

Exploring Parents' Satisfaction and its Potential in Boosting Sales and Profits in the Tutoring Business Sector

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Abstract

This paper assesses the potential of satisfied parents in boosting sales and profits in tutoring business by using case studies of two families who had their children tutored for five months. At the end of tutorials, they were sent specific feedback questions to answer via emails and text messages. They both responded via emails. The collected data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to create tables for comparing parents' responses. The results show both parents are satisfied with the tutorials given to their children. The children developed confidence and ability to believe in themselves in answering examination questions. Tutorials also improved their understanding of the subject areas in which they were struggling. As a result, parents are satisfied and willing to act as the referee for the tutor; recommend the tutor's services to other parents; willing to share their children's examination results; and willing to purchase tutorial services again in the future. It can be concluded that satisfied parents have potential to boost sales and profits in tutoring business. It is recommended that tutors should actively seek parents' feedback on their tutorial delivery.

Keywords: Tutoring business; customer satisfaction; parents' feedback; sales & profits.

1. Introduction

In tutoring whether online or face to face, like in any other business, customer satisfaction is important for maintaining or increasing sales and profitability. This is particularly important in the modern fast changing business environment in which businesses find it hard to keep pace with customers 'ever changing tastes and preferences which result from changing political, economic, social, technological and environmental factors. Furthermore, customers are more likely to switch from suppliers who stand still or do not meet customers' changing needs and expectations. The loss of customers will inevitably have a negative impact on the business' sales, profit and market share.

Therefore, tutors need to keep abreast with the changing needs of parents by regularly assessing parents' satisfaction with the tutoring services their children receive; it is the parents who purchase the tutoring services. This can be achieved through regular collection and analysis of parental and tutee feedback data. This paper uses feedback data from two parents whose children were tutored face to face and one-to-one between January and May 2016 to assess the extent to which they were satisfied with the tutorial services provided to their children and the potential of parents' satisfaction in boosting sales and profits in tutoring business.

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2. Customer Satisfaction

Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu (2010) reported that in modern marketing thinking and practice, customer satisfaction is a central concept because it emphasizes on delivering satisfaction to consumers and getting profit in return. It is believed that if businesses achieve this, quality of life may be improved resulting in making customer satisfaction crucial in meeting the various needs of consumers, business and society. Many studies and annual conferences on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behaviour have taken place in an attempt to find ways of contributing to understanding this important area in the last decade (Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu, 2010).

Consumers compare their perceptions of product performance with a set of standards (Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu, 2010). They confirm their perceptions when the perceived performance matches with standards or expectations and disconfirm perceptions when perceived performance does not match their standards or expectations. The range of confirmation and disconfirmation contributes to consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore, satisfaction is closely linked with customers' expectations and the product's perceived performance. If the product meets their expectations, they are satisfied; if it exceeds them they are highly satisfied; but if it falls short, the consumer is dissatisfied. Customers who are highly satisfied become loyal and continue repeating buying from the same supplier and spread positive word of mouth in addition to continuing being loyal customers for the business. This is in contrast to those who are not satisfied as they do not only stop buying but they also start spreading negative word of mouth about the company and its products which result in deterring the future buyers which might lead to decline in sales and profitability and market share (Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu, 2010).

Research studies have also shown that customer satisfaction is linked to profitability and other business results (Au and Yeng, 2013; Zhang and Pan, 2009). It's important to note that dissatisfaction has important implications for the future of a business too. Therefore, a customer centric firm must pay attention to dissatisfied customers as much as it pays to the ones that are satisfied. The reason is that dissatisfied customers not only discontinue their patronage resulting in an erosion of the company's customer portfolio but also they usually according to TARP (1986 quoted by Ofori-Okyere and Kumadey, 2015; Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu, 2010) do not complain but when they exit they often start producing negative word of mouth. In addition, Best (2009) said dissatisfied customers may become 'customer terrorists' as they try to ease their dissatisfaction by telling others, trying to affect other potential customer by destroying the reputation of the firm in market place.

Many studies agree that customer satisfaction is a forward looking indicator of business success that measures how well customers will respond to the company in the future. The other measures of market performance, such as sales and market share are described to be backward looking measures of success. They tell how well the firm has done in the past, but not how well it will do in future (Byrne, 1993 reported by Sensoy and Kucukosmanoglu, 2010). This suggests that for future business success customer satisfaction needs to be seriously being focused on and more investment input is needed.

