Factors affecting student retention in the Hong Kong Continuing Education Institution

Irene Ho Chin Szeto
Master in Business Administration
Bachelor of Business Studies

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration
The University of Newcastle, Australia
April 2014
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. When deposited in the University Library, I give consent to this copy of my dissertation being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

---------------------------------------------------
Irene Ho Chin Szeto
SYNOPSIS

The purpose of this document is to present the findings of a Doctor of Business Administration research project. The primary objective is to investigate the critical factors that affect students’ college experience, satisfaction, and completion of their courses at the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK). Data sources include responses to questionnaires and secondary sources of data, such as published literature on student enrolment, satisfaction and retention. Three variables were tested in this study: faculty performance, advisory staff performance and classes. Results found that, compared to classes, both faculty and advisory staff were more influential on students’ college experience, satisfaction, intention and retention.

The method used to conduct this research project is questionnaire administration at OUHK. Data collected and analysed are primarily quantitative from the questionnaire administered to students at the institution.

Our research recommendations are: (i) That as “support strategies” is an ongoing process especially appropriate for upper level students, mentoring and life-long learning seminars would improve their academic performance and help students to develop skills, set goals and enhance personal development in their college life; (ii) More practical classes in the community setting would provide real life business experience to facilitate students’ learning interest, thus improving their overall student satisfaction and retention. (ii) Financial aid may be another factor affecting students’ intention to stay or drop-out, especially in relation to self-financing students. If the OUHK can provide some financial
assistance, such as scholarship programmes, this may encourage students to persist to graduate at the institution.
ABSTRACT

Keywords: Student retention; Student retention in Hong Kong; Student retention in Asia; Student retention in Asian Open Universities; Student satisfaction in Higher Education in Hong Kong

Student retention studies have been examined for many years for reasons of students’ educational experience and the determinants in affecting students’ overall satisfaction, intention and retention. However, most of the published literatures are in English and undertaken in the western world context, particularly the United States and in Western Europe. As such, not much is known about the practices in Asia and in the Chinese context in particular.

This study focuses on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of The People’s Republic of China. The researcher reviews the major factors that most influence student satisfaction and retention. Another objective is to discover whether the institution’s current “support strategies” have a positive impact on student satisfaction, intention and retention at the continuing education institution of OUHK. The findings of this research can be a useful starting point for educators who may want to understand why Chinese students choose to persist in a programme or decide to drop-out. The study can generally provide information on the key factors that most influence student satisfaction and their intention to stay at the institution.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The production of this dissertation is by far the most challenging undertaking as well as the most significant achievement in my academic career. First of all, a whole-hearted appreciation, thankfulness and respect to Dr. Richard Oloruntoba, who acted as my supervisor of this dissertation apart from his many academic and professional commitments. Dr. Oloruntoba continuously provided me with useful critiques and constructive suggestions during the development of this research, which enabled me to have an in-depth understanding of this subject. His professional knowledge, valuable advises, continuous encouragement and warm reminder has inspired and motivated me tremendously throughout the study. Had it not been his guidance, patience and persistent help, this research would not have been carried out and realized.

In addition, I also want to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Benjamin Chan, the former Deputy Director in the continuing education institution of the Open University of Hong Kong. Dr. Chan has been my role model as a very successful educationist. Whenever I approached him for any difficulties in work or study, he would extend his kind help despite that he has been engaged in various working commitments. His kindness, enthusiasm and intelligence are contagious in our institution.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, especially my mother for giving me the trust and decision to study, and provided me with her best encouragement and support during the long journey. I dedicate this dissertation to all of my lovely family members.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Research questions, aims and identified variables
  3.1.1 Variables and hypotheses testing
3.2 Alternative research approaches, selected research approaches and rationale
3.3 Questionnaire design
3.4 Sampling, selection criteria and questionnaire administration
3.5 Analytical techniques implemented
3.6 Human ethics approval, data storage, access and disposal
3.7 Summary

