

The Importance-Satisfaction Survey in Hanoi Open University

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in Vietnam has coped with changing requirements to supply its society with potential human resources. A recently action plan of the Government of Vietnam [8] is the implementation of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education. In this context, distance education plays an especially important role in the national education system. Over the last few years, together with the development of other training methods, distance learning method with the credo “supplying learning opportunities for all” has developed both in scale and training quality at Hanoi Open University. This study was carried out to assess the importance and satisfaction of learners of the distance education process of Hanoi Open University. This study focuses on the analysis of eight dimensions, namely: Curriculum, Faculty, Facilitator/Tutor, Outreach, Learning Center, Finance, Life & Career Plan, and Support Services. From the results of the study, Hanoi Open University should reduce its shortcomings and improve its quality in training process by implementing some action plans as suggested.

Keywords: *Distance education, importance-satisfaction survey, quality, institutional effectiveness.*

INTRODUCTION

Entering the twenty-first century – the century of knowledge-based economy, regular learning, and long-life learning have become one of the essential needs to update knowledge, professional skills and improve quality of human resources in the society. To supply potential human resources for society, higher education in Vietnam has coped with changing requirements. The core issue of education reform is to innovate and diversify training methods. The action plan of the Government of Vietnam is to implement fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education, which has identified key tasks and primary solutions to direct the Ministries, branches and localities

to develop an action plan, implement, check, supervise and evaluate the implementation of Resolution 29/NQ–TW. One of the nine action plans states that, “under the action program, the open and flexible education system would be perfected with a view to connecting all educational levels, different types of education and training, meeting the demand for long-life learning and international integration.”¹

In this context, distance education plays an especially important role in the national education system. Although distance education is a new learning method in Vietnam, in recent years, higher education under this system has been much more developed. In order to meet the demand on human resources of the society, currently, there have been many learning methods with different levels. The competitiveness in training human resources has become an intense challenge in educational institutions. Over the last few years, together with development of other learning methods, the distance learning method with the credo “*supplying learning opportunities for all*” has developed both in scale and training quality at Hanoi Open University. However, it is not easy to develop this method sustainably. In particular, the assessment of learners’ learning experience and the satisfaction of employers with training quality of the university are closely tied to the growth in scale as well as the sustainable development of a university.

In the scope of this study, we assess the satisfaction of learners with the distance education facilities of Hanoi Open University. This study was conducted based on the initial efforts of Open University of Malaysia (OUM) in getting students’s feedback on the importance and satisfaction with the services provided by an ODL institution (Latifah, 2014) . The outcome of this collaborative research will be collated and analyzed to assist the five Open Distance Learning (ODL) Universities under the OU5 to take note of the strengths and weakness of each university and learn from each other. Besides, we hope that this study by HOU, along with those by the other members of OU5: Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), Open University Malaysia (OUM), Universitas Terbuka, (UT) Indonesia and University Philippines Open University (UPOU) will affect policies and solutions aimed at improving open and distance education systems particularly in the ASEAN region and around the world.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to identify factors that are important to learners and whether the institution has met students’ expectations in providing those services that are important to them. The quadrant analysis which maps the importance and satisfaction ratings by the respondent will highlight areas of strengths and weaknesses. Institutions can leverage on the strengths for promotion and marketing purposes and improve on the services that were found to be poorly rated in terms of satisfaction. Appropriate solutions were proposed in order to improve the distance education facilities at Hanoi Open University (HOU) and meeting the requirements of its learners.

¹ Resolution 29/NQ - TW of the 11th Central Committee of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam

Scope of the study

This study focuses on the analysis of the importance and satisfaction of distance learners at Hanoi Open University based on eight dimensions, namely: *Curriculum, Faculty, Facilitator/Tutor, Outreach, Learning Center, Finance, Life & Career Plan, and Support services*. It focuses on undergraduate level and is conducted over the duration of one academic year.

