

Students' Motivation and Learning Outcomes: Significant Factors in Internal Study Quality Assurance System

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Abstract

In this paper the author focuses on some of aspects of student motivation as one of many internal factors who have an impact on learning outcomes management in institutions of higher education within the framework of doctoral thesis "Introduction of Model for Learning Outcomes Management in Institutions of Higher Education".

The topicality of this study is grounded by the fact that learning outcomes management in institutions of higher education as a component of internal quality assurance system has not been investigated. Though, there have been many discussions, seminars and trainings organised in Latvia, still there is no methodology for the management of learning outcomes process. This process should be viewed in line with internal quality assurance system of the institution of higher education, its full operation, as well as current external quality assurance system

To ensure the quality of study programmes, within the frame of internal quality system, fields of responsibility and decision making process should be defined at management level according to the structure, strategy and priorities of the institution of higher education [3].

The literature review contains an overview of various several other studies on students' motivation and their influence on learning outcomes and impact on internal quality assurance system. Therefore, while managing internal quality assurance process and learning outcomes as a part of this process, the institution has to take into account student motivation and other internal and external factors. The author of the study also slightly touches several internal factors and their mutual interaction. However, these aspects require more in-depth study.

1. Introduction

Strategic planning is a tool for organizing the present on the basis of the projections of the desired future. In other words, a strategic plan is a road map to lead an organization from where it is now to where it would like to be in five or ten years.

The plan must be: simple, written, clear, based on the real current situation, and have enough time allowed to give it a time to settle. It should not be rushed, because rushing the plan will cause problems.

Purpose of strategic or long-range planning is to assist an organization in establishing priorities and to better serve the needs of constituency. A strategic plan must be flexible and practical and yet serve as a guide to implementing programs, evaluating how these programs are doing, and making adjustments [16].

Model for learning outcomes management in institutions of higher education might be grounded on a process-based quality management system. While developing the model for learning outcomes management, the following aspects have to be taken into account: internal organisational culture of the institution, traditions and attitude towards quality management system, its role and significance. Quality assurance should be included in the university strategy [19]. In Figure No.1 author shows structure of Internal Study Quality Assurance System.

Anyamele's [14] paper investigates how university leaders in Finland implement quality management in their respective institutions. The study uses a modified model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model as a theoretical base in eliciting information on quality management strategies from the senior academic leaders in these universities. The main objective of the study is to explore the different management approaches in quality improvement in university management as perceived by the leaders. The study has made use of administration questionnaires and interviews as methods of data collection. Although the findings show many approaches to quality improvement in university management, one of the conclusions emerging from the study is that Finnish responses to their management styles may serve as inspiration for other universities especially with regard to quality control and leadership styles [14].

Learning outcomes are described as written statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning. At the beginning of the 90s, an EU pilot project on ECTS showed that study programs were much easier to compare if they were described in terms of outcomes, instead of inputs. Learning outcomes started to gain importance at policy level and have consequently been supported by the development of national qualifications frameworks (Berlin Communiqué), the adoption of the ESG, the overarching outcomes-focused.

Today and in the near future student-centered learning and learning outcomes will be at the core of 'implementing Bologna'. The importance of learning outcomes will increase for several reasons. Firstly, learning outcomes make qualifications more transparent for students. Then, the range of graduates is becoming wider and thanks to learning outcomes, employers may have a better understanding of the acquired knowledge, skills and competences in order to recruit the most suitable candidate. Learning outcomes benefit for quality assurance as they increase transparency and comparability between qualification standards. Learning outcomes are also valuable in terms of course design [10].

In accordance with goal-setting theory, individuals are able to motivate themselves, if they have set goals for the future. Four goal-setting theory mechanisms can be singled out:

- 1) Direct attention;
- 2) Energizing: putting out a certain amount of effort in performing a certain task;
- 3) Task persistence: helping a person to be more assertive;
- 4) Development of an action strategy [4].

Students' self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness and self-development become the main most influential driving forces in learning also within the human pedagogy context.

- 1) If a student is aware of his/her goal, strengths and weaknesses and have an adequate self-esteem, the student is ready to assume responsibility for his/her learning outcomes, feels more stress-free and is able to realize oneself more successfully;
- 2) Students' intellectual progress to a great extent depends on their personality, self-esteem, motivation, ability to set realistic goals. The attainment of their goals depends on students' ability to cooperate and communicate in an efficient way [5].

