

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY BASED ON THE STAKEHOLDERS THEORY*

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Abstract

In accordance with the importance that the student stakeholder represents to universities, the objective of this research project was to identify and classify the leading expectations of students at public universities. In order to achieve this, the study adopted both the premises of Stakeholder Theory and the approaches of earlier studies on the management of university stakeholders. This empirical study began with an exploratory study of students, at one university, to identify their expectations this resulting in a list of a total of twenty-five confirmed expectations. This provided the basis for the subsequent quantitative study involving students attending eleven Portuguese public universities. Through recourse to an online questionnaire, we obtained 1,669 correctly completed surveys that provided the input for data analysis deploying descriptive statistical processes and multiple linear regressions. Our findings show that the most important student expectations are the academic level of demand, the university's connections with the employment market, student personal self-fulfillment and the prevailing university environment. According to students, these expectations should gain priority attention by university managers, once they consider them the most relevant aspects to the relationship between the student and the university.

Keywords: stakeholders, stakeholder management, university management, expectations, students.

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1. Introduction

The social and economic perspectives in the early phase of the 21st century, deriving from progress in technology in general and information and communication technologies in particular, have demanded new forms of organisational management in all types of companies (Clark, 2004). Many of the longstanding paradigms of the management field have been changing and adapting to this new reality. This reformist context around company management models prevails irrespective of what they do or of their respective sector of activity (McVea and Freeman, 2005).

It is within these new circumstances that one of the oldest and most influential organisations of society, the university, has been called upon to contribute towards meeting two great challenges: on the one hand, consolidate, broaden and facilitate general access to higher education and, on the other hand, aid in responding to the need for international competitiveness resulting from globalisation processes (Neave, 2000). A knowledge society needs citizens with advanced levels of education and critical and creative visions of the world, facets acquired during university level education. Furthermore, university should also focus its efforts on research, conveying and transferring knowledge and technology in accordance with benchmarks of excellence (Meek, 2006).

It would correspondingly be expected for new proposals to be put forward for university management. One of the management fields that has begun to raise researchers' interest looks at the relationships between universities and their stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno, 2008). Various authors taking this approach have argued that analysis of stakeholders may be the key to identifying problems requiring resolution (for example, Freeman, 1984; Frooman, 1999; Bryson, 2004; Friedman and Miles, 2006), especially in situations where power is diffuse, there are many participants, either affected or who have partial responsibility for taking action (Beach, 2008).

According to Polonsky (1995), stakeholder management involves: (1) identifying the groups relevant to the organisational management, (2) determining the participation and importance of each stakeholder group, (3) determining to what extent the needs and expectations of each group are currently being met, (4) modifying corporative policies and priorities to take into consideration the respective stakeholder interests.

Hence, one fundamental aspect to managing stakeholder relationships is knowing just what they expect and need from the organisation (Frooman, 1999). For example, in universities, students are deemed one of the most important stakeholders given that, after all, their existence is implicit to the university's own existence (Duke, 2002). Nevertheless, not many universities set out to discover and meet the needs of their students. This may result from the student having proven to be a passive subject in this relationship and prepared to accept whatever the decision handed down by the university is (Neave, 2000).

The identification of students' demands within the scope of Stakeholder Theory has not been a common theme in the literature. There are only a handful of studies raising

these issues. In these few studies, student demands are normally approached from the perspective of university managers and not the students themselves (Chapman *et al.*, 2010). Thus, we opted to look at the expectations of students within the scope of Stakeholder Theory. The core project objectives are to identify and classify by level of importance the key expectations of students towards the university.

To achieve this, we first provide a brief review of the literature on Stakeholder Theory and on university stakeholder management. Subsequently, we discuss the relationship between these parties before moving on to present the research methodology adopted and the analysis of the data collected. The article ends with conclusions, recommendations and study limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Stakeholder Theory

The ideas of Freeman (1984) emerged out of an organisational context where it became clear that the company was not self-sufficient and actually depended on its relationships with internal and external ambiances, made up of interest groups both internal and external to the organisation, as observed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). These were the groups that affect or are affected by the company and which Freeman (1984) named stakeholders.

In the opinion of Jones and Wicks (1999) and Savage, Dunkin and Ford (2004), the key premises of Stakeholder Theory are based upon:

- The organisation has relationships with many groups affecting or affected by the company, its stakeholders according to Freeman (1984);
- The theory approaches the nature of these relationships in terms of processes and results for the company and the stakeholders;
- The interests of all legitimate stakeholders hold intrinsic value and it is assumed that no set of interests will prevail over others, as Clarkson (1995), and Donaldson and Preston (1995) observed;
- The theory focuses upon management decision-making;
- The theory explains that stakeholders will try and influence the decision-making processes of the organisation in order to consistently fashion them within their own needs and priorities; and
- Organisations seek to understand and balance the interests of the various intervening participants.

Taking these premises into consideration, Clarkson (1995), Donaldson and Preston (1995), Rowley (1997), Scott and Lane (2000), and Baldwin (2002) propose that the concept of stakeholder management is put forward so as to enable organisations to recognise, analyse and examine the characteristics of individuals and groups who influence or are influenced by organisational behaviour. This management is made across three levels: the identification of stakeholders, the development of processes able to recognise their needs and interests and the construction of relationships with them, and entirely from a perspective of attaining the organisation's own objectives.

