

Sharing Good Practice in Education: Student engagement and retention

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Learning outcome

- Identify factors affecting student retention
- Consider strategies used to promote students' retention and achievement
- Think about how these inter-relate
- Reflect on our own teaching and learning strategies to engage students in the classroom

How I became interested in the issue of student retention

- Background in Local Authorities in London and National Health Service in Southampton.
- First teaching was in primary school before progressing to FE and HE.
- My research interest began when I started teaching accounting in 1995 at City and Islington College of Further Education.
- My first day in the classroom was a big shock because most of the students apparently were not interested in learning.
- I began to think of the best approaches to help engage and retain students.
- This interest eventually led to my research in two London colleges as I studied towards my EdD.

Focus of my research

- Two Business level 2 and 3 courses in two similar but contrasting inner city colleges
- The study explored students' and staff views on the existing retention strategies and their implementation for the two colleges.



Factors affecting student retention

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Ethnic background**
- **Social class**
- **Failure to make transition from school to college**
- **Course level & qualification type**
- However there are variations from college to college.



Nine key strategies identified in the existing research literature

1. Recruitment and induction
2. Course management
3. Student motivation
4. Communication
5. Teaching and learning
6. Course assessment
7. Student support
8. College environment
9. Quality assurance



Action research in two colleges

Focus on two FE Colleges to look at retention in similar but different contexts

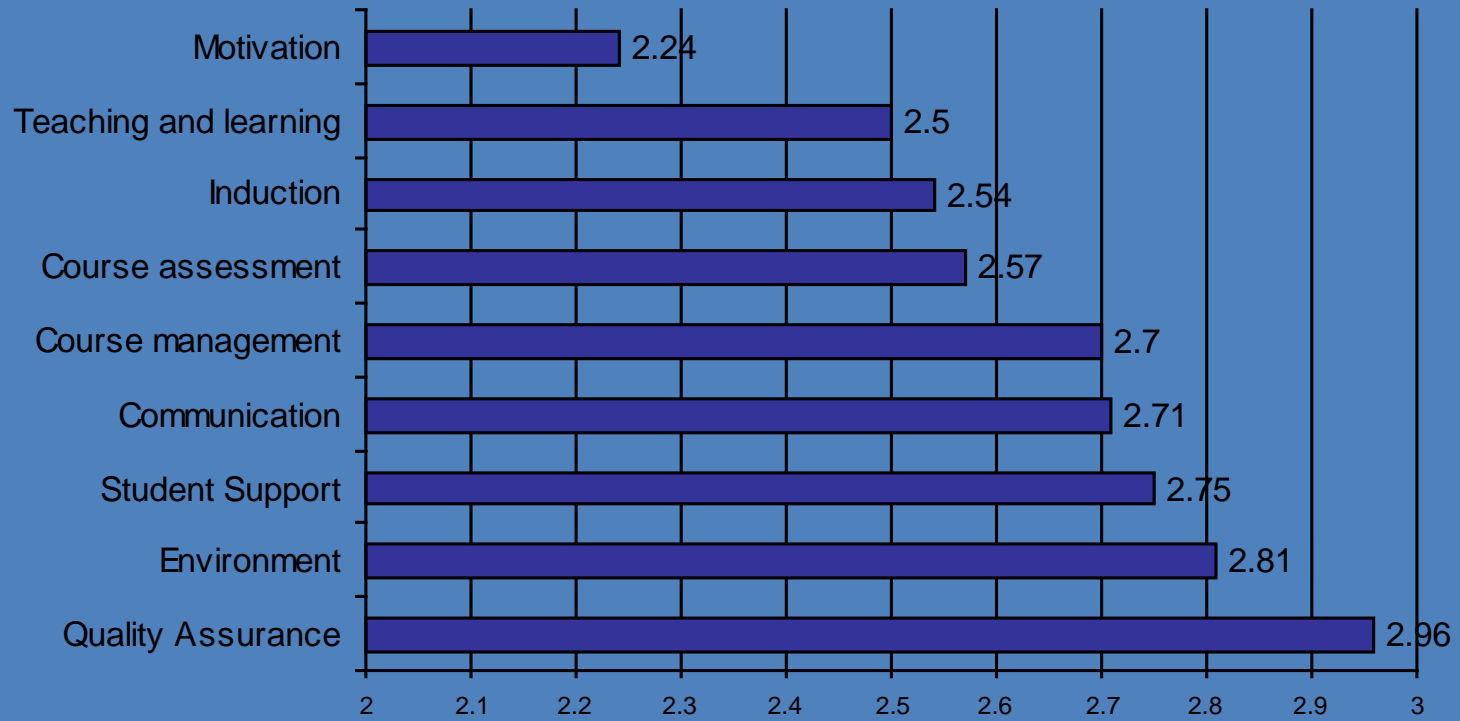
- same geographic area, serving an economically deprived area with a largely Black and Asian population.
- very similar retention rates in the two colleges were.
- Level 2 and 3 Business Studies courses.

Methodology

- The research used quantitative and qualitative methods, with three main types of data collection employed:
- Self-completion questionnaires given to students in colleges A and B
- Focus groups with students
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews with teachers
- Observations of teaching and learning in the two colleges

Which strategies did students say have most impact?

Figure 1 - Mean ratings given for the implementation of each retention strategy (n=218).



(1 = 'Excellent', 2 = 'Very good', 3 = Satisfactory', 4 = 'Poor', 5 = 'Very poor')

Key findings

- Particularly strong importance attached by students and staff to **teaching and learning** and **student motivation**
- These key elements should be at the heart of any college retention strategy.
- It is also important that retention strategies are not segmented into different phases or areas of college activities.

Importance of connections between different strategies...

- My research focussed mainly on the identification of *individual retention strategies*, evaluating the effectiveness of their implementation in two colleges.
- However, *important connections between the strategies* were also highlighted. Beatty-Guenter's (1994) work on different types of retention strategy – based around the four processes of **'sorting'**, **'supporting'**, **'connecting'** and **'transforming'** – was used to highlight these connections.

Strategies that transform the student were most important:

Figure 2 - Mean ratings given for the implementation of different types of retention strategy, using Beatty-Guenter (n218).



Implications for improving student retention strategies:

- Implication of the many connections between the nine different strategies is that there is a ***need for a holistic approach to student retention.***
- As suggested by Martinez (1997), Martinez, Houghton and Krupska (1998) and Moxley *et al* (2001), it is important that these strategies are not implemented in isolation but that they are integrated as part of a wider college retention strategy.

Reflections & recommendations

- I recommend that all teachers should find out what motivates their students to engage in academic studies.
- What works and what doesn't work?
- Students will engage in learning if we have effective teaching and learning strategies that accommodates the level of our students.
- We need to ensure 'joined up' approaches to engagement and retention, as teachers and institutions.
- This is an action research which I hope to continue to work on and share further findings with my colleagues. Thank you.

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