

Measuring Academic Life Satisfaction in Portuguese Students

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Abstract

Student's academic life satisfaction (ALS) plays a relevant role as an indicator of student's academic success and wellbeing. However, literature shows a lack of instruments to measure ALS in Portugal. The aim of this paper is to present the concept elements and an instrument to measure Academic Life Satisfaction. Using a literature review, some relevant instruments come up to assess satisfaction with academic. Results indicate a lack of precise instruments to measure ALS in Portuguese's Students. Develop accurate tools to measure ALS, is important to design programs to improve student's adjustment, academic success and wellbeing in the campus.

Keywords: Academic Life Satisfaction; Students Adjustment; Wellbeing; Measurements

Abbreviations: ALS: Academic Life Satisfaction; MMAU: Multidimensional Model of Adjustment of Young People to the University context; CSSQ: College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire; CSS: College Student Survey; HERI: Higher Education Research Institute; SSI: Student Satisfaction Inventory™; QAE: Questionnaire of Academic Experience; SAES: Satisfaction with Academic Experience Scale; ASSCS: Academic Satisfaction Scale for College Students.

Introduction

Background

Academic Life Satisfaction (ALS) is a complex multifactorial construct that includes the wide experiences of the students' life in the campus, as well the quality of students' adaptation to academic environment [1,2]. Academic adjustment is a major challenge for freshman that involves academic satisfaction,

developmental aspects (personal, social and vocational), as well the academic environment and features of attended campus [3]. Currently, students' academic life satisfaction plays an important role as a key indicator of students' success and well-being [2,4]. In Portugal, in the last two decades a discussion on the construct and measurement of ALS remains [4,5]. Yet, there is a lack of instruments to measure ALS. So, this paper aims to present a review of Academic Life Satisfaction concept elements and some measurement instruments.

Academic Life Satisfaction

Academic life satisfaction (ALS) encompasses overall the experiences regarding to students' life in the academic environment and shows the quality of campus adaptation [4]. Literature review shows that three aspects must be considered to study and understand academic life satisfaction's multifactorial concept: (1) higher education transition is a vulnerability period with multiple and

complex adjustment tasks and setting specificities; (2) adaptation tasks involve students' personal characteristics and may disturb their health, wellbeing and performance (3) students' ALS play a significant role in measuring institutional effectiveness [4,6,7].

Recent research about student's transition to college established the positive relation between adaptability and life satisfaction [8]. The accomplishment of this transition depends on student's wellbeing, and how they face and surpass their challenges [6,9]. An important contributor to development of ALS construct and measures came from the Multidimensional Model of Adjustment of Young People to the University context (MMAU) [10].

MMAU model advocates that student's transition and adjustment to the academic context do not occur dissociated from human's development or learning processes, on the contrary, it covers several dimensions: satisfaction with the pedagogical relations with teacher; physical environment and facilities of the campus; personal commitment to the course; extracurricular activities on campus; setting facilities to study; students skills and competences; self-perception of academic performance; and relationship with colleagues and teachers [4,10].

In the scope of MMAU's model, the concept of ALS is influenced by student's personal characteristics, wellbeing and, by the subjective assessment and value of circumstantial academic experiences, all this combining with the cognitive and affective components [10,11]. So, ALS is a dynamic concept covering students' personal characteristics, relationships with teachers and colleagues, the quality of the curriculum and teaching, as well the conditions provided by the campus features and environment [5,12].

Adjustment and Wellbeing

Student's adjustment and wellbeing involved several tasks grouped in four domains: (a) academic - (typically demanding) to continuous adaptations to new learning strategies, teaching and evaluation system; (b) personal - to establish identity, expand self-awareness, develop self-esteem and a personal view of the world; (c) social - to develop progressively more mature interpersonal relationships (family, colleagues, teachers, colleagues of the opposite sex and authority figures); (d) vocational - to strength vocational identity and decision making, to explore and commit with professional goals. ALS's concept involves a multifaceted complexity process of experiences (personal, affective, cognitive aspects and institutional features and facilities) [4,7,11]. Hence, it is

not easy to limit and to identify ALS's construct components, and to have agreement about how to measure it accurately [4,12,13].

ALS Measurements

International research indicates some relevant instruments to measure ALS: the *College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire* (CSSQ) [1], with 70 items (5 points Likert scale) and 5 subscales (comprehension, social life, work conditions, recognition and educational quality); the *College Student Survey* (CSS) used by the *Higher Education Research Institute* (HERI), with items covering curriculum and teaching, services and support, student life, relationships with teachers and conditions and equipment (HERI) [14]; the *Student Satisfaction Inventory™* (SSI) includes 45 core questions, three summary questions, and several standard demographic items. Additionally, institutions can add up to 10 campus-specific questions (7 points Likert scale).

In Portuguese speaking countries studies, some instruments with suitable psychometric properties came up to measure ALS: the Questionnaire of Academic Experience (QAE) [15-17], with 170 items and 17 subscales, later reduced to 60 items and 5 dimensions' structure (personnel; interpersonal; career; learning; institutional) and a Brazilian short version (QAE-r) [18], with 55 items and same 5 subscales structure showing appropriated; the *Satisfaction with Academic Experience Scale* (SAES) [19] has 35 items distributed by 3 factors (satisfaction with course; opportunities and development; satisfaction with the institution); and the *Academic Satisfaction Scale for College Students* (ASSCS) [12] with 35 items (4point Likert scale), distributed by 4 factors (pedagogic milieu; affectivity; campus milieu; self-esteem).

Conclusion

The present review shows that MMAU's model provides a conceptual framework to measure ALS's dimensions, involving student's core elements of adjustment and wellbeing. Also, indicates a lack of instruments to measure ALS in Portuguese's students. Despite the evidence of good psychometric properties of Portuguese instruments point out, authors are still discussing their effectiveness and suitability to measure student's ALS [4,11]. Additionally, some consider that most of these measures lack in strength in their underlying constructs, find them to be extensive, meticulous or very specific. Also, differ in terms of variables or assign insufficient attention to dimensions like interpersonal relations, course or campus, covering particularly cognitive and psychosocial variables [5,12].

Overall, we can conclude that more research is needed to expand and develop suitable instruments to measure Portuguese student's ALS more accurately, assuming the inner aspects of adjustment process and setting conditions that involves students' life experience, as defended by MMAU model. Develop accurate tools to measure student's ALS is important to design suitable programs to improve student's adjustment. This knowledge can improve success and add wellbeing to student's life in campus.

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