On the other hand, stakeholders define their expectations, internalise the effects of their relational experiences with the organisation, evaluate the results obtained and act accordingly, whether to strengthen or weaken their ties with the company (Polonsky, 1995; Post, Preston and Sachs, 2002; Neville, Bell and Mengüç, 2005).

Thus, organisational strategic positioning should take into account these internal and external environments, their resources and internal competences and the expectations and influences of stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997). We may therefore conclude that one of the main contributions of Stakeholder Theory is its influence over the management and strategic development of organisations: changing the nature of management decisions, changing the type of objectives, and changing the strategic architecture and point of view. According to Zirgūtis (2008), the results of activities focused upon stakeholders and their consequences may be seen either as just additional obstacles or as potential drivers of enhanced competitiveness.

As Clement (2005) stated, modern organisations are placed under ever more pressure to respond to distinct groups of stakeholders. Clarkson (1995) had already pointed out how the survival and success of an organisation depended on the capacity of its managers to generate wealth, value and satisfaction for its stakeholders. Similarly, Cummings and Doh (2000) attribute the competitiveness of a company to its capacity to relate with its stakeholders. Its multiple roles, representing an important factor in the analysis of the company's chain of value, contribute with the information, resources and competences necessary for organisations to cope with uncertain and turbulent environments. Preston and Donaldson (1999) argue that stakeholder management may boost the wealth of the organisation and that economic benefits derive from positive relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders. The authors necessarily include the determination and evaluation of service value perceptions held by stakeholders, including facets such as the sharing of knowledge, complementary resources, capacities and patterns of cooperation.

2.2. University stakeholder management

Conway, Mackay and Yorke (1994) highlight how higher education contains multiple stakeholders, simultaneously complementary and contradictory. The different desires and needs of these distinct stakeholders may sometimes enter into conflict and throw up difficulties to strategies designed to meet their needs effectively (taking into consideration the expected results) and efficiently (utilising the minimum level of resources). According to Bertrand and Busugutsala (1998), universities should, beyond actually identifying their respective stakeholders, recognise the different expectations and needs (demands) present in each case. Their approach divided the demands up into three different categories: (i) non-student demands, such as scientific fields, professional entities, employer associations and society as a whole, (ii) the demands of students as individuals, and (iii) the demands of the target group of students who have particular characteristics and for whom universities should provide specific and carefully defined services.

Even while a complex exercise, the management of university stakeholders proves a necessary endeavour. In order to guarantee a place in a modern knowledge based economy, universities everywhere face an obligation to thoroughly rethink their role and their relationships with diverse actors and communities. This is reflected in activities such as identifying participants, classifying them in accordance with their relative importance and establishing relations with stakeholders in accordance with their importance and respective demands. In a university (or even in its many constituent parts), the capacity to identify, prioritise and get involved with communities reflects the state of organisational evolution (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno, 2008).

Identifying intervening institutional participants is a correspondingly important first step but achieves little in terms of understanding and prioritising the demands of interested parties. To this end, in accordance with Burrows (1999), mechanisms able to discover the patterns of differences and similarities between stakeholder groups are needed. The literature reveals various different types of differentiation between stakeholders: internal and external, active and passive, potential partners and threats (Freeman, 1984; Harrison and St. John, 1994; Clarkson, 1995; Frooman, 1999). Burrows (1999) puts forward four dimensions for universities to differentiate between their stakeholders based upon their location, state of participation, potential for cooperation and threat, and their participation and influence in the organisation. In this way, universities are able to define their missions and goals in order to reflect the needs of their internal and external stakeholders.

As regards the actual management of duly identified and categorised stakeholders, the institutional mission and objectives should provide direction regarding the deployment of resources and the respective weightings of the allocations. The future of universities incorporates the recognition of the demands of multiple actors connected to higher education (Hagenbuch, 2006). The institutions, in their declared missions, have already explicitly recognised their obligation to meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders. However, diverse interests generate conflicts that the management encounters when dealing with competing demands and expectations (Macfarlane and Lomas, 1999).

Hence, according to Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2007), the legitimacy of higher education in society will increasingly be evaluated in terms of the levels of quality and commitment that institutions in the sector establish and maintain with their stakeholders. These institutions gain and maintain their social legitimacy through the forms and means of guaranteeing quality and the responsibility shown towards clients. Academic research and study programs may be adapted to the demands of the various stakeholders. This means that higher education institutions need to seek out ways of involving their stakeholders so as to be able to understand the value of the service rendered and the means for its respective improvement.

A stakeholder governance model seems better adapted to the collegial and representative governance of universities, especially when their governance processes involve a broad range of stakeholders, including, among others, students, teaching staff,

corporate partners, the government and the public in general (Baldrige, 1983; Hill, Green and Eckel, 2001; Longin, 2002). Another model is that of shared governance, closely resembling the organised anarchy model (Schick, 1992; Drummond and Reitsch, 1995; Eckel, 2000; Trakman, 2008). Stakeholder governance provides for the broad reaching participation of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making and extending beyond the nomination of the range of stakeholder representatives (Alfred, 1985; Gilmour Jr., 1991; Floyd, 1994; Lapworth, 2004; Currie, 2005). One typical example of stakeholder focused governance is the university board membership of community groups, which, while having no formal association with the university, reflect environmental, ethnic, gender and other public interests of particular pertinence to the university. The problem with stakeholder governance lies in determining just which entities should be represented on such bodies, their means of representation and the extent of the authority to be attributed.

