

Academic satisfaction: a qualitative study with university students from Mozambique

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Abstract

The expansion of higher education in Mozambique has been associated with greater socio-cultural diversification of students, allowing the entry of students from the most disadvantaged social classes. However, these are also the students who experience the most difficulties in their adaptation, success and permanence. In view of this observation, this paper analyses the satisfaction of Mozambican college students in relation to different aspects of their academic experience. A group of 30 students from different courses, in their 1st or 2nd years, participated in the study. Students responded individually to a semi-structured interview about the experience of satisfaction regarding their academic experience. The results indicate that the most valued dimensions are related to the infrastructures of the institution, interpersonal relationships, and conditions for learning. The development of autonomy and preparation for the future job also emerged. Learning conditions and the institution's infrastructures were the aspects with higher students' dissatisfaction. The results of this study can be used to identify items for the construction of an instrument of collective application to assess students' academic satisfaction and, on the other hand, suggest where institutions can introduce changes to support students' learning and engagement.

Keywords

Higher Education. Academic satisfaction. Academic experience. Mozambique.

Satisfação acadêmica: um estudo qualitativo com estudantes universitários de Moçambique

Resumo

A expansão do ensino superior em Moçambique tem associado uma maior diversificação sociocultural dos estudantes, permitindo o ingresso de alunos das classes sociais mais desfavorecidas. No entanto, são também estes os discentes que mais dificuldades experienciam na sua adaptação, sucesso e permanência. Em face desta constatação, o presente artigo analisa a satisfação acadêmica de estudantes universitários moçambicanos em relação à sua vivência acadêmica. Participaram do estudo 30 alunos de diferentes cursos, frequentando o 1º ou 2º ano dos cursos. Os educandos realizaram

individualmente uma entrevista semiestruturada sobre a satisfação com as suas experiências acadêmicas. Os resultados reportam que os aspectos mais referenciados pelos estudantes dizem respeito às infraestruturas, relações interpessoais e condições de aprendizagem. O desenvolvimento da autonomia e a preocupação com a futura profissão também emergiram como áreas importantes. As condições de aprendizagem e das infraestruturas são dimensões que apontam maior insatisfação junto dos alunos universitários. Os resultados permitem identificar itens importantes a considerar na construção de um questionário de avaliação da satisfação dos universitários com as suas experiências acadêmicas, sugerindo também áreas de intervenção institucional para promoção do envolvimento e do sucesso acadêmico desses discentes.

Palavras-chave

Ensino superior. Satisfação acadêmica. Experiência acadêmica. Moçambique.

**Satisfacción académica: un estudio cualitativo
con estudiantes universitarios de Mozambique**

Resumen

La expansión de la educación superior en Mozambique se encuentra asociada con una mayor diversificación sociocultural de los estudiantes, lo que permite la entrada de discentes de las clases sociales más desfavorecidas. Sin embargo, estos son los educandos también que más dificultades experimentan en su adaptación, éxito y permanencia. En vista de esta observación, este artículo analiza la satisfacción académica de los estudiantes universitarios mozambiqueños en relación con su experiencia académica. Participaron del estudio 30 estudiantes de diferentes titulaciones, frecuentando el 1º o 2º año de los cursos. Los estudiantes realizaron individualmente una entrevista semiestruturada sobre su satisfacción con sus experiencias académicas. Los resultados señalan que los aspectos más mencionados por los aprendices están relacionados con las infraestructuras, las relaciones interpersonales y las condiciones de aprendizaje. El desarrollo de la autonomía y la preocupación por el futuro profesional también surgieron como áreas importantes. Las condiciones de aprendizaje y las infraestructuras son dimensiones que sugieren un mayor descontento entre los estudiantes universitarios. Los resultados permiten identificar ítems importantes a considerar en la construcción de un cuestionario para evaluar la satisfacción de los universitarios con sus experiencias académicas, sugiriendo, además, áreas de intervención institucional para promover la participación y el éxito académico de estos estudiantes.

Palabras clave

Educación superior. Satisfacción académica. Experiencia académica. Mozambique.

