International student satisfaction:
The importance of eliciting help

Jonathon Ryan
Wintec, Hamilton
Research Questions

- What do international students find satisfying and dissatisfying about:
  - Their classes?
  - Their (tertiary) institution?
  - Living in NZ?
- 1200 international students invited to participate
- 108 completed a narrative frame
- 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 ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Typical findings from previous studies

Many aspects of the student experience are relevant to satisfaction:

- 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)
- 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
Findings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of satisfaction</th>
<th>Source of dissatisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42% Kind, friendly teachers</td>
<td>15% Class schedules / timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35% Skilled, expert teachers</td>
<td>13% Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% Friendly &amp; supportive classmates</td>
<td>10% Grades &amp; assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Class atmosphere</td>
<td>9% Topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9% Student behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8% Workload</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals >100%
Institution: Top of mind

Satisfiers

- 41% Facilities
- 19% Learning & study made easy
- 17% Teachers being helpful
- 10% Support staff being helpful
- 8% Friendships
- 8% Being a student

Dissatisfiers

- 33% General facilities
- 15% Computers
- 15% Parking
- 7% Entertainment options
- 5% Support staff/services unhelpful
### NZ: Top-of-mind sources of (dis)satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfiers</th>
<th>Dissatisfiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55% Natural environment</td>
<td>24% Public transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% People</td>
<td>15% Petty crime, feeling insecure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Infrastructure</td>
<td>10% Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Lifestyle / pace of life</td>
<td>9% Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% Homestay</td>
<td>9% Cost of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8% Weather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accessing help
The four most frequent content words were: *student, people, teacher* and *study*.

The 5\textsuperscript{th} was *help* (mostly verb).
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} most common verb (33\textsuperscript{rd} highest frequency in L1 English).

*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: 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
B: 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 passedahaha
P: ah, I’m happy with the tutor part. And classmates.
    But I don’t happy with staff.
L: staff
P: A Block staff.
L: yeah, is that the enrolment staff?
P: yeah yeah yeah
    not all staff
L: yeah
P: just I don’t like [full name] hahaha
P: ‘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 they went looking for help but it 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
- Textbooks often teach requests (incl. ‘requests for help’)
  - But present inauthentic request strategies (e.g. Campillo, 2007; Usó-Juan, 2007)
  - Usually sentence stems such as ‘Could you’, ‘Would you mind’
  - These often seemed designed to be rejected!
- For bigger things, native speakers elicit offers of help (e.g. Schegloff, 2007). This strategy:
  - Avoids the risk of rejection
  - Opens up a range of ways the other person can demonstrate helpfulness
- Achieved through outlining the problem and staging information that hints at what you want
Conclusions

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

While avoiding creating dependency

Searches for help 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 when they need it**
  - Learners need to be able to conduct searches for help that will avoid refusals
References


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.”
Interviews

- Loosely structured with prompts such as:
  - How’s it going?
  - How are your classes?
  - How was your homestay?
  - Any experience of discrimination? Crime?