Despite these difficulties, universities typically deploy some form of stakeholder governance in nominating or electing members of academic staff, students, and government representatives along with other stakeholders. However, they diverge significantly in the composition of their councils as well as the authority attributed to the different stakeholders (Baldrige, 1983; Wolvin, 1991; Leatherman, 1998; McCormack and Brennen, 1999; Baldwin and Leslie, 2001; Gerber, 2001; Tierney, 2001; Gayle, Tewarie and White Jr., 2003).

Furthermore, higher education institutions should develop their capacity to manage the pressures applied by the different stakeholder groups as well as the tensions in the co-existence of competition in cooperative regimes. The importance of identifying and guiding stakeholders in accordance with the strategic objectives of the institution needs to be one of the key steps in setting out and implementing a stakeholder management strategy. In order to nurture the development and effectiveness of such strategies, universities should create specific structures for managing their stakeholder relationships. Taking into account the importance of analysing and managing stakeholder expectations and values, the following are among the recommendations made in the literature (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno, 2007):

- Higher education institutions should map out the relationships between intervening parties in terms of high, medium or low priority;
- Stakeholder management strategies need to be set out and accompanied by a process/methodology for evaluating both the relationships resulting and the benefits accruing to the institutional mission; and
- Core institutional values also need to be maintained and kept relevant to the surrounding environment.

In summary, each university, in order to be competitive, has to carefully evaluate the challenges and threats posed by the environment, understand stakeholder needs, attract and consolidate resources, face up to external changes and resolve internal problems. The capacity of a university to react to the prevailing environmental threats, to meet

the needs of its publics and to resolve internal problems determines the institutional stakeholder orientation (Clarke III, Flaherty and Mottner, 2001; Tam, 2007).

3. Research methodology

Taking into account that the research objective incorporates the quantification of the perceptions of expectations held by the student stakeholder with the goal of confirming and classifying such demands, this research made recourse to a descriptive-quantitative methodology (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2003). A descriptive approach was necessary so as to describe the reality analysed from the students' point of view. However, the study was also quantitative given the objective of quantifying students' perceptions and undertaking statistical confirmation of the results obtained. This objective explains the deployment of the methodology adopted given that it seemed most appropriate to attaining the aforementioned goals.

3.1. Population and sample definition

The target population of this research was made up of all students (irrespective of their level of study) in attendance at eleven of the fifteen Portuguese state universities. The exclusion of four universities is due to the fact that they differ from the other eleven: three are university foundations with differentiated management methods and the remaining one focuses upon distance learning. The target population was calculated to total 129,534 students.

Considering that the target population is finite, the sample structure was stratified disproportionately, where the stratum was the cycle of study attended by the student and which contains non-proportional quantities of individuals (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, all students at these eleven universities, across all cycles of study, were deemed potential respondents given that all were called upon to participate in the research.

This strategy sought to obtain a response level sufficient to obtain statistically valid results and thereby enabling their generalisation. Following the conclusion of data collection, the project had received 1,669 correctly completed questionnaires (a total of 163 questionnaires were excluded on found to be incomplete), which enables the statistic validation of the data collected, with the final error determined as 2.43%, a level of significance lower than the maximum rate of 5% as set out by Malhotra (1999). The final response rate stood at 1.29%.

3.2. Technical and data collection procedures

Given the lack of known research identifying students' expectations, the questionnaire set out required prior research, of an exploratory nature, for obtaining the evidence necessary to test on the final sample. Hence, we carried out a series of ten interviews with university students. Following content analysis of interview responses, we obtained an initial list of 36 expectations that were subsequently grouped into 25 given the similarities existing between some responses.

The data obtained in the exploratory research provided the grounds for the research questionnaire. The characteristic features of this questionnaire are self-applied, structured and non-disguised (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2003). The first part of the questionnaire detailed a brief description of the research objectives and its target audience. There then came questions referring to student expectations before proceeding with some questions designed to characterise respondents.

As regards student expectations, we first drafted a question seeking the respondent's opinion on each of the 25 demands. To respond to each of the 25 expectations, a differential semantic scalogram was set out on a five point scale (that is, a Likert type scale) (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2003) on which the respondent chooses between totally disagree, partially disagree, neither agree nor disagree, partially agree, totally agree, don't know / don't answer (a sixth option where the respondent either does not want to or cannot respond to the question). Each expectation only gets one response. After responding with their opinions on each of the 25 expectations, the respondents were questioned as to their general expectations in relation to their university studies (a question with six alternatives – very low, low, medium, high, very high, don't know / don't answer) and their general expectations in relation to the university (with the same six alternatives).

The questionnaire ended with details as to the individual respondent: the university attended, cycle of study attended, degree studies, age, gender, professional experience (in years) in the area of study, and professional experience (in years) outside the area of study.

