

Analysis of Education Service Quality in Universities of Pakistan: Postgraduate Students' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Education service quality is central to the academic reputation of a university and employability of its graduates. Pakistan is striving successfully in improving its higher education sector for socio-economic development from individual to national level. The present study intends to explore education service quality in universities of Pakistan by using exploratory qualitative method. The research relied on the perception of 60 postgraduate students recorded through semi-structured interview schedule mainly based on the Higher Education PERFormance (HEdPERF) model. Interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently, thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was made. Education service quality data included six indicators – admissions, academic aspect, non-academic aspects, reputation, access, and programs issues. The study found that the *admission services quality* was reported satisfactory because of assured transparency in the admission processes at all the sample universities. Education service quality for the rest of the five indicators was reported to be of low level. Based on the findings, this research recommends that education service quality is heavily required to be improved by accommodating student voices and concrete measures are mandatory to improve it from present marginalized state to its highest echelon as per student satisfaction as well as market demand of higher education sector.

Keywords: *HEdPERF, education service quality, post-graduate, students' perspective*

Introduction

Service quality is a key indicator of success in higher education sector (Sandhu & Bala 2011, Landrum, Prybutok & Zhang 2007), which is now considered as market; and the students are known as the customers. Higher education does matter as it has indispensable role in national economic growth and sustainability through institutional partnership with local and global industries (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair, & Ragavan 2016, Altinay & Ezel 2011, Abdullah 2006, Dabholkar 1995). That is why, higher education institutions should keep on assessing continuously their service quality to meet the customers' expectations (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006, Devinder & Dalta 2003, Albretch 1991). Service quality is a sign of customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention (Nadiri, Kandampully, & Hussain 2009, Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin 2007, Brady,

Cronin, & Brand 2002, Dabholkar, Shepherd, & Thorpe 2000, Dion, Javalgi, & Dilorenzo-Aiss 1998, Cronin & Taylor 1994). Therefore, competitive higher education market compels educational managers to ensure the education service quality (*ESQ*) to improve the institutional profile, global outlook and reputation among potential customers (students) and employers (Green 2014, Sohail & Shaikh 2004, Patric 1996).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Abdullah (2006) developed models i.e Service Performance (SERVPERF) and Higher Education PERFormance (HEdPERF) respectively to explore higher education service quality. There are multiple dimensions of *ESQ*, and different researchers have a diverse opinion on their relevance with *ESQ*. However, some common dimensions are academic aspects, staff competence, institution reputation, access, administrative services, and

physical resources (Onditi & Wechuli 2017, Narang 2012, Clewes, 2003, Elliot & Shin 2002, Athiyaman 1997); because the customer satisfaction is not confined to classroom activities only (Anantha & Abdul Ghani 2012). Students, parents, faculty, administrative staff and employers are the stakeholders of higher education, and they may have their definitions of service quality following their need and expectation (Gruber, Fuß, Voss & Gläser-Zikuda 2010, Appleton-Knapp & Krentler 2006, Aldridge & Rowley 1998). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) stated that *service quality* is playing indispensable role in the current market of higher education. The rising universities of the world which have been ranked high in QS world ranking are the models of service quality. Most of these universities realized that students are required to be treated as potential clients so that their expectations can be met accordingly (DeShields *et al.*, 2005). Perceived *ESQ* is a product of comparison between the set standard and the performance (Suuroja 2003). Kimani and co-workers (2011) stated that the concept of higher education service quality is similar to other market-based services context. Higher education institutions are advised to view the service quality in organizational management perspective (Oldfield & Baron 2000).

The literature exposed that the *service quality* has been widely studied and ushered in industries and other commercial sector and it rightly contributed to its development conspicuously; but it remained neglected in higher education (Shank, Walker & Hayes 1996). Therefore, it is the key responsibility of higher education institutes to follow *ESQ* models in its true spirit (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen & Johnson 2009). The education services may be improved by introducing best (appropriate) service quality models which should be equipped with modern technologies in all areas of students' needs (Ong & Nankervis 2012). The researchers