3. Tutoring services

Tutoring is a service that is commonly delivered on a one-to-one basis to students who are normally struggling with the subject being studied in class. The Online Collins English Dictionary defines tutoring as '*remedial or additional teaching designed to help people who need extra help with their studies*' (free online English Dictionary, 2016). It also describes a tutor as '*a person who gives individual or in some cases small group, instruction*' (*ibid*) It can be concluded from this that the aim of tutoring is to help students help themselves and guide them to the point at which they become independent learners and no longer require tutoring service.

4. Rising demand for tutoring services in the UK

In the UK the demand for tutoring services, estimated at around 8% of children aged 5 to 18 years for a traditional 'at-home' tutor, 6% attending a private tuition centre, and 1% working with an online tutor (The Tutor Pages, 2015) has increased due to a number of reasons, foremost of which include: (a) teacher shortages in schools and colleges (Judith, 2016), (b) failure of the available few teachers to provide student tailored services, particularly to the slow learners, which in turn has led to many parents feeling that their children are being let down by their schools as reported by the Ofsted report, "The Most Able Students: Are they doing as well as they should in our non-selective secondary schools?" (Ofsted, 2013), (c) another factor contributing to increased tutorial services demand is that the teachers have been told not to let the most able pupils down by slowing progress due to paying attention to slow learners.

This suggests that the slow learners will have no choice but to seek for extra teaching support outside schooling the form of tutoring and (d) advancement in technology have also enabled tutoring services to be delivered online with the benefit of reducing travel costs increasing and widening accessibility to the service while at the same time reducing costs. For the tutor savings in travel costs can be passed to the customer. The customer (student and parent) also saves on travel costs, (e) the rising number of children from the migrant population; for example, Syria and other war torn countries that have come into Britain to seek refuge is also contributing to an increase in the demand for tutorial services. The rising demand has led to a corresponding rise in the number of tutoring services that have been set both by individuals and by agency organisations. There is strong evidence supporting that this rising demand in tutoring services trend will continue not only in the UK but across the globe.

5. History of tutoring and its impact

There is a general belief that private supplementary tutoring '*in academic subjects which is provided for financial gain and which is additional to the provisions by mainstream schooling*' (Bray & Kwok, 2003, p.2) is effective in improving student learning outcomes (Cohen *et al.*, 1982). A study by Etters (1967) aimed at investigating the effectiveness in terms of improvement in Grade Point Average (GPA) of a supplementary tutorial programme at Parsons College involving a random sample of 345 students enrolled into the study, showed that though generally tutored students were as successful as non-tutored students, but the low achievers were significantly more successful. This suggests that tutoring is more effective in helping those students who are experiencing difficulties in the subjects they are studying which results to low education outcome achievement.

Another study by Taylor (1969) aimed at assessing whether a tutorial programme could be effective in improving academic performance of freshmen engineering students using thirty students assigned to either control or intervention group showed that students who were tutored significantly performed better than the control group. Within the intervention group, students who extensively used the tutorial programme and had lower GPA had significant academic improvement than those who used less extensively and had higher GPA at the start. This supports that tutoring is more effective in improving the performance of poor performing students. Also, it suggests that in order for tutoring to be effective, students need to use it extensively.

Studies on the evaluation of the impact of tutoring services has also shown that its effectiveness does not depend on either the mode of delivery or subject; although it is used more often in some subjects than the others. Clark and Whetstone (2014) used multiple regression to explore the impact of an online tutoring programme called Math Whizz (Whizz Education, 2014) and found that usage of the Math Whizz programme was related to improvement in mathematics achievement as measured by online tutoring programme. This suggests that tutoring is effective in maths and also when delivered online. In 2007, the Reading Rescue tutoring intervention model was investigated with 64 low-socioeconomic status, language-minority first graders with reading difficulties; it was found tutored students made significantly greater gains in reading words and comprehending text than controls and the majority of tutored students reached average reading levels whereas the majority of controls did not (Ehri *et al.*, 2007). This suggests that tutoring does also improve language learning and skills.

On the whole Cohen *et al* (1982) conducted a meta-analysis study from 65 independent evaluations of school tutoring programmes which showed that these programmes have positive effects not only on the academic performance but also on the attitudes of those who receive tutoring as tutored students outperformed control students on examinations and they also developed positive attitudes towards the subject matter covered in the tutorial programmes (Cohen *et al.*, 1982).