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Demographic and Background
4.2 Reliability Analysis
4.3 Results
4.4 Summary

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Findings, summary, conclusion and implications
  5.1.1 Effect of the faculty performance on student partial college experience
  5.1.2 Effect of the academic advising on student partial college experience
  5.1.3 Effect of classes on student partial college experience
  5.1.4 Effect of the student partial college experience on student satisfaction
  5.1.5 Effect of student satisfaction on intention to stay or leave the institution
5.2 Limitations of the research
5.3 Resulting implications for practice
5.4 Summary of the dissertation and suggestions for future research
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>Email of consent from Prof. Ali Kara for questionnaire conducted in OUHK</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Questionnaire to OUHK students</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>Permission letter granted by the Director of OUHK</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>Letter of invitation to OUHK students for data collection exercise</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5</td>
<td>Value codes and labels for demographic variables</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Empirical Models of Retention ................................................................. 21  
Table 2.2 Spady’s Model of Student Attrition ......................................................... 23  
Table 2.3 Tinto’s Model of Student Attrition ........................................................... 27  
Table 2.4 Bean’s Model of Student Attrition ......................................................... 31  
Table 2.5 Bean and Metzner’s Non-traditional Model of Student Attrition ........... 34  
Table 3.1 Sample distribution ................................................................................. 61  
Table 4.1 Comparison of Gender, Age, Parent support, Source of aid (tuition fees), Study decision ......................................................................................... 68  
Table 4.2 Reliability of faculty performance, advisory staff performance and classes .... 69  
Table 4.3 Difference in Means for Faculty Performance between Group 1 and Group 2 students .......................................................................................... 71  
Table 4.4 T-test Results for Faculty Performance between Group 1 and Group 2 students .......................................................................................... 71  
Table 4.5 Difference in Means for Academic Adviser performance between Group 1 and Group 2 students .......................................................................... 73  
Table 4.6 T-test Results for Academic Adviser performance between Group 1 and Group 2 students .......................................................................... 73  
Table 4.7 Difference in Means for Classes between Group 1 and Group 2 students .... 74  
Table 4.8 T-test Results for Classes between Group 1 and Group 2 students ......... 74  
Table 4.9 Retention Results Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined Group participants ................................................................. 77  
Table 4.10 ANOVA Results for Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined Group participants ................................................................. 77  
Table 4.11 Correlations of student college experience and satisfaction ................. 80  
Table 4.12 Retention Results Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined Group participants ................................................................. 81  
Table 4.13 ANOVA Results for Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined Group participants ................................................................. 82  
Table 4.14 Student college experiences influence student satisfaction in Group 1 and Group 2 ................................................................................................. 86
Table 4.15 T-test Results for college experiences between Group 1 and Group 2...........86
Table 4.16 Correlations between student satisfaction and intention to stay .................87
Table 4.17 Retention Results Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined
  Group participants........................................................................................................88
Table 4.18 ANOVA\textsuperscript{b} Results for Regression Model for Group 1, Group 2 and Combined
  Group participants........................................................................................................89
Table 4.19 Comparison on student satisfaction influencing intention to stay between
  Group 1 and Group 2........................................................................................................93
Table 4.20 T-test Results for students’ intention to stay between Group 1 and Group 2....93
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Adopted from Keaveney and Young’s Student Satisfaction and Retention Model</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Scatterplot for Regression Model of Combined Group participants in faculty, academic advising, classes to students’ college experience</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Regression standardized residuals for Combined Group participants in faculty performance, academic advising and classes to students’ college experience</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Scatterplot for Regression Model for Group 1 and 2 participants’ college experience and student satisfaction</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Regression standardized residuals for Combined Group participants’ college experience and student satisfaction</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Scatterplot for Regression Model for Combined Group participants’ student satisfaction to intention to stay</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>Analysis of Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAAVQ</td>
<td>Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKDSE</td>
<td>Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKSAR</td>
<td>Hong Kong Special Administrative Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUHK</td>
<td>The continuing education institution of the Open University of Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>