of higher education believe that the institutions should be well informed regarding students opinion of their educational services. This would make them able to make proper allocation of funds, resources and strategic plans of service delivery (Darlaston-Jones, Pike, Cohen, Young, Haunold & Drew 2003, Lee & Tai 2008, Alves & Raposo 2009). The systematic mechanism to explore the student perception of the service may be more authentic and may help giving better insight. In this connection, Ojo (2010) also stressed on listening of student voices for improvement of service quality. Pakistan is a developing South Asian state having 207 universities (124 public and 83 private). The higher education sector in Pakistan is experiencing a multitude of variations due to political, social and economic factors. The sector needs massive reforms to make it contributory to the national economy, thus strengthening democracy and peace process. Resultantly, it will start impacting the economic growth, political process, and reduction of unemployment. Jamjoom (2009) expresses that quality education imparts the necessary skills among graduates which help them in employability. The institutions of higher education across the world are concerned with the quality of higher education (Angell, Heffernan, & Megicks 2008, Tan & Kek 2004, Sohail & Shaikh 2004). Moreover, they are interested to evaluate *ESQ* in higher education which is a social, professional and economic need; whereas, perceived satisfaction level of the customers should be increased through ensuring *ESQ* by higher education institutes (Jelena 2010, Zafiroopoulos & Vrana 2008). Therefore, the objective of the intended research is to explore *ESQ* in the universities of Pakistan from the perspective of the postgraduate students. The *ESQ* cannot be improved

without exploring the quality of services being currently offered. Following are the research questions of this study.

1. What are post-graduate students' perspectives of *ESQ*?
2. What are post-graduate students' suggestions to improve *ESQ*?

Research Methodology

This study used an exploratory qualitative method to explore the *ESQ* offered at universities of Punjab, Pakistan. The Qualitative research focuses to hear participants' voices and perspectives in their natural context (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, Hatch 2002, Creswell 2007, LeCompte & Schensul 1999). Pakistan has five provinces and Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan. There are 60 universities under its administrative control; out of which 34 are public universities (HEC 2019). Therefore, the study was delimited to 29 general public universities of Punjab. These universities share homogeneous culture and structure in their academic faculties, and admission and administrative processes. The research relied on the perceptions of 60 postgraduate students. The researchers randomly selected six general public universities – University of the Punjab, Government College University Lahore, Islamia University Bahawalpur, University of Sargodha, University of Gujrat, and Government College University Faisalabad. The researchers purposely selected five departments – Department of Chemistry, Department of Physics, Department of Education, Department of Psychology and Department of English, and two students from each department thus making a sample of 10 students from each university. These departments were selected because of the higher probability of having students of MPhil and/or PhD. Semi-structured interview schedule was developed to explore students' perception of *ESQ*. The interview schedule was mainly based on the Higher Education

PERFORMANCE (HEdPERF) model (Abdullah 2006) because this model was specifically developed and validated to explore *ESQ* at the higher education level. Finally, the interview schedule includes information about Admissions, Academic Aspect, Non-academic Aspects, Reputation, Access, and Program Issues. HEdPERF has been found a more reliable scale in the research literature; and it is recommended to be applied in different countries to explore *ESQ* (Icli & Anil 2014, Abdullah 2006). Moreover, the researcher believes that HEdPERF covers all necessary aspects of higher education services which a student uses and experiences during the higher education studies (Brochado 2009) and it is a wide-ranging performance measuring scale which consists of important indicators of *service quality* about higher education (Zafiroopoulos & Vrana 2008). A researcher Dennis (2013) assessed the appropriateness and adequacy of SERVPERF and HEdPERF scales by collecting data from postgraduate students of Hong Kong higher education system and he found HEdPERF more reliable and valid as compared to SERVPERF. The result obtained through context-specific instrument of service quality can be used more confidently to improve the *ESQ* in higher education; therefore, the HEdPERF model was followed in this study. Interviews are extensively used for data collection in qualitative educational research because interviews provide in-depth information like perceptions, thoughts, and feelings which cannot be directly observed (Gall, Gall & Borg 2007, Patton 2002, Mills 1988); and sometimes interviews are designed, with already identified set of questions (Gay, Mills, & Airasian 2009, Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun 2011). Sixty interviews were considered enough as described by (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Whereas, Creswell (2007) recommends that 20 to 30 individuals should be interviewed who have a

comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. Interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently, thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was made, because audio recording of the interviews provided cohesive themes for analysis purpose (Gay et al., 2009, Fraenkel et al., 2011).

Results

The researchers analyse the qualitative data by applying the thematic analysis techniques. The results of interviews are given below on the identified indicators – Admissions, Academic Aspect, Non-academic Aspects, Reputation, Access, and Programs Issues.

