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CURRICULAR OFFER INFLUENCING STUDENTS' SATISFACTION: COMPARATIVE STUDY

Case
study

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Abstract

The main objective of the study is the determination of students' satisfaction regarding curricular activities. The study has been accomplished using the qualitative and quantitative research, using the bibliographic study, various secondary sources and different primary sources. The study is developed with a marketing research and accomplished using the survey method. 699 students from four universities have been questioned. Due to a comparative study the University of Applied Sciences Worms, University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim, University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main and Nürtingen-Geislingen University have been analysed and their similarities and differences have been identified. The collected data, based on the established sample, is evaluated through univariate and bivariate analysis.

In accordance with the evaluated sample, specific gaps from each region are identified regarding the curricular offer of the analysed universities.

As a result to the conducted study, recommendations for the University of Applied Sciences Worms regarding the student's satisfaction concerning the curricular offer are presented.

As a most far-reaching challenge we can identify the increasing globalization and internationalization of the education sector. Through the Bologna Process universities are supported in their international competitiveness. (Germany's degree system 2011) New degrees such as Bachelor's and Master's programs were introduced and thus a comparability of higher education services could be ensured. This should increase also the attractiveness of German universities for foreign students in order to take into account the increasing international competitive environment and the trend of transnational cooperation in the field of research, so that smart potential students can be attracted. (Heribert, Detlef, 2007)

For the students with medium studies, continuing their studies and implicitly choosing a university is basically influenced by the curricular offer, university reputation, its facilities, but also the extracurricular offer and the atmosphere on campus and the surrounding geographical area. (Hermann, Winter, 2009) Thus, the students' satisfaction vis-à-vis these factors is one of the required study components, as the results of the study can be utilized in the university's management, for the adjustment of the university offer, with direct implications on the decision of potential students in choosing the correspondingly university. (Heine, Willich, 2006), (Hachmeister, Harde, Langer)

The main goal of this study is to analyse the curricular offer and the students' satisfaction comparing four universities, University of Applied Sciences Worms, University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim, University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main and Nürtingen-Geislingen University. As specific goals, identifying the differences and similitudes between the analysed universities can be mentioned, but also providing recommendations for University of Applied Sciences Worms. The gathered data have been collected by means of a questionnaire and have been analysed through univariate and bivariate analysis. The first part of the research describes the sample. In the second part the students' satisfaction regarding the university is approached, followed by the students' awareness in regards to the curricular offer. Afterwards, recommendations for the University of Applied Sciences Worms are identified.

Sample description

The sample of the questionnaire is represented by students enrolled in the Winter Semester 2013/2014 of the University of Applied Sciences Worms, University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main, University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim and Nürtingen Geislingen University. The sample was chosen randomly. The total number of questioned students is 699, respectively 229 students from the University of Applied

Sciences Worms, 127 students from the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main, 103 students from the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim and 240 students from the Nürtingen-Geislingen University. From the total number of questioned students there are 35% male and 65% female. At the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main there is a majority of male students that have answered the survey, 53%. The majority of the respondents from the four universities are following a Bachelor program. In average, 18.9% from the surveyed students are enrolled in a Master program and 1.7% are pursuing a Diploma program.

Students satisfaction in regards to the university

As it can be seen in Figure 1, more than half from students at each university are pleased with the experience gained at their university. Still there are almost 20% in average of students that have a neutral opinion in regards to their experience. Furthermore at the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim and Nürtingen Geislingen University there are approximately 10% of students which are not pleased with their experience, in comparison to 4% at the University of Applied Sciences Worms and University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main.

The majority of the surveyed students have shown their satisfaction in their choice of university and would, given the chance, decide on the same university. Students from the University of Applied Sciences Worms have shown their content with the choice of university with 22% and 41% of students fully agreeing and agreeing with the statement "If I could choose again, I would choose the same university".

16% of students from the Nürtingen Geislingen University do not agree with the mentioned statement and 8% are regretting their decision. Similarly can be seen for the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim.

