International Student Expectations:

Undergraduate Student Voices in an Australian University

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Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

(Stephen Neil Howlett)

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First, I express my gratitude to the students who participated in this study, and to the teachers and education managers at the research site who shared with me so generously their classes, time, ideas and dreams for the future.

My journey as a teacher was principally inspired by the example and encouragement of the teachers at the Sydney College of Advanced Education (now a part of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the University of Technology, Sydney) in the 1980s. In particular, I was inspired by the example of Ian Cornford, who remained a constant mentor and friend over many years, and until the time of his retirement in February 2008, was the Principal Supervisor of this work.

When I arrived in the research site, it was Ken Hawkins who encouraged me to begin to understand some of the practical issues and possibilities that inform the discourse in international education; and to then describe these for others so that our practice might thrive and prosper. Later, working and learning with Alison Owens across the full expanse of university teaching with international students was a high point in my career.

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I dedicate this thesis to my family, from whom I learned something of understanding and perseverance; and to the future of all the young people from many nations that I have been honoured to call my students. They would have enjoyed knowing that sharing some small part of their learning journey might benefit others who engage in the practice that we call international education.

Abstract

The education of full-fee paying international students is a multi-billion dollar business in Australia. One consequence of global market growth is the entry of new and increasingly aggressive competitors in the international marketplace who are gaining market share at the expense of traditional suppliers such as Australia. This has opened a new dimension in the discourse: the imperative of commercial sustainability in international education and its effect on good practice.

Students from the Indian subcontinent represent a fast growing but also a volatile demographic for Australian universities. This study explores the experiences of a cohort of Sub-continental international students studying a Bachelor of Accounting degree in an Australian university. It was conducted on the city campus of a teaching-intensive university that caters exclusively to full-fee paying international students. The work captures a cross-sectional appreciation of the perceptions of the student sample during their learning journey in Australia.

The research takes the approach of problematising student expectations in order to generate questions investigated through a survey questionnaire and in interviews with students on site. The study seeks to engage with students' voices through dialogue with the researcher. The framework for analysis is grounded in a symposium approach and an appreciation of four theoretical fields of international education, literacy and critical thinking, commercial practice, and the policy agendas surrounding international education in Australia, to create a trans-disciplinary perspective of teaching as business. To date, there exist no published studies of Sub-continental student experiences which have conducted this particular kind of enquiry.

The research finds that these students' perceptions are reflected within and across the theoretical constructs and can thus be used to derive a better appreciation of value in an international education experience. International students' perception of value is found to derive in the first instance from satisfaction of their expectations as a consumer-student. Such students' perception of value is found to be further

enhanced, and satisfaction in their other role as a student-consumer improved, if constructs of difference between international and domestic students are no longer problematised within the discourse.

The study presents an alternative holistic conceptual frame for theorising agendas in international education. That frame foregrounds student expectations in order to improve the practice of international education. The research outcome paves the way for proposing what might constitute an equitable, ethical and sustainable interaction between business and education that can strengthen the prestige and commercial position of Australian universities in the global market of services.

Keywords

accounting
action research
Australia
Bangladesh
commercial sustainability
competition
consumer satisfaction
consumer-student
critical thinking
education
ethics
equity
ESL English as a second language
ESOS educational services for overseas students
global development
global market
globalisation
India
international education
international students
L1
L2
learning expectations
market growth
migration
needs and expectations
Nepal
overseas students
Pakistan
Pedagogy
relational
risk
social justice
Sri Lanka
student-consumer
student voice
Sub-continental
sustainability
symposium methodology
TBL triple bottom line
teaching-intensive university
undergraduate

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