

Students' Perceived Image of the University before entering and during study

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Abstract

The study goals were to investigate what images have the high school and the university students about university, before entering and during study. A tool was developed consisting of (54) items. Face validity, Cronbach alpha coefficient, ANOVA, and Scheffe post-hoc tests were computed. Results show that university image mean is high among high school and university students, but the high school students' image is higher than that of the university students, and the university students' image during study is lower than theirs when they were in high school. All these differences are statistically significant.

Keywords: perceived image, university climate, service quality.

1.1 Introduction

The University has a special position in the ladder of the educational system in any society. People, in general, political administration, industry, and all other sectors, expect much to be done from it. Universities have been viewed as "engines" of innovation that pump out new ideas, knowledge creation (Florida, 1999) and training elites, to achieve progress in life.

In the related literature of the university characteristics and effect on students, the comprehensive study of Feldman and Newcomb, published in 1969, in their book "The Impact of College on Students", reviewed and synthesized the findings of more than 1,500 reports and studies over forty – years period, from the middle twenties to the middle sixties. They provide a conceptual map and generated a number of major hypotheses about how college affects students, and helped to stimulate a large number of studies in this field. The book republished in 1996 (Feldman, & Newcomb, 1996).

Most of the recent researches on university has focused, in general, on several aspects, such as, students' academic achievement and its relation with high school achievement (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007), and the fit between secondary and university learning and experience environments which enhance adjustment and achievement effects (Torenbeek, Jansen & Hofman, 2010), transfer of learning to use previous knowledge in novel situations, and the barriers affecting it was investigated, on a sample of 45 faculty members and 265 college students (Lightener, Benander & Kramer, 2008). Students' attitudes toward online study and self-directed learning, seemed to be positive, as revealed in a study conducted on a sample of 300 students (Malik & Shabbir, 2008). Perceiving self-image among university students, revealed that females perceive themselves as overweight, males perceive themselves as too thin, this was in a study consisting of 5900 students from several European countries (Mikolajczyk, Maxwell, Stock, & Petkeviciencene, 2010).

The professional practices that might be considered ethically suspect also, were studied on a sample of 728 academic faculty members. Results indicated that these practices are perceived to occur relatively infrequently (Piette, 2000). Another study conducted to examine students' perceptions of the characteristics of the effective college teachers, participants were 912 students. The characteristic that students considered to reflect effective college teachers were: responsive, enthusiast, student-centered, professional, and expert, connector, transmitter, ethical and director (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Miedmaier & Moore, 2007).

The kind of students' registration was one of the investigated factors, like the study about the part-time students' perception of their state in the UK universities, which indicated that they have a sense of themselves as being ignored and marginalized in their universities (Williams & Kane, 2010).

University service quality was studied also. In one of these studies, the purpose was to determine students' perceived image towards service quality of residential halls, 96 participants answered the questionnaire. The findings indicated that tangible and assurance showed a significant relationship towards the total services provided by the residential halls (Hamzah, 2009), and in another study of service quality and intention to leave the university, and the overall satisfaction with the university, was conducted on a sample of 391 in two South African universities. Findings indicated significant relationship between service quality and intention to leave university, trust in management of the university and overall satisfaction with their university (de Jaqer&Gibadamosi, 2010), college students' perceptions and attitudes toward some services available like counseling were also examined (Baezhen, 2008).

Another kind of studies dealt with the university image and climate. One of them investigated the differences in perceptions of the institutional climate among humanities, social science, and natural science majors in two colleges of arts and sciences. Humanities majors rated the institutional climate significantly higher on an aestheticism/idealism factor than their peers in the social sciences; and social sciences majors' students rated

their universities climate significantly higher on bureaucracy factor than either humanities or natural science majors (Pascarella, 1976). Students' satisfaction with faculty climate, faculty diversity and perception that faculty diversity contributed to their educational experience, were also tested (Lee, 2010).

In a study on a sample of (6775) Spanish university students , showed that the cognitive image component differs from the affective image component , and precedes it , and both of them affect the students' satisfaction with the university (Palacio, Meneses, & Perez , 2002). In another study, the image of the university showed a positive relationship with students' loyalty, but not with the image of the study program (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). Arpan, Raney, & Zivinuska (2003) found that the same university has different image among different groups such as students and non-students, because of using different criteria when rating universities. Polat (2011) investigated the relationship between university image and academic achievement at Kocaeli University in Turkey, the results showed a moderate relationship with the quality image, but a low one with the social environment image.

