

# CONCEPTUALISATION OF LEARNING SATISFACTION EXPERIENCED BY NON- TRADITIONAL LEARNERS IN SINGAPORE

Henry Khiat

Teaching and Learning Centre, SIM University

## **Abstract:**

This study uncovered the different factors that make up the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners in Singapore. Data was collected from a component of the student evaluation exercise in a Singapore university in 2011. A mixed-methods approach was adopted in the analysis. The study stated that non-traditional learners' learning satisfaction can be generally grouped into four main categories: a) Desirable Learning Deliverables; b) Directed Learning Related Factors; c) Lecturer/Tutor Factors and d) Indirect Learning Related Factors. Another important finding showed that academic factors might play a more determining role in affecting the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners as compared to social, personal, administration, operation and environmental factors. The data suggested that flexibility in learning plays a very significant role in the conceptualization of learning satisfaction for the non-traditional learners. At the same time, the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners depends greatly on their lecturer being knowledgeable in the content taught, prompt and helpful in meeting their learning needs and pedagogically sounds to teach them well. In the context of Singapore, from a learning viewpoint, this study has an important implication as understanding the conceptualization of non-traditional learners' conceptualization of learning satisfaction can help local educators to formulate plans to improve their learning persistence and attrition that can be closely correlated to their learning satisfaction. Knowing that non-traditional learners possibly focused certain academic issues as their conceptualization of learning satisfaction, the case university can focus on addressing them as a starting point to improve learning satisfaction. At the same time, from a research viewpoint, this study can contribute to the existing relevant literature related to learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners.

**Keywords:** Learning satisfaction; non-traditional learner; mixed methods; flexibility of learning; lecturer characteristic.

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**Corresponding author:** Henry Khiat  
E-mail: [henrykhiat@unisim.edu.sg](mailto:henrykhiat@unisim.edu.sg)  
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## 1. Introduction

A traditional student is usually one who goes direct into university for full time study after graduating from pre-university education. On the contrary, a non-traditional student is typically an adult above 24 years old who is juggling different roles as a student, worker, spouse and/or parent and is at least one year absent from studying in a learning institution (Howell, 2001; Vander Zanden, 2007). In Singapore, traditional and non-traditional learners can pursue their studies in local public funded universities or private educational institutions that offer degrees from overseas universities. Public funded universities are regulated by the Ministry of Education, while private educational institutions are regulated by the Council for Private Education. Specifically, for non-traditional learners, they generally take government subsidized part-time degrees in the three public funded universities (National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University) and Singapore's only private university, SIM University. There are also others who undergo degrees courses offered by foreign universities through private educational institutions. Learner satisfaction is a learner's subjective evaluation of the services' performance provided by a learning institution (Kotler, Lane, Koshy & Jha, 2009; Sweeney & Ingram, 2001; Tough, 1982). A learner will feel a certain level of learning satisfaction, depending on whether the actualisation of an educational service used by him or her, is equivalent to, surpasses or does not meet his or her expectation set (Martin, 1988). The experiences that determine the learning satisfaction of traditional and non-traditional learners are different (Bontenbal, 2000; Bull & Kimball, 2000). Compton, Cox and Laanan (2006), Wei

(2007) and Wintre and Yaffe (2000) stated that there may be differences in learning goals, motivation and commitment between traditional and non-traditional learners. One of the important differences is that non-traditional learners tend to be more demanding in fulfilling their satisfaction of how learning institutions meet their learning needs as compared to traditional learners since they generally finance their own studies and have more life experience. Spady (1970), Bean and Metzner (1985) and Pascarella (1980) showed that there is a positive correlation between learner persistence and learner satisfaction for non-traditional learners. And learner persistence is synonymous with learning attrition. Non-traditional learners' learning persistence is generally lower than traditional learners' (Hoyt, 1999; Naretto, 1995). Although research had shown that non-traditional learners' learning persistence can be affected by their satisfaction in the learning environment, little is known about the areas that they are satisfied about in terms of their university experiences (Keith, 2007). Thus, it is more important to research on this group of learners to find out what types of learning satisfaction they are looking for as a starting point so as to address their lower learning persistence as compared to traditional learners (Hoyt, 1999; Naretto, 1995). However, there is no research that that investigated on the types of learning satisfaction experienced non-traditional learners in the context of Singapore. Thus, this study can help to fill up this gap in the existing literature. The aim of this study is to uncover the different factors that determine the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners in Singapore. To achieve this aim, the research question posed in this study is "What are the factors that influence the learning satisfaction experienced by non-traditional learners?"