Admissions Services

The analysis of admission services reveals the following sub themes.

(a) Guidance and counselling

It has been reported by the respondents of the present study that universities do not have a proper system of guidance and counselling for prospective students. Therefore, most often students fail to make an informed decision in selecting an academic program of their choice. For example

“I am enrolled in a program which was not relevant to me. Later on, I have come to know that the program has no job-related scope” (Student 22)

(b) High merit and limited seats

Present study records that universities have limited seats and merit of each program is competitively very high. Consequently, the students are compelled to seek admission in private universities. Otherwise, they find a place in a program which they are least interested in. For example

“I was interested to get admission in engineering after BSc but due to high merit I could not.... Now I am in MPhil Mathematics just

to have a degree” (Student 6, Student 43)

And

“University should offer admission to maximum applicants who fulfill the basic criteria; instead of offering admission on competition basis” (Student 18, Student 52, Student 55)

(c) Financial support

The respondents said that, firstly, universities had limited financial aid for students in the form of scholarships; secondly, most of the time, students were unaware of the availability of university scholarships and the process how to get scholarships. It has been reported

“It is very difficult for my parents to pay my fee. University should identify the deserving students at the time of admission to grant them scholarship” (Student 14, Student 46)

And

“After completing my two semesters, I heard about PEEF scholarship in which I was eligible. University should have clear and easy procedure to award scholarships” (Student 3, Student 21)

(d) Transparency

The current study explains that universities have a transparent admission process. Therefore, the students get admission purely on merit. Students are highly satisfied with the admission process. For example

“My university has highly transparent merit system and students have no doubt on it” (Student 2, Student 7, Student 12, Student 43)

And

“The university has developed online admission services wherein you can access your merit online and even you can see the marks details and merit wise position of other competing candidates” (Student 37, Student 22)

A. Academic Aspects

In the analysis of academic aspects, further sub-themes have been generated which are given below.

(a) Teacher’s professional competence

The present study reports that teachers do not have in-depth understanding of students’ issues. Therefore, they remain unable to cater with their diversity, cultural barriers and emotional aggression. Hence, they cannot give personal attention to students for individual guidance and advice. The university teachers have a theoretical basis of knowledge but they should have a more practical understanding of it. Furthermore, some of the teachers need to develop their communication skills in understanding and integrating their knowledge. Further, and keep on updating themselves continuously in their area of expertise. Students’ opinion is given below.

“I think teachers are not self-motivated to teach and impart skills to the students. They look like office workers who come to university and fulfill their official formalities of routine office work” (Student 13)

And, conversely,

“My university has really qualified, professional, knowledgeable and self-motivated teachers. However, it would be good if they teach us

courses with their practical applicability. We, the students, are lucky enough that our teachers are senior professors; and they do not leave us on the mercy of their teaching and/or research assistants” (Student 58, Student 15)

And, furthermore

“Just having a degree in hand does not ensure the quality of knowledge a person possesses. Same situation, I have observed at my department, almost all teachers are PhD degree holders, but the difference lies in their way of teaching. Some of them put really great effort in educating young brains; while others only take it as a spiritless mechanics and deliver their lecture taking the entire activity for granted, thus making it insipid to its fullest. In this way they are unable to deliver quality of knowledge with passion” (Student, 39)

It has been described by the respondents of the study that the culture of sharing and collaboration partially exists, but it needs to be channelized. Moreover, the teachers’ behaviors are so rusty that their teaching in the classroom fails to instil confidence in their students. Students’ voices are being narrated as under:

“Before admission I was expecting high; but university teachers did not properly arrange the seminars and open debates in my

department specifically related to my field of study. While watching lectures from youtube I came to know that there is a huge gap between theory and practice in our system” (Student 28)

And

“After spending couple of years at university I am still not confident enough about my professional and social skills. Because I was taught in the same way as I did at college and school” (Student 34, Student 51, Student 44)

(b) Curriculum and content

The present study reported that academic programs have defined course contents and objectives; but, teaching modules are not designed to cater to the individual student’s needs. Moreover, the overall development of students is compromised, and unfortunately, the course content is not effective to make students competent enough to get them well-adjusted in competitive job market around them. Students believe:

“I feel that the syllabus being taught is very traditional which do not appeal us very much. Sometimes, I feel bored because of unnecessary lecturing in the class” (Student 6, Student 11, Student 31, Student 40)

