

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SATISFACTION OF ANTALYA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Student satisfaction is crucial for educational institutes, especially universities. This study utilizes “Net Promoter Score”, which is a management tool that can be used to gauge the loyalty of a firm’s customer relationships. It serves as an alternative to traditional customer satisfaction research. Although criticized, it has been widely used mainly because of its simplicity and practicality. Another reason that led to this method is that it has been utilized in “Key influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe” reports prepared 3 times by StudyPortals since 2011 ([www.studyportals.eu](http://www.studyportals.eu)) which has more than 1200 participating universities in 40 countries in its Student Experience Exchange Platform (STeXX) project funded by the European Union in 2010-2011, forming a basis of comparison for the outcomes of the research. This research aims to reveal the international student satisfaction of Antalya International University students.

**Key Words:** Student satisfaction, Mobility, Higher education, International education.

### INTRODUCTION

Number of international students has been steadily increasing. During 2000-12, the number of foreign tertiary students enrolled worldwide more than doubled, with an average annual growth rate of almost 7%. In OECD countries, the number of foreign students enrolled at the tertiary level mirrored the global trend (OECD, 2014). Academics usually perceive the marketing of higher education as a “necessary evil” that has relatively little to do with the ultimate goal of a university (Bush et al. 1998), while increasing number of students who are willing to pay for a better education abroad has been evolving higher education into a market where education itself has become services, lecturers and professors have taken the role of service providers, universities have taken the role of business organizations and the students have started to see themselves as customers or clients together with their conventional duties in some aspects. Therefore student satisfaction, which is defined as the favorability of a student’s subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1989), has become more important in order to attract new and more students from any country.

#### Universities in Turkey

Including newly established 8 universities with the recent amendment at the beginning of April 2015, the number of universities has summed up to 189, 77 of them being foundation universities (YÖK, 2015). There are two types of universities in Turkey: government and foundation. As there are no private universities in Turkey, profit making cannot be a primary concern for any of them. Because the law forbids foundation universities to make profit and they must be supported by their foundations. However, as the number of foundation universities have increased beyond demand and tuition fees in government universities have been waived, majority of the foundation universities have difficulties in recruiting paid students. This could be seen in recruited number of students in 2014 too. While 97.5% of 390,631 seats in government universities had been filled in 2014, this ratio was only 77.4% for foundation universities (ÖSYM, 2014). Please note that majority of the empty seats consist of paid student quota, leaving foundation universities with drastically lower student

incomes. As lost income needs to be compensated, recruiting paid international students is becoming more important for foundation universities.

### **International Students in Turkey**

Recruiting international students is not only important for foundation universities, but also government universities. Council of Higher Education, (YÖK) has an intention to increase the number of international students from to over 100,000 in a few years (YÖK, 2014). This figure stands at 38,590 for 2012 according to UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2014), bringing the inbound mobility rate to 0.89%. Comparing this figure to OECD average of 8.38%, England's 17.14%, France's 11.82% and USA's 3.53%, the ratio of international students in Turkey is quite low and is likely to increase (OECD, 2014). This means there will be more international students in government universities too.

### **Decision to Study Abroad**

Deciding to go abroad for tertiary education is a difficult choice. It needs exploring options of countries and institutions too. This choice is time consuming to make, involves significant expenses and risk, and must consider a wide range of possibilities and alternatives (Kemp & Madden, 1998; Pimpa, 2005; Yang, 2007). Factors such as family, peers, global ranking of the institution are important in decision making (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified six factors influencing the selection of a host country: knowledge and awareness of the host country, personal recommendations, cost issues, environment, geographic proximity, and social links. Top 5 countries with most students in Turkey are Azerbaijan, Turmenistan, Iran, Germany and Greece (UNESCO, 2014). Considering the six factors above and Turkish minorities with Greek and German citizenship, it could be said that the current situation is in line with the findings of the mentioned study.