## 2. Methodology

This study made use of a component of the student evaluation exercise in a Singapore university in 2011. This particular component is related to the student satisfaction level in their learning. All non-traditional students in the concerned university participated in the evaluation exercise. This particular component was not compulsory for the students to feedback on. There were two open ended response questions in this component that are utilized in the research. They are:

a) In what ways could your learning experience be enhanced/improved?

b) What did you like best about your learning experience?

These two questions were specially crafted to understand their learning experiences, both positive and negative. And the comments from the students with regards to the above two questions could be explicitly translated into their conceptions of learning satisfaction.

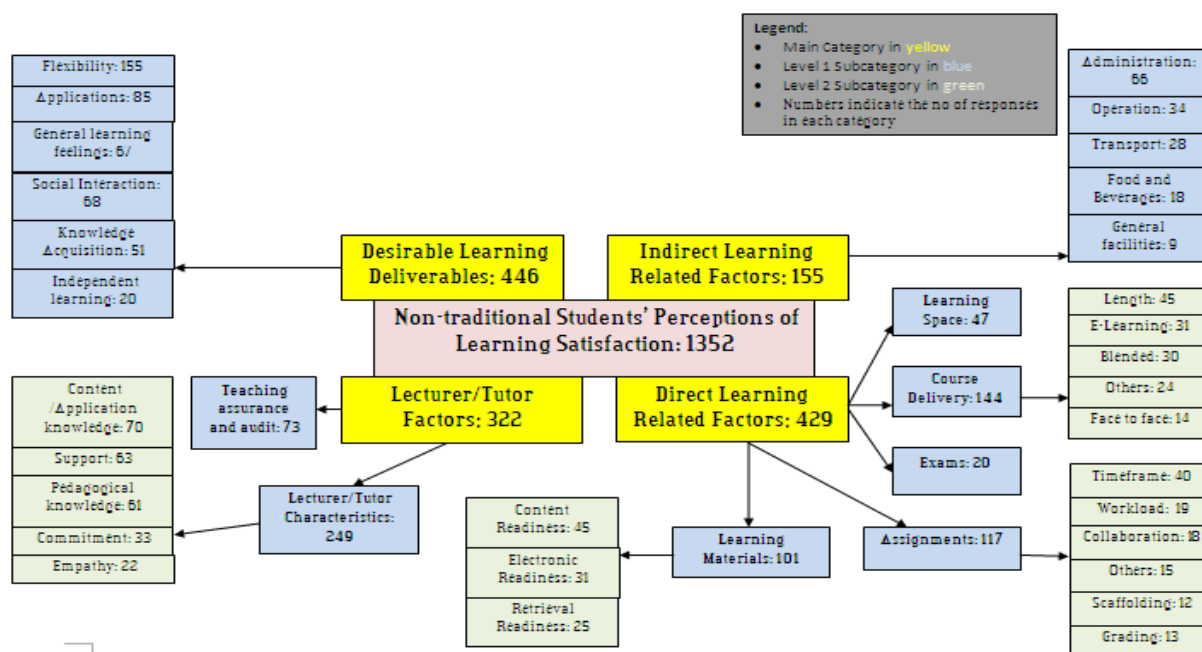
A mixed methods approach was adopted in the analysis. Qualitatively, each response was first coded, and grouped into main and subcategories in terms of

learning satisfaction. The coding and categorization was influenced by related literature to some extent. However, the final categories were still uniquely derived from the data. Quantitatively, the frequency of each code being mentioned was noted to illustrate its importance in the conceptualization of learning satisfaction. Eventually, there were a total of 679 (from 1570 responses) and 673 (from 1428 responses) meaningful codes derived from all the responses for Qn a) and Qn b) respectively. Non-analyzable responses included those like “Nil”, “NA”, “No comment”, “-“, “none”, “...” etc. More than one code could come from each meaningful response.

## 3. Analysis

The analysis showed that non-traditional learners’ learning satisfaction could be generally categorized into four main categories: a) Desirable Learning Deliverables; b) Directed Learning Related Factors; c) Lecturer/Tutor Factors and d) Indirect Learning Related Factors. A category mapping of the analysis of the conceptualization of learning satisfaction is shown below.