And

“It was shocking for me to see the syllabus with graduate level study material. In PhD class teachers prepared us for written examination which has no relation with scholarly skills. Curriculum should be

revised to meet the emerging market needs. (Student 5, Student 8)

(c) Pedagogical resources and ICT resources

It has been narrated by the respondents of the present study that universities do not have sufficient technological resources to support pedagogical practices effectively. Teachers are using traditional ways of teaching. They partially use multimedia and ICT resources. Resultantly, these practices have less attraction for students to get involved in learning. Their opinions are given below:

“My college (private sector) has had more technological resources than that of the university. I still do not have internet access at my department. For the presentation purposes we get multimedia after much difficulty” (student 2, Student 46)

It is observed that universities are failing in two perspectives in the context of technological advancement. Firstly, universities do not have the proper technology to support teaching and learning practices. Secondly, teaching and non-teaching staff are not trained enough for using modern technologies.

(d) Assessment and feedback

This research reported that our sample universities lacked in providing systematic feedback on students’ performances. The universities have an examination system but they fail to promote critical thinking and technical and professional skills among their graduates. Assessment practices are testing the knowledge and memory of students which is being considered an outdated practice at present. It is evidenced as under:

“Our class test, midterm and final term examinations purely demand rote

memorization. Teachers are also teaching on the same pattern to make us prepared for such written tests. The project based performance is rare at my university; therefore, in my opinion, it would be difficult for me to survive in professional world of work” (Student 16)

And

“I never find the result of midterm and final term in time. University has very poor system of feedback. Many times, I asked my teacher to give me details of my result and requested for rechecking but I was told of tough procedure of rechecking my answer books. I think it should be responsibility of the teachers to submit their feedback in time, in order to maintain transparency and to make students active, thus, avoiding mistakes as it had happened” (Student ,Student 17)

Furthermore,

“There is no such parameter that, I might have come across at my department which would have told me about my progress. Exams are the only thing which measures the knowledge and aptitude of a student. Moreover, the teachers have had allocated sufficient time for student and had displayed their

*consultation hours”
(Student 20, Student 31)*

The respondents have unanimously shown their disbelief in the present system of examination which is not appealing to them.

B. Non Academics Aspect

Sub-themes of the non-academic aspects (willingness, ability, politeness and availability of administrative staff) are being described below. Respondents of the present study said that the administrative staff is lacking in the willingness and ability to help the students. Moreover, the staff attitude is harsh towards the students, which adversely affects students’ confidence in them. Although, few respondents commented that the staff is very welcoming but does not know the rule of business i.e. how to deal and facilitate students to help them resolve their problems. Ensuing lines provide robust evidence on it.

*“I feel hesitation to visit administrative offices due to fear of rude behavior of administrative staff. The staff, most of the time replies, “I do not know”, which is very embarrassing to me”
(Student 24, Student 33)*

Whereas,

“I feel there is no problem with the administration during my university education. I have chance to make a very respectful relationships with them. They keep good feelings for the students and keep their promises” (Student 14, Student 37)

And,

“The clerical staff of my department is not cooperative; they provide only partial

information about different programs, scholarships and other tasks related to students' matters. So, in this case, they are unable to fully guide and facilitate the students" (Student 7)

C. Reputation

The reputation generates following sub-themes which are analyzed as under:

(a) Library, labs and cafeteria

The present study indicates that universities have a couple of cafeterias and library resources but these are not well managed to deliver the quality services to the students. Students' trend to visit the library is very low because they feel that the library is not attractive for them in term of services and environment. Moreover, modern science equipment are not available to the students of pure sciences working in labs. Carrying out their research projects and theses, they fail to get practical lab exposure in the real sense of the term. However, the universities have been reported to have favourable and ambient conditions (like ventilation, noise, odour, etc.). Buildings and grounds are up to the level of students' satisfaction. Students' voices are being narrated here.