METHODS

Different methods of study have been employed to conduct this survey. They include the following methods:

Theoretical research method

The analysis, collecting, systematizing, generalizing of files and other documents relating to this research were employed to build the questionnaire and background of the survey. Resources, articles and regulations on education process and quality were thoroughly studied and analyzed. Education resources were updated and expanded by collecting opinions of researchers and standard regulations.

Expert method

This study assessed and commented on the contents of the students' Importance – Satisfaction (I-S) survey on distance education offered by HOU through interviewing experts, leading boards of HOU and its Learning Centers as well as the open distance learners (ODLs).

Description method

The study collected a sample of 1.043 undergraduate ODLs from 15 Learning Centers of HOU. These ODLs are studying in five main programs in operation, namely: Bachelor of Business Management, Bachelor of Accountancy, Bachelor of Economic Laws, Bachelor of Finance and Banking, Bachelor of English. The questionnaire survey on I-S for the ODLs was the research instrument of this study.

Data-processing method

Qualitative and quantitative data were processed to construct the foundations and generalize the distant education situation in HOU. For the quantitative data, the collected data were processed by Excel or SPSS software to define the development or tendency of the data.

For qualitative data, the data were processed logically by giving out judgments on the essence of education dimensions as well as showing out the logical connections between all factors.

RESULTS

1. Profile of the Respondents

Gender

This study was carried out with the participation of over 1,000 open distance learners/students (ODLs/ODSs). The gender of all the respondents is shown below:

Table 1: Respondents by Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
1. Male	567	54.62%
2. Female	471	45.38%
Total	1,038	100.00%

It can be seen from the table that the male learners who take the open distance education courses outnumber the female learners. The gender composition of the learners varies across each program.

Table 2: Respondents' Gender by Program

Programmes in Operation	Male	Female	Total
1. Bachelor of Business Management (BBM)	93	54	147
2. Bachelor of Accountancy (BOA)	107	141	248
3. Bachelor of Economic Laws (BEL)	342	252	594
4. Bachelor of Finance and Banking (BFB)	6	10	16
5. Bachelor of English (BOE)	12	19	31
Total	560	476	1,036

The Table above shows that there are more male learners in the fields of management and law compared to female learners. It is envisaged that in Vietnam, the number of the male learners who are likely to take the courses in Law is going to increase in some years to come. Presently there are many professionals working in remote areas: rural villages and distant districts, and they need to have good knowledge in law to do well in their profession.

Table 3: Respondents' by Age

Age	Number	Percentage
1. 18 – 25	141	13.54%
2. 26 – 35	316	30.36%
3. 36 – 45	437	41.98%
4. 46 – 55	133	12.78%
5. Above 56	14	1.34%
Total	1,041	100.00%

The age of the ODLs range from 18 to over 50. To become a student of HOU, learners have to finish their high school education and obtain diplomas. The majority (> 70%) of the respondents are in the working age group of 26-45. The older age group of learners over 56 years represents 1.34% of the respondent population.

Table 4: Respondents by Year of Study

Year of study	Number	Percentage
1. First	65	6.23%
2. Second	153	14.67%
3. Third	409	39.21%
4. Fourth	374	35.86%
5. Newly-enrolled	42	4.03%
Total	1,043	100.00%

ODLs who took part in the survey come mostly from the third and fourth year of study. They were randomly selected.

Table 5: Respondents by Programmes

Programmes	Number	Percentage
1. Bachelor of Business Management (BBM)	147	14.19%
2. Bachelor of Accountancy (BOA)	248	23.94%
3. Bachelor of Economic Laws (BEL)	594	57.34%
4. Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT)	0	0.00%
5. Bachelor of Electronics and Telecommunication (BET)	0	0.00%
6. Bachelor of Finance and Banking (BFB)	16	1.54%
7. Bachelor of English (BOE)	31	2.99%
Total	1,036	100.00%

There are seven Bachelors degree programs at HOU as shown above. In 2014, there were only five out of seven programs for open education since the students of BIT and BET had already graduated from HOU in the previous year. It can be seen clearly that the biggest number of ODLs comes from BEL followed by BOA and BBM. Some years ago, the situation was completely different. At that time, most ODLs were from economic fields since the economic situation was more developed than it is now. BET is quite a new program but the number of learners is not large in spite of the demand of the economy. BIT, BET and BOE seem to be selective for the learners as these fields are specialist programs and require higher levels of qualification. Therefore, the number of learners in these fields is quite small.