It can be observed that more than half of students from each university would recommend their university to high school graduates. 26% of students at University of Applied Sciences Worms fully agree to further recommend the university, in comparison with 17% from the other analysed universities.

The university is playing an important role in aiding its students on different levels. In terms of professional orientation the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim is aiding its students the most, 39% of the students have benefited from the aid of its university. The students at the Nürtingen Geislingen University are also aided but still 54% of the students state that the university's aid was only in a small amount.

Students at the University of Applied Sciences Worms are mostly encouraged to take part in social

interactions, 36% of them, in comparison with the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim where only 17% of students are abetted towards social interactions and 27% of the questioned students are of the opinion that the university does not aid them at all with this matter. At the University of Applied Sciences Worms only 13% of the students consider that the university does not aid them at all in regards to social interactions, in comparison with around 23% at the other universities.

Regarding personal development most of the students are supported by their university although more than half of the students at each university are of the opinion that the university aids them in a small amount.

As it can be seen in Figure 2, more than three thirds of the students at each university are pleased with the study offer. The students at University of Applied Sciences Worms are in terms of 70% satisfied with the offer, followed by the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main with 69%. At the Nürtingen Geislingen University 13% of the students are in particularly satisfied with the study offer, followed by University of Applied Sciences Worms with 9%.

In regards with the teaching quality the majority of students are satisfied. Students from University of Applied Sciences Worms are the most satisfied as the ones answering with "Very satisfied" and "Satisfied" counts to more than 90%. The same can be noticed at the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main followed by the two other universities.

Students awareness of the curricular activities

The curriculum is the backbone of the theoretical, professional and graduate programs of academic institutions. It may be viewed as a processing machine that determines the quantity and quality of the desired outputs. In the university setting, all activities undertaken in its operation may be directly or indirectly related to the curriculum.

As the number of international students is in constant increase so should the universities focus intensify towards making the foreign students feel welcomed and integrated in the new foreign country.

Progressively more and more universities are offering their students the possibility to do a semester abroad or do an internship abroad. This can be seen in the responses of the surveyed students from the four universities which in a high percentage agree that the universities are offering their students the opportunity to study a semester abroad. 56% of the students from the Nürtingen Geislingen University have fully agreed with the statement that the university offers them the opportunity to study abroad, followed by the University of Applied Sciences Worms with 55%.

Taking into consideration the students that agree and fully agree with the previous mentioned statement the students from the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim and the Nürtingen Geislingen University both have 87% of students in this category, followed by the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main with 85% and University of Applied Sciences Worms with 82%.

The same can be observed in regards to the opportunity of doing an internship abroad. The majority of students agree with this statement but still 17% and 18% from the University of Applied Sciences Worms, respectively University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main have chosen to answer neutrally.

Students at the Nürtingen Geislingen University are mostly aware of the opportunity to study or do an internship abroad counting to 75% of responding students that agree or fully agree that the international office inform them of their opportunities. 66% of the students at the University of Applied Sciences Worms are informed of their international opportunities, followed by the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim with 65% and the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main with 53%. It can be noticed that a high number of students at University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main have responded neutrally to this statement and 16% of them do not consider that the international office is informing them in regards to their opportunity to study or obtain an internship abroad.

The Nürtingen Geislingen University has the majority of students that disagree and fully disagree with the opportunity to follow a dual study at their university, 72%. At the University of Applied Sciences Worms and at the University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim 39% of the students agree with the opportunity to follow a dual study, but a significant difference is the students answering with neutral, counting for 37% for the students from Worms and 21% for the ones from Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim. The students from the University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main have the highest agreement rate to the dual study opportunity, counting for almost half.

Taking into consideration the opinion of the students from Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim regarding their preparation for the labour market, they are the best prepared, in comparison with other universities. 59% of the students from the Wiesbaden-Rüsselsheim University agree with the fact that the curriculum prepares them for the integration in labour market in comparison with 43% of the students from Worms, 43% from Nürtingen-Geislingen and 40% from the students from University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main.