"University library services are less professional. The services provided over there do not sufficiently meet the need of the researchers. The library should have fast digital access to international digital resources to access the latest research literature in the form of books, journals and other research documents. Cafeterias are available, but they are not having proper and clean places to

arrange students' social gatherings" (Student 12)

And, furthermore

"How to use library services for research purposes is very important question. University library staff should make the brochures and arrange training sessions to guide students and research scholars for better digital access in today's ocean of knowledge. The library is not open for 24 hours. Further, the cafeterias are not economical; and the food quality is very low" (Student 23, Student 41)

Moreover,

"I am an organic major student in Department of Chemistry department. I have marked unavailability of laboratory equipment, machines such as NMR, IR spectrometer at my Department during practical work in the lab. This affects the development of lab skills which are essential for carrying out research in MPhil and PhD" (Student 3)

(b) Sports and recreational infrastructure

Respondents of present study perceived that universities have reasonable sports infrastructure and offer admission on sports basis. But a few of them highlighted that universities lack in the international collaboration in sports. Students' opinions are:

"The university makes efforts for sports

activities, which are commendable. However, the promotion of university sports at global level is still direly needed. This can be done through linkages with universities and sports forum across the border. This will also add to soft image of the country” (Student 1)

Further they suggested,

“There should be indoor and outdoor sports venues at university which may open to all the students. Moreover, provision of quality food and services should be on priority of university administration” (Student 25, Student 49)

It has been reported by the respondents of present study that despite scarce resources regarding permanent recreational infrastructure, universities arrange recreational activities throughout the year. Students reported that they did not have specified playing areas at campus to arrange social gatherings, thus, feeling incapable of promoting the social skills and having a very limited exposure to personal experiences among the class and campus fellows. Further, the universities arrange annual events which are commendable but these are very few in number. Students’ voices are being raised occasionally which are as under:

“I feel that the social clubs and places for social gatherings are lacking in university. University should have such places on the campus where students can arrange the events independently under the specified standard operating procedures

(SOPs). A few events which university arranges annually do not expose the students’ talent” (Student 11, Student 42)

ESQ was perceived low by the students. This is merely because of poor coordination among various components of a university.

(c) Employability

Participants of present study perceived that the university reputation has greater impact on the graduate employability and job prospects. The respondents agreed that the public sectors universities do not keep good reputation in the corporate sector in terms of employability of their graduates, which is indeed questionable. The reputation in terms of job prospects was perceived very low. One of the students suggested:

“As a student I feel that university should improve the service quality. It is important to enhance the overall level of service quality for students to impart the skills among its graduates. These skills are undoubtedly necessary in competitive job market”. (Student 19)

Adding to this, another student said that

“Due to lack of skill and knowledge, graduates face hardships in finding better jobs, which may cause unemployment. Another reason for unemployment is the lack of linkages between university and industries, companies and business firms” (Student 30)

(d) Career counseling

The present study finds that the institutions do not have proper counselling services for their graduates to prepare them to meet future challenges during their schooling and immediate after their graduation. Majority of the participants told that they needed career counseling, mainly to seek advice and guidance to search a job. It has been reported that

“Our university does not have career counseling service; otherwise, we may have had access to a range of jobs and internship blogs. It may provide an opportunity to practice psychometric tests which may be useful for securing a job or at least joining an internship program.”
(Student 8)

Adding to this note, another student exclaimed:

“University is not supporting us with the career counseling service. It shall be crucial for me in improving my job prospects in consideration of the competitive job market. I believe that career counseling services have evident impact on graduate employment.”
(Student 29)

D. Access

From the data of access, the sub themes (availability of staff, students' freedom of expression and transparency in official procedures) which are analyzed as under: It has been narrated by the respondents that the staff has less availability in their offices to help the students. The university administrative procedures are not refined enough to deliver quality services within no time. Moreover, there is no transparency in official procedures and

practices. Whereas, a few respondents reported that official procedures are clearly defined and have been made accessible to public at large; but the university officials manipulate regulations as per their understanding (sometimes, biased and/or sometimes, evil intentions). Students believe that

“University administrative staff’s attitude towards students is good; but their less availability in the offices has made the official procedures extremely time taking and hard enough. University should have strong digital system to facilitate the students.”
(Student 15)

Another student added,

“Our universities are not providing quality services to students in different aspects. The higher education should work on modern lines following the practices in the corporate sector, which keep on focusing the customers’ needs, and try to deliver the best accordingly”
(Student 11)

It has been reported that freedom of expression is also compromised in the institutes of higher learning, which is a hindrance in the promotion of democratic and social values. A student claimed

“I have not come across any student club or organization at campus which would have been rendering student service productively, like, creating awareness about core social issues, enhancing gender equality, women

empowerment and promoting cultural diversity” (Student 5)

It has been suggested that

“Presence of on campus social clubs and unions serve as a platform for the exploration of hidden talents and positive intents of young minds. Their potential may have taken negative turn if not properly channelized, as we have seen in the form of extremism which has adversely affected our country in recent years” (student 21)

Overall the quality of administrative services offered by universities was perceived very low.

