

# Extent of Students' Satisfaction with the Placement of Field of Study at Hawassa University

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to assess the level of university students' satisfaction on the placement of field of study. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was conducted. All generic undergraduate regular students of Hawassa University in 2014/15 were involved in the study. Percentage, mean and correlation analysis were used for data analysis. The study reveals that e students were not assigned according to their first or second choice in the department selection. Most of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction on the placement of study. It was also found that there was no significance difference of the level of satisfaction among male and female and level of study. It was recommended that the University has to take into account the student's choice when assignment field of study to attract more students.

**Keywords:** *Students, Field of Study, Level of Satisfaction.*

## Introduction

Students are one of the primary customers of the higher learning institutions. Their level of satisfaction with the services and teaching learning processes of the universities and colleges play a decisive role in the academic performances of the students. Satisfaction is a complex behavioral phenomenon. Various social, environmental and psychological factors affect the level of satisfaction. Student satisfaction, therefore, is a continually changing construct in the Higher Education environment due to repeated interactions (Elliott & Shin 2002). It is an overall response not only to the learning experiences of students but also to the social and environmental interactions.

Research (Elliott and Shin 2002) suggest that satisfaction of individuals need to be monitored in order to be able to improve the services provided as per the expectations of the clients and needs to be studied. A number of student and course related benefits including increases in learning motivation and lower attrition rates may be directly or indirectly related to the level of satisfaction of the students. Level of satisfaction is determined based not only on current experience but also all past experience, as well as future or anticipated experiences. In this context, student satisfaction is defined as the student's fulfillment response (Spreng, MacKenzie & Olshavsky 1996). They goes on saying that it is the individuals' overall subjective evaluation and experience of a service feature and between what was received and what was expected from a specific service provider. So, expectations are defined "as beliefs about a product's attribute or performance at some time in the future" (Spreng, MacKenzie & Olshavsky 1996).

To grasp the complexity of the learning experience, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to student satisfaction. For many students, the process of studying not only represents the acquisition of certain skills and theoretical knowledge. It is also related to personal growth and social development (Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker & Grogard, 2002). A university is an assemblage of communities with different ideologies, agenda, and academic traditions held together by a common institutional logo and name. As a result, students can be and should be seen as customers and key stakeholders (Tonks & Farr, 1995). Hill (1995) suggests that the primary customers of the universities are the students and so Higher Education is increasingly recognizing that it is a service industry and is placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Furthermore, researchers argue that relationships are important and that the overall market orientation of organizations needs to be translated to a relationship level in order to be effective (Helfert, Ritter & Walter, 2002). The marketing aim should be the development of long-term customer relationships because they are a university's most valuable resources.

Satisfaction has developed extensively as a basic construct for monitoring and controlling activities and is therefore, often viewed as a central determinant of customer retention. Nevertheless, satisfaction appears to mean different things to different people (Giese & Cote, 2002; Parker & Mathews, 2001). It can be viewed as an outcome of a consumption activity or experience. When universities accept the students as an important customer group a revolutionary change in the management in Higher Education will be in place. Especially, when a relationship management approach is adopted, the basic understanding of what the students want is vital. It is obvious that student satisfaction in the university context is central for the students and the providers. Only a few universities routinely measure satisfaction. Additionally, most of those measurements are not used for marketing planning, evaluation and controlling.

According to Elliott & Shin (2002) focusing on student satisfaction not only enables universities to re-engineer their organizations to adapt to student needs, but also allows them to develop a system for continuous monitoring of how effectively they meet or exceed student needs. So, the student satisfaction approach is important for the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement (Aldrige & Rowley, 1998).

Orientation of customer at the higher learning institutions has been underemphasized compared to

the profit-oriented organizations. However, the increased turmoil in the higher education marketplace may force the colleges and universities to utilize a more customer-oriented philosophy in delivering their services, and those who understand these principles will have a better chance of achieving their educational objectives more effectively (Kotler and Fox, 1995). Students, academic staff, faculties, alumni, donors, and others are the main stake holders for educational sectors. A drop in student retention without a compensating enrollment increase impacts on all the above customers. Hence, the need to manage the university retention process from student entrance to graduation has become increasingly important (Seymour, 1993).

Students are the direct recipients of the service provided by the university. Assessment of the students' satisfaction in their placement to the field of study and the teaching learning process, therefore, has become an extremely important issue for universities and the management itself direct or indirectly. Hence, student satisfaction is an important issue in terms of quality of service provided in the marketing to be addressed by the university. University should focus the services to students because as a direct customer they receive the service directly from the university program. The objective of any university is to maximize student satisfaction, minimize dissatisfaction and therefore this in turn to improve the institutions performance.

