

Assessing students' perspective on teaching and learning. The case of national students' surveys

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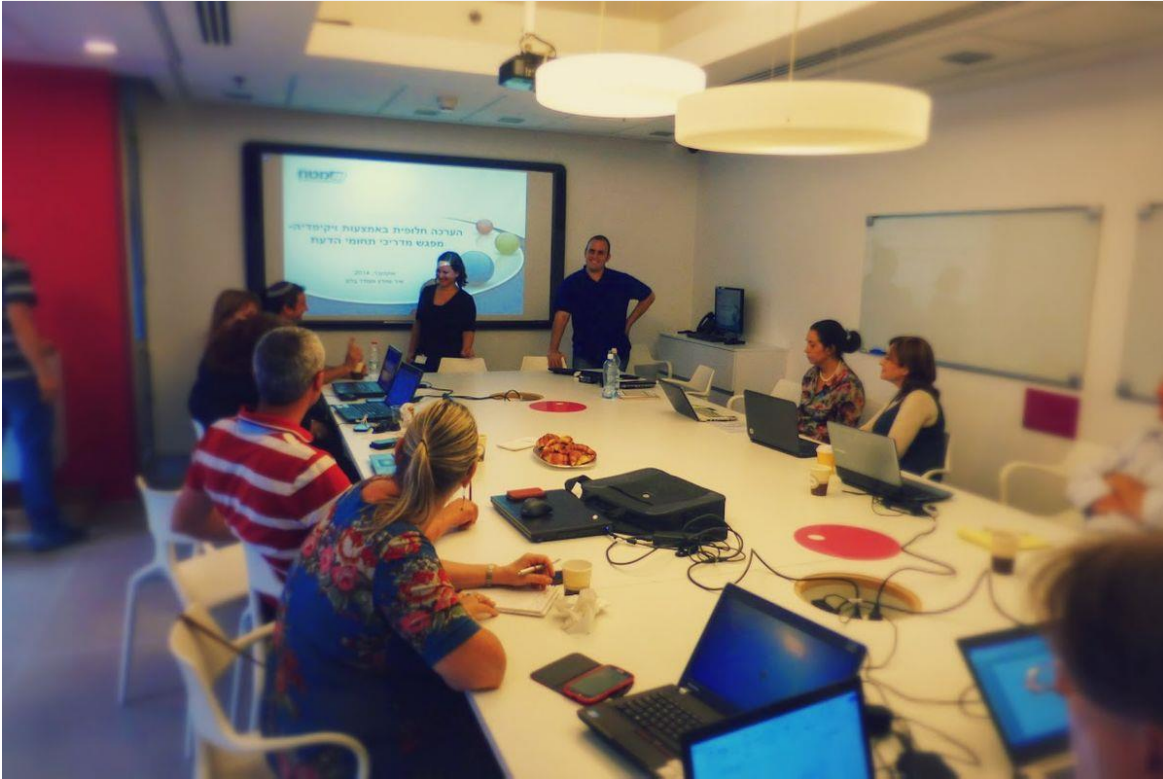
1. Introduction

- Beginning with the **London Communiqué (2007)**, ministers recognized the need of a transition towards a **student-centred approach of learning and teaching**, recognizing the **role of students** in the educational process.
- **Paris Communiqué (2018)** highlighted the importance of **collaboration between states** in order to **enhance innovation in learning and teaching**.
- As SCL became more and more important, **students' satisfaction surveys** became a **common reality within many universities part of EHEA**. These surveys are one of the most efficient solution in order **to assess students' perspective on teaching and learning**, but also to see their perception regarding any other elements of a higher education institution (Montserrat and Gummesson 2012).



1. Introduction

- In this presentation, we try to:
 - to provide an **insight regarding the usefulness of a national student survey** for the **further development of European Higher Education Area** as, for the moment, these are not a common practice in the majority of the member states.
 - To analyze the **connection** between several **ministerial communiques** and the **content of the surveys**.
- Also, the actual ***Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*** provide the framework for developing instruments of enhancing QA such as student surveys.



