

Quality Concerns in Education

Editors

**D. Balaramulu
Ravindranath K. Murthy
Sreenivasa Dasu P
G. Balaji**

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K. Sudhakara Chary
email: ksudhakarachary@gmail.com

EVALUATION OF THE FACTORS THAT DETERMINE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. Jayanna C.T.

Assistant Professor

SJM Women's College, Dental College Campus
B D Road, Chitradurga - 577 502, Karnataka State
Mail:jayannact@gmail.com. Mob:09886840737

Introduction

Universities have seen the provision of higher education to become a product and have been driven by competition to examine the quality of their services, to redefine their product and to measure customer satisfaction in ways that are familiar to service marketing specialists. Universities have realized that their long-term survival depends on how good their services are and that quality sets one university apart from the rest. Education services are often intangible and difficult to measure, since the outcome is reflected in the transformation of individuals in their knowledge, their characteristics, and their behaviour. Therefore, there is no commonly accepted definition of quality that applies specifically to the higher education sector. Further, when we assess quality of higher education institutions (HEIs), issues such as autonomy and independence complicate the whole process.

This study focuses on the determinants of service quality within the Higher Education sector and attempts to assess their individual weight in defining quality from a student perspective.

More specifically, this study's objective is to establish and test dimensions for measuring service quality in higher education, with specific reference to students following undergraduate taught programs and to measure student's preferences in the available educational services. It also aims to measure and analyse the factors that determine the quality, to what extent they meet the students' expectations and if there are any differences of the students' perceptions about the weighting of the importance based on demographic factors. In the following sections, we will review the related literature, present an overview of quality assurance in HEIs, and then discuss the research methodology. Subsequently, we will present the results of the study. Finally, we will present the recommendations – conclusions.

Quality and quality assurance in higher education

Even though, there is an enormous volume of published books and journal articles on the subject of quality, starting from early 1980s up to now, the concept of quality is still frequently misrepresented, misunderstood, or both, by many academics.

A number of different definitions has been given concerning quality in Higher Education, each one representing a different view, including: exceptional, perfection, as fitness for purpose, value for money the stakeholder perspective of quality degree to which the previously set objectives are met offers a very interesting discussion on the meaning of quality in education presenting his reflections on this topic for the last 30 years.

At the same time, there have been a lot of definitions in the literature describing the concept of service quality. It has been oriented as focusing on meeting customers' needs and requirements screening if the service delivered matches their expectations. In fact, a lot of the contemporary quality descriptions originate from the thesis that quality is the degree up to which customer expectations are met. Besides, considerations of quality are sternly linked to the subject of satisfaction leading prospect behaviour. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the attitude or feeling of a customer towards a product or service following the usage of it.

Research methodology

This study attempted to look at the determinants of quality in HEIs rather than quality as a whole, and its objective was to measure the weights of the quality determinants in order to discover those that influence students' satisfaction most. The starting point was the questionnaire developed by HQAA which defined explicitly the quality determinants.

The primary objective of AHP is to classify a number of alternatives (e.g. a set of quality determinants) by considering a given set of qualitative and/or quantitative criteria, according to pair wise

About the Editors

Prof. D. Balaramulu

Prof. D. Balaramulu is presently the Head, Department of Education, Osmania University. He is also the Principal, Institute of Advanced Study in Education (IASE), Osmania University, Hyderabad. He started his teaching career in 1984, working as a SG Teacher at Zilla Parishad School in Warangal District, Telangana, India. He is actively involved in teaching, research and administration in Osmania University for the past nineteen years. He worked in various capacities such as coordinator, IASE, Osmania University, Chairman, Board of Studies in Special Education, IASE, Osmania University. In addition he is discharging the duties of Director, University Employment Information & Guidance Bureau (Model Career Centre) since 2005. He is actively involved in teaching and research; by far he has produced fifty M.Phil.'s & eighteen Ph.D.'s in the field of Education and Special Education. He has published several articles in National and International journals. He is a member of several National and International organizations. He has outstanding performance in various academics, research, and administrative activities. In recognition of his work in education he was awarded Vidya Shiromani Award in 2016, best teacher award in 1996 and 2012. He has conducted several job mela's and also organized several career conferences at the National and International level.

Dr. Ravindranath K. Murthy

Dr. Ravindranath K. Murthy is presently working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, Osmania University, Hyderabad. Prior to joining Osmania University, he worked as Assistant Professor at the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, (NUPEA) Ministry of Human resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi.

Mr. Sreenivasa Dasu P

Mr. Sreenivasa Dasu P. is a Senior Research Fellow of UGC and pursuing his Ph.D. in Education, Osmania University, Hyderabad. He has Qualified UGC - NET in Education, Psychology and Philosophy. He has Presented more than 20 Papers in various International and National Conferences and also published more than 20 research articles in various journals and books.

Mr. G. Balaji

Mr. G. Balaji is a Senior Research Fellow (SRF) of UGC and doing his Ph.D. in the Department of Education, Osmania University, Hyderabad. He has presented papers in various National and International conferences, and published several articles in National and International journals.



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