1 Introduction

Higher Education (HE) in Mozambique has undergone exponential growth in recent years. As in other developing countries, the HE's objective is seen as an instrument of ascension and social justice, as well as supporting the country's social and economic development. These are, in fact, the main reasons for the increase in higher education institutions (HEIs) and, also, the increase in income at this level of education. This growth comes with the diversification of institutions and courses, and also with the greater heterogeneity of the candidates themselves.

Higher demand for higher education is inherent to the process of greater democratization of accessing education in the country (ROSÁRIO, 2013; ZUIN; BASTOS, 2019). This democratization was made possible by Law 1/1993, which, seeking to meet the requirements of the socio-economic and cultural context, opened space for the intervention of the private sector in HE. However, it is important to highlight that the expansion of HE did not obey certain criteria that could guarantee the quality of teaching and learning, even though an evaluation committee was created in 1995 (Comiche Commission) to create criteria for the expansion of HEIs and that would function as a regulator for expansion and the desired quality, which in practice didn't happen (ROSÁRIO, 2013).

Given the inexistence and non-fulfillment of the necessary criteria for expansion, and also due to the difficulties of the public institutions to meet the higher demand for higher education by young people and their families, Matos and Mosca (2010) listed some difficulties of HEIs in Mozambique, ranging from the professors' lack of preparation to poor quality of the infrastructures. This situation affects the quality of teaching, which may affect the quality of training and academic success of the students, as well as their levels of satisfaction. Not all institutions meet requirements for their academic activity (e.g., lack of teaching staff with the required qualifications, lack of proper facilities or inadequate infrastructure), which can frustrate students' expectations in their transition to HE (CAMPIRA, 2016; ROSÁRIO, 2013).

The recognition of these limitations has increased the need for inspection by the government. For example, the approval of the National Higher Education Quality Assessment, Accreditation and Quality Assurance System (Sinaques) by Decree-Law No.

63/2007, of December 31st, and the National Higher Education Quality Assessment Council (CNAQ) by Decree-Law No. 64/2007, of December 31st, exemplify the Government's concerns with the inspection of quality. These legal provisions attempt to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of HEIs following the respective higher education law, Law No. 27/2009, of September 29nd (ANGST, 2016; PREMUGY, 2012).

Various authors explain the challenges that HE attendance poses to students, particularly when they are very different from each other in previous academic paths, in their skills, and vocational projects (ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2006; ARAÚJO *et al.*, 2016; ASTIN, 1999; PASCARELLA; TEREZINI, 2005; PEILA-SHUSTER, 2016; SANTOS *et al.*, 2013; TINTO, 2006). Leaving home, new teaching and learning methodologies, the need to establish new friendships, or the exercise of greater autonomy in the management of daily tasks and financial resources illustrate some of the challenges that students face when entering HE. How these challenges are experienced varies greatly, suggesting that the process of adaptation to higher education will depend on the students' characteristics and personal resources, as well as on the changes and availability of resources and support by educational institutions (ARAÚJO *et al.*, 2016; ASTIN, 1999; DE JAGER; JAN, 2015; LOURENS; BLEAZARD, 2016; RODRÍGUEZ; URAZÁN; ARANGO, 2009; ZUIN; BASTOS, 2019). Anyway, students entering HE are increasingly diverse and a considerable percentage have difficulties when entering HE, especially in the first weeks of academic adaptation (ALVES; SIMÃO; LEITINHO, 2018; CAMPIRA, 2016). In this sense, we can understand that an increase in the number of admissions without ensuring the opportunities for success will eventually identify HE as a new context of social exclusion, especially when students with fewer socioeconomic resources have more difficulties in adapting and the first ones to drop out of school (ARAÚJO *et al.*, 2016; WILSON-STRYDOM, 2011).

