

The Foundations and Criteria of University Self-Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Algerian Students' Perspectives (University of Setif 1 as a Model)

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Abstract---As human investment constitutes the fundamental pillar for any modification, change, or reform in the university education system, investing in the development of the university student—as a key input to this system—is therefore a primary objective for any reform. Given that the student is a fundamental partner in the educational process and plays a significant role in ensuring and enhancing the quality of their university (Al-Hadi, 2021), the significance of the current study emerges. This study aimed to measure the quality of university facilities and equipment and the availability of a healthy environment from the perspective of students at the University of Setif. To achieve the study's objectives, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 100 students from the University of Setif 1. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part included items related to the students' general information, while the second part comprised six axes. The first axis pertained to pedagogical facilities, the second to the availability of pedagogical tools, the third to cleanliness, the fourth to safety and security, the fifth to health, and the sixth to accommodation and housing. Each axis contained five questions. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were verified. The results were processed using statistical methods via SPSS and were interpreted in light of previous and similar studies that support and confirm the study's findings.

Keywords---Quality, Facilities and Equipment, University Students.

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Introduction

The concept of quality began to occupy human thought with the dawn of self-awareness and awareness of one's surroundings, driven by the realization of the importance of continuous improvement in one's life, work, productivity, as well as in development, growth, and happiness. This interest was epitomized by the founding father of quality management, the American Edward Deming, who emphasized that customer orientation is one of the primary principles of Total Quality Management, whether on the level of products or services (Deming, 2018).

Due to this paramount importance of customers in an organization's life, the idea of establishing dedicated customer relationship management departments and programs emerged in recent decades. In universities as well, specialized student affairs departments exist that strive to enhance the quality of university services (Douglas et al., 2020). However, amidst this significant expansion in higher education institutions, the increasing number of graduates, and the scarcity of available job opportunities, it has become imperative to focus on higher education research and elevate its quality to align with the needs of both students and the labor market (Marginson, 2023). Consequently, numerous local and international conferences have been held in recent years, and the Bologna Accord for developing higher education in Europe stipulated that measuring student satisfaction should be a component of quality and accreditation (Zmas, 2021).

Student satisfaction depends considerably on the quality of their mental and physical health on one hand, and the suitability of the university institution on the other (Stallman, 2021). This is to achieve the student's sense of fulfillment of educational and learning needs, self-esteem, institutional support or backing, and a high degree of security and happiness (Soria & Horgos, 2021). It is from this standpoint that the present study emerged, aiming to measure the level of quality in university facilities and equipment and the availability of a healthy environment from the perspective of students, who are among the most important beneficiary groups of the services provided by the university.

Research Problem

The issue of quality in services provided by various institutions and organizations is a subject that warrants significant attention from researchers and specialists, given its importance and vitality in developing institutional performance to achieve competitiveness amidst the rapid changes of the modern era (Harvey & Williams, 2021). This is particularly relevant as the growth of services and the increase in institutions striving to gain competitive advantages for survival and sustainability—including public and private universities—has intensified this need (Altbach & de Wit, 2022).

For universities to consistently achieve their goals and keep pace with evolving developments and challenges, and since development cannot occur without measurement, it has become necessary to assess the quality of educational services provided to students. This assessment identifies strengths and weaknesses within the educational process, enabling officials to pursue development based on clear and definitive foundations, thereby facilitating the achievement of a competitive edge (Cheng & Tam, 2023). All this necessitates that higher education institutions measure the quality of services delivered to their student clients to ensure that these services meet expectations and are capable of being competitive (Shah et al., 2022).

Consequently, Algeria has focused on implementing quality assurance systems to reform education in general, and university education in particular. In the context of higher education, quality refers to a set of procedures implemented to achieve continuous improvement in graduate outcomes, the quality of scientific research, and community service (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2020). Quality assurance systems have established an administrative framework grounded in a set of

values and reliant on utilizing data and information to invest in various levels for continuous improvement and accreditation preparedness (El Messaoudi, 2021).

Given that human investment is the cornerstone of any modification, change, or reform in the university education system, investing in building the university student as a key input is therefore a fundamental objective. Since reforming this system requires a holistic perspective that addresses all its components, the reform must be founded on ensuring quality across these various elements. Among the most crucial of these components is the quality of the university student's healthy life (Kara & Zayed, 2021). Hence emerges the importance of the present study, which focuses on the quality of general health life. The research problem crystallizes around the following main question:

What is the level of quality of university facilities and equipment and the availability of a healthy environment from the perspective of the university student?

