Comparison of offshore and onshore students’ perceptions of university learning environments and quality of educational experiences:

Implications for teaching and learning

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Objective

- To present the preliminary findings about the relationship between offshore and onshore students’ perceptions of learning environments and the quality of educational experiences
Key question

• What are the contextual factors (individual, university-level and classroom-level) that influence offshore and onshore students’ educational experiences?
The Research Context

- University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia
- Providers of on-campus and distance education programs in Australia and globally
- 75% students study via distance or online
The Framework for Analysis

- Based on Kek & Huijser’s (in press) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ‘whole ecology’ and its impact on Student Learning and Outcomes in HE

- Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s Theory of Human Development (1979) and Bronfenbrenner & Ceci’s Bio-ecological Model (1994) conceptualisation of ‘whole ecology’

- Explores the extent to which the macro (distal) & micro (proximal) systems interact to impact outcomes
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Environment Applied to Student Learning and Outcomes in Higher Education

Framework used in comparing USQ offshore and onshore learning contexts

Individual Characteristics
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Degree or Sector
- Study Year

Distal Environment
- Family
- University

Proximal Environment
- Teaching and Learning
  - Academic Challenge
  - Active Learning
  - Staff-Student Relationship
  - Support
  - Work Related Learning
  - Employability Skills
  - General Learning

Outcomes
- Quality of Educational Experience
Research Design

• Questionnaires to offshore and onshore students in 2008
  • Administered AUSSE Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
    – Explores extent of students’ involvement with educational activities and the conditions found in the learning environment
      • Eg. Questions – “During the current academic year, how much/often have you done....or how much has your course emphasised ...to what extent has your experience contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development ...”
    – Developed and managed by Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) & based on USA’s National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
    – Psychometrically validated, robust sampling strategy
Sample

• **Total** – 1,314 students

  • **Onshore**
    – 930 (USQ Toowoomba)

  • **Offshore**
    – 384 (USQ Partner Institutions in China & Malaysia)
Analysis

• Used hierarchical regression analyses
• With following sequence for entering the blocks of factors in the framework:
  1. Personal characteristics: Gender, Ethnicity (ESL or not), Age, Degree (UG or PG) for offshore model or Sector (International or Domestic) for onshore model, Study Level (first year or final year)
  2. Family environment: Parents’ highest educational level
  3. University environment: Proportion of online learning, Accommodation on Campus
  4. Learning and teaching environment: Academic Challenge, Active learning, Staff-Student Relationship, Support, Work Related Learning, Employability Skills, and General Learning
  5. Outcomes: Students’ satisfaction with Quality of Education
AUSSE Overall Satisfaction: Quality of Educational Experience

Onshore

Offshore

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent
Predictors of Quality of Education – Offshore Students

Offshore students who are highly satisfied with their educational experiences are:

- First year students compared to final year students
- Those in learning environments that had placed great emphasis on staff and student relationships
- Those in learning environments that had placed great emphasis on teaching employability skills

Final R = 0.47, effect size = 0.28 (medium), p = 0.000
Predictors of Quality of Education – Onshore Students

Onshore students who are highly satisfied with their educational experiences are:

- Older in age
- Domestic students
- Those in learning environments that had placed great emphasis on staff and student relationships
- Those in learning environments with encouraging academic support
- Those taught in learning environments that placed great emphasis on teaching employability skills

Age
International or Domestic
Staff-student relationship
Academic support
Emphasis on Employability Skills
Outcome

Final R = 0.70, effect size= 0.96 (large), p=0.000
Preliminary Conclusions

- There are similarities in the offshore and onshore learning environments that affect students’ educational experiences.

- Main similarities are found in the learning and teaching environments that emphasised: 1) staff & student relationships; and 2) teaching employability skills.

- Learning and teaching environments (contexts) predict student satisfaction with their education experience.

- There were individual differences (age, student status, study level) in predicting student satisfaction with their education experience but micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-factors are all influential, indicating the importance of addressing students’ learning journeys as integrated ‘educational ecologies’.
Implications for Teaching...

- It is important to ‘get the context right’ to facilitate students’ learning journeys by crafting ‘educational ecologies’

- Use of AUSSE can serve as a quality enhancement tool to assess the performance of a university’s offshore partners in relation to the university’s expectation of its providers (partner management agreement)
References