In her previous study, within the framework of the study course "Business" implemented at the Red Cross Medical College of Rīga Stradiņš University, the first-level professional study programmes "Nursing" and

"Medicine", in academic years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, the author questioned first year students with an aim to learn their motivation in choosing a certain study programme and an educational institution. Respondents could mark several options.

Motivational factors included in the questionnaire arranged by the frequency of mentioning by the respondents:

- Desire to help others
- Interesting profession
- Intention to continue studies
- Obtaining higher education
- Prestige of the college
- Influence of the family
- Study places financed from the state budget
- Guaranteed job
- Closeness to home
- Failure to enter other institution of education [20].

The author intends to further the study of the connection between the learning outcomes of various study courses and factors of motivation mentioned by the students.

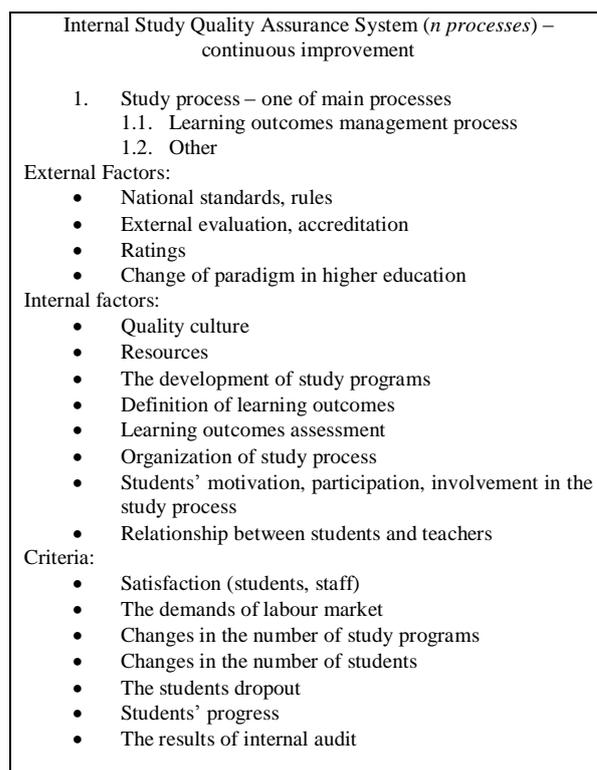


Figure No. 1 Structure of Internal Study Quality Assurance System

2. Literature Review

There exists a close connection between many internal factors within framework of internal study quality assurance system:

Teacher's direct perception and students' frequency of participation in the classroom activities, at the same time, there is a close connection between the teachers and students' emotional learning, motivation and satisfaction [2].

Teacher's perception assessment scale in three dimensions: "The teacher devotes time in order to fully answer students' questions", "The teacher communicates, is interested in what students are learning", "The teacher uses different methods to help students understand the course material", etc. Whereas, in the assessment of the teacher' explicitly, the following statements were included: "My teacher sets clear goals of the course", "My teacher speaks directly during the lectures", etc. In the assessment of learning outcomes three different indicators in emotional and cognitive learning were used. By means of the first statement the following aspects were assessed: students' feelings/perception of the significance, for instance, "The tasks done in the classroom are important to me"; the influence – "I am able to recognize the differences between the tasks to be done in the classroom", and the competence – "I am convinced (sure) that I can do the given tasks adequately". Students' emotional learning was assessed by inviting the students to express their feelings on the course content: "good/bad", "useful/not useful", and to ground their future choice of the courses of the respected field. Learning indicators' scale was used as the third instrument, for instance, "I participate in discussions about the study content", "I explain the course content to other students", etc. The study results showed that all three teacher's communication habits affect students' learning outcomes [13].

Supportive environment in the Robinson, Beachboard, Li and Adkinson [11] studies are investigating how the Learning Communities help to improve the learning outcomes using self-determination theory in the analysis of students' survey. The hypothesis expressed in the theory, that a supportive environment is connected to the increase of the motivation, proves that it affects the learning outcomes in a positive way [11].