Students' expectations and attitudes toward their colleges, across some variables, as athletes and non-athletes, were tested and revealed differences among them (Keith, William, & Jovauno, 1997), and the university image among high school seniors, college students, and alumni, was investigated, and revealed a generally positive image among them (Stuckman –Johnsom & Kinsley, 1985).

1.2 Study Problem

The review of literature as it appears in the introduction of the current study revealed that the research on university has focused on aspects like: students' learning and achievement, and some of the studies compare them with high school students. Attitudes and self-image, teaching effectiveness professional practices, service quality provided, and the university image, climate and students' satisfaction.

It can be concluded that, no study had been done, in the relative literature about the university image among students: before, and after entering the university, and across their study years , compared with a senior high school students' image , which it is still a common stereotype image . This gap in research represents the problem that the current study will deal with, so it may add a little bit of new knowledge to the field of higher education research, as well as using a combined method of retrospective and cross-sequential.

Results of the current study provide those who are responsible at the university or persons concerned in any way , with a better insight, to improve their work, and make the image of the university better.

The image is a mental picture of a model constructed from characters, elements and concepts (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007), attributed to the university, as perceived by the participants.

1.2.1 Study Questions

- 1- What are the University images among 12th Grade and University students before entering and during study?
- 2- Are the differences in high school students' image about university and university students' image before entering and during study, statistically significant?
- 3- Are there statistical differences in students' image about university across gender and level of study?

1.3 Methods and procedures

1.3.1 Study Sample

A stratified random sample of 12th graders was chosen from two high schools in Muscat province, and Sultan Qaboos University. The sample size was 183. Two variables considered to be represented in it: gender: male, female, and level of study; 12th grade high school students, and first year through fourth year university students. Table (1) shows sample distribution.

Table 1

Sample distribution according to gender and level of study variables

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
12 th grade (high school)	47	48	95
1 st & 2 nd year college	15	18	33
3 rd & 4 th year college	24	31	55
Total	86	97	183

1.3.2 The Questionnaire

A tool was developed, based on the theoretical literature of the related subjects as: perception image, concept, and the role of university. And from a pilot study on a sample of 20 high school students, and of 20 university students. They were asked to write their images about the university and the mental picture they have about it.

After analyzing the data of the literature and the pilot study, 54 preliminary items were constructed. A rating scale with 3 alternatives: high, medium, low, was used with the items. The high score indicates positive image. Two forms of the tool were developed, but with the same items, for high school, and university students. The difference is the retrospective alternatives in the university students' form, which asking them about their image before entering as well as during their study. (Appendix: 1, 2).

1.3.3 Validity

A panel of 10 members from academic staff of the college of education in Sultan Qaboos University insured the questionnaire validity. They agreed about its validity, and some of them suggested some modification in a few items.

1.3.4 Reliability

Computing Cronbach alpha coefficient for each study level, yielded .90-.94, and for the all subjects was 0.92. Table (2) explains this.

Table 2

Cronbach alpha coefficient

Students	N	Cronbach alpha
12 th grade (high school)	95	0.90
1 st & 2 nd year Un.	33	0.94
3 rd & 4 th year Un.	55	0.94
Total	183	0.92

1.4 Statistics

Row data processed by using SPSS-19. Means, Standard Deviation- Cronbach alpha, one-way and two-way ANOVA, and Scheffe post-hoc test for post comparisons were used.

1.5 Results

Q1: *What are the university images among 12th grade, and university students before entering and during study ?* Means and standard deviation were computed for each item (Appendix 3). High school students' item mean was (2.47), and within a range of (1.91-2.83). University students mean before entering the university was (2.47), and the range was (2.09-2.77), and their mean during study (2.35), and the range was (1.51-2.82).

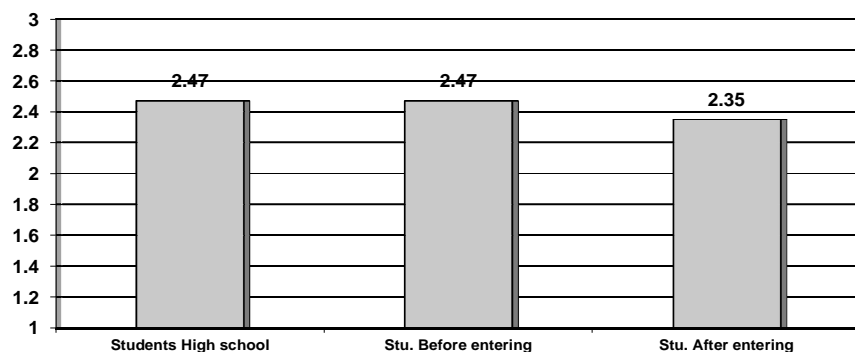


Figure 1: *Bar chart for the university image means according to level of study*

Appendix 3, with figure 1, shows that the university image is high among high school and university students before entering, but the image decreases after entering. Table 2 shows the items which have the highest means, and give a positive university image. The first five image items for high school students are: (the student is responsible of his state), (away to get a job), (a way to open future doors), (to get a social status), and (developing self-independency).