Significance of the Study

1. The quality and nature of services provided represent a vital and important subject within modern educational paradigms. Despite numerous improvements undertaken by universities, the quality level of university services remains modest (Bendermacher et al., 2023).
2. The services sector in Algerian universities has not received sufficient attention (Bouzeghem & Benachenhou, 2022).
3. Understanding the level of services provided and the degree of quality achieved offers clear and crucial signals to those overseeing the educational process in Algerian universities. It enables them to identify strengths and weaknesses in these services, which is particularly significant given the intense competition among universities in the academic marketplace (Hénard & Roseveare, 2022).

Study Terminology

1 Quality

Among the most prominent scholars who studied and analyzed the concept of quality are Harvey and Green (1993). They identified several conceptual approaches to defining quality in higher education, most notably:

Quality as Perfection (or Excellence):

According to this conceptual approach, quality means the absolute, the unique, a high standard, or the exemplary benchmarks that signify excellence. Consequently, the presence of quality is not judged by meeting specific criteria, but by the existence of a model that is itself synonymous with perfection. For instance, considering Harvard University in the United States or the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom as the epitome of perfection in higher education institutions. Thus, other universities must strive to attain this perfection to be characterized by quality (Harvey & Green, 1993)

Quality as Transformation:

This definitional approach views quality in higher education institutions as measured by the concept of value-added. This means that the quality of education provided by an institution is achieved if knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes are added to the student, beyond what they possessed prior to joining the institution. Therefore, this approach focuses on the educational activities within the university that can bring about a qualitative, positive transformation in students within the educational framework. This definitional approach is the most widely accepted among researchers (Ashwin, 2020).

2 The Concept of Student Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the feeling of happiness and pleasure that a person obtains as a result of the fulfillment of a need or desire. In the context of business and services, such as consumer satisfaction, it is the utility

derived from consuming a product or benefiting from a service. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which they perceive the organization's effectiveness in delivering products or services that meet their expectations and needs (Oliver, 2014).

Measuring student satisfaction is a strategic matter for both public and private colleges alike, as it is analogous to a profit and loss statement for companies:

If the satisfaction rate is higher than the student's expectations (a rare occurrence), the university is in a state of superior profit. This is because the college has achieved its goals by equipping the student with the targeted knowledge, values, and skills. The student will be pleased and delighted with their academic achievement and professional life, and will speak positively about the college (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2023)

If it is lower than expected, the university is in a state of loss. This is because the college has failed to achieve its goals and the student's expectations. The student may withdraw from their studies, transfer to another college, or remain in the college but interact with it negatively (Tinto, 2022)

Previous Studies

- In the United States, Kara and D'Angelo (2021) studied the relationship between business student satisfaction at the University of Pennsylvania (143 students) and their intention to persist at the college or university. They found a positive correlation between the two variables. The study concludes that student-centered educational institutions have a greater opportunity to meet their students' needs and desires, thereby retaining them until graduation.
- In Turkey, Kocabacak et al. (2022) studied the satisfaction levels of nursing students at Istanbul University. Their findings indicated that the average satisfaction was high in the first year, decreased in the second year, rose again in the third year, and then dropped to its lowest level in the fourth year. The authors attributed this final decline to the students' realization that they would have chosen a different major as their first preference, as the college had failed to meet their desires and needs.
- At the University of Mauritius, Jhurree (2005) conducted a study titled "Beyond Quality Measurement in Higher Education: Listening to the Voice of Mauritian University Students." The study was based on the premise that understanding students' educational needs would help the administration develop plans to ensure future success. The researcher used the SERVQUAL service quality questionnaire and administered it to 300 students from five faculties. As anticipated, the quality of university services was lower than students' expectations. Most services provided by the university—such as teaching services, faculty, administrative staff, laboratories, and support systems like the library, transportation, catering, and sports—received negative ratings.
- Al-Hassanah's study (2009), titled "The Satisfaction Level of Students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Aleppo, Regarding the Administrative and Academic Performance of their Faculty: A Survey Study," aimed to identify student satisfaction levels within the framework of modern approaches to higher education development, where student satisfaction has become a fundamental element of educational quality. This exploratory research sought to measure the satisfaction level of students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Aleppo, concerning the administrative and academic performance of their faculty. A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool on a sample of 290 undergraduate and postgraduate students from all four years of study. The results revealed that the overall satisfaction level across the ten studied domains ranged from good in the area of faculty member performance, to acceptable in scientific research, and weak in all other domains. The results also indicated no substantial differences in satisfaction levels attributable to demographic and academic variables, except for a few specific items.
- A study by Abdul Mohsen Taqi and others (2008) on students' perceptions of the service climate at the University of Kuwait, the College of Applied Studies, and private universities involved 500

students and utilized the SERVQUAL scale by Parasuraman. The findings showed that 60% of the sample expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided, 30% considered the service acceptable (i.e., meeting expectations), and only 10% stated that the service was better than expected. The study also revealed that students in private universities were more satisfied with their university's services compared to students in public universities. Furthermore, younger students were more satisfied than older students, and male students were more satisfied than female students—a finding that contrasts inversely with the results of student satisfaction research in the UK.

