Satisfiers and dissatisfiers for international students: Improving the student experience

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Typical findings from previous studies

Many aspects of the student experience are relevant to satisfaction:

• Academic challenges (e.g. Li, 2016)
• Stress (Jackson, 2010)
• Homestays can be a great (e.g. Campbell, 2004)
  • But when they’re bad, they’re awful
• Loneliness “is one of the defining features of the international student experience” (Marginson et al, 2010, p. 365)
• Trouble making friends with locals (e.g. Ayano, 2006)
• Frustration and fear from discrimination (Marginson et al, 2010)
Methodology
Data

- Participants: all international students at Wintec invited to participate
- 108 completed a narrative frame
  - Frames eliciting satisfying and dissatisfying things about
    - Classes
    - The institution(s)
    - NZ
- 20 interviewed
  - Fairly unstructured interviews up to 90 minutes
Narrative frame

When I think about my classes,
I remember feeling *(very/somewhat/a little)* satisfied about
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
Because _________________________________________
________________________________________________

However, I remember feeling *(very/somewhat/a little)* dissatisfied about
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
Because _________________________________________
________________________________________________
Interviews

• Loosely structured with prompts such as:
  • How’s it going?
  • How are your classes?
  • How was your homestay?
  • Any experience of discrimination? Crime?
Findings
Class: Top-of-mind sources of (dis)satisfaction

**Source of satisfaction**

- 42% Teachers being kind, friendly, approachable
- 35% Teachers being skilled & knowledgeable
- 27% Classmates being friendly & supportive
- 12% Class atmosphere

**Source of dissatisfaction**

- 15% Class schedules / timetables
- 13% Facilities lacking or being substandard
- 10% Grades & assessments
- 9% Topics
- 9% Student behaviour
- 8% Workload

Totals >100%
## Institution: Top of mind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfiers</th>
<th>Dissatisfiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41% Facilities being</td>
<td>33% General facilities lacking, inconvenient, or in poor condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modern/convenient</td>
<td>15% Computers being insufficient / poor condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19% Learning &amp; study made</td>
<td>15% Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy</td>
<td>7% Entertainment options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17% Teachers being helpful</td>
<td>5% Support services unhelpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Support staff being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% Friendships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8% Being a student</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
NZ: Top-of-mind sources of (dis)satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfiers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dissatisfiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55% Clean, beautiful, unpolluted</td>
<td>24% Public transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% People being friendly &amp; welcoming</td>
<td>15% Petty crime, feeling insecure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10% Social services</td>
<td>10% Food</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10% Lifestyle / pace of life</td>
<td>9% Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7% Homestay</td>
<td>9% Cost of living</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8% Weather</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Accessing help
Word frequency analysis

- *Help* (noun & verb) was the fifth most frequently occurring content word in the frames (after *student*, *people*, *teachers* and *study*)
- *Help* and *helpful*: 99 tokens (90 statements)
- Mostly used to describe a satisfier
- In 25% of satisfaction frames
Previous work

• Helpfulness is a major source of satisfaction (Bianchi, 2013)
  • But too much can create uncomfortable feelings of dependency (Ayano, 2006)
• Receiving help is frequently a feature of the narratives of sojourning students (e.g. Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013)
• Students usually turn to co-nationals for help (e.g. Ayano, 2006; Li, 2016; Major, 2005)
  • Even for academic matters
  • Support services are seldom used
  • Teachers are mostly only approached for language and academic matters
Becky’s story of satisfaction

R: okay, and um, so classmates are good
B: all good, [yeh] they’re all friendly Kiwis,
R: what about um teachers?
B: our tutors?
R: mm
B: they all good, I don’t why they’re so good
R: really?
B: before I scared of [xx] tutor ‘cause I heard someone told me ‘You know the [xx] tutors ALL terrible, TERRIBLE’, I said ‘okay’ and I scared to go the – you know the [xx] centre, I thought ‘oh I don’t want, oh I don’t want to talk to them’
B: yeah and at the repeat of my semester one, at that time, because I didn’t come to the class for a few weeks, and the [XX] manager, she emailed me like ‘Do you want to stay to study?’ . . . . and before I was really scared, I told myself ‘It’s okay, you can do it’, and then I had a meeting with them, but they were friendly hahahaha . . . . they actually helped me, they said like ‘although you didn’t come to the class a few weeks, that means – that NOT means you failed, you also can join your class, and you have to join your class after this meeting hahaha,
my tutor, they give me lots of support, like because my first essay over due date because I didn’t attend the class a few weeks and they like ‘It’s okay it’s okay take your time’

... and I passed hahaha
ah, I’m happy with the tutor part. And classmates. 
But I don’t happy with staff.

A Block staff.

yeah, is that the enrolment staff?

yeah yeah yeah  
not all staff

yeah

just I don’t like [full name] hahaha
'cause uh my friend, mm came mm on here in July she her expired date is very close and they just uh one day later . . .
the [first name] refused to help her but I can understand the rules yeah, that’s her fault cause that’s her fault cause she had one day late. But you can like speak or smile just the attitude can be a little better or you can talk like in a better way, . . . he seems like in rush and just uh um the attitude is not good.

*Offence taken at the sense of being denied help*
Summary so far

• When faced with a problem, students were very grateful for help received
  • especially from someone seen as going ‘above and beyond’
• This was a major source of satisfaction
• When help was denied or withheld, students were hugely frustrated and even took offence
  • Especially when they felt it was your role to help
• This was a major source of dissatisfaction
Teaching implications

• It’s **crucial** that students know – *interactionally* – how to get help

• Language learners struggle to produce pragmatically appropriate requests (see Kasper & Rose, 1999)

• Textbooks do a poor job of presenting authentic request strategies (e.g. Campillo, 2007; Usó-Juan, 2007)
  
  • Usually sentence stems such as ‘Could you’, ‘Would you mind’
  
  • These often seemed designed for rejection!

• Usually overlooked is that requests are ‘dispreferred’ (e.g. Schegloff, 2007)
  
  • For bigger things, we elicit offers of help
    
    • By staging information (outlining the problem)
Conclusions

Most students don’t often look for help; when they do, it’s really important, and staff need to be alert to this

Such moments can go two ways:
• Help is provided
  • and this is evidence that you have people to turn to
• Help is denied
  • and this is evidence that you are alone / people are unkind

• As language teachers, we have an important role in equipping students to elicit offers of help
References


• Campbell, N. (2004). Home(stay) is where the heart(ache) is: A study of Chinese international students living with local families in New Zealand. Australian Journal of Communication, 31(2), 107-134.


• Li, M. (2016). Learning the rules of the game: Issues affecting academic acculturation of Asian international students in New Zealand universities. In K. Bista & C. Foster (Eds.), *Exploring the social and academic experiences of international students in higher education institutions* (pp. 38-58). Hershet, PA: IGI Global.


Teachers

• “Every teachers are very kind and patient, always encourage me to keep going.”
• “I think they are very friendly and they help me a lot.”
• “They are friendly and helped me with my study.”
• “The tutors have always had nice patience for us.”