Students from University of Applied Sciences Worms seem to be more enthusiastic in regards to the curriculum in comparison with the other respondents. As shown in Figure 3, 60% of them demonstrated a keen interest and enthusiasm in the curriculum, in comparison with 37% of the students from University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main.

Around a third of the students agree that there is a balance between theoretical and practical learning at their universities and another third disagreed with this fact. At University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main 37% of the respondents agreed with this affirmation, 16% fully agreed and only 11% disagreed.

Most of the respondents agreed or fully agreed with the fact that the university provides students with contacts to future employers. Around half of the respondents fully agreed or agreed with this. Students that are recommended from the universities to their future employer also need to take into consideration that they represent the universities in regards to gained knowledge, analytical skills and high motivation. Also universities should keep increasing their contacts with companies and provide their students with employment opportunities during but also after their studies.

25% from the respondents of University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim fully agreed that at their university student's opinion and satisfaction level regarding the university are periodically questioned. Only 5% from the questioned students from Worms shared the same opinion. 24% students from Worms disagreed with this in comparison with 19% or 20% from the other universities. It is shown that at University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main and University of Applied Sciences Worms the students opinion and satisfaction level is less periodically questioned like other universities.

The following figure shows the fact that respondents from University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main are more satisfied regarding the canteen of their university. 56% of the respondents from Frankfurt am Main agreed or fully agreed with this fact and only 37% of the questioned students from Worms shared the same opinion.

The respondents from University of Applied Sciences Worms agreed with the fact that the university has enough green space and only 2% from them totally disagreed, in comparison with 14% from Frankfurt am Main, 19% from Wiesbaden-Rüsselsheim and 22% from Nürtingen-Geislingen that agreed with this affirmation and 37% from Frankfurt am Main, 38% from Wiesbaden-Rüsselsheim and 22% from Nürtingen-Geislingen that totally disagreed with this. This shows the fact that the campus of Worms is

considered more green than the other campuses from the analysed universities.

47% from the respondents of University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main said that every classroom is equipped with projectors, in comparison with 10% at Geislingen-Nürtingen, 21% at Wiesbaden-Rüsselsheim, or 19% at Worms. 57% of the Worms' respondents consider that their laboratories are well equipped, and only 22% from the one from Frankfurt am Main and 28% from Nürtingen-Geislingen share the same opinion. Around three quarters of all analysed universities respond that their university is equipped with meeting rooms. Almost all students consider that its library has sufficient and relevant material, with exception of University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden-Rüsselsheim where only 55% are the same opinion. 82% of the questioned students from Worms said that their university have a PC pool, 63% that their university has an electronic learning system management or access to reference database, in comparison with University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt am Main where 57%, 36% respective another 36% agreed with this. Only 32% from Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim and 55% from Nürtingen-Geislingen respond that their university is equipped with a PC pool, respectively 55% and 60% that they have an electronic learning system or that they have access to a reference database.

It can be observed that in generally students have the opportunity to do an internship abroad. Only a quarter of the students fully agreed with the fact that they are informed about this directly from the International office, fact that shows some gaps regarding the university marketing of the university.

Most of the student's opinion is negative towards the possibility to follow a dual study program at their university, especially at Nürtingen Geislingen University. The implementation of such programs could increase also the university attractiveness.

Less than half of the students consider that at their university there is a balance between theoretical and practical learning, fact that can show some deficiencies when it comes to study cases, seminars or trips to companies.

34% of the students from Worms in comparison with 63% from Wiesbaden Rüsselsheim or 54% from Nürtingen Geislingen say that they are periodically questioned towards their satisfaction with the university where they are studying. The satisfaction could be increased by following periodically questionnaires, so that the evaluation in time can be observed.

Regarding the students declaration only 18% of the students from Worms agreed with the fact that the classrooms are equipped with projectors in comparison with 47% from Frankfurt am Main. It is recommended to improve the equipment of the

classrooms in order to increase the satisfaction of students towards the curricular offer.