### **Measuring Student Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is frequently measured through either a single-item aggregate or multi-item attribute level (Szymanski & Henard, 2011). While aggregate approach assesses overall satisfaction, attribute approach assesses each attribute or dimension of the product or service. In case those two approaches are not highly correlated, using either one of the approaches may yield different overall satisfaction levels (Mittal *et al.*, 1998). If an aggregate approach is used, despite the simplicity in answering and analysis, information generated would hardly be useful to find out their opinions about what attributes are important for them (Elliott & Shin, 2002). In this case, more information is necessary to find out the attributes considered important by the students, or in other words, what makes them satisfied or dissatisfied with their experiences in their universities.

### **Satisfaction vs. Loyalty**

Some scholars believe that satisfaction is the key to loyalty. The main idea is that; loyalty will be naturally intensified by an increase in satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). In general, researchers have assumed a linear relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Gustafsson *et al.* (2005), Lin & Wang (2006) assumed a positive linear relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. However, the linear relationship between them is contradicted by Oliver's 'satisfaction-loyalty asymmetry' (Oliver, 1999). According to him, satisfaction does not necessarily mean loyalty (Oliver, 1999). This has led some researchers to argue that there is a nonlinear relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Agustin & Singh, 2005; Mittal, Ross, & Baldasare, 1998; Oliver, 1999). Jones & Sasser (1995) commented that merely satisfaction while still having freedom of choice is not enough for loyalty. Oliver (1999) pointed out that the relation between satisfaction and loyalty is asymmetric. Although loyal consumers are most typically satisfied, satisfaction does not universally translate into loyalty. Reichheld & Teal (1996) labelled this phenomenon the 'satisfaction trap'. Therefore loyalty could be seen a better measure for satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY

### Universe

The universe of the study consists of 393 international students currently studying at Antalya International University.

### Data Collection Tool

The study was conducted by finding out the Net Promoter Score of the university. "Net Promoter Score" was introduced by Reichheld (Reichheld, 2003). NPS measures the loyalty that exists between a provider and a consumer. The provider can be a company, employer or any other entity –for instance, a university- that is asking the questions on the NPS survey. The consumer is the customer, employee, student or respondent to an NPS survey.

NPS is based on a direct question: "*How likely is it that you would recommend our company/ product/ service to a friend/ colleague/ relative?*" The scoring for this answer is based on an 11 scale Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 10. Therefore this scale is an ordinal scale.

Promoters are those who respond with a score of 9 or 10 and are considered loyal enthusiasts. Detractors are those who respond with a score of 0 to 6 - unhappy customers. Scores of 7 and 8 are passives, and they will only count towards the total number of respondents, but not directly affect the formula. NPS is calculated by the following formula:

$$\text{NPS} = \% \text{Promoters} - \% \text{Detractors}$$

The primary purpose of the NPS methodology is to evaluate loyalty, not to evaluate satisfaction. However as stated above, loyalty could be a better way to assess satisfaction, since one needs to partially risk his/her credibility in order to recommend.

Despite the lack of support in form of scientific studies, the net promoter score have gained popularity among business executives. The Net Promoter concept has attracted quite a lot of controversy from academic and market research circles. Some critiques to NPS are not providing proof of a causal connection between NPS and growth (Keiningham *et al.*, 2007), not adding anything compared to other loyalty-related questions (Hayes, 2008), and using a scale of low predictive validity (Schneider *et al.*, 2007).

Despite all these shortcomings of the NPS, the proponents of the Net Promoter approach claim that the statistical analyses presented prove only that the "recommend" question is similar in predictive power to other metrics, but fail to address the practical benefits of the approach, which are at the heart of the argument Reichheld put forth. Proponents of the approach also counter that analyses based on third-party data are inferior to analyses conducted by companies on their own customer sets, and that the practical benefits of the approach (short survey, simple concept to communicate) outweigh any statistical inferiority of the approach. However a survey using any other question can use the same approach.