The first five image items for university students before entrance are: (a way to open future doors), (a scientific tower), (provides students' need to scientific development), (developed teaching methods), and (developing students, identity).

The first five image items for university students during study , are: (the student is responsible of his state), (developing friendship relations), (developing self-independence), (developing the whole personality), and (a scientific tower).

Q2: *Are the differences in high school image about university and university students' image before entering and during study statistically significant?*

Means and standard deviations were computed for the general mean of the tool items (table 4). One-way ANOVA was used in testing the three means differences. The value of the computed F is 5.096, and it is statistically significant at 0.007 levels. Table 3 shows ANOVA results.

Table 3: ANOVA results of the students' university images

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F value	Level of significance
Between groups	0.852	2	0.426	5.096	0.007
Within group	22.389	268	0.084		

To define the differences among means trends, Scheffe's test for post multiple comparisons among means was computed, differences were significant between high school and college students after entrance, in favor of before entering. Table (4) shows Scheffe's test results for after comparisons.

Table 4: Scheffe's test results for after comparisons of students' image about university

Group	Mean difference	Significance trend
High school students Un. students before entering	0.00	Not significant
High school students Un. students after entering	0.12*	In favor of high school
University students Un. students during study before entering	0.12*	In favor of before entering un

* Significant at 0.05 level.

Q.3: Are the differences in students' image about university according to gender and level of study, statistically significant?

General means and standard deviation of the items, according to gender and level of study were tested. Table 5 shows this.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of Students University image before entering university according to gender and level of study.

Level of study	Males		Females		Male and Female	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
12 th grade (high school)	2.47	0.23	2.48	0.24	2.47	0.23
1 st & 2 nd year un	2.46	0.21	2.27	0.35	2.35	0.31
3 rd & 4 th year un	2.32	0.31	2.38	0.32	2.35	0.31
Total	2.42	0.26	2.41	0.30	2.42	0.28

Two-way ANOVA was computed to test significance of means differences according to gender, level of study, and interaction between them. Computed F is significant at 0.012 levels, for level of study, but not for gender, or interaction. Table 6 shows 2 X 2 ANOVA results.

Table 6: 2x2 ANOVA results of gender and level of study effects on students' image before and after entering university

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F value	Level of significant
Level of study (a)	0.670	2	0.335	40.530	0.012
Gender (b)	0.059	1	0.059	0.793	0.374
(a) X (b)	0.356	2	0.178	20.407	0.093
Error	130.092	177	0.074		

To investigate the mean differences trend, Scheffe's test for post multiple comparisons was computed, among the three comparisons. The differences were statistically significant between high school students and university first and second year level, and in favor of high school students, and between high school students and third and fourth year level, and in favor of high school students. Table (7) shows Scheffe's test result of the post comparison.

Table 7: Scheffe's test results of the post multiple comparisons

Groups	Mean difference	Significance trend
High school students	*0.12	Significant in favor of high school
High school students	*0.12	Significant in favor of high school
First and second year	0.00	Not significant

*significant at .05 level

1.6 Discussion

The results revealed, in general, a positive perceived image about university among students before entering. This result is like Pascarella (1976), and Stuchman- Johnsley (1985) results about the perceived positive image and climate about university among humanities majors. This positive image of the university perhaps, because it has a deep root in the past, when there were scarcity in foundations that deal with science, and the universities took the responsibility of developing science and technology. This idea of the university transmitted, and became a stereotype. In addition, people evaluate the university graduated persons positively: in social life and work. This was revealed through the items that got the highest means, such as: (mean to get a job), (a way that opens future door), (to get a social status), and a (scientific tower).

Results also showed that the image of the university decreases after the students, entering. This result is also confirmed when comparing high school student's image with university student's image, which is in favor of the former. The cause of this result, in some respect, due to the big expectation that the students have about university, as a land of dreams, this image becomes normal and lose some of its brightness as the time goes on, and the students used on its climate. This interpretation depends upon the theory of expectancy, and the law of newness (Eggen&Kauchak 2007).

