1.2. Improving learning in technological-advanced societies

SP - (18919) - TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED STUDENT VOICE COMMITTEES - THE ROLE OF INFORMAL, DIGITAL FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Ana Bogdanovic (United Kingdom)[1]; Elaine Tan (United Kingdom)[1]; Cezara Nicoara (United Kingdom)[1]

1 - Newcastle University

Short Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Universities to reconsider their teaching provision, accelerating the need for technological solutions in Higher Education. Against this backdrop, shifts towards the integration and use of online platforms have been proposed as necessary adjustments to maintain the quality of the student learning experience in challenging circumstances (Bhagat and Kim, 2020).

This presentation outlines insights from the implementation of the Unitu Online Student Voice platform at Newcastle University Business School Marketing (student cohort 655 students). The Unitu platform is an online space that allows students to interact with fellow classmates, student representatives, and staff, for the purpose of a better-informed Student Voice Committee experience. The Unitu platform is intended as a means to collect *informal* feedback from students alongside more formal feedback mechanisms (including module and programme evaluation forms and the student voice committee).

In this paper, we discuss the challenges associated with limited student engagement on the platform, adding to the growing body of studies highlighting student 'voice fatigue' and student resistance in taking part in student voice projects (Seale et al.,2015; Mendes and Hammett, 2020). We explore the sources of resistance and argue for the importance of meaningful dialogue in fostering engagement.

Findings for this study are drawn from two sources: 1) objective Unitu feedback engagement data; and 2) focus groups with student representatives and students enrolled on the platform. The presentation will focus on disseminating key learnings from project implementation. We discuss the opportunities provided by the platforms, but at the same time open for critical discussion the extent to which adding more student voice mechanisms can actually be counterproductive and can serve to confuse and alienate students, rather than fostering constructive dialogue.

Despite a general drive for technological solutions in Higher Education, the mere introduction of technology such as the addition of an online platform to supplement the collection of student feedback from traditional channels such as the student voice does not lead to tangible improvements in student engagement on its own, as our results indicate.

This study contributes to growing literature on student voice and mechanisms for facilitating student engagement in Higher Education and adds to the discussion of student voice challenges and opportunities in the following ways. The study outlines the reasons that lead to student 'voice fatigue' in the Global Classroom (Seale et al., 2015), discussing issues of resistance, related to the lack of student engagement in the project and reluctance to use the platform. Using insights from the focus groups, it explores the motivations for engaging in student voice. We argue that student voice should not be regarded primarily as a tool to improve measurable outcomes (i.e., improvements in NSS scores) (Czerniawski, 2012).

We conclude by reviewing several opportunities for student voice engagement. We argue for student voice mechanisms that enable and empower students, individually and collectively, leading to meaningful conversations (Mendes and Hammat, 2020).

References

Bhagat, S., & Kim, D. J. (2020). Higher education amidst COVID-19: Challenges and silver lining. *Information Systems Management*, 37(4), 366-371.

Czerniawski, G. (2012). Student voice-by-numbers. *Research in Teacher Education*, 2(1), 14-18.

Mendes, A. B., & Hammett, D. (2020). The new tyranny of student participation? Student voice and the paradox of strategic-active student-citizens. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-16.

Seale, J., Gibson, S., Haynes, J., & Potter, A. (2015). Power and resistance: Reflections on the rhetoric and reality of using participatory methods to promote student voice and engagement in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(4), 534-552.