Conclusions, personal opinions and recommendations for the University of Applied Sciences Worms

It is shown that the curricular offer can influence, among other factors, the choice of a university by a student and its satisfaction regarding the university. These offer can increase a student's motivation and the attractiveness of the university is positive influenced. In this matter the university image and performance will be improved. Increasing its attractiveness and performance, the university can gain a competitive advantage among international or German concurrence.

The opinion of the questioned students, including those from the University of Applied Sciences Worms, about the curricular offer of their universities is in generally favourable, even though, some students expressed their negative opinion. Students are also satisfied about the teaching quality, although a small number of students express a high satisfaction regarding these factors. This means that a need for improvement of the above mentioned factors exists and should be reviewed accordingly.

The fact that only a quarter of the students fully agreed with the fact that they are informed about the opportunity of making an internship abroad directly from International office, shows some gaps regarding the quality of consulting services offered by the International Office. This is recommended to be improved and to increase students' awareness of what is offered by the International Office.

In order to increase the attractiveness of the curricular offer of the University of Applied Sciences Worms the implementation of dual study programs is recommended. According to the responses of the surveyed students, the increase in practical experiences in the learning process is desired as students expect more study cases about companies that are now present on the market, wish for more seminars, guest speakers and trips to companies.

The satisfaction of students, the image and reputation of the university could be increased by following student's opinion periodically through means of questionnaires, so that the evolution in time can be observed. Improving the university

marketing and increasing the attractiveness of the curricular offer will lead to an increase in the university image and reputation so that further students can be attracted.

Acknowledgement

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Journal article

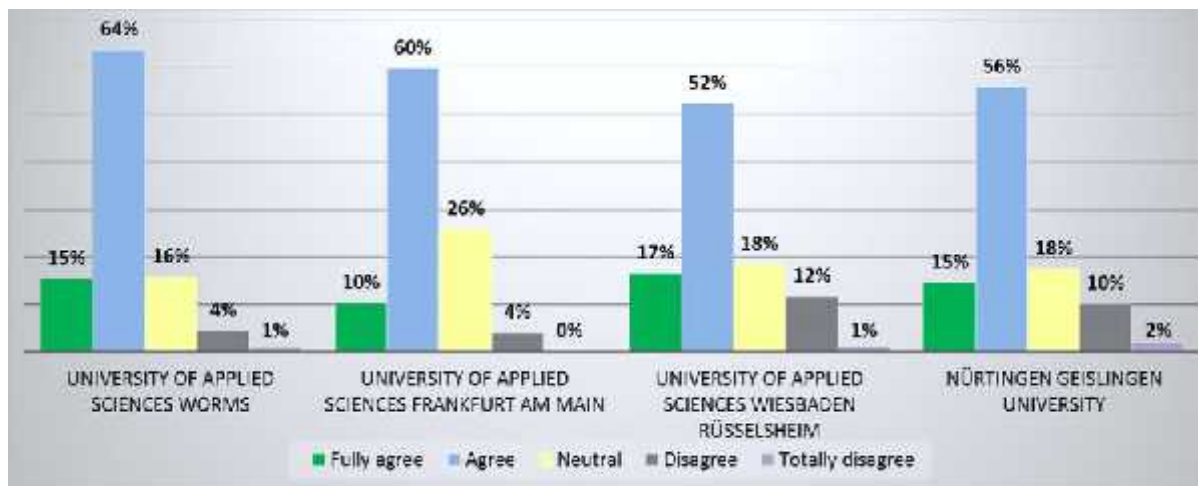
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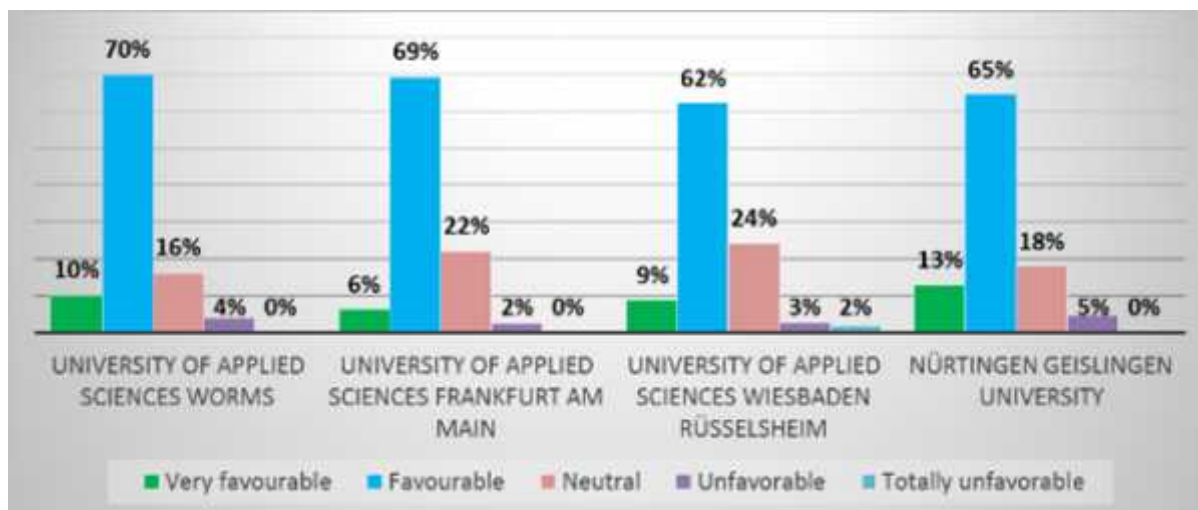
Appendices