Results of Mazer's [9] study demonstrate a positive relationship between students' emotional and cognitive interest and involvement into the study process. By developing the model, the author has taken into account several motivation theories, linking several learning system concepts and formed an applicable system in order to understand, to analyse, to guide and

to increase students' motivation. The author investigates the microenvironment, classroom environment, structural characteristics in the classroom, the content and the process, the teacher's factors, expectations and hopes, and achievable outcomes. The author puts forward seven hypotheses [9].

Research by Debnath's [17] shows that taken together these factors – classroom, school environment, student educability and teacher's sense of efficacy – are affected by the social, economic, and other conditions. These factors may eventually determine whether teachers can appropriately design the structure of classroom, emphasize one goal over another, or motivate students in classrooms. The author has designed a model that has several practical implications for teachers, administrators and researchers. The model can provide a basis for analyzing and diagnosing issues and problems related to student motivation. Based on the literature from multiple disciplines, the proposed model of student motivation is an attempt to couch the learning systems concept within an integrated network, composed of several relevant motivation theories, and is designed to provide a parsimonious and useful framework to understand, analyze, manage, and enhance student motivation in college classrooms [17].

3. Discussion

What could be another factors influencing student motivation? Are students' learning outcomes connected with the academic environment? Is there a correlation between the academic environment and learning outcomes, indirectly related to students' involvement?

The authors Pike, Smart, Ethington [6] were looking for the answers to these questions in the study on students' involvement and relationship between academic disciplines and study outcomes, based on Holand's theory and previous studies, that students' learning and development are closely related to their chosen study field. The authors have used the conceptual method to depict the correlation between characteristics, academic discipline, involvement and measurements of learning outcomes.

Despite the limitations in the study and the fact that causal relationship between the academic environment, students' involvement and learning outcomes cannot be determined, the results of the study have a great influence on the investigation of Holand's theory and students' involvement. First of all, the socialization effects of academic environment are depicted in the study. The correlation between the academic environment and their learning outcomes was proved. Yet, Holand's principles should not be used "blindly",

however, they can give the guidelines in working out and implementing interventions for the achievement of students' success [6].

How and whether teachers' behaviour influence students' learning outcomes? Goodboy and Bolkan [1] study shows the relationship between the influences of misbehaviour of college teachers on students' communication habits and traditional learning outcomes. The hypothesis forwarded by the authors: the teachers' misbehaviour through emotional learning has a direct or indirect influence on communication habits and learning outcomes. The authors refer to their previous research, in which 28 categories of teachers' misbehaviours were singled out according to the students' description. The authors in their research have used three main types, where misbehaviour is characterized as:

- 1) Lack of competence, it means, that a teacher does not care; he/she is not interested in the study course or students. Students may perceive it as if their teacher does not clearly understand what he/she is doing. As the examples they mention boring lectures, non-decent tests and lack of knowledge with regard to the course content;
- 2) Indolence, this habit is related to laziness and carelessness towards students, for instance, forgetting about the test or the date, failure to evaluate students' papers on time;
- 3) Insulting, the teacher uses offensive/insulting expressions, is usually mocking at students, and is arrogant.

343 participants took part in the research. The forwarded hypotheses were confirmed as a result of research:

- 1) Teachers' misbehaviour has a direct and indirect effect on students' and teachers' resistance;
- 2) Teachers' misbehaviour has an indirect effect on students' participation;
- 3) Teachers' misbehaviour has a direct and indirect effect on satisfaction with communication, but only an indirect effect on motivation and cognitive learning [1].

This study provides some methodological problems related to contingent instructors and student outcomes. By applying non-aggregated and aggregated measures of exposure to contingent instructors to the same data, this analysis demonstrates that effects of commonly used measures of exposure to contingent instructors have little to do with actual contingent instructor effects on student outcomes.

Two multi-level approaches—cross-classified and multiple membership models—are applied in the single-institution analysis of faculty status effect on student outcomes—grades and first year retention. The

analysis showed no variability in student retention and a significant variability in grades by faculty characteristics. Compared to their tenured and tenure-track peers, contingent instructors are more likely to assign higher grades, which may lead to lowered levels of academic challenge and student motivation to do their best work [7].

