on his university and social life, thus creating a vicious cycle.

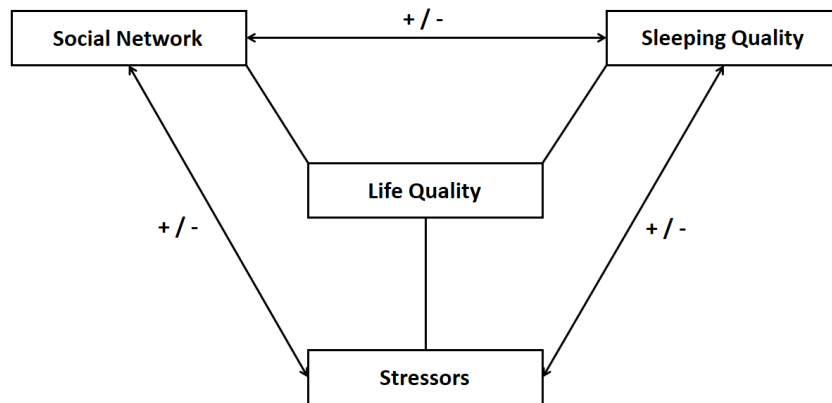Based on the findings we discussed above, a simple model of students' life quality was created (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research model of students' life quality

Our research focused on elements of the model and the possible relationships among them.

3. Research method

We applied focus group interviews in our research. The advantage of this methodology is that it often yields unexpected discoveries from free conducted group discussions. What's more, an interpersonal and well-communication moderator is needed to conduct the efficient discussion, also, an observer is also required to observe the participants' behaviours regarding the topic.

The respondents in this research are international and native full time students. However, even non-international students are included in this research, we will compare the two groups in quality of life, so that we will get the similarities and differences in the collecting information. Focus group interviews were recorded by voice recorder, with the permission of participants. Under the relaxed and informal atmosphere, time duration of interviews were between 1.5 and 2 hours, depending on the size of the group, with the members ranging from 3 to 12 people.

There were four focus groups conducted at the university. As illustrated in table 1, we have collected participants' basic data, including their genders, educational levels, specializations, as well as countries.

We assessed the trustworthiness of the research by applying sets of criteria from former studies Anney (2015). As demonstrated in Table 2, we believe, our data and analyses met these criteria.

	Number of Students	Gender	Educational Level	Specialization	Countries
Focus group 1	12	M (3)	Third-year bachelor (12)	Business Administration and Management (3)	China (5)
		F (9)		Catering and Tourism (5)	Cambodia (4)
				Applied Economics (1)	Laos (1)
				English and American Studies (3)	Nigeria (1)
					Ghana (1)
Focus group 2	4	M (2)	First-year master (4)	Tourism Management (3)	Morocco (1)
		F (2)		International Economic Relations (1)	Romania (1)
					China (1)
					Laos (1)
Focus group 3	3	F (3)	Second-year bachelor (3)	Commerce and Marketing (3)	Hungary (3)
Focus group 4	5	F (5)	First-year master (2)	Management and Leadership (3)	Hungary (5)
			Second-year master (2)	Tourism Management (1)	
			Phd (1)		

Table 1. Study sample

Trustworthiness Criteria	Method of Addressing in our Study
Credibility Confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings	- Investigator triangulation: four research team members during data collection and interpretation - Engagement in field: two student-researchers among team members - Member checks: respondents were informed about the first interpretations and could give comments - Result: better understanding of core issues; participants were involved in interpretations
Transferability The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents	- Thick description of method and sample - Purposive sampling - Result: description allows comparison of our context to other possible context; greater in-depth fndings
Dependability Stability of findings over time	- Stepwise replication: two researchers analysed the same data and compared the results - Peer examination: During the research researchers continuously discussed the process and findings with colleagues - Result: inconsistences could be eliminated; peers contributed to deeper analysis
Confirmability Interpretations and findings clearly derived from the research data	- Triangulation - Reflexive journals, discussing preliminary theories - Result: reduce the effect of investigator bias
Integrity Ensure that data were not fabricated by the informants	- Interviews were professional, of a nonthreatening nature and anonymous - Result: participants were not trying to misinformation and evade the discussed issues

Table 2: Trustworthiness of the Study and Findings

4. Results

What does life quality mean for our students? At first, we got the answers which we can read in books: „it is mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing", „you live actively every day in your life", „there is no wasted time", „having the opportunity for self-actualization". But if we dig deeper we find out that there are factors, circumstances and affairs affecting our students' life quality. Based on the model we showed in Figure 1, we grouped the answers.

4.1. Stressors

In case of native students, we can say that there is some difference between the factors influencing their quality of life according their ages. Younger students who do not have their own existence and are supported by their family, consider the university and friends as the main factors in this terms. What is common in these two groups are the main stressors they mentioned.

First of all, university has a huge impact on the life of the students in both positive and negative ways. The home assignments, exams and deadlines can make stress for them but on the other hand, the friendly environment and the attitude of teachers can make a positive influence. For example some MA students did not go to other university after finishing their bachelor but stayed here because of these reasons. Five foreign participants explained that they felt stressed due to lots of homework and exams, included students from China, Nigeria and Cambodia. Participants complained that they had to put a lot of efforts on the exam and homework, and deadline was so close, it made them stressful.