2. Methodology

- **Research questions:**
 - How do we implement a national student survey?
 - Who is in charge for the implementation, the review and the improvement process?
 - Which are the categories of eligible students?
 - What is the period of implementation?
- **Research instruments:**
 - Review of the scientific literature;
 - Desk research on student surveys public websites (including some of organisations/institutions in charge with implementing the surveys);
 - Interviews with representatives of the organisations/institutions that are in charge with conducting and developing the student surveys (especially where the information was not available, or not available in English).



2. Methodology

National Student Survey

- United Kingdom

Studiebarometeret

- Norway

National Sociological Research about Students' Satisfaction

- Romania

3. Setting the background



- In late '80s and at the beginning of '90s, different types of students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness were developed, such as Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ), perceiving students rather as customers than partners (Guolla, 1999).
- As they were developing the instrument, their work was undermined by several myths regarding their unreliability and validity, that included the capacity of students to make consistent judgement, the fact that students were considered "unexperienced" and "capricious". Nevertheless, these myths were systemically deconstructed (Aleamoni, 1999).

3. Setting the background

- Student surveys tend to provide **more accurate information about issues of great importance for teachers and students**, such as teaching and learning (Harvey 1995).
- Measuring the student engagement on several key themes from a survey can determine **HEIs and other stakeholders to take evidenced-based decisions to improve different aspects of the educational processes** (Maskell and Collins 2017).
- One of the earliest studies on this subject were made by Harvey 1995 and Hill 1995.



Harvey 1995	Hill 1995
Accommodation	Accommodation service
Computing services	Career service
Course organisation and assessment	Catering service
Financial circumstances	Computing facilities
Library services	Counselling welfare
Refectories	Course content
Self-development	Feedback
Social life	Financial services
Student workload and assessment	Health service
Teaching methods	Joint consultation
Teaching staff and teaching style	Library service
University environment	Personal contact with academic staff
	Physical education
	Student involvement
	Students' union
	Teaching methods
	Teaching quality
	Travel agency
	University bookshop
	Work experience

Table 1. Examples of topics in a students' satisfaction survey (Harvey 1995, Hill 1995).

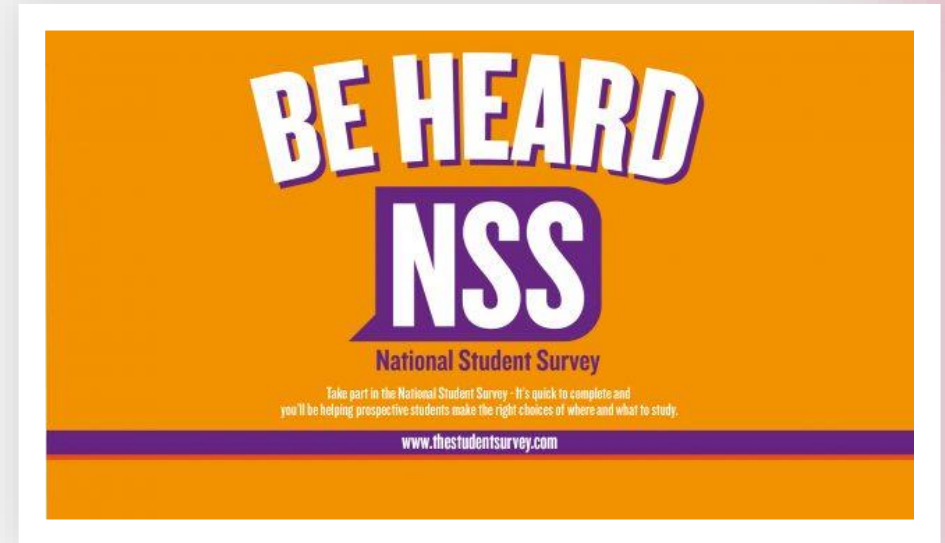
3.1. National Student Survey (United Kingdom)

- a questionnaire designed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), being implementing since **2005** with the aim of collecting data on student satisfaction and students' perception on the quality of the courses provided by universities in the UK.
- The questionnaire has evolved over times, but its latest format comprises 27 questions with a 5-grade scale (definitely agree, mostly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mostly disagree and definitely disagree) and the not applicable option.
- One of the questions has the general purpose of assessing the overall student satisfaction, while the remaining 26 questions cover other aspects.