Following the setting out of the questionnaire, it was then subject to two pre-tests for content validation. Following the pre-tests, the questionnaire was ruled to be ready for application. Through the intermediation of the Public Relations Office of the university hosting the research, the questionnaire was sent out via email to all students at the eleven Portuguese state universities participating in the research and requesting that they fill it on-line. The 1,832 questionnaires returned were received from the period between 29th April and 21st May 2010. Following the latter date, evaluation began on the data collected focusing upon whether there was any bias in responses or eventual failures/problems in filling out the questionnaires returned. Of the 1,832 questionnaires received, 1,669 were found to be valid for analysis.

3.3. Data analysis techniques

Following the completion of data collection, we proceeded with a range of quantitative analysis tests. The first corresponded to the characterisation of respondents, analysing diverse aspects, with the objective of detecting eventual trends that would compromise the analysis.

First, the data was subject to analysis through descriptive statistics, such as averages, standard deviations, variances, among others. Then, the data was subject to multivariate analysis through multiple linear regression (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2006). The dependent variables were the general expectations of students about their degree and

their university. Meanwhile, the independent variables were the 25 expectations that were subject to evaluation in terms of individual expectations.

In order to classify expectations, the main objective of this study, we adopted the method set out by Garver (2003) and its approach to evaluate the importance of attributes (in this case, student expectations), utilising the results of the perceptions declared by respondents and the statistically calculated importance via multiple linear regressions:

- Expectations obtaining higher than average rankings and also attaining statistical significance in regression are considered “key”;
- Expectations obtaining lower than average declared rankings and that do not attain statistical significance in regression are considered “secondary”;
- Expectations obtaining higher than average rankings but which do not attain statistical significance in regression are considered “basic”; and
- Expectations obtaining lower than average rankings but which do attain statistical significance in regression are considered “amplifiers”.

Based upon this methodology and the analysis described in this section, it was possible to attain the research objectives: the confirmation and classification by importance of the expectations identified in the exploratory research.

4. Data analysis

As regards the analysis of the data collected, first the sample was analysed before carrying out the descriptive analyses and the multiple linear regressions of the variables tested. This procedure enabled the key, basic, amplifier and secondary attributes to be extracted. The analytical process is described below.

4.1. Sample characterisation

The objective of this analytical stage was to validate the sample as well as to identify any eventual errors or biases in the research answers collected through control variables, in this case the respondent characteristics. A summary of respondent characteristics is given in Table 1.

Based on the analysis of the data set out in Table 1, we find that the distribution of respondents across the eleven universities researched does enable the conclusion that no institution had an excessively high response rate or that they might overwhelmingly represent the opinions of students at one particular university and hence the results obtained do represent the generality of students at Portuguese state universities.

As regards the respective cycles of study, it would be expected that the majority of respondents would attend the first cycle of study as most students are undertaking the first cycle (Taylor *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, this correlates with the responses obtained as 60.81% of respondents were in the first cycle. We should draw attention to the low level of students taking specialist or other courses distinct to the 1, 2 and 3 cycles (only 0.72%). These courses represent an alternative source of revenues for the university but the quantity of responses obtained from students on such courses in particular may represent the low incidence of its type at the universities researched.

Table 1: Summary of research respondent characteristics

Respondent Characteristics		
University	UAlg	3.18%
	UAc	11.38%
	UBI	10.43%
	UC	8.09%
	UEvora	7.19%
	UL	8.33%
	UMa	9.23%
	UMinho	6.17%
	UNL	17.56%
	UTL	14.68%
	UTAD	3.76%
Cycle of studies	1st Cycle	60.81%
	2nd Cycle	28.28%
	3rd Cycle	10.19%
	Other	0.72%
Area of study	Exact Science	29.18%
	Biological and Healthcare Sciences	11.50%
	Social and Human Sciences	51.59%
	No Response	7.73%
Age	Average	24.24 years
	Minimum	17 years
	Maximum	67 years
Gender	Male	39.72%
	Female	60.28%
Professional experience in area of study	Average	1.54 years
	Minimum	0.40 years
	Maximum	30 years
	None	70.10% of cases
Professional experience beyond area of study	Average	2.16 years
	Minimum	0.25 years
	Maximum	41 years
	None	59.68% of cases

Source: Research data

In relationship to the field of study, it was found that around a half of students answering this question belong to the fields of the social and human sciences. This majority was also to be expected given that a large majority of the degrees provided by the Portuguese state university system fall within this scope. This fact also extends to other types of public and private higher education institutions as such social science degrees require less investment than degrees linked to the exact sciences or biology/healthcare. Therefore, as it is easier to supply such degrees, this results in an excess in certain specific areas, such as law and management (Levy, 2002). This reality certainly holds for the prevailing Portuguese higher education sector.

Other variables reveal: an average respondent age of 24.24 years, a fairly high average (and hence, the older the student, the greater the propensity to respond to the questionnaire), the majority of respondents were female (over 60%), a trend that is widely observed in developed countries (Levy, 2008). Despite the fairly high age, the professional experience of students, whether in the field of study (1.54 years on average), or beyond it (2.16 years on average) demonstrates that the professional experience of Portuguese university students on completing their degrees is low. In fact, the majority have no experience at all both in the field of study (70.10%) and in other professional areas (59.68%). This final aspect proves to be an important indicator for university management, especially in questions relating to student professional development and enhancing professional opportunities.