What are teachers' and students' relationship from students' perspective? Research in this topic was carried out by Docan – Morgan and Manusov [18]. Its aim was to investigate the interaction between teachers and students. The authors paid a particular attention to critical/crucial points and their potential outcomes in student-teacher relationship. The answers to the following research questions were obtained in the study:

- 1) What specific cases/events do students consider as critical points in student-teacher relationship?
- 2) What points do students consider being positive and which ones negative?
- 3) What is the outcome of these relationships?
- 4) In what ways do these results differ from the outcome types?

The hypotheses were confirmed stating that these points affect emotional and cognitive learning. Consequently, there are events which affect teacher-student relationship positively and there are events that affect mutual relationship between students and teachers negatively. Teachers can avoid potentially negative aspects if they manage to notice the moments in which these events are essential or can create radical changes in mutual relationship timely.

Specific events were grouped according to the following categories:

- 1) Instrumental (course content, outcomes, discussion of regulations, discussions about the educational institution, practice, etc.);
- 2) Personalities (discussion about the course paper, personal information, discussion about common interests, compliments, the use of the name, etc.);
- 3) Rhetoric (learning style, lecture topic, complaints);
- 4) Discipline-related;
- 5) Location;
- 6) Other persons' [18].

Does the teacher's competence, students' motivation, learning outcomes and satisfaction with the study course influence students' perception of the teacher? The study is based on students' assessment questionnaire of teachers in Website RateMyProfessor.com, where students are anonymously evaluating the teachers by five criteria. The forwarded hypotheses were confirmed:

- 1) Students are of the opinion that the most popular teachers have greater competence;

- 2) Students are higher motivated to learn under the guidance of popular teachers;
- 3) Students are more satisfied with the study course, they have better learning outcomes and a better teachers' evaluation if the teacher is more popular.

The study showed differences between the genders – for female students the teacher's physical attractiveness seems to be more significant rather than for male students. Respondents answered the questions both about the teachers whom they rated high, and about those who were rated low. Respondents had to comment on the term "hotness". According to students' answers, five dimensions were identified by the means of content analysis: pleasant appearance, to good shape, well-dressed, attractive and sexy. Each of the measurements was ranged from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree) in Lickert scale [8].

Results of Ebberts [15] dissertation "The Impact of social model agent type (coping, mastery) and social interaction type (vicarious, direct) on learner motivation, attitudes, social comparisons, affect and learning performance" shows and explains social learning (motivation, attitudes, and social comparison activity) through Sweller's Cognitive Load theory, Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance theory, Bandura's Social Learning theory, and Turner's Theory of Social Interaction. In this study took part 103 undergraduate learners from a pre – service teacher's course "Introduction to Technology" [15].

Jones, Miller, Jones, Packham and Pickernell [12] study explored the attitudes and motivation of Polish students towards an entrepreneurship education programme. In this research 122 students from Karol Adamiecki University of Economics who had taken same course were involved in semi-structured interviews from 2006 till 2010. This course focused on two main elements: key attributes of an entrepreneurship and on development of a visible business idea. Study results shows that this study programme can inform student attitudes and give them support to consider the idea of entrepreneurial career. There are differences by gender: female students more interested in entrepreneurial recognition elements of course, but male students – more interested in the business plan component of course.

This research proposes that for entrepreneurship education to make impact it must be delivered employing a dynamic pedagogy, utilising a range of interactive delivery methods. Research confirmed that entrepreneurial education can positively reinforce student attitudes towards an entrepreneurial career choice within a developing country – such as Poland [12].

4. Conclusion

The literature review allows concluding that students' motivation is a very significant factor in achieving the learning outcomes. Students' motivation, on the other hand, is influenced by different factors. The following factors should be regarded as very significant: positive environment, students' and teachers' interrelations and perception and other. Taking into account these factors and their impact, one has to strive to avoid the unfavourable factors and develop the positive ones, thus helping students achieve learning outcomes in the best way. Significance of students' motivation and its influencing factors has to be considered both by the teachers and the administration of the higher educational institutions while organizing the study process.

It is clear that the best value of quality management activities appears to be at the institutional level, as this gives sufficient information for significant changes, and the ownership necessary to support and encourage quality improvement activities in institutions of higher education [14].

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