3.1. National Student Survey (United Kingdom)

- NSS was criticized for being a survey of 'satisfaction' rather than a survey that is focused on learning outcomes or to 'students' commitment to the academic and social environment' (Gibbs 2010). Other issues that were identified through scientific literature were:
 - NSS-UK had little information about other factors that were not directly linked to teaching and learning;
 - NSS-UK neglected students' perception about the relevance of the course in connection to employability;
 - Part-time students cannot submit relevant information about their status (Buckley 2012);



3.2. Studiebarometeret (Norway)



STUDIEBAROMETERET

- Developed by the **Ministry of Education and Research** and carried out by the **Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)** since **2013**.
- The aim of the survey is to provide '**concise and user-friendly information about students**' opinion of the quality of education offered at Norwegian higher education institutions.
- Some of the topics approached by Studiebarometeret are:
 - Teaching;
 - extent of feedback and academic counselling;
 - feedback and academic counselling;
 - academic and social environment;
 - study environment and infrastructure;
 - student assessment and participation or learning outcomes.

3.3. National Sociological Research about Students' Satisfaction (Romania)

- Part of the 'Quality in higher education: internationalisation and databases to enhance the Romanian education system' project, implemented jointly by the **Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)** and the **Ministry of Education and Research (MER)** and is set to be launched in May 2020.
- The purpose of the student survey is to help both MER and HEIs to fundament future policies in order to improve the quality of student experience.
- It includes a dynamic part, that will change from one year to another in order to assess how different policies adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research are perceived by students.



4. Developing a Student Survey at national level



- Student surveys are one of the most **popular** methods in order to assess teaching and learning from students' perspective as they represent an instrument that **can be applied easily to many under-graduates** (Tucker 2015).
- They are basically an efficient tool to implement several guidelines from ESG, such as ESG 1.9.
- An important aspect is that the period of implementation is important to be set in a strict correlation with the structure of the academic year.
- A notable difference regarding the analysed surveys is the eligible students that are able to participate.
- Also, studies have shown that every year students are required to fill in a high number of questionnaires that can lead to a decrease in the number of respondents due to "survey fatigue".

	NSS - UK	Studiebarometeret – NOR	NSRSS – RO
First implementation	2005	2013	2020
Previous implementation	2019	2018	-
Stakeholders involved in developing the survey	Office for Students (OfS), Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Department for Economy Northern Ireland (DeFNI), Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Health Education England (HEE), Ipsos MORI, National Union of Students (NUS UK)	Ministry of Education and Research, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)	Ministry of Education and Research (MEC), Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI), The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), National Unions of Students (NUS)
Stakeholders involved in promoting the survey	Governmental structures responsible for higher education, Market research company, National union of students'	QA national agency, National union of students, HEIs	Governmental structures responsible for higher education, QA national agency, National unions of students,
Period of implementation	January-April	October-November	March - April
Eligible students	Students in their final year of study.	Second year bachelor and masters' students and fifth year students of professional degree and integrated masters.	Bachelor degree students'.

Table 2. Comparison between selected national student surveys

4. Developing a Student Survey at national level

- In all three cases we have identified an important input from the governmental structure that oversees higher education affairs. Also, in Norway and in Romania, the national QA agency is involved in the process of developing the student survey.
- Students are involved also in this process, through the national unions of students. They have a significant role especially in United Kingdom. Student bodies play an important role in developing and promoting these student surveys.
- NSS-UK has an important role in Teaching Excellence Framework. It represents an example of how such a national student survey is to be integrated in developing national policies.