Figure 1. Category mapping of learning satisfaction.

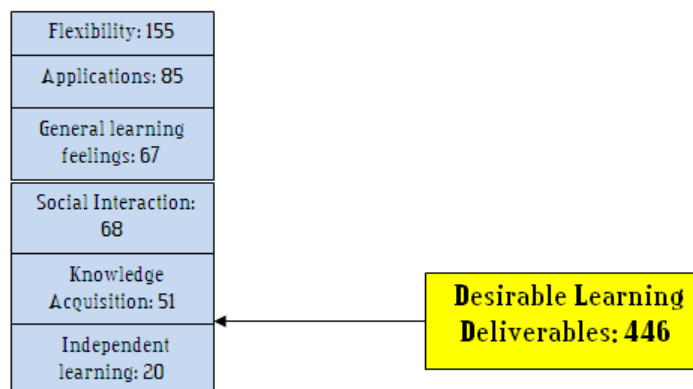


### 3.1. Desirable Learning Deliverables

There are five desirable learning deliverables as perceived by the learners - a) Flexibility; b) Applications, c) Knowledge Acquisition, d) Social Interaction and e) Independent

Learning. A subcategory of general learning feelings is added to this category to group positive comments about learning but are not specific enough to be grouped into a) to e).

Figure II. Category mapping of desirable learning deliverables



#### 3.1.1. Flexibility

There are 155 comments related to the flexibility of education. Flexibility of education is perceived by the students in terms of a) Time, b)Space, c)Pace and d)Subject Selection. There is another subcategory of general comments pertaining to the flexibility of learning but but not specific enough to be analyzed more in depth as the rest. Brief

descriptions of, and selected comments pertaining to, the five subcategories are shown in the table below. The numbers in the parentheses were used to identify the respondents to ensure anonymity and maintain a proper audit trail of the data. Comments were selected randomly and quoted to illustrate each category.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<u>Flexibility of Time</u> This refers to the choice of choosing when to study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility in choosing my timetable. (03474)</li> <li>That the courses suit working adults and are well spaced out over time. (00002)</li> </ul>
<u>Flexibility of Space</u> This refers to the choice of where to study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some are e-learning courses, accessible anywhere. (01798)</li> <li>Learning can done anywhere. (01751)</li> </ul>
<u>Flexibility of Pace</u> This refers to the choice of how fast one wants to study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn at my own pace. (02582)</li> <li>I can choose to spread out my modules across 5 years and this enables me to juggle my work and studies effectively. (00763)</li> </ul>
<u>Flexibility of Subject Selection</u> This refers to the choice of what course or module to study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The freedom to choose the course that best suited for me. (00594)</li> <li>The flexibility to choose subjects in each semester that suit students' preference, an option to take subjects with or without exams. (03956)</li> </ul>
<u>General</u> These comments points to flexibility of study but do not specify how it is flexible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible, independent learning environment. (05208)</li> <li>Very flexible especially for working adults. (07168)</li> </ul>

Table I. Flexibility.

### 3.1.2. Applications

85 comments are related to the importance of application of knowledge in their workplace or life. The table

below gives a brief description of the subcategory of Applications and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Applications</u></b></p> <p>This refers to the students' ability to use their knowledge learnt in the university in their workplaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutor should provide more real-life experience. (00787)</li> <li>• It is a very good learning ground as i think the main focus for university is to really teach us on how to apply what we use in real life rather than just teaching us how to study. (02795)</li> <li>• Useful knowledge that can be applied during work. (07052)</li> </ul>

Table II. Applications.

### 3.1.3. Social Interaction

Social interaction among peers and lecturers is quoted as desirable in 68 comments in the main category of

Desirable Learning Deliverables. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategory of Social Interaction and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Social Interaction</u></b></p> <p>It means the ability to interact and network with peers and lecturers during and after class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with the class and lecturers. (02988)</li> <li>• Making new friends and sharing many thoughts, ideas, similarities and diversified lifestyle. (08598)</li> <li>• More networking / social events could be carried out to foster bonds amongst students. (06841)</li> </ul>

Table III. Social interactions.