Since only one value is not enough in finding out the reasons, a second question concludes the survey: "Why did you rate so?" The answers usually are revealing for most of the providers. This part of the survey is in phenomenological pattern. Since the survey includes both qualitative and quantitative parts, this study is considered in mixed method.

## RESULTS

77 out of 393 international students have returned the NPS survey form. Some students preferred to comment on more than one item and all of those items were recorded. The average rating of the university was calculated as 6.62 ( $\sigma=2.32$ ), and NPS was calculated as -17.1%. 21.1% of the students were promoters and 38.2% were detractors.

According to the returned results, 30.8% of the total comments were about academics, while 29.9% was about university services, 21.4% was about city and culture, and 12.0% was about social life. Rest of the comments was about cost, surroundings, and personal and professional development.

While 78.0% of the comments about academics were positive, 22.0% stood to be negative. City and culture received no negative comment, making 100% positive. While only a mere 8.6% of the comments about university services were positive, 91.4% of them were negative. Interestingly, social life drew no positive comments just to make 100% negative. While 48.7% of all of the comments were positive, 51.3% were negative.

49.1% of the positive comments were about academics and 43.9% were about city and culture. On the other hand, a vast 53.3% of the negative comments were about university services.

Most satisfied students are Europeans with 42.9% promoter rate and South East Asians, where 31.5% are promoters, and least satisfied are Africans (4.8% promoters). Detractor rate was lowest for Central Asians with 25.0% and South East Asians with 26.3%. Middle Eastern students were the biggest detractors with 62.5%.

### Benchmarking With STeXX

Following table shows comparison of the overall ratings of EU and Turkish university with Antalya International University's ratings.

Table 1: Overall Ratings Of EU And Turkish Universities And AIU

	2011 EU	2011 Turkey	2013 EU	2013 Turkey	2014 EU	2014 Turkey	AIU
Overall			8.8	8.2	8.8	8.7	6.6
NPS Score	+72	+50	+56	+39	+60	+56	-17

Following table shows overall comments of the students about the universities they study in EU and Antalya International University's international students about their own university.

Table 2: Overall Comments Of The International Students In EU Universities And AIU

	2011 EU	2013 EU	2014 EU	AIU
Academics	21%	22%	25%	31%
Personal and Professional Development	29%	10%	8%	1%
City and Culture	27%	25%	25%	21
University Services and Facilities	4%	14%	11%	30%

Following table shows positive comments of the students about the universities they study in EU and Antalya International University's international students about their own university.

Table 3: Positive Comments Of The International Students In EU Universities And AIU

	2011 EU	2013 EU	2014 EU	AIU
Academics	N/A	21%	25%	49%
Personal and Professional Development	N/A	11%	8%	2%
City and Culture	N/A	25%	27%	44%
University Services and Facilities	N/A	11%	10%	5%

Positive comments about academics included background of academic staff and education level at the university. Majority of the positive comments on city and culture was concentrated on international atmosphere of the university and the city, and pleasant weather of Antalya. A few comments were made on the architecture of the university.

A South East Asian student who has rated as 10 has stated his/her opinions as *"...What I like most studying here is my professor who will push you to your potential who will always believe you that you can do it."*

An African student who has rated as 9 has shared his/her opinions as *"This university is fully interested in their students and specially in the quality of education, trying to give their students the best of all. Moreover, the university respects the different cultures living into its campus and developing many activities to share that with other ones. I feel so happy and excited studying in this university due to having people of different countries. People with we can share culture, customs, moments, dreams, experiences, etc; it also people who was different perspective about seeing the world."*

A Central Asian student who has rated the university as 8 has shared his/her opinions as *"Teachers are perfect. The location of the university is a little far away from the city center. Otherwise I would give 10/10."*

A European student who has rated as 8 has stated his/her opinions as *"I love my professors and the way they deal with me in terms of schooling advice and academic help. The reason why it's 8 is because sometimes there are delays in the student registry office that in turn delay certain things in our schooling life here."*

A South East Asian student who has rated as 7 has stated his/her opinion as *"It is very challenging to study in this university because of its high expectations and the quality of the professors, setting a new benchmark for formal university education. I have rated 7 because when settling down the student affairs and the foreign student office would be of little help."*

Following table shows positive comments of the students about the universities they study in EU and Antalya International University's international students about their own university.

