

Chapter 9

Student Feedback Process in Enhancement of Quality of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to increase knowledge of using student feedback in the quality management of higher education. While the literature includes plenty of theories and discussion on the nature of quality, student feedback, and higher education, very few studies have approached student feedback utilization in terms of two parallel processes: universities' and students' processes. However, there is a clear need for such approaches, since university is the service provider and students are the customers. Understanding both sides and both processes gives a new and relevant perspective to this phenomenon. This chapter contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual process model of using student feedback in the quality enhancement of higher education. The model illustrates two parallel combined processes and their actions: universities' processes and students' processes. The method and model development of this chapter is based on an extensive literature analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Quality in general and quality of higher education are unclear concepts, and several definitions exist for them. No universal definition of quality exists. Instead, different definitions are usable in different contexts. The same applies to quality of education. The vague nature of the term quality does not mean that quality management would be useless or overly difficult. Rather, it emphasizes the need for explicitness and rigour of definitions

in the communication. Effective utilization of student feedback in the quality management of higher education includes several measures and steps.

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DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6198-1.ch009

process. However, there is a clear need for such approach, since university is the service provider and students are their customers. Understanding both sides and both processes gives a new and relevant perspective to this phenomenon. This article contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual model of using student feedback in the quality management of higher education. The model illustrates two parallel combined processes and their actions: university's process and student's process. The method and model development of this article is based on an extensive literature analysis on quality, student feedback and higher education.

The structure of this article is as follows. First, based on the literature analysis, it reviews the central research areas that constitute the basis of the conceptual model development. It starts by describing the concept of "quality" in general. Then, it pays attention to the theories of quality of higher education. Next, it looks at the reasons for why student feedback is used in the quality management of higher education. After that, it sheds light on the role of student feedback in monitoring and developing the quality of higher education. Then, it puts forward various methods used in gathering and analysing student feedback. Next, it gives an overview challenges and potential problems in using student feedback. After that, based on the earlier literature analysis, this article proposes a conceptual model of using student feedback in the quality management of higher education. Then, the article draws the final conclusions.

THE TERM "QUALITY"

The concept of "quality" is analysed in this section. The research on quality has its origins in industrial and business context. No universal definition of quality exists; instead, different definitions are usable in different contexts (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Different definitions are needed in order to capture the complexity of the quality construct,

and, in order for organizations to address quality issues that change as products and services move through various stages, from design, through production to consumption in the marketplace (Garvin, 1984; Sebastianelli & Tamimi, 2002). Quality has been defined as value (Feigenbaum, 1951; Abbott, 1955), conformance to specifications (Levitt, 1972; Gilmore, 1974), meeting or exceeding customer expectations (Grönroos, 1983; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985), and fitness for use (Juran, Gryna & Bingham, 1974). If quality is understood as conformance to specifications, then, objective and measurable standards are established by the product engineers or service designers for the product/services performance and fitness for use. When quality is defined as value, then price is also included in the product/services attributes that are evaluated by customers when purchasing and consuming the good/service. Especially in the context of services, quality is often understood as meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Meeting or exceeding expectations results in satisfaction (Ojasalo, 2006). If quality is understood as fitness for use, it refers to the extent to which a product successfully serves the purpose of the user.

Juran, Seder & Bingham, (1962) identified the following eight primary uses for the term "quality" in industry. (1) Market place quality: the degree to which a specific product satisfies the wants of a specific consumer; (2) Quality of design: the degree to which a class of products possesses potential satisfaction for people generally; (3) Quality of conformance: the degree to which a specific product conforms to a design or specification; (4) Consumer preference: the degree to which a specific product is preferred over competing products of equivalent grade, based on comparative tests of consumers; (5) Quality characteristic: a distinguishing feature of a grade or product (i.e. appearance, performance, reliability, durability, etc.); (6) A vague expression of general excellence but without being specific enough to be classified; (7) The name of a function

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