Table 6: Respondents by Learning Centers

Learning Center	Number of Students	Percentage
1. Long Bien Training Station(LBTS)	42	4.03%
2. Ha Tay Continuing Education Center (HTCEC)	115	11.05%
3. Bac Ninh Continuing Education Center (BNCEC)	82	7.88%
4. Ninh Binh Finance-Accountancy-Technique School (NBFATS)	79	7.59%
5. Son Tay Continuing Education Center (STCEC)	77	7.40%
6. Learning Materials Center - Thai Nguyen University (LMC-TNU)	67	6.44%
7. Center for Training Cooperation(CTC)	58	5.57%
8. Institute for Research and Language-Culture Development (IRLCD)	63	6.05%
9. Nam Dinh Continuing Education Center (NDCEC)	81	7.78%
10. Thanh Hoa Continuing Education Center (THCEC)	65	6.24%
11. Bac Giang Continuing Education Center (BGCEC)	59	5.67%
12. Thai Nguyen University, College of Agriculture and Forestry (TNAFU)	46	4.42%
13. Viet Duc, Nghe An Vocational Training College (VDNAVVC)	53	5.09%
14. Bach Khoa, Phu Tho Vocational School (BKPTVS)	96	9.22%
15. Quang Ninh Continuing Education Center (QNCEC)	58	5.57%
Total	1,041	100.00%

There are fifteen learning centers randomly selected. In these learning centers, students are enrolled in either BBM or BBA. They are either in the first, the second or the last year of study.

Results of the study

All the contents of the survey are divided into eight dimensions: Curriculum, Learning centre, Faculty, Facilitator/Tutor, Support services, Finance, Outreach and Life & Career plan. These eight dimensions are very relevant to the learners in the institutions. Learners who have submitted their assessments on the dimensions are those who are responsible for their studies and their opinion should be taken into consideration so that their institution should be improved to meet their demands in learning.

A. *Importance Rating*

Table 7: Importance Means

Dimension	No of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Curriculum	4	6.18	0.763
2. Learning Centre	5	6.15	0.823
3. Faculty	10	6.13	0.786
4. Facilitator/Tutor	10	6.11	0.787
5. Support services	8	6.09	0.837
6. Finance	5	6.05	0.821
7. Outreach	2	6.03	0.725
8. Life & Career Plan	3	6.02	0.742
Total:	47	6.10	0.786

As can be seen clearly from the Importance Mean Score in Table 7, the four most important dimensions (IDs) are Curriculum (6.18), Learning Centre (6.15), Faculty (6.13) and Facilitator/Tutor (6.11). These four IDs are above 6.10 of the mean score. Curriculum is the most important dimension for the ODLs especially when it can help them in their work, saves time and financial resources during the course.

The second most important dimension to ODLs is Learning Centre. According to the profile of the learners, about 87% of learners in HOU are working in the public or private sector. Only about 13% are unemployed as they are still students or they are seeking for another job. Therefore, the learners in HOU place the learning centre as the second most important factor when they decide to enroll in a course because they need to balance their work, and study at the same time. When making a decision to choose a learning centre, learners usually need to take into account a number of factors: whether or not it is well known, distance from their home, and also access via public transportation.

Faculty is the next important dimension. The name of the institution or faculty they are going to spend their time and money is also considered. ODLs take into consideration that the institution's reputation and quality are known by conventional university students and also the public. This is important to them because they believe they find better jobs when they graduate from a well known institution.