### 3.1.4. Knowledge Acquisition

A total of 51 comments are made in the subcategory of Knowledge Acquisition. Comments in this subcategory are related to students gaining knowledge in their education. Comments regarding knowledge in terms of applications are

separated from this subcategory and installed as an equal subcategory by itself due to its prevalence of occurrence in the data set. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategory of Knowledge Acquisition and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Knowledge Acquisition</u></b></p> <p>This means that the students gain knowledge in their study. Comments about application knowledge are grouped in this category.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning something new in every module. (04644)</li> <li>• Gaining unlimited amount of knowledge from knowledgeable lecturers. (05068)</li> <li>• From zero knowledge in keying Chinese inputs into the computer, till the day I submitted my assignments, I am very happy, that I made myself learnt something new. (08213)</li> </ul>

Table IV. Knowledge Acquisition.

### 3.1.5. Independent Learning

20 comments stated independent learning as important in their education. The table below gives a brief

description of the subcategory of Independent Learning and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Independent Learning</u></b> It means the students are self directed in their learning without the need of extensive prompting by lecturers and tutors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-learning has enabled us to explore the concepts ourselves and thus the knowledge attained tends to be stay in our long term memory. (06159)</li> <li>• Pushing myself not to give up. Discipline for self study. (06280)</li> <li>• Most of us are able to self study. (05410)</li> </ul>

Table V. Independent learning.

### 3.1.6. General Learning Feelings

These are feelings about learning that do not specify the areas they targeted at. Nevertheless, these feelings should also be captured as they might represent any of the other five subcategories referred

as desirable learning deliverables. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategory of General Learning Feelings and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>General Learning Feelings</u></b> They are students' feelings about learning but are not specific why these feelings arise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have good learning experience with University.... (06758)</li> <li>• Had been pleasant/satisfying, beneficial, very positive experience. (07086)</li> </ul>

Table VI. General learning feelings.

### 3.2. Lecturer/Tutor Factors

There are two subcategories related to main category of Lecturer/Tutor Factors. They are a) Teaching Assurance and Audit and b) Lecturer/Tutor Characteristics. 73 students believe that it is important to check on the quality of the lecturers and tutors to ensure effective delivery of lessons. 249 students listed

five desirable lecturer/tutor characteristics that can affect the effective delivery of lessons. They are a) Content/Application Knowledge, b) Pedagogical Knowledge, c) Support of Student Learning, d) Commitment to Teaching and e) Empathy towards Student Needs. There are a total of 322 comments pertaining to Lecturer/Tutor Factors.

Figure III. Category Mapping of Lecturer/tutor factors.

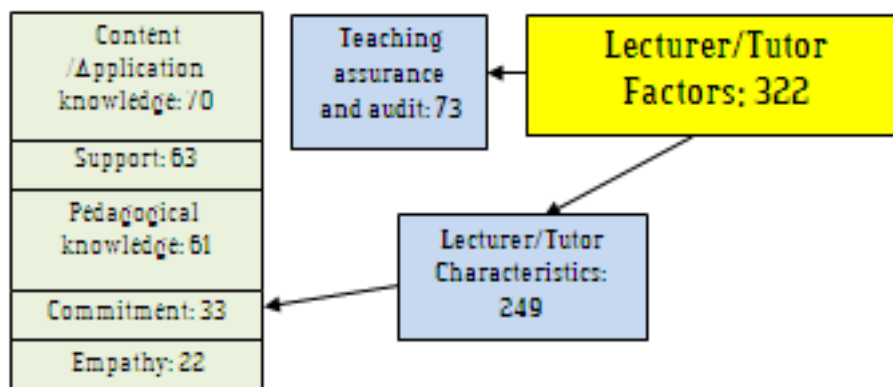


Table VII and Table VIII further elaborate and illustrate the two subcategories.

Level 1 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Teaching Assurance / Audit</u></b> It refers to the need to provide high quality lecturers through regular auditing and training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New tutors should be observed. (03724)</li> <li>• Hire the better grades lecturers. (07857)</li> </ul>