Table 4: Negative Comments Of The International Students In EU Universities And AIU

	2011 EU	2013 EU	2014 EU	AIU
Academics	N/A	24%	35%	13%
City and Culture	N/A	15%	12%	0%
University Services and Facilities	N/A	29%	21%	53%
Cost	N/A	16%	13%	7%
Social Life	N/A	N/A	N/A	23%

An African student who has rated as 7 has stated his/her opinions as *"... and I'm struggling with fake promises!"*  
 A South East Asian student who has rated as 6 has stated his/her opinions as *"I have rated so because I would be happy if some more friends come to join us in our university. Because we are so few."*

A Central Asian student who has rated as 5 has stated his/her opinions as *"Because university does not have experienced professors they come to experience here (smiley). One more thing is that I don't want them to face disappointment. University does not look like university, I mean shapely it has only 3 buildings. It takes many years to feel the atmosphere of university."*

A Middle Eastern student who has rates as 4 has stated his/her opinions as *"Because I didn't meet the exact experience I wished for. Maybe might meet in the future but for not it is quite less. The dormitories are far from the campus and the city. And we don't have enough activities neither."*

A European student who has rated as 3 has stated his/her opinions as *"I have to be responsible for my friends' future... Very tough. Busy as hell. Dozen of exams per semester. Many foreign faces but not related at all. Professors who seem responsible but make students feel confused about later career."*

Another African student who has rated as 1 has stated his/her opinions as *"I have rated so because this university cannot be considered as a university. We still feel like we are in a high school."*

Another Middle Eastern student who has rated as 0 has stated his/her opinions as *"There are regulations and surveillance everywhere."*

Calculated NPS scores differ from region to region. While students from some regions show higher satisfaction, students from other regions tend to be more dissatisfied. European and South East Asian students have higher NPS scores with respect to their African and Middle Eastern friends. Although there are students from Americas, only one student has returned the survey, therefore NPS for Americas has not been calculated. Following table shows the NPS scores with respect to geographical origins of the students.

Table 5: NPS Score With Respect To Geographical Origins Of The Students.

Region	NPS
Europe	+28.6
South East Asia	+5.3
Central Asia	-5.0
University Average	-17.1
Middle East	-50.0
Africa	-52.4

## CONCLUSIONS

Both NPS score and the average rating of Antalya International University have been found to be dramatically low with respect to European universities. Being a new university, there are many drawbacks that Antalya International University faces, some of which are lack of facilities and lack of students. Both of these problems are time related problems that the university administration has little to do with. It could be predicted that the facilities and number of students would gradually increase within a few years, carrying the NPS score to positive values.

The location of the university is criticized by some students. However geographical layout of Antalya limits having such a vast plot close to city.

Positive comments on academics are considerably higher than European universities. This is very important because academic satisfaction is the biggest key to success for a new university. Moreover, since the university succeeded to attract students from 81 countries in 3 years, reaching Turkey's highest international student ratio even in its first year, international atmosphere of the university is greatly appreciated by the students. European students are more satisfied with respect to their friends. This could be because of cultural similarity, as well as geographical proximity. African and Central Asian students' dissatisfaction appears to be related with social life and facilities.

According to the outcomes of this research, the university administration should take action in educating administrative staff, keep promises given to attract students, provide social livelihood and activities to the students, and decrease food cost in order to increase satisfaction, while maintaining internationality of the university and academic staff quality.

**IJONTE's Note:** This article was presented at 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on New Trends in Education - ICONTE, 24-26 April, 2015, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 6 Number 3 of IJONTE 2015 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.

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