In earlier times, after completing high school, students would usually join universities considering their ability to complete the courses successfully. These days, however, students' focus has shifted to getting good jobs after graduation (PRLog, 2009). They choose their department based on this. The problem of placing high school students to colleges/universities and to departments has always taken the attention of the public. There is little academic consideration while placing students to colleges/universities. A student's choice of department or course of study is determined by the availability of good jobs which indirectly determine the student's career path for the rest of his/her life. Thus, because of these and other reasons most students choose competitive and rewarding fields of study such as Engineering and Medicine (Cooper, 2009).

It is believed that students must choose different fields of studies/departments by their interest (without influence of external force). However, students are placed to different departments on a competitive basis in most of the Ethiopian higher institutions. Hence, the interest of low performing students is not taken into consideration. This in turn, is thought to have a negative impact on the students' academic performance. This is because, if students express lack of interest in the field they are placed, it affects the way they react or listen to the instructor (Ayotola, 1998). Thus, it can be said that interest and attitude of learners towards the subject plays a decisive role for the success of the learner. Students joining a particular department by their interest are believed to be highly motivated to learn than students placed in a department without their interest. High motivation is a factor which can lead students to a better achievement.

Studies conducted in Cameroon concluded that placement dissatisfaction is one of the mention challenges in clinical nursing education (Vivian et al., 2011). Elsewhere the satisfaction level of student placement survey to their field of study carried on different parts of the world. However, a wide survey was performed on the general satisfaction level of the students in higher institute than placement satisfaction. A survey carried out in 2004, at University of Limerick UK, indicated that the satisfaction level of the students in general setup of university was 19%. As report of this survey indicated, the student satisfaction level was lower than the previous three consecutive years (Student satisfaction survey report 2004).

Another study conducted at University of Limerick UK, indicates that 80% of students were very satisfied or satisfied with their program placement, while 9% were dissatisfied. In addition, 73% found their program interesting and engaging. The high level of very satisfied or satisfied responses is also reflected in the qualitative comments, which requested students to consider their 'worst' and 'best/favorite' modules. Studies done by different authors disclosed that motivated students perform better academically than unmotivated ones (Broussard and Garrison, 2004; Sandra, 2002).

Ethiopia, over the last decade, has been in a massive expansion of public higher learning institutions. Consequently, the number of public and private universities and colleges has drastically increased. The number of students joining these higher learning institutions also increased for instance, from 6354 in 1994 to 31921 in 2005. In 2009, the number of students enrolled to the higher public higher learning institutions was estimated 72,000. This remarkable improvement in terms of increasing the number of educated human resources needs to be complemented by improving quality of training. To this end, the government has formulated a package to address the problems that adversely affect the quality of education at various levels of education sectors in the country.

Field placement has significant effect on students' achievement in the program. Consequently, students need to be placed according to their choice. Yet, there is some evidence that indicate students often enter their placements without their choice and this led then to inter the department/school with apprehension, stress, anxiety, and unclear expectations, negative emotions that may well interfere with effective learning (Barlow & Hall, 2004; Barlow et al, 2006; Gelman, 2004). On top of that if students' entered the field without their choice, it lead them to develop low confidence in their skill and experience role confusion or conflict (Gelman, 2004). It is known that in Ethiopian universities most of the students were not assigned in the field of study based on their first, second and/or third option. Thus, this study tried to see to what extent university students were satisfied with their field of assignment

- 1) What proportion of undergraduate students in Hawassa University are satisfied with their placement of study?
- 2) Is there relationship between level of satisfaction in the placement of study area and demographic factors?

## Materials and Method

A descriptive cross-sectional study that involves a quantitative method was conducted. All generic undergraduate regular students of Hawassa University in 2014/15 academic year constituted the source population for the study. All the students in a regular program from the three campuses were included in the study, while those attending the non-regular program were excluded. Sample size for the quantitative data is determined using Epi-info version 2002 considering the following assumptions:

- Total regular student population of the university during the study period (15,000)
- An anticipated population proportion of 50%.
- 95% confidence interval
- 5% margin of error
- design effect of = 2
- 10% of expected non response rate

Accordingly, the minimum number of students required was calculated as: 845

List of clusters was established by the field and year of study. According to the list, there were 150 clusters of regular students. Data was collected from 30 clusters selected by using cumulative frequencies of number of students. Then, the total number of

students was divided by 30 clusters to get the sampling interval. The first cluster was selected randomly. The total sample size was divided proportionately to the selected 30 clusters. Finally, a systematic sampling method was used to select students from the clusters selected for the study.