Applied Aspect of the Study Research Methodology

Descriptive Approach:

As the name implies, descriptive research aims to describe various phenomena and events, gather information, data, and observations about them, describe the surrounding circumstances, and determine their state as it exists in reality. Descriptive research does not stop at description and diagnosis but is also concerned with determining what the phenomena and events under investigation should be.

Sampling Technique:

A purposive (judgmental) sampling technique was employed.

The Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of 100 male and female students from the University of Setif 1 (72 females, 28 males), distributed across various academic disciplines. The sample included both resident and non-resident students.

Study Instrument:

The Questionnaire:

A questionnaire is a standardized tool for surveying opinions or collecting data on specific subject(s), prepared according to scientific criteria. Questionnaire results are statistically analyzed to understand these opinions and facilitate the interpretation of the findings (The Body, *Student Guide to Quality*, 2019, p. 31).

Among the most prominent questionnaires related to students are student satisfaction surveys – sometimes called student opinion surveys or student inquiries – used to ascertain students' views on matters related to the educational process, such as their opinion on the curriculum, examinations, administration, the library, and other aspects. This also includes their opinion on non-educational services provided by the institution, such as health, social services, and others – which is the focus of our current study. Consequently, a questionnaire was developed to measure student satisfaction with the institution's facilities, their adequacy, cleanliness, and the provision of a healthy environment.

Instrument Description:

The questionnaire, developed by the two researchers, consisted of six main axes:

1. **Axis One:** Availability of Facilities in terms of Quantity (Items 1 to 5)
2. **Axis Two:** Availability of Pedagogical Tools and Equipment (Items 6 to 10)
3. **Axis Three:** Cleanliness (Items 11 to 15)
4. **Axis Four:** Safety and Security (Items 16 to 20)
5. **Axis Five:** Health (Items 21 to 25)
6. **Axis Six:** Accommodation and Housing (Items 26 to 30)

Statistical Tools Used in the Study:

- Frequencies
- Percentages

Presentation of Results

Question 1: Availability of Facilities in Terms of Quantity

Results regarding the availability of facilities in terms of quantity showed a generally positive evaluation by the students. 89% of the sample respondents agreed that the number of academic facilities is proportionate to the number of students in the college (79% strongly agreed, 10% agreed). The results also indicated good acceptance of the suitability of catering facilities for the student population, with 90% of respondents agreeing (76% strongly agreed, 14% agreed). Concerning facilities for students with disabilities, 62% of students agreed that the facilities meet the needs of this group (50% strongly agreed, 12% agreed). Additionally, 60% of the sample indicated the availability of suitable facilities for practicing religious rites. However, a relative decline was noted in the evaluation of sports and cultural facilities, where only 42% strongly agreed with their availability, indicating a shortcoming in this aspect.

Question 2: Availability of Pedagogical Tools

The results for the pedagogical tools axis revealed a mixed picture. 62% of students agreed on the availability of pedagogical and audiovisual tools in classrooms (50% strongly agreed, 12% agreed). Furthermore, 70% of respondents agreed that the equipment in computer labs is available and sufficient for the number of students (56% strongly agreed, 14% agreed). The evaluation of the library was very positive, with 89% of the sample agreeing on the availability of modern books needed by students (79% strongly agreed, 10% agreed). Regarding the university's website, 70% of students agreed that it provides good and timely information (57% strongly agreed, 13% agreed). In contrast, the evaluation of the internet room showed a division in student opinions, with only 30% strongly agreeing, while 30% of respondents expressed disagreement (12% disagreed, 18% strongly disagreed), indicating problems with the quality and quantity of internet services.

Question 3: Availability of Cleanliness

The results for the cleanliness axis showed notable variation in student evaluations. While 62% of respondents agreed that the buildings and floors are clean (50% strongly agreed, 12% agreed), this percentage dropped significantly for the evaluation of restrooms, where only 60% agreed they are clean (46% strongly agreed, 14% agreed), while 37% expressed disagreement (17% disagreed, 20% strongly disagreed). The evaluation of the efficiency of cleaning services and waste disposal also showed a significant decline, with only 43% strongly agreeing, whereas 48% of respondents expressed disagreement (24% disagreed, 24% strongly disagreed). The results for evaluating university restaurants and clubs were very positive, with 89% of the sample agreeing on their cleanliness (79% strongly agreed, 10% agreed).