In summary, following analysis of respondent characteristics, it was confirmed that the sample represents the reality of the universities under study and there is no bias present that might in any way compromise the results obtained.

4.2. Student expectations in relation to their degree and their university

Based upon the expectations drawn from the initial interviews, this part of the research sought to confirm the demands (expectations, needs, desires) of students and to this end deploying a differential semantic scale of the Likert type (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2003). For each one of the 25 expectations tested, the students were requested to provide their level of agreement with options ranging from “totally disagree” through to “totally agree”. The results obtained are featured in Table 2.

From the analysis of Table 2 we find out firstly that all expectations returned averages in excess of three meaning and that all expectations tested for were included among student expectations, desires and needs prior to entering university. The importance of measuring expectations after having begun their studies is that prior to embarking upon them, there is neither the perception nor the understanding as to the reality of university. Only after utilisation of the organisational services is the student able to compare that expected with that received and hence ensuring the opportunity to determine the expectations the student brought into the university and when the reality becomes clear (Mainardes, Alves and Domingues, 2009).

In general terms, the student nurtures greater expectations on entering the university in relation to the degree (an average of 3.90, which practically corresponds to the highest level of expectation), even while expectations in relation to the university are also relatively high (3.75).

Table 2: Descriptive results of the 25 student demands

Descriptive Statistics				
	No.	Average	Standard Deviation	Variance
Expec_Level_demand	1669	4.06	1.061	1.126
Expec_New_friends_Academic_life	1669	3.79	1.167	1.361
Expec_Good_job	1669	4.40	1.006	1.012
Expec_Practical_classes	1669	3.69	1.184	1.402
Expec_Updated_content	1669	4.45	0.926	0.857
Expec_Financial_support	1669	3.47	1.297	1.683
Expec_Good_infrastructures	1669	4.45	0.891	0.794
Expec_Good_services	1669	4.44	0.919	0.845
Expec_Coordination_bet_lecturers	1669	4.27	1.011	1.023
Expec_Lecturer_availability	1669	3.98	1.083	1.174
Expec_Scientific_research	1669	3.62	1.247	1.555
Expec_Motivating_classes	1669	4.29	1.010	1.020
Expec_University_agile_adaptable	1669	4.10	1.058	1.120
Expec_Clear_bureaucratic_processes	1669	3.98	1.202	1.445
Expec_Technological_structure	1669	4.38	0.947	0.896
Expec_Connections_with_job_market	1669	4.41	1.000	0.999
Expec_Freedom_of_thinking	1669	4.15	1.072	1.149
Expec_New_life_experiences	1669	4.37	0.975	0.950
Expec_Relationships_with_other_universities	1669	4.03	1.138	1.294
Expec_Voluntary_social_work	1669	3.07	1.285	1.652
Expec_Personal_fulfilment	1669	4.31	1.065	1.133
Expec_Time_management	1669	3.36	1.241	1.541
Expec_Pleasant_safe_environment	1669	4.28	0.979	0.959
Expec_Value_in_job_market	1669	4.53	0.964	0.929
Expec_Events_related_to_degree	1669	4.23	1.047	1.097
Expectation_General_Degree	1669	3.90	0.756	0.571
Expectation_General_University	1669	3.75	0.777	0.603
Valid N (listwise)	1669			

Source: Research data

Hence, prior to beginning university, the student, in various different ways, has high expectations, especially that: on graduation he/she will carry value in the employment market (average of 4.53), that the university has good infrastructures (average of 4.45), that the course content will be up to date (average of 4.45), that the university runs good services (average of 4.44), that both the degree and the university hold strong links with the job market (average of 4.41), and that on graduation the student is able to attain a good job (average of 4.40). In summary, these are the greatest expectations

of students on entering university and clearly without overlooking the 19 other expectations, which were all confirmed by students with 17 of the 25 expectations getting average figures in excess of 4, which represents high expectations in relation to all seventeen.

Furthermore, we may state that in general terms, the main expectations declared by students, on entering university, focus on the subsequent professional opportunities (value in the job market, a good job, connections with the job market), in degree content (updated course content) and the university in itself (infrastructures and services). These are the points around which students focus their greatest attention and hence deserve attention by the university management, a factor also found by Mainardes, Alves and Domingues (2009) in a similar research project undertaken in Brazil.

Furthermore, the lesser student expectations according to their own opinions relate to participation in voluntary social work (average of 3.07), learning to manage their time (average of 3.36) and accessing university financial support (average of 3.47). That is, despite displaying positive expectations as regards this aspect, the other expectations prove more important and more susceptible to dissatisfaction. Therefore, these aspects with lesser averages may be factors that came as a surprise to respondents as they had no particular pre-established position on them.

Nevertheless, as it may be observed in Table 2, the averages are fairly high in overall terms and this may pose certain difficulties to university managers in their efforts to focus upon the expectations of this stakeholder as recommended by Stakeholder Theory (Clarkson, 1995). Hence, it is necessary to discriminate between the expectations declared by students in accordance with the importance attributed (Mainardes, Alves and Raposo, 2010). To this end, one useful option is the model by Garver (2003), as explained above. Model implementation requires the application of multivariate analysis, multiple linear regression.