When entering HE, students search for the correspondence between their expectations and the conditions offered by IES for the realization of such expectations. At that stage, the institutions' difficulties in ensuring quality training or the poor conditions for a stimulating environment, not least because some students may also enter with very high expectations and, even unrealistically, may generate feelings of disillusionment and dissatisfaction in the face of their academic experiences. For all these reasons, student satisfaction is seen as a decisive variable in their engagement and academic success,

with dissatisfaction appearing associated with poor engagement, low achievement, and student dropout (ALBUQUERQUE, 2008; ASTIN, 1993; SANTOS *et al.*, 2013). In this sense, and given an increasingly competitive context among the HEIs, student satisfaction emerges as one of the quality indicators of HE (ALBUQUERQUE, 2008; PINTO *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, feeling greater pressure from the government, society, and families, the HEIs themselves feel obliged to create some psychosocial support services for their students. This need became more evident given the greater diversity of students and the recognition that a significant number of students face difficulties in the transition and adaptation to higher education, as well as feelings of dissatisfaction with the academic conditions and experiences (ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2006; DE JAGER; JAN, 2015; RIQUELME *et al.*, 2012).

Academic satisfaction is described in the literature as the way students' needs and aspirations are met, involving cognitive processes, behaviors, motivations, and emotions (BUTT; REHMAN, 2010; HASAN; ILIAS, 2008; PINTO *et al.*, 2017; RAMOS *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, satisfaction with academic experiences can be understood as a multidimensional construct that involves personal variables (personal traits and psychosocial development), institutional facilities and physical conditions (the institution's resources and infrastructure), the quality of the academic program (curriculum adequacy, quality of classes), interpersonal relationships (relationships with professors and peers) and professional training (correspondence between the training received and the desired future profession) (ARAÚJO, 2017; DE JAGER; JAN, 2015; KARA; TANUI; KALAI, 2016; MAMPANE; OMIDIRE; ALUKO, 2018).

The instruments for assessing academic satisfaction incorporate several dimensions in line with what has been presented. Most of them include, for example, personal dimensions, interpersonal dimensions, institutional dimensions, learning dimensions, and dimensions of professional preparation (GRANADO *et al.*, 2005; RODRÍGUEZ; URAZÁN; ARANGO, 2008). This multidimensionality is also explained due to the diversity of students enrolled in HE (AMBIEL; HERNÁNDEZ; MARTINS, 2016; ARAÚJO, 2017; MAMPANE; OMIDIRE; ALUKO, 2018). Although important, university expectations aren't limited to the development of skills for professional practice, as high-quality institutions promote the development of autonomy, the establishment of interpersonal relationships, and higher levels of self-regulation in learning (CHICKERING;

REISSER, 1993). On the other hand, along with personal experiences, academic satisfaction also reflects the quantity and quality of services and equipment provided by the HEI, as well as the quality of courses and teacher training or the possibility that students perceive to preserve their sociocultural identity (MAMPANE; OMIDIRE; ALUKO, 2018). On the other hand, along with personal experiences, academic satisfaction also reflects the quantity and quality of services and equipment provided by the HEI, as well as the quality of courses and teacher training or the possibility that students perceive to preserve their sociocultural identity (ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2006; KHOSRAVI *et al.*, 2013).

Given the importance of academic satisfaction in learning, academic success, and psychosocial development, as well as the research gaps in this field, it is important to research this topic among Mozambican students in HE. Thus, this study aims to explore, through in-depth interviews, the academic experiences and institutional conditions that are factors of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction of the students. The content of the interviews will later serve as a basis for the development of a structured questionnaire, which will allow assessing the satisfaction of HE students on a large scale. In this sense, the content of the conducted interviews will allow the identification of dimensions and items to be included in the questionnaire.

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

Thirty students (20 women and 10 men) from different undergraduate courses of a public HEI in the city of Beira (Mozambique) were interviewed. Students who participated in the study were divided by course: Basic Education, six students; Early Childhood Education, five students; Psychology, 10 students; and Educational Sciences, nine students. These students were between 17 and 42 years old (average around 25 years old) and attended the 1st year (21 students) and 2nd year (nine students) of their courses. Most of these students have some professional occupation, namely, they teach in public primary schools and live around the city of Beira.

2.2 Instrument and procedures

The semi-structured interview was developed to collect data based on the literature review. The questions intended to explore students' experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the course and the institution. The purpose of this interview was to answer questions and situations that indicate students' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the academic experience (e.g., what elements of satisfaction and dissatisfaction do you experience in your educational institution?). The students signed an informed consent form to participate in the study and to record the content of the interviews. The interviews were conducted at the higher education institution, in the longest intervals between classes. The objectives of the interview were previously informed, and anonymity and confidentiality of the information were ensured. The interview was conducted by the first author and lasted an average of 20 minutes. The answers were manually written down by the investigator during the interview. Data analysis was performed based on content analysis, in order to identify categories and subcategories that expressed students' satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with their experiences at/with the university.