The research studies analysed above provide strong evidence that tutoring improves academic performance of students in the subjects they are struggling regardless of the delivery methods used in addition to developing positive attitudes towards the subject being tutored. Anecdotal and empirical evidence is that many parents are aware of the benefits that tutoring can bring to their children. They may also be aware of what sort of tutors are able to enhance academic performance and develop positive attitudes of their children. All these help parents to form preconceived standards or expectations which help them to measure the performance of tutorial services being delivered. If these expectations are met parents are satisfied and if not, they are dissatisfied. As importantly; are there reciprocal benefits from parents to tutors who deliver these benefits to students? This paper attempts to answer this question using feedback from two parents whose children were tutored maths for GCSE Higher Ed excel Examination Board over a period of 2 months and 5 months respectively.

6. Methods

6.1. Participants

The respondents to the feedback questions were two mothers whose children (a boy and girl) were tutored face to face and one-to-one between January and May 2016 in preparation for their June 2016 Edexcel Examination Board's GCSE Maths (Higher) examination. In addition, the boy was tutored business studies for the same examination board. These two families live 7.4 miles apart and do not know each other. The boy had tutorials for 2 months (April to May) while the girl had tutorials for five months (January to May). Consent to use the feedback was given by the two parents. In order to maintain their confidentiality though consent was given for their names to be used; the boy's mother is referred to as **Parent A Feedback** while girl's mother is referred to as **Parent B Feedback**. Similarly, the names of their children have also been removed.

6.2. Instrument

A set of three questions and their follow up extensions aimed at obtaining parents satisfaction feedback data were drafted. The questions came from full feedback questionnaire used in previous studies. These questions were slightly modified by adding relevant follow up questions. The old questions were used because they did not need pilot testing as they were already pilot tested and refined (see **appendix A**).

6.3. Data Collection

The three questions were incorporated into email and text messages and sent to the two parents. The combination of email and text messages was used to increase the chances of the parents receiving the questions. Both parents sent their answers to the question using email.

6.4. Data Analysis

Due to the small size of data, the responses were analysed manually comparing the answers given by both mothers to the questions asked noting their differences and similarities. Using the excel sheet the tables were created for visual presentations of the results and to make comparisons easier to see.

7. Results

7.1. Tutorial benefit to a child

Parents were asked to state if the delivered tutorials benefited their children. According to answers of the mothers, it could be seen that both children benefited from the tutorials. From Table 1 we know that both parents believe that their children benefited from the tutorials despite the children's differences in gender and the duration of delivery of the tutorials (the boy had shorter period of tutoring compared to the girl).

Table 1: Tutorial benefit to a child

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
1a.	Did my tutorials benefit your [child]	Yes it did	Your tutorials definitely benefitted my daughter

7.2. Ways in which tutorials benefited the child

Parents were asked specifically to state how the tutorials had benefited their children if they reported so. Mothers answers in Table 2 show that both children developed confidence in their answers and belief in their ability to do well. Also both children understood the areas of their study they were struggling or thought needed help with. In addition, parent B answer shows that her child was also able to cover the areas she had missed in class due to her absence in school.

Table 2: Ways in which tutorials benefited the child

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
1b.	if so how?	It helped him understand areas in which he struggled with and helped him develop confidence in his answers more.	They enabled her to practice the areas where she felt she needed help and to cover the areas she had missed due to her absence from school. She felt able to ask if she was not sure of anything, and your patience and kind manner were very helpful to give her some much needed confidence to believe in her ability to do well. It was lovely to hear you laughing together. It made the sessions enjoyable rather than a chore. You were very reliable and communicated well regarding the sessions

7.3. Areas of tutorials that needed improvement

Knowing that not everything in tutoring can go smoothly, parents were asked to state any areas of tutorial sessions delivered to their children that did not go according to their expectations and therefore needed improvement for the future delivery. Answers from mothers in Table 3 show that both parents said neither them nor their children found any areas that needed improvement.

Table 3: Areas of tutorials that needed improvement

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
1c.	if not in which areas that needed improvement?	My son did not find anywhere that needs improving in terms of his tutoring.	No areas noted that needed improvement

7.4 Parents satisfaction with the delivered tutorials

In order to assess whether or not parents' tutorial expectations were met, they were asked if they were satisfied with the tutorials delivered to their children. Both parents' answers in Table 4 indicate that they were both satisfied suggesting that their expectations and that of their children were met.