Question 4: Availability of Safety and Security

The results for the safety and security axis indicated a general sense of reassurance among students. 70% of respondents agreed that adequate systems are in place to ensure personal safety within the university (57% strongly agreed, 13% agreed). Additionally, 69% of students agreed on the availability of necessary arrangements for protecting personal belongings (59% strongly agreed, 10% agreed). 78% of the sample agreed that security systems exist to protect individual privacy and personal information (66% strongly agreed, 12% agreed). Furthermore, 60% of respondents indicated the university's commitment to providing the necessary quiet atmosphere for study (57% strongly agreed, 3% agreed). Finally, 70% of students felt personally safe while on campus (48% strongly agreed, 22% agreed).

Question 5: Availability of Health

The results for the health axis revealed a positive evaluation of public health services at the university. 90% of respondents agreed that classrooms meet health and safety requirements (76% strongly agreed, 14% agreed). Additionally, 70% of students agreed that the health services can promptly attend to students in emergencies (57% strongly agreed, 13% agreed). 78% of the sample agreed that the health services conduct periodic check-ups and awareness campaigns (66% strongly agreed, 12% agreed). The

evaluation of the health staff was very positive, with 89% of respondents agreeing on their competence and adequate numbers (79% strongly agreed, 10% agreed). Also, 60% of students indicated that the health services conduct periodic monitoring of public facilities (57% strongly agreed, 3% agreed).

Question 6: Availability of Accommodation and Housing

The results for the accommodation and housing axis showed a varied evaluation by students. 60% of respondents agreed on the adequacy of the number of rooms in student housing (42% strongly agreed, 18% agreed). Furthermore, 60% of students agreed that experienced specialists oversee the management of the housing (56% strongly agreed, 4% agreed). 57% of the sample indicated the proximity of the housing to the university and the availability of transportation (45% strongly agreed, 12% agreed). The evaluation of the suitability and safety of the housing was positive, with 70% of respondents agreeing on this (57% strongly agreed, 13% agreed). Additionally, 70% of students agreed on the availability of public services within the housing and their ease of access (58% strongly agreed, 12% agreed).

Discussion of Results

The study's findings reveal a varied picture of the quality of university facilities and equipment from the students' perspective. Overall, the results indicated a positive trend regarding the availability and suitability of basic pedagogical facilities for the student population, with the rate of strong agreement on items in this axis reaching approximately 79%. The results also pointed to a positive evaluation of the presence of pedagogical tools and technical equipment in classrooms and laboratories, as well as the availability of basic health services and a competent health staff, where satisfaction rates in these areas ranged between 66% and 79%. This positive assessment aligns with the study by (Douglas et al., 2020), which confirms that investment in educational and health infrastructure is a fundamental pillar of student satisfaction.

Conversely, the results highlighted clear weaknesses in several vital areas. The lowest levels of satisfaction were recorded concerning the cleanliness of restrooms and the execution of basic maintenance tasks, where the rate of strong agreement on some of these items dropped to around 43%, coupled with a notable increase in the percentage of respondents who disagreed. Students also indicated shortcomings in the quality of electronic services and the up-to-dateness of content in internet labs, as well as insufficient measures to protect personal belongings. These findings are consistent with what was indicated by (Jawahar, 2020)'s study regarding a gap between student expectations and the reality of non-educational services in universities. This disparity is attributed to the possibility that university management might focus more on direct academic aspects at the expense of service and environmental aspects that significantly impact the overall student experience and the quality of university life (Stallman, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the level of quality of university facilities and equipment and the availability of a healthy environment at the University of Setif 1 is characterized by variability. While strengths exist in basic pedagogical and health domains, there remains a pressing need for improvement in aspects related to general cleanliness, maintenance, electronic services, and security. This conclusion underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to quality management within the university, one that is not limited to the educational process alone but extends to encompass all factors that shape a stimulating and supportive university environment for the student.

Based on these findings, the study presents a set of recommendations, the most important of which are: enhancing programs for cleanliness and periodic maintenance in public facilities coupled with increased oversight, developing technological infrastructure and electronic services to meet student needs, and

establishing more effective security procedures to protect property within the university campus. We also recommend conducting similar studies on broader samples and including other variables, such as the relationship between the quality of facilities and academic achievement, and student psychological stress, to draw a more comprehensive picture that contributes to enhancing the quality of university life in Algeria.

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