Another important stressor is the transportation. Some of the native students still live at home with their parents which means that they travel every day between the university and their hometown. Regarding this, they mentioned that sometimes they have to wait for the bus or train to get home which takes time, or they have free time between two classes and cannot go anywhere or the last bus or train of the day leaves too early. However, for financial reasons they choose to live at home and commute between the two places.

Transportation is a big issue for foreign studenst as well, but with a different meaning. They need to travel within the city especially when they need national food. For Asian students, they couldn't find Asian ingredient or food at local area and vegetable categories are too little, which made them upset.

Another component of life quality is – as one of the participants mentioned – the work-family-study triangle. Even for those who are not living at home with parents, family can be a stressor which influence their performance at work or study causing more and more stress. For younger students, it is a challenge to find a job which they can do along with the

university unless they work in their families' businesses while the older ones try to perform at their workplace or to find a job for the future which meets their expectations and they hope not to make a wrong decision about this. In addition, it is also crucial whether they are good for the job which requirements seem to be too high for them.

Moreover, there are many expectations in several areas of life which students have to face. On the one hand, they say that: „in all of the areas of life, they think that this is primary for you" whether it comes to work, study or anything else. Beside the expectations of other people, they also make requirement on themselves. In case of younger students, we talked about it in terms of the performance at the university but MA students are more concerned with their future. They have the urge to build a career and establish their own existence.

Among foreign studenst we could fine additional aspects. Six participants feeling homesick since they studied abroad, including students coming from Laos, China, and Cambodia. Especially the sense of missing home was strongest at the early stage, but later it's a short-term feeling and then forgot it. For those students who hold scholarship, scholarship is not enough for them to travel or monthly life spending, they might seek for job or ask parents to get more money. Another factor causing stresses is discrimination, a participant coming from Morocco mentioned that when he walked on the street, there were some people staring at him, but they didn't talk to him and even didn't know him. As for closing time of stores and public services, a participant coming from Laos mentioned that after 6pm, there were less and less people walking on the street and stores were closed from this time, the best place for dinner would be McDonald's, because sometimes it's open for 24 hours. But also, a participant coming from Romania complained about the attitude of public service. "They are rude, they don't speak English". Immigration office is the place where every international student must go for applying or expand for residence permission, participants hope that the attitude of service and English of immigration office should improve.

4.2. Sleeping quality

Lack of high quality of sleeping causes low efficient class, students can't focus on study well, so that it might result in low grade at homework or exams. Most of the native students live at their parents home but others chose to live in dormitory or rent a flat in the city of the university. For them, it is important to have enough space and adequate circumstances for learning and sleeping. In addition, leaving the family home improved their life quality because of the independence, self-reliance and newness. Students, who choose the dormitory, faces with further issues. There used to be parties like local-language Karaoke, held often at accommodation or next to accommodation until midnight or till dawn. Some students would

like to go to bed early, but they couldn't completely fall asleep due to the noise. It greatly affected students' quality of sleeping. There were four participants who agreed that, included students coming from Cambodia, Morocco and China.

4.3. Social Network

It turned out that the social network plays an important part in the life of students especially for younger ones. For them, it is necessary to have friends around them to do their job and make their life easier at the university. Also one of the MA students mentioned that she does not like living in the capital because of the lack of company.

Social network is truly important for international student's life. Making friends with different countries helps much easier to learn about different cultures and share information by establishing social network. However, language becomes the barrier to communicate each other. There were 16 participants who can't speak native language, but also there were 11 participants who didn't take any English proficiency exams before coming study in this university, included students from China, Cambodia, Laos and Ghana, but they knew the basic English speaking and writing. However, local residents often don't speak English, when international students go shopping or approach to local people, it becomes difficult to communicate each other. As one of participants commented: "Sometimes, I find difficulties to communicate with the reception and everything. Because there is only one who speaks English, only one." More importantly, for international students, they socialize with compatriots and other international students much more than native students or residents due to language barrier. Before Chinese students study abroad, they never learn local language. A participant coming from China expressed that information about student events is native language, it's hard for them to know the detail, causing they couldn't join with local students. Other respondents couldn't agree more about it, they suggested the information about the students' activities provided by university should be much more international.

5. Conclusions and implications

The findings of this research revealed that while there are some factors influencing the life quality both of the native and international students, it is also proved that there is a significant difference between them.

We can state that social network is an important factor for both groups, however international students sometimes have some difficulties with communications due to the lack of language knowledge of them or native students, local residents. For this reason, having other students from their home nations around them can improve their well being.

While there are some stressor which were mentioned by both of the groups, such as the university obligations and expectations of other people, for international students acculturation cause serious problems. Cultural shock, discrimination appear in their life, sometimes they feel homesick and also financial difficulties were emphasised more among them. Even the public services cause them problems.

Due to the literature we collected, we also featured the sleeping quality as an important influence factor of life quality however we did not get many information about this. Some international students mentioned that events organised in the dormitory, sometimes disturb them at nights.

Based on these results, we can state that for improving the life quality of international students, universities have to focus on their social lives. For this purpose, universities can organize tolerance trainings for native and international students, as well, and also some special events and programs in order they can explore the wider area of the university / country, and to get to know the cultures of each other.

In case of stressors, the university can facilitate the administration processes for international students by better cooperation with the city government and service providers. Also local events could help for residents accept the foreigners.

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