

Research Group on Higher Education – University of Konstanz

ISSUE – International Student Survey in Europe

Methods of instrument and sample

The methodical proposition has a short-range and long-range target. One part of the survey should be the same with all the groups within Réseau UNI 21, the other can diverge depending on the interests and possibilities of each member of the association around the ISSUE concept.

Short-range target

The short-range target is to carry out a pilot study where the most important subjects are well represented. The pilot study aims to test whether it is possible to do such a survey, to gain practical experience in carrying out an international comparison, and to formulate recommendations for the regions – how they should go on when carrying on the initiative. This target has been fulfilled with the participation of the research groups in Grenoble, Barcelone and Konstanz. The instrument demonstrates to be useful, and some international publications has been completed.

Long-range target

The long-range target is to create an instrument to observe students at the universities in all regions or nations in Europe (especially members of FREREF) in the long run. According to the description of the theories (Theoretical Frame), it collects data about motivation and problems of students. These data are guaranteed, reliable and comparable, and are collected regularly.

Shapes of the questionnaire

The main instrument to gain information is the questionnaire "research project situation of students". It consists of closed questions, used in Germany since the middle of the eighties. The possibility to use a questionnaire which has been put to test already several times, is a big advantage for all members of the Réseau UNI 21, and a notable contribution of the AG Hochschulforschung at the University of Konstanz.

Each region has to translate the questionnaire well and to test it in order to get the final formulation for the pilot study. To make sure that the data stay comparable for all participating regions, a consensus is necessary regarding the part of the questionnaire they have in common. On the other hand there are questions which should not be used for different reasons. At the same time each region may introduce new aspects relevant for their own or for common reality.

It may be important to complete the data of the quantitative survey with possibilities of a qualitative comparison. In this way significant explanations and interpretations of the quantitative results are possible, for instance by building students' discussion groups in the different subject areas. This idea could be carried through by a few groups, depending on interest and presuppositions.

Sample

It is proposed to distribute around 2,400 questionnaires among different faculties.

The following criteria should be used in order to choose from the amount of subjects and students:

- The choice should be significantly representative. Subject culture, connection to studies and jobs, social background, etc. have to be included. About 400 students per faculty should be questioned. The sample can be reduced to about 200 questionnaires among those disciplines which are generally rather homogeneous (law and medicine).
- Choice of faculties with high rate of students. This criterion is important for the pilot study to record general problems on the lowest possible cost.
- Choice of subjects using the criterion of internal homogeneity within the subject, and distinction in regard to the other subjects.

The priorities defined are the following:

- Consideration to the historical opposition between the humanities and natural sciences.
- Consideration to the traditional professions, like medicine and jurisprudence.
- Consideration to new professions in the field of technology and administration.

It is proposed to distribute the sample as follows:

Humanities	200 (100 languages, 200 literature)	200 (history)
Natural sciences	200 (120 physics and chemistry, 80 biology)	200 (mathematics, 100 computing science)
Medicine	200 human medicine	200 veterinary medicine(optional)
Engineering (technical orientated)	200 (mechanical engineering, manufacture science, electrical science)	200 (electronics and communications theory)
Jurisprudence	200 law	
Economics	200 business management	200 (national) economics
Social science	200 (100 sociology, 100 political science)	200 (120 psychology, 80 education)

This survey is directed at third-year-students at universities because they have already gathered a substantial amount of experience in regard to their studies, and at the same time have more concrete ideas about their job expectations. The possibility to question the first-year-students should be discussed, because here the rate of those who fail in exams is rather high.

This typology guarantees a fundamental representation regarding the total survey as well as the different faculties. Furthermore it is possible to show differences between them by including hypotheses regarding i.e. subject area, gender, social background.

(Editing of the English text: Birgitta Godt)