*Table VII. Teaching assurance/audit.*

Level 2 Subcategory	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Content / Application knowledge</u></b> The lecturer needs to have strong content and application knowledge in the fields he/she is teaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The company of highly knowledgeable lecturers and tutors. (08119)</li> <li>• Most of the lecturers are knowledgeable and shared their experiences as examples to the study course. (06878)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Support</u></b> The lecturer has to be helpful and prompt in addressing the student learning need both in and outside class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the tutors and lecturers are very approachable and helpful. (04317)</li> <li>• The email to the respective lecturers can be replied promptly to help to answer to the difficulties met when doing assignments. (05719)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Pedagogical knowledge</u></b> The lecturer needs to know the art and science of teaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of tutors needs to be looked into as some may be knowledgeable but lack the ability to pass on that knowledge. They are lacking in pedagogical skills. (01718)</li> <li>• It is fun and engaging and I look forward to lessons each time as the lecturers conduct interesting lessons. (04832)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Commitment</u></b> The lecturer has to show commitment in his/her teaching and to the student learning needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I really appreciate their encouragement and admire their passion in teaching. (03013)</li> <li>• Many part-time lecturers are not very passionate in education (01781)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Empathy</u></b> The lecturer needs to be understanding and caring to adult learners' needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of the tutors were understanding. (04957)</li> <li>• Lecturer needs to understand their difficulties in full filling assignments, attendances, many has families, and fulltime job. (00196)</li> </ul>

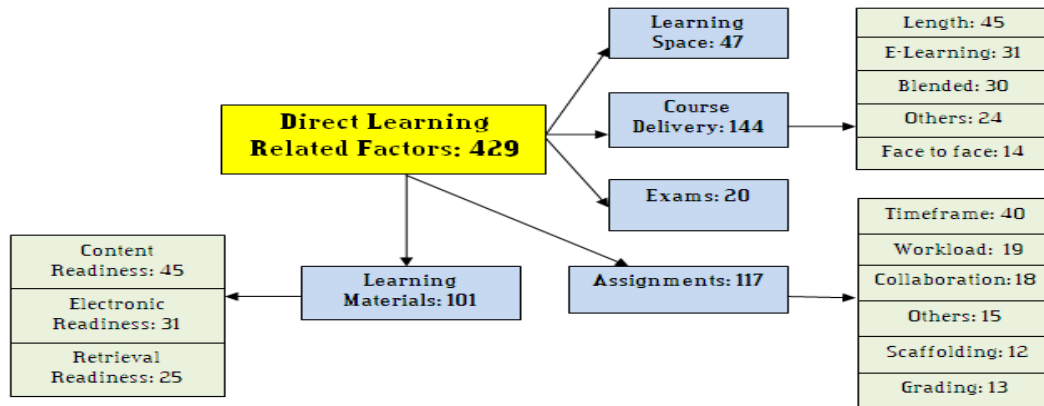
*Table VIII. Lecturer/tutor characteristics.*

### 3.3. Direct Learning Related Factors

There are a total of 429 comments that are directly related to different aspects of learning. There are five subcategories

- a) Course Delivery, b) Assignments, c) Learning Materials, d) Learning Space and e) Exams.

Figure IV. Category mapping of direct learning factors.



### 3.3.1. Course Delivery

There are five Level 2 subcategories in this Level 1 Category of Course Delivery. They are: a) Length, b) E-learning, c) Blended Learning, d) Face

to face and e) Others. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategories of Course Delivery and its relevant comments.

Level 2 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Length</u></b> It refers to the number of lessons conducted for each module.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The courses are very cramped. Learning a module in a few weeks is a tough job, especially for working adults who have family commitments as well. (01921)</li> <li>Timing and pace of lessons are just nice. (07115)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>E-learning</u></b> It refers to electronic learning through the Learning Management System.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I disagree with the idea of e learning. We pay the fees to learn but then most of the modules this semester are e learning. (02235)</li> <li>Encourage more e-learning and lesser of face to face tutorials or seminars. (07641)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Blended</u></b> It refers to the group of modules that are delivered both face to face and online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To include more face-to-face lectures for all subjects. To provide less e-learning. (06086)</li> <li>Maybe have more face to face sessions instead of e-learning. (07541)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Others</u></b> It refers to issues generally related to the types and duration of face to face delivery (seminar, lecture, tutorial, workshop etc.), class size and class procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More lecture than tutorial. (08624)</li> <li>smaller number of students per class. (00799)</li> <li>Perhaps lesser breaks between semesters so that we could complete our modules at a quicker pace. (06415)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Face to face</u></b> It refers seminars, lectures and tutorials that are conducted face to face.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have face to face classes. (01377)</li> <li>The face to face sessions allow us to learn more and better and quiz makes us explore more. (07714)</li> </ul>

Table IX. Course delivery.