Different background variables that address the objectives of the study were assessed. Some of the variables include socio-demographic characteristics like sex, year of study, and field of study. A pre-tested and structured self-administered questionnaire was employed. The questionnaire was administered in English. Pretest was done among 100 students in one of Hawassa University campus that is not included in the study.

## Results

A total of 807 participants were included in this study, among which 428 (53.03%) were males and the remaining were females. The non-response rate of the study was 33(3.93%). Almost equal number of students involved from each batch except 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year. Three fourth of the study participants were assigned in the field of Agriculture, Natural sciences' and Social sciences.

**Table 1: Biographical Information**

No	Items		Frequency	percentage
1	Gender	Male	428	53.03
		Female	379	46.97
2	Assigned college	Medicine and Health sciences	192	23.79
		Social Sciences	205	25.4
		Agriculture	204	25.28
		Natural sciences	206	25.53
3	Year of Study	1 <sup>st</sup> year	188	23.3
		2 <sup>nd</sup> year	214	26.5
		3 <sup>rd</sup> year	213	26.4
		4 <sup>th</sup> year	161	20
		5 <sup>th</sup> year	31	3.8
4	preparatory school attended	Government	290	35.93
		Private	322	39.90
		Religious	186	23.04
		Others	9	1.11
5	Have you heard about current field of study before joining	Yes	387	48.00
		No	420	52.00
6	Did you get first choice of your field?	Yes	226	28.00
		No	581	72.00

**NB.** Approximately equal chances were given for all colleges but the number of questionnaire returned from health sciences were lower compare to other colleges.

About 508(62.93%) of the study subject were from private and religious preparatory or high schools. Only 387(48%) of the students were heard their current field of study before they choose. Among them 41% of them had not got their first choice. However, 28% of the participants got 1<sup>st</sup> choice and only 33% of them got 2<sup>nd</sup> choice.

### Level of Satisfaction on the Field of Study

About 73% of the students were not satisfied on their field of study. The mean satisfaction scale was 2.3 on liker scale. However, almost 96% of the groups very

dissatisfied on opportunity in filed and anticipated salary. But the health sciences students have better satisfaction than natural sciences and other sciences. However, agriculture students were 100% very dissatisfied on their field of study.

### Level of Satisfaction with Theoretical Teaching Process

The level of satisfaction was justified based on the score of the responses and classified in five level based on Best's criteria (1977) as follows

$$\frac{\text{Highest score} - \text{lowest score}}{\text{Numbers of levels}}$$

$$\text{That is } \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.80$$

If the mean value is 1.00 – 1.80 is very unsatisfied,  
1.81 – 2.60 is unsatisfied, 2.01 – 3.40 Neutral, 3.41.-

4.20 satisfied and 4.21 – 5.0 is very satisfied.