ODLs also place the Facilitator/Tutor dimension as a highly important factor in learning. They are at different ages, from over 20 to over 56 years old, and most of them are employed full-time and have left the university for many years. Thus they expect the facilitator/ tutor of the institution to help them and make them feel more comfortable in their studies.

With 6.02 of the mean score, Life & Career Plan is the least important dimension for the ODLs in HOU. It is perhaps easier to explain this as most of the ODLs are employed before they become students of HOU. After all, they decide for themselves what course they are going to enroll in. Each student will have their own reasons for enrolling in the open distance course.

B. Satisfaction Ratings

Table 8: Satisfaction Means

Dimension	No of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Faculty	10	5.71	0.837
2. Facilitator/Tutor	10	5.67	0.846
3. Outreach	2	5.65	0.982
4. Learning Centre	5	5.64	0.859
5. Finance	5	5.62	0.818
6. Life & Career Plan	3	5.59	0.825
7. Support services	8	5.57	0.824
8. Curriculum	4	5.53	0.917
Total:	47	5.62	0.864

As the study indicates, Curriculum, Learning Centre and Faculty are the highly rated (high importance) dimensions for choosing ODL as a mode of learning. But how do the students rate their satisfaction with the different components of the ODL? Faculty is rated in the third place of the Importance Means Score but it comes up as the highest item in terms of satisfaction (5.71). This indicates a very high level of satisfaction amongst ODLs with the staff with the faculty. This suggests that in the ODLs' point of view, the quality of faculty is adequate. Facilitator/Tutor (5.67) is ranked in the second position in the satisfaction ratings while rating this dimension in fourth place in the level of importance.

Standing in the third place of Satisfaction Mean Score is Outreach with a means score of 5.65. Although this dimension has not been evaluated with a high importance rate, ODLs are quite satisfied with the outreach of the institution. In their opinion, the outreach dimension is good enough for the process of training. The study found that while ODLs rank Curriculum as the most important dimension, the least satisfactory dimension for them is Curriculum with a mean satisfaction score of 5.53. When ODLs enter the course, they hope the knowledge of the curriculum will help them in their work and suitable for them. However, the curriculum may sometimes be very demanding on them. The curriculum has been regarded as "too sophisticated", extensive, and "more theoretical than practical".

From Importance and Satisfaction Mean Score, the study is able to produce the Dimension Means Score as follows:

Table 9: Dimension Means

Dimension	I - Mean	S - Mean
1. Curriculum	6.18	5.53
2. Facilitator/Tutor	6.11	5.67
3. Faculty	6.13	5.71
4. Support services	6.09	5.57
5. Outreach	6.03	5.65
6. Learning Centre	6.15	5.64

7. Finance	6.05	5.62
8. Life & Career Plan	6.02	5.59
Total:	6.10	5.62

With the Importance means score of 6.10, there are four dimensions that are above average: Curriculum, Facilitator/Tutor, Faculty and Learning Center. With the Satisfaction means score of 5.62, there are also four dimensions whose satisfaction levels are above average: Facilitator/Tutor, Faculty, Learning Centre and Outreach.

In summary, most of ODLs are most concerned about whether a course in the institution meets their demands, except for the curriculum. ODLs hold high expectations for the curriculum but the fact is that they are not satisfied with it. ODLs evaluate some dimensions as important, while some others as not important. ODLs feel satisfied with some dimensions, and unsatisfied with the other ones. Combining the two tables of Importance and Satisfaction means score, the gap was calculated. The bigger the gap, the more crucial it is for the institution to do something about it so that it better meets learners' expectations.

Table 10: The Gap (Importance-Satisfaction)

Dimension	I - Mean	S - Mean
1. Curriculum	6.18	5.53
2. Facilitator/Tutor	6.11	5.67
3. Faculty	6.13	5.71
4. Support services	6.09	5.57
5. Outreach	6.03	5.65
6. Learning Centre	6.15	5.64
7. Finance	6.05	5.62
8. Life & Career Plan	6.02	5.59
Total:	6.10	5.62

In this table, there are three main problem dimensions: Curriculum, Support services and Learning Centre. These have been indicated by ODLs as weak points for HOU, and there needs to be future improvements in these three areas. For these dimensions, the ODLs rate them highly by importance but they get low satisfaction with those ones.