### 3.3.2. Assignments

There are six Level 2 subcategories in this Level 1 Category of Assignments. They are: a) Timeframe, b) Workload, c) Collaboration, d) Grading, e)

Scaffolding and f) Others. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategories of Assignments and its relevant comments.



Level 2 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Timeframe</u></b> It refers generally to the submission deadline given to an assignment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve the assignment submission, the schedule is too rush, after 2 lessons, students have yet to understand the course content but we have to submit our assignments. (02582)</li> <li>Most of the subjects assignments, Quiz due date and exam dates are very close to one another, students got to juggle the test within a short span of time, possibly affecting the results. Perhaps can spread out a little?? (04375)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Workload</u></b> It refers to the amount of work needed to do an assignment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assignments are very heavy. (06280)</li> <li>The weekly assignments can be really taxing on working adults. (04017)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Collaboration</u></b> It refers to the pros and cons of peer collaboration in assignments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discard group assignment, please!! Not beneficial unless I am in the same office with my group mates. How can it be beneficial if one stays in Jurong, another in Pasir Ris, works the graveyard shift, another office hour? We meet in our dreams? Even that will clash with our different sleeping hours. (02460)</li> <li>If could add in few group assignments, it will be better. (05416)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Grading</u></b> It refers to the transparency and fairness in the grading process and the promptness and quality of feedback of the graded assignment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grades and return of assignments to be prompt. (00007)</li> <li>Allow students to view the marking rubrics so as to know how one can do better and improve in their work. (04739)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Scaffolding</u></b> It refers to the assistance rendered by the tutor in the process of doing the assignment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I was surprised to find that questions in the assignments were not taught before we were asked to attempt. (08948)</li> <li>More time may be set aside to go through tutor marked assignments, to help us to learn better. (01546)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Others</u></b> It refers to other comments related to assignments but cannot be grouped into any of the five typologies above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The availability of end of course assignment is an excellent way of assessment. (05081)</li> <li>Please remove the unnecessary video presentation for assignment. (03742)</li> </ul>

Table X. Assignments.

### 3.3.3. Learning Materials

There are three Level 2 subcategories in this Level 1 Category of Learning Materials. They are: a) Content Readiness, b) Electronic Readiness and

c) Retrieval Readiness. The table below gives a brief description of the subcategories of Learning Materials and its relevant comments.

Level 2 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Content Readiness</u></b> It refers to the availability of course and assessment information, course level of comprehensiveness, relevance, accuracy and update.</p>	<p>Some of the course materials were not helpful in the completion go assignment. (04220) Learning materials are sufficient. (02913)</p>

<p><u>Electronic Readiness</u> It refers to the availability of course material in the Blackboard.</p>	<p>Video record ALL the lectures and put them online. (03433) The video tutorial helps me a lot in catching up on those topics that I don't understand. (00109)</p>
<p><u>Retrieval Readiness</u> It refers to the collection and availability of course materials from vendors or library.</p>	<p>The current database for searching past year papers is very inconvenient. (02561) I would prefer to have the slides all printed and compiled. There could be a service vendor doing this for students and we could purchase it from them when we collect our study materials. It is tedious to log in to find the slides, print and compile them. Some students may not have printers/laser printer so this process is cumbersome!! (02267)</p>

Table XI. Learning materials.

### 3.3.4. Learning Space

There are 47 comments that are related to the students' learning space. The

table below gives a brief description of the subcategory of Learning Space and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><u>Learning Space</u> It refers to all issues related to the physical learning environment in terms of the availability, conditions and types of classrooms, study areas, laboratories, library etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The learning environment or classroom could be improved. (07465)</li> <li>• Clean and serene environment conducive for learning. (08687)</li> <li>• There should be more study benches around the University to provide more study area for students. (07108)</li> </ul>

Table XII. Learning space.

### 3.3.5. Examinations

There are 20 comments that are related to the issues concerning examinations. The table below gives a brief

description of the subcategory of Examinations and its relevant comments.