Table 4: Parents satisfaction with the delivered tutorials

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
2	Are you satisfied with the tutorials that [child name] received?	Yes, very much	Yes

7.5. Parents willingness to recommend and or become a tutor's referee

If parents and children's tutoring expectations were met they are more willing to recommend or be able to give verbal reference to other parents who might be looking for a tutor for their children. Therefore, parents were asked if they could do the same. Their answers in Table 5 show that both parents were willing to both recommend tutor's services and be a tutor's referee. In addition, they were willing to give their personal email address and telephone number through which they can be contacted.

Table 5: Parents willingness to recommend and or become a tutor's referee

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
3.	Would you recommend me to other parents who may be looking for a tutor? if yes, would you be happy to be my referee if some parents ask for the evidence of tutorial delivery experience I have had with your child? If yes which phone number or email address would you like them to contact, you on?	Yes, I definitely would and yes, I would be happy to be your referee, but I would rather you not give them my personal phone number, and instead give them my email address.	I would be happy to recommend you if required. I would prefer if you use my home number which is ...

7.6. Parents willingness to share their child's examination results with the tutor

In order to assess the true effectiveness of the delivered tutoring service is to see how the children performed academically in their examinations. Therefore, parents were asked if they would be happy to share the results with the tutor when they are out. Both parents' answers in Table 6 show that both parents were willing to share their children results with the tutor when they are published.

Table 6: Parents willingness to share their child's examination results with the tutor

Q No.	Question	Parent A Answers	Parent B Answers
	Willingness to share results	And my son would love to share with you his exam results, once his results are out, which will be on the 25th of August.	I will let you know her results when we get them

7.7. Parents' complements

The complement data from both parents demonstrate that they were satisfied with the tutorial services delivered to their children. As a result of this they both promised to purchase more services in future as shown in Table 7.

Q No.	Question	Parent A Complements	Parent B Complements
	Complements	<p>Thank you very much for enabling my son to achieve more than he thought he could and improving his confidence within the two subjects, business and maths. Also, I really enjoyed listening to the laughter between you and my son within tutorial sessions, which also helped my son become less stressed with areas he struggles with</p> <p>Thank you again for all your help, time and effort. We may be calling you again for my daughter's GCSE's and my son's A-levels.</p>	<p>Many thanks for all your help.</p> <p>My daughter hopes to go on to complete a diploma in healthcare so we will remember you if she requires any help in the future. She hopes to eventually progress to nursing.</p>

8. Discussion

Both parents in this study sought tutoring services because they believed that their children were not performing to their potential. The child of parent A was struggling in some areas of the maths subject and so too for the child of parent B in addition, she had missed some topics in class due to her school absence. From the above data, it can be seen that both parents were satisfied with one-to-one and face-to-face maths tutorials that their children received. They were satisfied because the tutorials were effective in that they met their expectations and those of their children in improving the understanding of the subject areas where they were weak and also in developing confidence to believe in themselves and their ability to face the examinations. From their answers, it can be derived that the effectiveness of these tutorials were influenced mainly by factors such as type of students, characteristics of the tutor and the tutoring process or tutoring delivery.

These results are supported by the studies that were reviewed in section 5 above which showed that tutoring is more effective among students who are struggling in their studies or low achievers (Etters, 1967; Taylor, 1969; Whizz Education, 2014; Ehri et al., 2007; Cohen *et al.*, 1982). From parents' answers, it can be understood that tutors need to be effective if they have to meet the expectations of both parents and their tutees. In the parents' minds, such effective tutors need to have some specific characteristics and abilities which are summarised in Table 8.

The way the children are tutored is as important as the tutor's knowledge of the content of what is being tutored if parents and tutee expectations are going to be met according to parents' responses above. Tutorials need to be delivered in a friendly manner and always giving plenty opportunities and time to the tutee to ask questions and giving them a chance to practice on questions in the areas they are struggling or not understanding as this helps them to develop their confidence and belief in themselves to face the examination questions and do well. Though there is the constraint of time as most tutorial slots are of duration of one hour.