**Table 2: Level of satisfaction with field of study**

Variable	Colleges	Very dissatisfied [1 point] N (%)	Dissatisfied [2 point] N (%)	1	Not determined [3 point] N (%)	5%	Satisfied [4 point] N (%)	Very satisfied [5 point] N (%)	Total	Mean rating (±SD)
Current field of study	HSc	31(16.15)	32(16.67)	63(32.82)	16(8.33)	113(58.86)	69(35.94)	44(22.92)	192	3.33 (±1.14)
	SSc	106(55.21)	45(23.44)	151(78.65)	12(6.25)	43(22.39)	29(15.10)	14(7.29)	206	2.03(±1.32)
	Agri	142(73.96)	32(16.67)	174(90.63)	4(2.08)	22(13.55)	18(9.38)	8(4.17)	204	1.62(±1.13)
	NSc	68(35.42)	37(19.27)		18(9.38)		63(32.81)	19(9.90)	205	2.65(±1.44)
Total		347(42.99)	146(18.1)		50(6.2)		179(22.2)	85(10.5)	807	2.39(±1.47)
Anticipated job opportunity	HSc	12(6.25)	8(4.17)		4(2.08)		162(84.38)	6(3.13)	192	3.74(±0.84)
	SSc	120(62.50)	42(21.88)		23(11.98)		15(7.81)	6(3.13)	206	1.76(±1.09)
	Agri	122(63.54)	68(35.42)		2(1.04)		8(4.17)	4(2.08)	204	1.55(±0.86)
	NSc	64(33.33)	35(18.23)		24(12.50)		64(33.33)	18(9.38)	205	2.69(±1.41)
Total		318(39.4)	153(18.9)		53(6.6)		249(30.9)	34(4.2)	807	2.42(±1.38)
Opportunity of your carrier development	HSc	6(3.13)	18(9.38)		14(7.29)		148(77.08)	6(3.13)	192	3.68(±0.81)
	SSc	49(25.52)	21(10.94)		25(13.02)		108(56.25)	3(1.56)	206	2.98(±1.28)
	Agri	72(37.50)	34(17.71)		4(2.08)		88(45.83)	6(3.13)	204	2.62(±1.41)
	NSc	60(31.25)	42(21.88)		20(10.42)		68(35.42)	15(7.81)	205	2.69(±1.38)
Total		187(23.2)	115(14.30)		63(7.8)		412(51.1)	30(3.72)	807	2.98(±1.31)
Anticipated monthly salary	HSc	81(42.19)	22(11.46)		19(9.90)		46(23.96)	24(12.50)	192	2.53(±1.52)
	SSc	147(76.56)	21(10.94)		12(6.25)		18(9.38)	8(4.17)	206	1.64(±1.16)
	Agri	158(82.29)	29(15.10)		7(3.65)		8(4.17)	2(1.04)	204	1.37(±0.81)
	NSc	108(56.25)	62(32.29)		8(4.17)		26(13.54)	1(0.52)	205	1.78(±1.03)
Total		494(61.21)	134(16.60)		46(5.70)		98(12.14)	35(4.33)	807	1.82(±1.23)
National contribution	HSc	8(4.17)	2(1.04)		3(1.56)		156(81.25)	23(11.98)	192	3.96(±0.74)
	SSc	42(21.88)	28(14.58)		18(9.38)		108(56.25)	10(5.21)	206	3.08(±1.29)
	Agri	16(8.33)	12(6.25)		6(3.13)		138(71.88)	32(16.67)	204	3.77(±1.04)
	NSc	11(5.73)	2(1.04)		8(4.17)		168(87.50)	16(8.33)	205	3.86(±0.79)
Total		77(9.54)	44(5.45)		35(3.33)		570(70.63)	81(10.03)	807	3.66(±1.05)
Capacity to address national priorities	HSc	6(3.13)	8(4.17)		23(11.98)		133(69.27)	22(11.46)	192	3.82(±0.81)
	SSc	19(9.90)	6(3.13)		8(4.17)		163(84.90)	10(5.21)	206	3.67(±0.96)
	Agri	2(1.04)	3(1.56)		4(2.08)		186(96.88)	9(4.69)	204	3.97(±0.46)
	NSc	1(0.52)	6(3.13)		13(6.77)		166(86.46)	19(9.90)	205	3.96(±0.56)
Total		28(3.46)	23(2.85)		48(5.94)		648(80.29)	60(7.43)	807	3.85(±0.73)

**Table 3: Relationship between gender, assigned college, year of study and students' level of satisfaction**

		Gender	Year of study	Level of satisfaction
Gender	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 00 108		
Year of study	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.22 00 108	1 .31 108	
Level of satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.206 .032 108	.13 .014 108	1 .01 108

The table indicated that there is no significant difference between gender, assigned college, year of study with students' level of satisfaction.

### Discussion and Conclusions

As can be seen in the finding section above, important issues were identified: the first point is that majority of the participants were attended their preparatory education in private schools such may led them to expect more support and encouragement and when they lack this support when they are at university, they become dissatisfied.

The second important point is that most of the students don't get their first or second choice in the department selection. This may lead for dissatisfaction. As different studies revealed that students perception about their field of study positively correlate with student's extent of satisfaction (Calvo, Markauskaite and Trigwell 2010). When students inter to the university, their choice was based on the degree of employability. Those students who have graduated from some department got good job immediately after graduation, but others have to wait for three or four years. Therefore, those students who are assigned in the department without their choice may be more dissatisfied.

The findings of correlation analysis indicated that there is no significant relationship between gender and students' level of satisfaction. It showed a negative significant relationship between gender and students' level of satisfaction ( $r = -.206$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, there is no difference on the level of satisfaction with year of study. That is the increase in year of study doesn't lead to improvement in level of satisfaction.

The findings of this study revealed that students were dissatisfied with their placement. Universities worldwide are now competing for students both nationally and internationally. In order to recruit and retain students they should aim to enhance student satisfaction and reduce student dissatisfaction. This can only be achieved if all the services that contribute to "academic life" are delivered to a suitable standard. The students are the sole judges of whether or not this has been achieved therefore student satisfaction surveys should be undertaken on a regular basis and a university's service offering adapted accordingly. In addition, there should be a means for students to express their suggestions for the purpose of improving the program.

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