It also can be seen from the table that 3 other dimensions: Faculty, Facilitator/ Tutor and Learning Centre are to be evaluated as quite good at present by the ODLs. HOU should therefore maintain these. The Learning Center dimension comes under the High Importance - Low Satisfaction quadrant and was accorded a high gap score. HOU needs to take bold and drastic action to improve learning centers, perhaps in its operations so that it learners are more satisfied, thus decreasing the gap in the next round of survey. Life & Career Plan and Finance are placed in the Low Importance - Low Satisfaction quadrant, which means these dimensions are of low priority to learners. The Outreach is in the "misallocation of resources" quadrant.

C. Total items in the I – S Matrix

Table 11: Distribution of Items by Quadrant

Dimension	Top Focus	Maintenance	Low Priority	Misallocation	Total
1. Curriculum	2	1	0	1	4
2. Facilitator/Tutor	1	5	2	2	10
3. Faculty	0	7	3	0	10
4. Support services	3	0	3	2	9
5. Outreach	0	1	0	1	2
6. Learning Centre	2	2	1	0	5
7. Finance	0	0	3	2	5
8. Life & Career Plan	0	0	2	1	3
<i>Total:</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Percentage:</i>	<i>17.0%</i>	<i>34.0%</i>	<i>29.8%</i>	<i>19.2%</i>	<i>100%</i>

This study focuses on the aspects that HOU should concentrate on to enhance its quality of teaching and facilities. The Top Focus column indicates that 17.0% of HOU's services need urgent attention. HOU's Support services really need to be improved as soon as possible as three in nine items do not meet the ODLs' expectations. Both Curriculum and Learning Centre are standing at the second position in the column also require attention. Two out of four (for Curriculum) and two out of five (for Learning Centre) are felt to be less than satisfactory by ODLs. Facilitator/ Tutor dimension requires further attention too. The table below will indicate clearly which items of each dimension that HOU should concentrate on to improve their services.

Table 12: Items that Need to be Improved

Dimension	Items	I- Mean	S- Mean	I - S Gap
Curriculum	The contents of the courses I am taking are valuable to me	6.19	5.63	0.56
Curriculum	There is a good variety of courses provided in the programme I am taking	6.17	5.61	0.56
Facilitators	Facilitators/ Tutors are concerned about my academic progress	6.19	5.62	0.57
Support services	The Center for Student Service is very useful for students.	6.18	5.60	0.58
Support services	I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to	6.17	5.61	0.56
Support services	University provide learners with online registration every semester	6.19	5.62	0.57
Learning Centre	The Learning Centre staff are caring and helpful	6.22	5.63	0.59
Learning Centre	My enquiries and complaints are dealt with by the Learning Centre staff without delay	6.20	5.63	0.57

34.0% ODLs of HOU are indicated to be satisfied with all eight dimensions in teaching and learning.

Some measures that HOU should take to improve its services

As mentioned above, HOU should pay more attention to three dimensions: Curriculum, Learning Centre and Support services to raise their quality in training and education services. For each dimension, HOU will have its own strategies to improve itself.