The results showed no differences between male and female students in their perceived image about university. This result may due to the same resources which they got their information and stereotypes from.

The results also showed no differences between university students' image of the university before entering, and high school students' image about it. The same interpretation which mentioned above can be said here.

The result indicates that the change toward less positive image about the university is happened at the beginning of the first two years at the university. But this change remains the same and does not increase across the senior years. The cause of this result may due to the same thing which was mentioned before, according to the theory of expectancy and law of newness, and stereotypes.

1.7 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the university image is positively high, and it is higher among students before entering, then it decreases in the first two years during studies after entering the university, and stays high positive image. Students, gender has no effect upon the university perceived image.

Recommendations:

It can be proposed that some researches have to be done to identify the causes that decrease the positive image of the university during the first two years.

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Appendix (1)

Sultan Qaboos University
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Questionnaire

Students Perceived Image of the University Before Entering and During Study.

Dear, Students:

The goal of this study is to investigate the university image which the student had after ending the high school study; and during his study at university .

You have items, related to the University climate, with three alternatives. Chose one of them by putting (√) under the alternative which represents your belief about university before entering, and once again to represent it during study, as following:

Please, read all the items, and then answer them carefully.

Write the following information:

Specialization:	College:		
Level of study (year): 1 ()	2 ()	3 ()	4 ()
Gender : Male ()	Female ()		

#	University image items	Before entering was			After entering is		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
1	A place of freedom.						
2	The student is responsible of his state.						
3	The professor is a scientist in his specialization.						
4	Freedom in choosing courses and instructors.						
5	A place of relaxation after high school general exam.						
6	A way to get a job.						
7	A way to open future doors.						
8	Work in hard and persistency .						
9	Evaluation does not depend on the examination score only.						
10	To get a social status.						
11	Training to use critical thinking.						
12	Building self-confidence.						
13	Developing friendship relations.						
14	Acquisition deep experience.						
15	Constructing the mind.						
16	Developing Self- independency.						
17	Creativity.						
18	Scientific research.						
19	Developing mind flexibility and broadening mid boarders.						
20	Intellectual and scientific aggregate. .						
21	A nice case						
22	Ambitions realization.						
23	Easy study.						
24	A place of rest.						
25	Preparing specialists.						
26	Freedom from home and family.						
27	Opening mind and acculturation.						
28	Independency.						
29	Developing the whole personality.						
30	Preparing efficient to serve society.						
31	A scientific tower.						
32	Provide students' need to scientific development						
33	Preparing creative researchers and scientists.						
34	Developed teaching method.						
35	Non- traditional examinations.						
36	Accepting the other different opinion.						
37	Applying science in life.						
38	Experiencing social activities.						
39	A place for conferences and symposiums.						
40	A place to get the lest discoveries in science.						
41	Scientific application.						
42	A brood curriculum; not restricted to some text-book.						
43	Less control than high school.						
44	Courses designed to serve specialization.						
45	Work out of routine.						
46	Objectivity in students' academic achievement.						
47	Developing students' identity.						
48	Examinations need thanking creativity and not remembering.						
49	Elegant high quality faculty members' students' relations.						
50	The hoped paradise.						
51	A place of invention.						
52	Leading the country to the advanced contemporary life.						
53	Positive humanistic relations with faculty members.						
54	Faculty member interest in students' academic achievement.						

Appendix (2)

Sultan Qaboos University
College of Education
Department of Psychology.

Questionnaire

High school students' university Image

The goal of this study is to investigate your opinion about the university Image.

Read the items, than put (√) under the alternative which represents your opinion about university.

You're Grad:

Your Gender : Male ()

Female ()

(*Note*: questionnaire items are the same as in the university students' questionnaire).

Appendix (3)

Item means and standard deviation of the university image among high school and university students