3 Results

Table 1 shows the dimensions of academic satisfaction or dissatisfaction of students according to what was said in the interviews. From the extracts of the students' answers, table 1 describes the situations most cited by the students, which we list to be included in the various dimensions of a future questionnaire. This aggregation is related to the taxonomy of dimensions present in the international literature regarding academic satisfaction. It should be noted that in three categories of responses (interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and career), aspects or situations of dissatisfaction weren't mentioned.

Table 1 – Content dimensions and exemplification of academic satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Dimension	Satisfaction / Dissatisfaction	Operationalization in students' speeches
Learning	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning quality - My academic performance - Methodologies used by professors
	Dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient teaching material - Insufficient classrooms - Poor classroom conditions - Overload of learning assignments - Lack of support from professors
Interpersonal relationships	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mutual respect between teachers and students - Understanding and help from professors - Collaboration between students - Teachers treat students equally - Friendships with other students
Autonomy	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being able to make the dream come true - “Opening up new horizons” - Being able to speak in public - A new way of living - Development of freedom of expression
Infrastructure	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institution location - Campus conditions
	Dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classrooms are lacking - Library doesn't meet the demand - Hygiene conditions of the building and leisure areas - Insecurity of the infrastructures - Lack of computers and other technological devices - Internet quality - Services provided by employees of the institution - Lack of student support services
Career	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility of becoming a well-trained professional - Learning for the future profession - Believing in professional success with lessons learned - Learning the practical applications of the knowledge learned in the course - The relationship between course subjects and the profession
Course	Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course satisfaction - Achievement of personal goal - Satisfaction with the course curriculum
	Dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delay in the release of grades - Orientation of the end of course work - Teachers are lacking for some subjects

Source: Author's own (2020).

Students who participated in the study reported satisfaction with aspects related to the course (e.g., "Quality of subjects taught in the course [...]") and learning (e.g., "Satisfied with the subjects learned"), as well as some satisfaction with the quality of relations with colleagues and teachers (e.g., "I am satisfied with the collaboration between professors and students"). Students demonstrate that there have been personal changes resulting from academic experience in this university context (e.g., "I feel different attending

university [...]”), and there is also some correspondence between the content learned and the future profession (e.g., “I believe that my professional life will be good”). Finally, the students also refer to the competence of the professors and the quality of the teaching methods (e.g., “Professors' behavior, their readiness to clarify doubts”). In general, and taking into account the aspects of satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, the feeling of personal development and the correspondence of learning with the future profession are the areas that express the greatest satisfaction for the students of this higher education institution.

On the other hand, regarding the dissatisfaction related to the students' experiences, there is a greater dissatisfaction with the institution's infrastructures (e.g., lack of water in the buildings, especially in the bathrooms), scarcity of learning resources (e.g., “Lack of some books in the library, which makes our learning difficult”), computer and internet quality (e.g., “Difficulties in accessing the internet room, as the available wi-fi doesn't have enough capacity to download some articles or others learning materials ”), lack of student support services, as well as perceived lack of security, cleanliness and classroom conditions (e.g., “[...] some rooms do not have glass, polishing and outlets”). There is also the perception of overload of assignments, associated with the lack of pedagogical support from professors (e.g., “Excessive learning tasks, which makes it difficult to manage time to complete all subjects' work”). In summary, in terms of dissatisfaction, students point to the aspects of infrastructure and learning as the most critical areas, also deserving attention to the way the course is organized to meet the students' needs.

Taking the structured information from table 1, we can see that the institutional or infrastructure dimension is the most highlighted by students, being the one that most dissatisfaction descriptors received from the interviewed students, mainly the facilities and equipment, showing only the location of the university and the condition of the campus as an aspect of student satisfaction. On the other hand, students express their dissatisfaction with the pedagogical conditions of the classrooms and the lack of learning material.