Table 3: Model obtained by multiple linear regression of the general degree expectations

Model Summary ^b										
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
Dimension	1	0.294 ^a	0.087	0.085	0.723	0.007	12.719	1	1665	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expec_Level_demand, Expec_Personal_fulfilment, Expec_Connections_with_job_market

b. Dependent Variable: Expectation_General_Degree

Method of estimation: stepwise

Validity Tests:

- ANOVA: significant
- Randomness Test: Accepts the randomness hypothesis
- Kolmogorov-Smirnov adherence test: Accepts the adherence hypothesis for normal distribution
- Homoscedasticity test: Accepts the homoscedasticity hypothesis

Source: Research data

Table 4: Coefficients obtained by multiple linear regression of the general degree expectation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	2.683	0.102				26.390	.000	2.484	2.882		
Expec_Level_demand	0.143	0.017	0.200	8.243	.000	0.109	0.177	0.24	0.198	0.19	0.927	1.078
Expec_Personal_fulfilment	0.076	0.018	0.107	4.108	.000	0.040	0.112	0.19	0.100	0.09	0.810	1.235
Expec_Connections_with_job_market	0.070	0.020	0.093	3.566	.000	0.032	0.109	0.18	0.087	0.08	0.812	1.232

a. Dependent Variable: Expectation_General_Degree

Source: Research data

This analysis was carried out for two different situations. Firstly, general student expectations were considered in relation to the degree as a dependent variable. Afterwards, the same process was undertaken in relation to general student expectations in relation to the university. The results of the regression analysis that approached general student expectations are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

This first research analytical phase demonstrates how the model obtained does little to explain the dependent variable, after all, the adjusted R^2 result is 0.085, hence explaining only 8.5% of the dependent variable via the linear combination of the three variables: expectable as regards the level of degree demand, personal fulfilment, and regarding the university connections with the job market. Despite this result falling below that desired, the objective of the analysis was not the model in itself but rather the identification of the variables that are statistically significant.

Analysis of the descriptive data in accordance with the Garver (2003) model found that the low level of explanation by the model could have been foreseen as the overall majority of expectations tested on students involve the attribution of high expectations (17 expectations with averages over 4), nevertheless the general expectation was lower than 4. As this was not the objective of the analysis, which was instead discriminating between the variables, the following results were reached:

- Core expectations (high average declared values – Table 2, and multiple linear regression statistical significance – Table 4):
- Level of study demand;
- University connections with the job market; and
- Personal fulfilment.

Basic expectations (high averages in attributed importance – Table 2, and not statistically significant in terms of multiple linear regression – Table 4):

- Get a good job after finishing studies;
- Up to date subject content;

- Good university infrastructures;
- Good university services;
- Good coordination between lecturing staff;
- Motivating classes;
- Agile university and adapting to student needs;
- Modern university technological structures;
- Freedom of student thinking and expression;
- New life experiences;
- Relationship with other universities;
- Pleasant and safe university surroundings;
- Student value in the job market; and
- Events related to the degree.

Amplifier expectations (low declared expectation averages – Table 2, and multiple linear regression statistical significance – Table 4):

- None.

Secondary expectations (low declared expectation averages – Table 2 and not statistically significant in terms of multiple linear regression – Table 4):

- Making new friends and a lively academic social life;
- More practical than theoretical classes;
- Receiving university financial support;
- Lecturers available to students;
- Carrying out scientific research;
- Clear and well defined bureaucratic processes;
- Voluntary student participation in social causes; and
- Learning how to manage one's own time.

Taking into consideration the results obtained by recourse to the Garver (2003) methodology, we find that the level of degree demand, the connections between the university and job market, and student personal fulfilment are the core expectations and as such, unidimensional expectations. This is the type of expectation that, where performance is appropriate, it is able to raise satisfaction and vice-versa. Thus, university management needs to be aware that these factors may positively or negatively influence student perceptions as to the degree they are taking.

As regards the expectations identified as basic, there were a total of fourteen. Basic expectations are those that represent the minimum that a student expects from a degree. In this case, the student at the least expects motivating classes, cutting edge study materials, getting a good job upon graduation, that the university has good infrastructures and services, freedom of thinking and expression, among others. The basic expectations do not raise overall satisfaction where performance is equivalent or greater than the individual's expectations. However, where performance does not meet expectations, this does cause dissatisfaction. Therefore, university management

should take into account that these are the minimum expected requirements of students as regards the degree they are taking.

As regards amplifier expectations, there were no such examples. These expectations relate to factors of attraction that raise the level of satisfaction where in existence and without any reduction in satisfaction where they do not exist or when performance is not good. This research project found no such factors of attraction in this category. The explanation of this stems principally from the fact that the expectations have been obtained from the students themselves (qualitative research) and these amplifier expectations tend to be “surprises” to the consumers of a particular product or service (Garver, 2003).

Finally, there were a total of eight secondary expectations (with declared rankings of below four). Despite the model returning these factors as secondary, in this case they may be approached as a second level of basic expectations, with the exception of voluntary social work that is more of a neutral factor. Despite students attributing lower rankings to these expectations, they also prove to be of importance as they returned results above the scale average. Hence, such are better perceived as a second set of minimum requirements expected by students of their degree.

