

An Instrument Design to Measure Institutional Support of Transfer Students

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Abstract: Only 10% of institutional services in higher education are transfer specific (Bobbitt et al., 2021). The researchers designed an instrument, modified from the Laanan Transfer Student Questionnaire (L-TSQ), to investigate the relationship between institutional support and student success for transfer program participants at a mid-sized university in Southwest Florida. The findings may help institutions to improve institutional support offerings for students in transition by understanding what types of institutional support have positively influenced transfer student success. Prior to undertaking a larger quantitative study on the relationship of institutional support and transfer student success, a pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility of the survey questionnaire and data collection processes. The purpose of this study was to describe the pilot testing process, explore feasibility issues, and improve the instrument and methodology before initiating the main research project with a sample of transfer program participants at one university.

Keywords: pilot study, instrument design, student transfer, transfer program, transfer student questionnaire

1. Introduction

The traditional college student who enrolls immediately following graduation from high school no longer represents most of today's students; thus, the focus needs to shift to attracting and retaining transfer students (Florida College Access Network [FCAN], 2018). Upon transferring to a university, students are overwhelmingly introduced to larger classrooms, increased financial demands, and expectations to perform academically at the same level as peers who entered immediately following high school graduation. As a result, transfer students can undergo overwhelming academic and social adjustments when transitioning to the university. To make the transfer student pathway viable, to increase access to underrepresented populations, and to provide necessary support to complete a degree, it is essential to think beyond simply linking two institutions to support transfers throughout the adjustment period. To understand the complexities of supporting AA graduates in transition, it is important that an appropriate instrument is developed to examine the relationship between institutional support and transfer student success. The purpose of this pilot study was to produce a suitable instrument to measure the relationship of institutional support and transfer student success for participants of a transfer program in a university in Southwest Florida. The study also aimed to understand the influence of state/community college factors and university factors in relation to student success as defined by student grade point average (GPA).

2. Brief Literature Review

Alternative transfer pathways are more formally taking shape to combat the rising admission standards and tuition costs, but they are not producing graduates at the same pace as traditional pathways (Burke, 2019; Solodev, 2021). Transferring and adjusting to a university is complex and requires psychological, academic, and environmental adjustments (Laanan et al., 2010). Laanan was the first to introduce the social and psychological perspective of the transfer adjustment and introduced the L-TSQ. The L-TSQ is a comprehensive instrument designed to gather demographic, social, and academic experiences of transfer students at 2- and 4- year higher education institutions to understand the complexity of the students' adjustment to the receiving institution (Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004). Transfer students tend to represent a diverse student population (i.e., first-generation status, race, age, gender, experience, etc.), so background data paralleled with institutional support can inform transition services (Laanan, 2004). As a result, development of an instrument to examine the relationship of institutional support and transfer student success will complement existing research and provide new understanding founded on student experiences, outcomes, and institutional data. Laanan (2004, 2007) has previously conducted extensive analysis to ensure the L-TSQ instrument can yield valid and reliable results. All questions included in the modified survey were deemed reliable with a coefficient value of .7 or higher (Laanan, 2004). Laanan's (2004, 2007) studies on community college transfers enable future researchers to develop similar research designs and applications. The present pilot study intends to further confirm the instrument's consistency in collecting data from transfer students to examine the relationship of institutional support and student success.

3. Research Methods

The research design included item design, questionnaire delivery data, collection and data analysis, and advanced improvement of survey items and the questionnaire. The instrument was designed in Qualtrics, a popular Web-based survey company, chosen for the economy of design and rapid turnaround time. To ensure the instructions were

understandable and communicated efficiently, a pilot study was conducted for three weeks to obtain feedback on clarity, errors, and impartiality of questions. The research instrument is a modified version of the L-TSQ developed to measure various academic and social components of support within the context of the state college or the university. It is important to note that previously validated surveys require the collection of additional reliability and validity in this specific study's context (Rickards, et al., 2012). The L-TSQ was modified to limit the number of questions with the intent of increasing the response rate. The modified survey is composed of three main sections that collected specific data on institutional support received throughout the transfer adjustment in relation to student success as defined by GPA. The structure of the questionnaire design for each section is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

The structure of the questionnaire design

		Goals	Number of questions	Types of questions	Question samples
Section 1	Background	Basic demographic and academic information (age, gender, entry term, academic program)	9	Multiple choice, text answer, and sliding scale	What is your academic major at FGCU?
Section 2	Institutional Factors	State/community college factors	12	Likert-scale	I consulted with academic counselors regarding transfer.
		University Factors	12	Likert-scale	Upon transferring, I felt alienated at this 4-year university.
Section 3	Institutional Experiences	Influential experiences	4	Open-ended	Please share any experiences you feel positively influenced your adjustment to the university.

4. Preliminary Results

The pattern of survey responses for this pilot study provided useful feedback to improve the instrument for future research. As a result of the pilot study, a handful of questions were reworded to increase clarity and align interpretation with researchers' intent. Through the initial responses and feedback received, improvements were made to several of the instrument's items to increase clarity and remove unintentional bias; thereby increasing the likelihood that respondents will interpret the items in the manner intended (Rickards, et al., 2012). For example, in the institutional experiences section, questions inquiring about experiences were amended to explicitly ask for examples to generate more fruitful responses. Additionally, questions were added to the institutional experiences section to capture respondent contact information for a follow-up interview to capture insightful qualitative data.

5. Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. The respondents may fail to provide honest answers pertaining to GPA that would skew the understanding of student success and invalidate data. Another limitation is the limited scope of the survey data as it only measures a single point in time to examine a single transfer program unless additional surveys are conducted (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

6. Significant Contributions

This instrument design was developed as the initial phase to conduct a future study. For the future project, the researchers will employ a mixed methods approach to collect data through survey questionnaire to measure the relationship between institutional support and transfer student success for participants of a transfer program in Southwest Florida. In addition to the survey questionnaire, in-person interviews will be conducted from the sample providing additional opportunity for instrument improvement. The research project can also provide a platform for researching other transfer programs. Future studies should focus on specific institutional support services or transfer program benefits to determine the individual support provided in relation to success indicators.

References

Available upon request.