4 Discussion

Academic satisfaction is one of the relevant elements to explain the adaptation and academic success of students, contributing to their permanence and completion of

the course, and also to the positive image of the university (JAGER; JAN, 2015; PINTO *et al.*, 2017). Given the complexity of this element, research in the area recognizes the confluence of personal and contextual variables in its definition and also its multidimensional nature, given the diversity of conditions and experiences that describe the academic context in HE (ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2006; ARAÚJO, 2017). This multidimensionality must be considered when the research attempts to explain the reasons for students' academic success and persistence or when the institutions are interested in meeting the needs and expectations of their students (DE JAGER; JAN, 2015; GUERREIRO; ALMEIDA; SILVA FILHO, 2014; KARA *et al.*, 2016; LOURENS; BLEAZARD, 2016; SCHLEICH; POLYDORO; SANTOS, 2006).

The results obtained in the interviews with the students point to some satisfaction from them in the areas of interpersonal and academic relations, as well as in the areas of personal and career development. On the other hand, the areas related to infrastructures, namely the conditions of the classrooms, the cleaning of the bathrooms or access to computers and internet, as the main reasons for dissatisfaction, which has already been highlighted in previous studies (DE JAGER; JAN, 2015; KARA *et al.*, 2016; MOTEFARKER, 2015; NASCIMENTO; BEGGIATO, 2020). The discourse of students entering the university suggests difficulties of the HEI in terms of facilities, equipment, and other infrastructure, as well as in terms of teachers, associating such difficulties to their dissatisfaction. Institutions don't always have the necessary conditions for good teaching, research, and university extension programs (ALMEIDA; SOARES, 2003; KARA *et al.*, 2016; SCHLEICH; POLYDORO; SANTOS, 2006). These variables undermine academic involvement and performance, not only in terms of academic results but involving the entire academic experience (e.g., cognitive, affective, social, cultural, and ethical development).

The students' discourses highlight the importance of the relationship between the students and peers or professors, as well as the teaching and learning process, for their levels of satisfaction. The teaching methodologies used by the teachers and the learning conditions of the classrooms are part of this concern. In accordance, some studies show that good university governance, infrastructures, services, professors' training, the quality of teaching, the offered courses, the learning environment, classroom conditions, and quality of learning assume a significant and positive effect on students' satisfaction

(BUTT; REHMAN, 2010; MARTONO *et al.*, 2020; PINEDA; ORELLANA; CASTILLO, 2019), and that professor satisfaction seems to have a significant association with student satisfaction (BURHAN; KHAN; ZAREI, 2020). In the same way, students refer to the relevance of their professional training and career development, which is also associated with the development of their identity and progressive autonomy, as professional choices and career projects shape the students' motivations to enroll in higher education (NASCIMENTO; BEGGIATO, 2020). In addition, this set of dimensions is recognized in the literature as relevant in describing the academic life of students and the quality of their adaptation and academic success (ARAÚJO, 2017; ASTIN, 1993, 1999; RIQUELME *et al.*, 2012).

5 Final considerations

From the results of this study, it was possible to identify the most frequent descriptors of students' satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with their experience in HE in Mozambique, more specifically at the Licungo University, the extension of Beira. On the other hand, the study refers to the possible dimensions to consider in future studies for the construction of a questionnaire to assess satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with academic experiences in the university context in Mozambique. Relating the collected reports with the dimensions present in the questionnaires assessing academic satisfaction, the collected information points to the emergence of dimensions of (dis) satisfaction related to learning, professional future, or career, interpersonal relations, course, personal or autonomy development, and university infrastructures and services.

This qualitative study raised a set of information to be taken into account in the construction of a questionnaire for collective administration, in order to assess, on a large scale, the satisfaction of students. When considering students' experiences and verbalizations, this questionnaire can help to identify institutional situations and conditions that can impact the success or failure and students' persistence or dropout, mediated by their (dis)satisfaction levels. In effect, the fact that we started from the students' discourses can favor the content and validity of the items to be included in the questionnaire. Future studies will make it possible to advance in the construction of the questionnaire and to delimit the number and content of its items to be applied to student samples to verify their

accuracy and validity, advancing in the progressive definition of the final version of the questionnaire.

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