Explanations About the Course Experience Questionnaire

Introduction

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) gathers perceptions of recent graduates about the quality and usefulness of their programs. The CEQ consists of 25 coded items i.e. statements to which respondents are asked to state a level of agreement or disagreement. All items are coded on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'.

The CEQ forms part of the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), which is administered annually by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA). The CEQ and GDS are mailed out four months after graduates have completed their award program.

CEQ Brief Background

In 1991 the Federal Government commissioned the Performance Indicators Research Group (‘The Linke Committee’) to examine indicators of performance in Higher Education. An outcome of the group’s recommendation was the creation of the Course Experience Questionnaire. According to the GCCA, Paul Ramsden and Noel Entwistle used the basic form of the CEQ in studies of undergraduate students in the United Kingdom. During 1989, Ramsden and colleagues tested a later version in Australian universities.

Universities now incorporate the CEQ into formal planning processes and recognise CEQ results as indicators of program quality.

The GDS has been conducted for over 25 years, whilst the CEQ since 1993. At RMIT, the Career Development and Employment Unit manages the administration and data collection of both GDS and CEQ.

CEQ Scales

The first 24 items measure agreement or disagreement to a statement about one of the following program aspects:

- Quality of teaching
- Clarity of goals and standards
- Nature of assessment
- Level of workload
- Development of generic skills

Items are grouped into 'scales' according to the program aspect they address.

For example, Item 2, addresses generic skills and is part of the Generic Skills Scale. This item is the statement:
The course developed my problem solving skills.

The respondent chooses a point between 1 and 5 on the response scale and receives a score according to the following scheme:

1 (strongly disagree) = -100, 2 = -50, 3 = 0, 4 = 50, 5 (strongly agree) = 100.

Scores of less than 0 indicate that respondents have a negative perception of their program in the context of the general issue addressed by the item. A score above 0 indicates a positive response. (For items which infer a negative attitude e.g. 'The workload was too heavy', the direction of scoring is reversed so that disagreement, which infers a positive attitude, receives a positive score).

Aggregated scale analysis includes only respondents who complete a majority of items within the scale being analysed. For each scale, the mean score of all items is calculated to arrive at a summary scale score. This gives a set of measurements for respondents' perceptions of each program aspect.

Below is a brief description of each CEQ scale.

**Good Teaching Scale (GTS)** measures respondents' perceptions of teaching standards. It focuses on teachers' feedback, motivation, attention, understanding of problems and skill in explaining concepts. Research undertaken by the GCCA indicate that high score on this scale are associated with the perception that there are good practices in place, conversely lower scores reflect a perception that these practices occur less frequently.

**Items:**
- The teaching staff of this course motivated me to do my best work
- The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work.
- The staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.
- The teaching staff normally gave me helpful feedback on how I was going.
- My lecturers were extremely good at explaining things.
- The teaching staff worked hard to make their subjects interesting.

**Clear Goals and Standards Scale (CGS)** measures respondents' perceptions of the clarity with which teachers communicated expected academic standards and program goals.

**Items:**
- It was always easy to know the standard of work expected.
- I usually had a clear idea of where I was going and what was expected of me in this course.
- It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course.
- The staff made it clear right from the start what they expected from students.

**Appropriate Workload Scale (AWS)** measures respondents' perceptions of the appropriateness of their program workloads. High scores indicate perceptions that
workload levels were adequate but not so excessive so as to be detrimental to learning.

Items:
- The workload was too heavy.
- I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn.
- There was a lot of pressure on me to do this course.
- The sheer volume of work to be got through in this course meant it couldn't all be all comprehended.

**Appropriate Assessment Scale (AAS)** measures respondents' perceptions about the extent to which assessment stresses the recall of information rather than other intellectual skills. High scores indicate that respondents perceived that skills other than recall were critical to successful academic performance.

Items:
- To do well in this course all you really needed was a good memory.
- The staff seemed more interested in testing what I had memorised than what I understood.
- Too many staff asked me questions just about facts.

**Generic Skills Scale (GSS)** measures respondents' perceptions of generic skill development (e.g. problem solving, communications, planning, team working) achieved in their programs.

Items:
- The course developed my problem-solving skills.
- The course sharpened my analytical skills.
- The course helped me develop my ability to work as a team member.
- As a result of my course, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems.
- The course improved my skills in written communication.
- My course helped me to develop the ability to plan my own work.

The 25th item asks graduates to indicate their Overall Satisfaction with their programs:
- ‘Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this course’.

**Notes on Interpreting CEQ data**

Analyses undertaken by the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit (IRCU) in interpreting CEQ data are in accordance with standard practices as reported by the GCCA in its annual statistical reporting.

Analyses have focused around two measures: the mean (plus standard deviation) and percentage agreement by scale. The scale mean is useful in some forms of analysis where continuous measures are important and percentage agreement is useful in representing differences between groups. Scale means are the average of the item ratings for the group of items making up the scale. Meanwhile the percentage agreement refers to the average across the items in a group of the percentage of respondents in a group agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item.
The term agreement, as used in the tables expressing percent agreement, refers to the aggregation of those who are in agreement with any of the CEQ statements, i.e. respondents answering with ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

In tables reflecting CEQ ranking, percent agreement has been used as the basis for such calculation. The ranking tables have been prepared in a sequential order: by field of study, by program level and finally, by institution.

The CEQ facilitates comparisons of groups on the basis of the results of the same scale. For example, a valid comparison can be made of the mean for the Good Teaching Scale among respondents whose field of study was Architecture and the mean for the Good Teaching Scale among respondents whose field of study was Administration and Management. (Providing the population sizes are adequate) the group with the greatest mean has the more positive perceptions of 'teaching standards' as measured by the Good Teaching Scale.

The design of the CEQ does not facilitate comparisons of results between different scales for the same group. An invalid comparison would be between the mean for the Good Teaching Scale and the mean for Appropriate Workload Scale for respondents who studied Administration Management. A greater mean for the Good Teaching Scale would not demonstrate that Administration Management respondents perceive teaching standards to be more satisfactory than workload levels. This is due to the fact that each scale contains a unique set of items which, due to differences in wording, may draw different response levels and hence, mean scores.

Generally, 'program of study' (e.g. BBus (Accountancy) is an inappropriate respondent category. Course [program] of study categories may contain respondents with a range of course [program] majors, making them incompatible for membership of the same group. A more satisfactory basis of comparison is 'field of study' which identifies graduates, not by program, but by program major.

Comparisons between fields of study should consider how differences in standard teaching methods, workloads, assessment and other factors, might influence CEQ scores. For example, respondents from fields of study with relatively high workloads may be more likely to express negative perceptions on the Appropriate Workload scale.

Care should be taken in comparing results across universities. Differences in discipline ranges and student profiles need to be considered when analysing results.

The GCCA's report on the 1998 CEQ recognises differences in mean results of 0.3 of a standard deviation unit as significant (p 27). This report uses the same criterion of significance. For example, the mean score for all Bachelor's Pass graduates on the Good Teaching Scale is 7 and the standard deviation is 41. As a result, means of sub-populations which are more than 0.3 of 41 (12.3) above and below 7 (i.e. between -5.3 and 19.3) are considered to be significantly different from the overall population mean.
Further advice on interpretation of the CEQ results is in the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee's (AVCC), Code of Practice the Disclosure of Data from the GDS/CEQ. This document guides readers in interpreting CEQ data and drawing conclusions.

**Further reading**


**Enquiries**

Should you require further information or access to CEQ data files, please do not hesitate to contact the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit (IRCU).

IRCU is developing a model to analyse CEQ results. Please forward your queries to ircu@rmit.edu.au

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