Level 1 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><u>Examinations</u> Issues related to timing and types of, and provision of revision class for, examinations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to the exams, lecturers should try to organize 1 revision lecture of each Term 1 modules. (06240)</li> <li>• I hoped that University could give a month for revision and preparation to the exam. currently we are having 2 wks.(02825)</li> <li>• There should not be any exams since its adult learning...would be more than happy if the exams are replaced with assignments. (03151)</li> </ul>

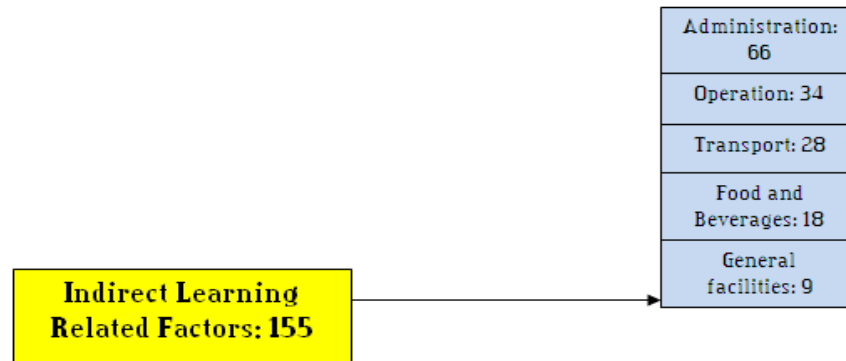
Table XIII. Examinations.

### 3.4. Indirect Learning Related Factors

Indirect learning factors are issues that are not directly linked to actions of learning. However, they can impact the student learning effectiveness as they can affect their subsequent emotions or moods in their process of learning. In this main

category of Indirect Learning Factors, there are five subcategories - a) Administration, b) Operation, c) Transport, d) Food and Beverages and e) General Facilities.

Figure V. Category mapping of indirect learning related factors.



The table below gives a brief description of each of the subcategory and some selected relevant comments.

Level 1 Sub - Category	Selected Comments
<p><b><u>Administration</u></b></p> <p>Issues related to course administration such as course structure and requirements, credit units, credit unit transfer, modules types and availability, fees etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think students should be informed of certain pre-requisites before taking on certain courses. (06992)</li> <li>Was very disappointed that the honors programme was removed without prior notice. (04518)</li> <li>Cheaper school fees. (07097)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Operation</u></b></p> <p>Issues related to ground operation support in the implementation of the courses such as helpdesk, online systems, lecture and seminar coordination, assignment submission procedures etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hope the University website and student portal will not be down especially on the period of assignment submission deadlines. (04010)</li> <li>Please make a point to inform students earlier in change of venue as it causes a lot inconveniences to us. (08488)</li> <li>Pleasant experience with University Support Team and staff and help given in time of difficulties. (02295)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Transport</u></b></p> <p>Issues related to availability and charges of car park lots and ease of travel to the campus due to frequent traffic conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parking is too expensive. (01790)</li> <li>Jam hour still bad to make to class on time. (05258)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Food and Beverages</u></b></p> <p>Issues related to availability, price and types of refreshments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More shops with various varieties to be open till 9 pm, some lecturers can carry out lessons longer, sending us late for break, mist of time we do not get a choice to choose from. (06704)</li> <li>Canteen food is expensive and prices have increased without notice. Chinese cooked food stall often overcharge. (00159)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>General Facilities</u></b></p> <p>Issues related to cleanliness, sign-ages and lightings of facilities such as toilets, bus stops, classroom etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean toilet please, every time the toilet was so smelly. like 2nd, 3rd, 4th floor. (00979)</li> <li>THE SMOKING AREA NEAR THE BUS-STOP, JUST BELOW OR NEXT TO THE OVERHEAD BRIDGE BY MANY YOUNG SMOKERS COULD BE MOVED TO SOMEWHERE? (07895)</li> </ul>

Table XIV. Indirect learning factors.

3.5. *Top five important subcategories*  
The top five important Level 1 subcategories (Total: 18) in terms of the

frequency of being mentioned in the data are shown below.

Rank	Category	Frequency	% of all responses
1	Lecturer/tutor Characteristics	249	18.4
2	Flexibility	155	11.5
3	Course Delivery	144	10.7
4	Assignments	117	8.7
5	Learning Materials	101	7.5

Table XV. Rankings of level 1 categories.