	NSS - UK	Studiebarometeret – NOR	NSRSS – RO
Accommodation service		x	x
Career service		x	x
Catering service			x
Computing facilities	x	x	x
Counselling welfare		x	x
Course content	x	x	x
Feedback	x	x	x
Financial services			x
Health service			
Joint consultation		x	
Library service	x	x	x
Personal contact with academic staff	x	x	x
Physical education			
Student involvement		x	x
Students' union	x		x
Teaching methods	x	x	x
Teaching quality	x	x	x
Travel agency			
University bookshop			

Table 3. Comparison of topics in a students' satisfaction survey (Hill 1995) with selected national student surveys.

5. Student surveys as tools to assess learning and teaching in the context of the Bologna Process.



- Bologna Process has promoted learning and teaching as a key part of the European Higher Education Area. As such, it is important to see how much the national students' surveys are able to monitor the main areas connected to L&T.
- From a comparative point of view, all three surveys include common topics such as:
 - Availability of adequate spaces and proper equipment for classes and laboratories;
 - Staff/teachers support for students when needed;
 - Availability of individualized learning paths;
 - Teaching and counselling sessions to reduce the learning gap;
 - Staff/teachers engagement in teaching activities;
 - Conducting class hours;
 - Group work with other students;
 - Learning outcomes;

	NSS - UK	Studiebarometeret – NOR	NSRSS – RO
Collaboration in learning and teaching	x	x	x
Combine academic and work-based learning	x	x	x
Digitalisation of HE	x	x	x
Diverse learning methods	-	-	-
Encountering research or activities linked to research and innovation	-	x	-
Enhance the quality and relevance of HE systems	x	x	x
Flexible learning	-	-	-
Innovative learning and teaching practices	-	-	-
Inter-disciplinary programmes	-	-	x
Open education	-	-	-
Quality teaching	x	x	x
Student-centred learning	x	x	x

Table 4. Paris Communiqué references related to learning and teaching from selected national student surveys

6. Conclusions.

- A national student survey is an important tool to assess teaching and learning in HEIs. Even though we expected to identify a larger percent of questions directly linked to these two categories, NSS-UK has 37.03% of the items connected to T&L, while Studiebarometeret has 28,57%. NSRSS – RO stands with the largest percent (37,5%).
- National Student Surveys can play an important role in gathering data from HEIs at country level based on the same methodology. As the importance of enhancing data collection was mentioned both in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) such as in Bucharest (2012) communique, it is to be taken into consideration if such an instrument could become a general one for the European Higher Education Area.
- HEI can use the results in a benchmarking process, which is promoted through Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Measuring constantly the students' satisfaction on these items can show as in which degree a university has improved, from year to year
- Governing bodies of higher education can improve their evidenced-based decisions and to evaluate how students' perception is evolving periodically. We still do not have enough data to conclude exactly on what was the impact of Studiebarometeret or National Student Survey (after TEF was implemented) on enhancing student-centred learning, for instance.

6. Conclusions.

- Since the surveys we analyze compound a significant percent of the of topics approached by the Paris communique related to teaching and learning, we consider that in the future, a student survey that can be applied in all EHEA countries is a desirable purpose and should be discussed in Bologna Follow-Up Group.
- As policy-makers are starting adopting educational policies starting from the research in the field rather than different Lisbon Strategy indicators for example (Ion and Iucu 2015), a national student survey represents a middle way between the two perspectives, as it has an important public impact as it has also relevant results that can lead to substantially improved policies.
- Adding a dynamic part to the questionnaire as in the case of Studiebarometeret and NSRSS – RO, can be extremely useful for the ministries responsible for higher education, as for other national stakeholders, when they are developing or revising public policies.
- Student surveys should include topics such as availability of adequate spaces and proper equipment for classes and laboratories, staff and/or teachers support for students when needed, availability of individualized learning paths, teaching and counselling sessions to reduce the learning gap, staff and/or teachers engagement in teaching activities, such as conducting class hours/group work with other students or learning outcomes, as it came out after the reviewing of the three surveys and also the literature.



Thank You

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