As regards the expectations of students in relation to the university, the same process was applied. Tables 5 and 6 detail the results obtained.

Table 5: Model obtained by multiple linear regression of the general university expectations

Model Summary ^b										
Model		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Dimension	1	0.268 ^a	0.072	0.069	0.749	0.003	4.664	1	1663	0.031

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expec_ Connections_with_job_market, Expec_Level_Demand, Expec_ Pleasant_safe_environment, Expec_ Financial_support, Expec_ Personal_fulfillment

b. Dependent Variable: Expectations_General_University

Method of estimation: stepwise

Validity Testes:

- ANOVA: significant
- Randomness Test: Accepts the randomness hypothesis
- Kolmogorov-Smirnov adherence test: Accepts the adherence hypothesis for normal distribution
- Homoscedasticity test: Accepts the homoscedasticity hypothesis

Source: Research data

Table 6: Coefficients obtained by multiple linear regression of the general university expectation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	2.624	0.112				23.357	.000	2.403	2.844		
Expec_Connections_with_job_market	0.107	0.022	0.137	4.910	.000	0.064	0.149	0.20	0.120	0.11	0.714	1.400
Expec_Level_Demand	0.090	0.018	0.123	5.006	.000	0.055	0.126	0.17	0.122	0.11	0.921	1.085
Expec_Pleasant_safe_environment	0.062	0.022	0.078	2.768	.006	0.018	0.105	0.17	0.068	0.06	0.709	1.410
Expec_Financial_support	-0.046	0.015	-0.076	-3.079	.002	-0.075	-0.017	0.04	-0.075	-0.07	0.905	1.105
Expec_Personal_fulfilment	0.043	0.020	0.059	2.160	.031	0.004	0.083	0.16	0.053	.051	0.740	1.351

a. Dependent Variable: Expectations_General_University

Source: Research data

As with the case of the regression above (and already explained), the model obtained when carrying out the analysis with general expectations about university as the dependent variable, also returned a low level of explanation, as only 6.9% of the dependent variable (R^2 adjusted = 0.069) is explainable by the linear relationship between five of the 25 independent variables (level of study demand, university financial support for students, connections between the university and the job market, personal fulfilment and a pleasant and secure university environment). As this was not our purpose, the analysis of results concentrates on establishing the classification of the variables in accordance with the Garver (2003) model. Hence, expectations were classified as follows:

- Core expectations (high average declared values – Table 2, and multiple linear regression statistical significance – Table 6):
 - Level of study demand;
 - Level of university connections with the job market;
 - Personal fulfilment; and
 - Pleasant and safe university environment.
- Basic expectations (high averages in the attributed importance – Table 2, and not statistically significant in terms of multiple linear regression – Table 6):
 - Get a good job after finishing studies;
 - Up to date study content;
 - Good university infrastructures;
 - Good university services;
 - Good coordination between lecturing staff;
 - Motivating classes;
 - University agile and adapting to student needs;

- Modern university technological structures;
 - Freedom of student thinking and expression;
 - New life experiences;
 - Relationships with other universities;
 - Student value in the job market; and
 - Events related to the degree.
- Amplifier expectations (low declared expectation averages – Table 2, and multiple linear regression statistical significance – Table 6):
 - University financial support.
 - Secondary expectations (low declared expectation averages – Table 2 and not statistically significant in terms of multiple linear regression – Table 6):
 - Making new friends and a lively academic social life;
 - More practical than theoretical classes;
 - Lecturers available to students;
 - Carrying out scientific research;
 - Clear and well defined bureaucratic processes;
 - Voluntary student participation in social causes; and
 - Learning how to manage one's own time.

In this second analysis, general expectations regarding university, we immediately find that the results are very close to those already set out when dealing with general expectations as to the degree of study. This similarity in results is due to the fact that expectations as regards the latter and the university in general are correlated (significant Pearson correlation at the level of 0.01, index of 0.462). Correspondingly, the student does not separate one facet from another and encounters difficulties in perceiving either only the course of study or only the university, a factor also identified in the study by Mainardes, Alves and Domingues (2009).

Nevertheless, two expectations did change classification in this second analysis: university financial support for the student and the university environment (pleasant, safe). As regards the university environment, there is logic to it being returned as significant in this analysis and not in analysis at the course level as the environment is a common space to all and the student would perceive this as not directly related to the degree but rather bound up with the university (Tam, 2005). In the case under analysis here, the expectation of a good university environment became a key demand, unidimensional in character, as already explained.

The other expectation, that students receive university financial support for taking the degree, may be similarly explained. That is, this does not relate to the degree but rather to the university level. Nevertheless, this expectation was reclassified and emerged as an amplifier (or attractive) expectation. Thus, in this case, we may conclude that the student does not expect to receive financial support for their studies, however, were the university in a position to provide such support, he/she would feel more attracted to that particular university. This factor may be a feature

of differentiation between the universities participating in this research project, as already pointed out by Veiga and Amaral (2009).