#	Items	Students					
		High school		Uni. Before entering		Uni. After entering	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1	A place of freedom.	2.40	0.64	2.32	0.67	2.11	0.72
2	The student is responsible of his state.	2.83	0.38	2.38	0.70	2.77	0.47
3	The professor is a scientist in his specialization.	2.52	0.58	2.52	0.64	2.14	0.61
4	Freedom in choosing courses and instructors.	2.40	0.71	2.10	0.88	2.34	0.74
5	A place of relaxation after high school general exam.	2.09	0.81	2.32	0.74	1.51	0.66
6	A way to get a job.	2.81	0.42	2.60	0.67	2.43	0.66
7	A way to open future doors.	2.80	0.45	2.67	0.58	2.56	0.58
8	Work in hard and persistency .	2.47	0.65	2.57	0.58	2.56	0.58
9	Evaluation does not depend on the examination score only.	1.91	0.65	2.09	0.71	2.08	0.85
10	To get a social status.	2.74	0.46	2.60	0.62	2.69	0.55
11	Training to use critical thinking.	2.33	0.64	2.30	0.76	2.42	0.69
12	Building self-confidence.	2.73	0.47	2.58	0.60	2.70	0.59
13	Developing friendship relations.	2.67	0.55	2.49	0.63	2.73	0.52
14	Acquisition deep experience.	2.66	0.58	2.59	0.62	2.67	0.54
15	Constructing the mind.	2.69	0.51	2.61	0.56	2.66	0.58
16	Developing Self- independency.	2.75	0.48	2.59	0.60	2.82	0.44
17	Creativity.	2.48	0.62	2.50	0.63	2.38	0.68
18	Scientific research.	2.48	0.63	2.32	0.69	2.40	0.67
19	Developing mind flexibility and broadening mid boarders.	2.55	0.58	2.45	0.62	2.53	0.62
20	Intellectual and scientific aggregate. .	2.41	0.61	2.38	0.72	2.18	0.72
21	A nice case	2.45	0.61	2.44	0.71	2.47	0.59
22	Ambitions realization.	2.60	0.59	2.61	0.56	2.39	0.63
23	Easy study.	1.93	0.71	2.32	0.81	1.69	0.73
24	A place of rest.	2.12	0.72	2.32	0.77	1.78	0.73
25	Preparing specialists.	2.54	0.58	2.56	0.60	2.42	0.60
26	Freedom from home and family.	2.09	0.83	2.18	0.75	2.07	0.80
27	Opening mind and acculturation.	2.52	0.65	2.48	0.64	2.57	0.58
28	Independency.	2.57	0.58	2.47	0.66	2.60	0.60
29	Developing the whole personality.	2.72	0.47	2.63	0.55	2.74	0.51
30	Preparing efficient to serve society.	2.66	0.52	2.57	0.56	2.58	0.56
31	A scientific tower.	2.68	0.53	2.77	0.47	2.80	0.43
32	Provide students' need to scientific development	2.55	0.60	2.65	0.55	2.44	0.68
33	Preparing creative researchers and scientists.	2.44	0.60	2.41	0.71	2.31	0.65
34	Developed teaching method.	2.57	0.61	2.68	0.56	2.45	0.64
35	Non- traditional examinations.	2.33	0.68	2.42	0.66	2.01	0.65
36	Accepting the other different opinion.	2.32	0.66	2.43	0.71	2.19	0.72
37	Applying science in life.	2.57	0.58	2.53	0.64	2.26	0.75
38	Experiencing social activities.	2.32	0.71	2.48	0.62	2.48	0.62
39	A place for conferences and symposiums.	2.63	0.62	2.40	0.75	2.70	0.51
40	A place to get the lest discoveries in science.	2.67	0.50	2.52	0.62	2.55	0.64
41	Scientific application.	2.57	0.56	2.50	0.68	2.42	0.60
42	A brood curriculum; not restricted to some text-book.	2.18	0.78	2.32	0.78	2.26	0.80
43	Less control than high school.	2.26	0.75	2.31	0.79	2.26	0.77
44	Courses designed to serve specialization.	2.57	0.56	2.55	0.62	2.30	0.71
45	Work out of routine.	2.34	0.70	2.55	0.66	2.17	0.76
46	Objectivity in students' academic achievement.	2.24	0.70	2.47	0.68	1.83	0.68
47	Developing students' identity.	2.62	0.53	2.66	0.57	2.60	0.62
48	Examinations need thanking creativity and not remembering.	2.46	0.60	2.43	0.71	2.03	0.82
49	Elegant high quality faculty members' students' relations.	2.34	0.66	2.57	0.60	2.18	0.69
50	The hoped paradise.	2.23	0.72	2.26	0.72	2.00	0.68
51	A place of invention.	2.40	0.68	2.42	0.69	2.15	0.69
52	Leading the country to the advanced contemporary life.	2.59	0.56	2.51	0.59	2.36	0.65
53	Positive humanistic relations with faculty members.	2.47	0.63	2.50	0.59	2.30	0.61
54	Faculty member interest in students' academic achievement.	2.34	0.71	2.48	0.68	1.99	0.78
General mean		2.47	0.23	2.47	0.32	2.35	0.31

Note: M= mean, SD= standard deviation.

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