1. Curriculum:

ODLs of all programs in this study say that they are not satisfied with the curricula. Therefore, improving the existing curricula is the first step that HOU should take as their concern. Relating to this issue, it is a priority for HOU to briefly revise the curricula for distance education. It is said that the curricula are too long. In addition, there are not so many other courses to support their study while ODLs are taking the courses. Another weakness of the curricula is that they are written with too much theory but with not enough guidance for practice. For those reasons, ODLs often lose interest during the course of their study as they cannot apply what they have done into their work. Therefore, some of the important things for HOU to do to improve its curricula may include:

- Briefly writing all the curricula for ODLs
- Making its curricula less theory-based, more practical
- Adding supportive courses to its curricula

Updating the training courses is another important thing that HOU should implement in the future. The variety of learners' objectives requires the diversity of the curricula. Labor conditions and demands in Vietnamese society are changing so HOU should respond to these changes to meet the demands of society. The objectives of learners are greatly diversified; therefore, HOU ought to revise its curricula to compliment them. Moreover, in order to attract more learners in the near future, HOU should open some new fields of study such as Human resources management, Administration management, and Tourism, for instance.

2. Support services:

There are still some weaknesses in support services for ODLs during their courses in HOU. As students, ODLs argue that they also need services like the other full-time or in-service students of HOU. They would like to join student clubs or to receive a variety of student services. Some main actions to improve HOU's services in training can be listed below:

- (a) Creating a good and regular environment for communication between Facilitators/Tutors and learners. Although ODLs have to study by themselves most of the time, and have little face-to-face time with Facilitators/Tutors, some do not even have time to do that. They want to have someone to care about their learning more regularly. To fulfill this requirement, HOU should improve its services to create good communication environment between Facilitators/Tutors and learners.

- (b) Enriching services for ODLs, especially IT services such as the IT library, IT registration, and IT learning environment. It is in no doubt that IT has a very important role in teaching and learning especially in open distance education. For this reason, HOU should pay more attention to its IT services and facilities for ODLs. The IT library should be expanded and IT registration should be improved as soon as possible. HOU is fortunate to have the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) helping out in perfecting its IT training.

3. Learning Centers:

ODLs in HOU regard the Learning Centre as one of the very important dimensions in the learning process. ODLs are rather satisfied with this dimension. However, they also expect more from the Learning Centre. They want it to be improved so as to help them during their course of study. In the matter of fulfilling its quality in training, HOU should pay more attention to its learning centers by doing the following:

- (a) Learning Centre staff should be more concerned about the learning progress of ODL learners. As has been mentioned above, ODLs want someone to be concerned about their learning. This someone could be the tutor, the faculty staff or the learning centre staff. By contrast, the learning centre staff spends more time with the ODLs than the other members of HOU staff (the tutors, the faculty staff). For that reason, ODLs feel more confident and satisfied when they are looked after by the Learning Centre staff.
- (b) Learning Centre staff should deal with ODLs' complaints or inquires without delay. During the course, whenever ODLs do not feel satisfied with something or they need something they will make complaints or inquires. ODLs in HOU say that sometimes they have to wait for some time for a response from Learning Centre staff when they complain or inquire about something. They are not satisfied with that. To raise its quality in services and training, HOU should pay more attention to the co-ordination with Learning Centre staff dealing with ODLs' complaints or inquires.

To sum up, there are many actions that an institution should take to improve its quality and services in training progress. Those actions mentioned above just are some main ones that should be considered by HOU in the future. All those actions should be implemented simultaneously and coordinated with the others.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this study is to show that ODLs have strong loyalty and trust in their institution despite improvements in the curriculum and services offered by HOU. Although ODLs of HOU are rather satisfied with its institution, HOU should implement action plans in order to attract more prospective ODLs. The action plans here include the ones not only for the current ODLs of HOU but also for the prospective ODLs of HOU. Some actions mentioned in the study are mostly for the current ODLs of HOU. Some plans that HOU could develop for prospective ODLs should include programs for people living in rural areas, bordering and territorial watering areas. Another action plan may refer to other particular career training such as prison wardens and guards.

The results of the study also indicate that distance learning has been closely affected by social demand. In recent years, the number of incoming students of HOU is decreasing compared to outgoing ones. It is not due to the quality of HOU as an institution. In fact, it is influenced by the social demands of the work force. Opening some new fields of study is considered necessary, and in order to know what Vietnamese society needs, HOU should carry out another survey like we always do.

REFERENCES

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