Parent A Feedback	Parent B Feedback
Tutor who work in cooperation with both parents and tutee	Tutor who helps tutee practise areas where help is needed (tailored tutorial)
Tutor who has ability to improve the tutee's confidence in the subject being studied	Tutor who gives tutee opportunity to freely ask questions in areas of the subject that is not sure of
Tutor who has ability to deliver tutorial in the manner that helps the tutee be less stressed in areas of the subject he is finding difficult	Tutor who has ability to be patient and kind to a tutee
Tutor who has ability to help tutee to understand the areas of the subject that is finding difficult or struggling with	Tutor who has ability to instil confidence in tutees so that they can believe in themselves and their abilities
	Tutor who has ability to be friendly and deliver tutorial in a friendly manner
	Tutor who has ability to make tutorial sessions enjoyable rather than a chore
	A tutor who is reliable and with ability to communicate well
	Tutor who helps tutee practise areas where help is needed (tailored tutorial)

8.1. Boosting sales and profits potential

The above parents' response data demonstrates that satisfied parents have potential of boosting sales and profits of tutor's business as noted in Table 9.

Parent A Feedback	Parent B Feedback
*Because she was satisfied she is willing to recommend tutors to other parents who might be looking for tutors for their children.	*Because she was satisfied, she is willing to recommend a tutor to other parents who might be looking for a tutor for their children.
*Because she is satisfied she is willing to be a tutor's referee and give her contact details [email address]	*Because she is satisfied she is willing to be a tutor's referee and give her contact details [home phone number]
*Because she is satisfied she is willing to share child's examination results when they are out	*Because she is satisfied she is willing to share child's examination results when they are out
*Because she was satisfied she is willing to make future purchase of tutoring services for other siblings or for the same child when reaches next upper level.	*Because she was satisfied she is willing to have repeat purchase of tutorial services from the same tutor when their child reaches the next level of her studies.

Specific way includes; through using word of mouth to recommend the service to other potential customers, becoming a tutor's referee so that they can write supporting letters, giving their experience to the potential new customers, sharing their children examination results with the tutor which the tutor can use as hard evidence to support the tutor's performance; which evidence can also be placed on the tutor's website and other media, including promotional material. Finally, parents can also boost sales and profits of tutoring service through repeat purchase for the same child when the child reaches a higher level of education or indeed for other siblings in the same family as summarised in Table 7 and 8. These findings confirm the results of previous studies by Zhang and Pan (2009) and Au and Yeung (2013) who noted that customer satisfaction is positively linked to current and future business profitability.

9. Conclusion and Suggestions

It can be concluded from the above analysis and discussions that customer satisfaction, in this case parents' satisfaction, is as important in tutoring business as it is in any other business. Parents who are satisfied with the tutoring services delivered to their children are more likely to promote the tutoring service by word of mouth to other families who might be looking for tutors for their children; they are more willing to act as referees for the tutor; they are more likely to repeat the purchase of tutoring services for the other children in the family when need arises or for the same child when reaches higher level and has a need; and they are more willing to share their children's academic results which the tutor can use as hard evidence to support the promotion of tutoring business. The overall benefit to the tutor is that these actions of satisfied parents have the potential of boosting sales and profits of the tutor's tutoring business.

It is suggested that tutors should actively seek parents' feedback after delivering tutorials as it also provides opportunities for identifying areas of weaknesses that the tutor needs to improve, in addition to its potential in boosting sales and profits of own tutoring business.

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Appendix A: Feedback Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam,

During the last few weeks I was involved in supporting your [**child**-specific child's name was indicated], with Tutorial support in [**specific subjects' names were inserted**]. Thank you for choosing me to provide help to your child and I enjoyed your friendliness and cooperation and more importantly the interest of your [**child**] to learn. All these made my tutorial delivery easier. I hope your (son/daughter) gained knowledge and confidence which enabled him to do his examinations well. However, I would like your feedback on how I performed. The information you provide will specifically be used to improve on my mistakes so that the next students should get better tutorial service from me. I will very much appreciate if you could answer the following few questions and thanks in advance for your help:

1. Did my tutorials benefit your [**child**] if so how? if not in which areas needed improvement?
2. Are you satisfied with the tutorials that [**child name**] received?
3. Would you recommend me to other parents who may be looking for a tutor? if yes, would you be happy to be my referee if some parents ask for evidence of the tutorial delivery experience I have had with your child? If yes which phone number or email address would you like them to contact, you on?

I will also be happy to hear how [**name of child**] did in his examinations once results are out Regards.