Finally, we may consider that the classification obtained by the second multiple linear regression more completely represents the types of student expectations, needs and desires. This classification serves to guide university management in developing their relationships with one of their key stakeholders, the student.

5. Conclusions, recommendations and research limitations

Taking into account that the objectives of this research were to identify and classify by importance student expectations, on completion, we perceive that even though students represent a traditional university stakeholder, some findings show that universities are at fault in the level of attention paid to this stakeholder. Drawing upon a diversified sample, with data on the various participant universities and with respondents covering the three cycles of higher education and the respective fields of study, with a range of ages and experiences, we may conclude that the results obtained represent a significant proportion of the reality of higher education taking place in these university organisations. As the data collection process was broad reaching, this correspondingly opens up a wide array of opportunities for future comparative research, deepening the discoveries made here, and providing the first recommendation of our study. In accordance with our findings, it is clear that there is a need to improve the relationship of partnership between students and universities, something that shall be to the benefit of both parties (Arnett, German and Hunt, 2003).

In order to raise the quality of this relationship, stakeholder requirements (expectations, needs, desires), in this case of the students, have to be understood. To this end, the expectations generated by prior qualitative research were tested and confirmed. The 36 initial expectations were reduced to 25 before then being incorporated into the questionnaire. Following analysis of the results, we identified the leading effective student expectations as linked up with the results produced by studying (subsequent professional opportunities), university infrastructures and services and suitably up to date study content. Of less importance to students are issues such as voluntary social work, time management skills and financial support for studying. These represent the initial findings and similar to those returned by Mainardes, Alves and Domingues (2009).

Furthermore, due to the sheer number of expectations, one fundamental factor is to highlight their respective level of importance. After due analysis of the general student expectations towards their degree and their university (with the results unified due to the level of correlation) via multiple linear regression and the application of the Garver (2003) methodology, we found the most important (key) expectations to be the level of course demand, university connections with the job market, student personal fulfilment and the university environment (pleasant, safe). From the outset, these expectations prove fundamental for the student to establish a strong relationship with the university. Complementarily, university financial support for students emerged as an amplifier. Other expectations proved to be basic across both levels.

These results show the alternatives that university management might opt for, should they wish to raise the standard of their relationships with this stakeholder (Clarkson, 1995; Polonsky, 1995), one of the guidelines implicit to Stakeholder Theory.

This means universities should focus upon meeting these student expectations and direct their actions towards the key and basic expectations (McCollough and Gremler, 1999). The results obtained for the course of study and for the university provide indicators for the development of the relationship between the university and its students, a leading stakeholder as observed above. The construction of a strong and committed relationship between the university and its students positively contributes towards the development of not only the organisation but also the students themselves (Arnett, German and Hunt, 2003). This process inherently involves actions targeting the core, basic and amplifier expectations and resulting in the most effective benefits without the wasting of resources.

Among the contributions made by this study, beyond establishing the current state of affairs transversally across the eleven Portuguese state universities participating as regards student perceptions as to their own expectations, this research also sought to meet another shortcoming in the literature, the measuring of student expectations according to the students themselves. Traditionally, student satisfaction evaluations draw their indicators from the literature (such as Mainardes, Alves and Domingues, 2009) or base their perceptions on university managers (as in the case of Macfarlane and Lomas, 1999). Furthermore, seeking out student expectations in their own right remains rare in the literature and hence this does represent one of the main contributions of this study.

Another important contribution was the discrimination between student expectations in establishing different levels of importance. These procedures prove of great value to university managers seeking to undertake the most effective actions, with the least possibility of wasting resources, a rather rare feat in the prevailing university environment (Rosa and Amaral, 2007).

Finally, in terms of research limitations, one of the points to be highlighted is that the expectations were drafted based upon prior qualitative research at one of the universities and other expectations might have been identified had this qualitative research been broader in scope. Hence, beyond the expectations tested in this research project, there may be others existing and as important as those actually tested but which were neither considered nor even did we provide the opportunity for respondents to include further expectations in their questionnaire responses. Due to this limitation, the recommendation must be to replicate the qualitative research before quantitatively embarking on data collection or alternatively opening up the possibility, in the quantitative survey, for students to put forward other expectations otherwise not taken into consideration.

While the objective of this research did not extend to analysis of the strata in the target population, future research might explore the data collected, with analysis broken down by university, area, cycle, age, gender or even by professional experience and generate comparisons between the general results and the specific results for a

specific variable. For example, do the expectations of young students differ from those of more mature students? This and other research possibilities may be subject to future development with these results thus already representing a relevant contribution and generating a deeper level of understanding on this important university stakeholder.

Another limitation relating to these results is that they derive only from Portuguese state universities that are not foundations. Hence, it is not possible to extend these results either to Portuguese university foundations or to polytechnic institutes and private institutions. It remains plausible that the expectations in these latter institutions are different. Hence, the replication of this study right from its initial stages, thereby involving a qualitative survey prior to quantitative data collection, at these institutions is recommended. Studies comparing student expectations between different higher education institutions might prove a highly fruitful approach for future research projects.

In summary, the broad range of research presented here seeks to provide another step forward in the construction of a new university management model based upon Stakeholder Theory. Focusing university actions and policies on meeting stakeholder expectations may result, in practice, in greater university efficiency and effectiveness.

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