The data above showed that non-traditional students put a very strong emphasis on the academic aspects of their learning. The top 5 most frequently mentioned in the survey are related to “How”, “What” and “Who” in the teaching of the course content. The social, administration and physical aspects of their learning experiences did not seem have the same level of importance as academic factors according to the frequency count. The subcategory of Lecturer/tutor Characteristics was significantly higher than the next four subcategories in terms of frequency count. This highlighted the importance of Lecturer/tutor Characteristics in non-traditional students’ conceptualization of

learning satisfaction. This particular subcategory was further analyzed later in the paper. A second observation was that the flexibility of learning featured prominently in the analysis with a second highest frequency count of 155. Flexibility in learning can come in the form of course, pace, space and time. As such, it would be believed that flexibility in learning plays a very significant role in the conceptualization of learning satisfaction for the non-traditional learners.

The top five important Level 2 subcategories (Total: 19) in terms of the frequency of being mentioned in the data are shown below.

Rank	Category	Frequency	% of all responses
1	Content/Application Knowledge	70	5.2
2	Support	63	4.7
3	Pedagogical Knowledge	61	4.5
4	Content Readiness	45	3.3
5	Length	45	3.3

Table XVI. Rankings of level 2 categories.

The data above showed that among the academic aspects of learning as prioritised by non-traditional learners as part of their learning satisfaction, the characteristics of lecturers/tutors are of great importance as the top three of the level 2 categories are related to it. This may mean that the learning satisfaction of a non-traditional learner depends greatly on a lecturer being knowledgeable in the content taught, prompt and helpful in meeting his or her learning needs and pedagogically sound to teach well.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis of the data has shown that the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners came from a wide repertoire of factors as the literature had shown. These factors can be academic, administration, social, physical or personal. In the case of this research, it was uncovered that non-traditional learners' learning satisfaction can come from four main categories: a) Desirable Learning Deliverables; b) Directed Learning Related Factors; c) Lecturer/Tutor Factors and d) Indirect Learning Related Factors.

In summary, although the analysis showed that the conceptualization of learning satisfaction can come from a number of factors, two individual factors featured more prominently in terms of frequency count. And, the data here had specifically shown that academic factors might play a more determining role in affecting the learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners as the frequency count of the Level 1 and Level 2 categories had shown. This might show that non-traditional learners are more focused on issues that affect their academic achievement directly. As this study did not aim to distinguish the differences in learning satisfaction between traditional learners and non-traditional learners, it could not be established if traditional learners take academic issues as the most

important factors in their conceptualization of learning satisfaction. It is hypothesized that one of the reasons why non-traditional learners perceive academic factors as most important in their conceptualization of learning satisfaction could be probably only attend lessons at night or during weekends and may not have the time to engage in other social activities within the institution's campus. Another possible reason might be non-traditional learners, as mature learners, are probably less bothered by, and are able to handle more effectively, factors related to administration, operations or the physical environment. The emphasis of academic factors in the conceptualization of learning satisfaction was unique in the case university might be a possible explanation. These hypothesized explanations would need further verification.

Two individual factors featured more prominently in terms of frequency count. They are the flexibility of learning and the characteristics of the lecturer/tutor. The reason why flexibility of learning is important to non-traditional learners could be best explained by the fact that they are juggling work, family, social life and study. Therefore it is important for them to have flexibility in terms of time, space, pace and course. As for the second factors of lecturer/tutor characteristics, it can most probably be attributed to fact that they would like to learn as much as possible within the short period of time they had for each lesson and a lecturer who can impart his vast knowledge to them effectively through good teaching methods and willing to help them promptly would be their best bet. However, all the above propositions need to be further investigated in future studies.

#### 5. Conclusion

The research has answered the research question, "What are the factors that

influence the learning satisfaction experienced by non-traditional learners?”, Understanding how students conceptualised learning satisfaction can help tertiary educational institutions to make the necessary adjustment to address the deficiencies in identified factors. Such follow-ups are very important as learner satisfaction can have impact on learning effectiveness through improving learning persistence and student attrition (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Jamelske, 2009; Özgüngör, 2010). In the context of Singapore, from a learning viewpoint, this study has an important implication as understanding the conceptualization of non-traditional learners’ conceptualization of learning satisfaction can help local educators to formulate plans to improve their learning persistence and attrition that can be closely correlated to their learning satisfaction. Knowing that non-traditional learners possibly focused certain academic issues as their conceptualization of learning satisfaction, the case university can focus on addressing them as a starting point to improve learning satisfaction. At the same time, from a research viewpoint, this study can contribute to the existing relevant literature related to learning satisfaction of non-traditional learners.

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