Figure 1 Survey answers to the statement “So far I am pleased with the experiences gained at this university”



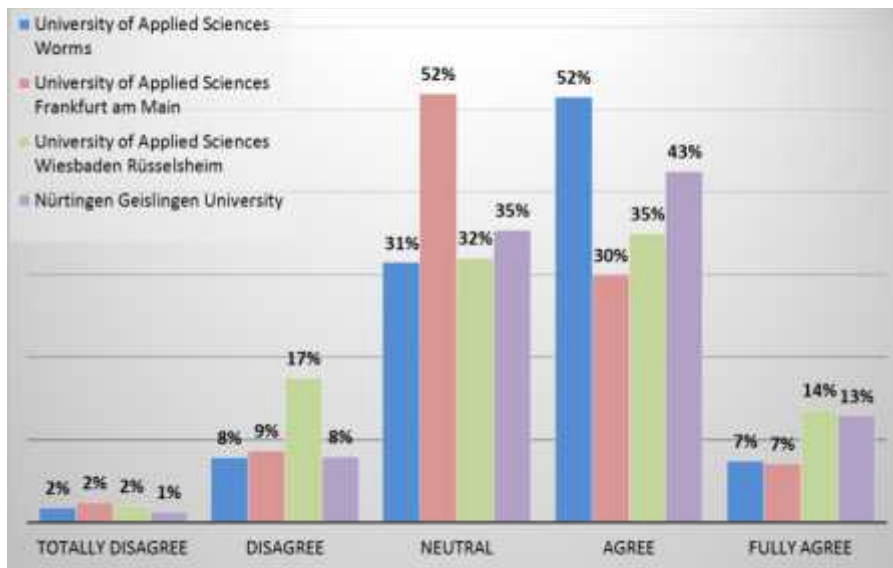
$N_{\text{Worms}} = 229$
 $N_{\text{Frankfurt}} = 127$
 $N_{\text{Wiesbaden}} = 103$
 $N_{\text{Nürtingen}} = 240$

Figure 2 Students' opinion in regards to the study offer”



$N_{\text{Worms}} = 229$
 $N_{\text{Frankfurt}} = 127$
 $N_{\text{Wiesbaden}} = 103$
 $N_{\text{Nürtingen}} = 240$

Figure 3 Survey answers to the statement “Students demonstrate a keen interest and enthusiasm in the curriculum”



$N_{\text{Worms}} = 229$
 $N_{\text{Frankfurt}} = 127$
 $N_{\text{Wiesbaden}} = 103$
 $N_{\text{Nürtingen}} = 240$