E. Programme Issues

It has been evidenced in the present study that, although, universities are offering a wide range of programs in various disciplines; but, in fact, they do not have proper infrastructure, labs, etc. to run these programs appropriately and effectively. The academic programs do not have variety in their specialization streams within that very discipline. A student reported:

“Students normally face inflexibility in choosing their desired combination of subjects and courses at my department. Only because of the fact that department is lacking in financial and logistic resources. Students are offered preplanned combinations of majors and minors; therefore, they are bound to select courses from a limited pool of the courses” (Student 7)

Adding to this, another student told:

“I am studying with the professors having PhD qualification; they are highly professional in their fields. One big issue is the unavailability of students preferred specializations in their discipline. The specializations are mentioned on the prospectus and faculty brochures, but the department offers only one of them. Therefore, the students are bound to opt only one which is being offered to whole class” (Student 36)

Discussion

A. Admissions Services

The present study reveals that the quality of admission services are perceived satisfactory by the students. However, the guidance services are not up to the mark to help students in selecting study programme of their interest. In this connection, Obermeit (2012) states that from the last ten years the American universities made efforts to train admission staff to help students by providing them guidance in selecting their future study programme. Fuller, Foskett, Paton and Maringe (2008) state that the majority of the students studying in the United Kingdom rely on the guidelines given by the counsellors available in the educational institutions. It is found that our students have a lesser degree of freedom in choosing their future study programme due to high merit and a limited number of available seats. Rather, they found their way into less preferred disciplines. Financial services are partially available and most often students are unaware of the availability of provided funding services. Financial services and student funding by universities do matter in improving *ESQ*

(Clewes 2003). Ismail (2009) finds that financial information and guidance provided by the university increase the student satisfaction level and add to their confidence in their institution. Our students are found highly satisfied with the transparency in the admission processes at general public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan.

B. Academic Aspects

This study reveals that academic service quality in universities is perceived low by the students. Universities have qualified academic staff but they are more focused on theoretical aspect instead of a practical one. Demands of potential employers of the existing industry are in contrast with the curriculum of the universities, which is an important reason behind increasing unemployment among the graduates. Narang (2012) had also found the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirement. Angell, Heffernan and Megicks (2008) report that postgraduate student's study experiences are the foundation to their future career, therefore, the curriculum modification according to industry and industrial linkages, should be prioritized immediately. Telford and Masson (2005) conclude in their survey that students give great importance to their career prospects immediately after completing their degree. We further found that university teachers do not have an in-depth understanding of students' issues. Similarly, Donlagic and Fazlic (2015) and Angell, Heffernan and Megicks (2008) indicate in their study that the academic staff does not provide required services to give attention to individual students and lack interest in students' successes. Therefore, the academics services have a quality deficit. Further, Navarro, Iglesias, and Torres (2005) establish the argument that the quality of academic staff and their services are important indicators of service quality. Further, the present study found that teachers do not give personal attention to students for guidance and advice. Faculty are not equipped with pedagogical

skills and teaching-learning practices are not facilitated with the latest technology. Viraiyan, Kamalanabhan, and Keshwar (2016) find that the latest teaching tools and equipment were insufficient in the University of Mauritius. Encabo (2011) reveals that academic resources were the most influential factor, for student's satisfaction. Universities have a proper examination system but students are assessed through memory test which is a hindrance in promoting critical thinking and skilful education. It is also found that there is no proper system of feedback for students' performance in universities of Punjab. However, other researches (Arambewela & Hall 2008) reveal that students give importance to the ability of the teachers to support them in solving problems and giving feedback. This research finds that the main reasons behind poor *ESQ* are low understanding of educational managers about higher education and its processes.

C. Non-Academic Aspects

Service quality of administrative aspects is perceived very low by the students in this study. Universities do not have campus management information system to deal efficiently with the student's query and consequently, to redress their day to day issues. Universities' non-teaching staff is not trained enough to deal with the students with a high level of politeness and help them solve their issues immediately. This is perhaps because they do not think of the importance of customers' satisfaction in the higher education sector. However, a few students were quite satisfied with the non-teaching staff. Ushantha and Kumara (2016) conclude that training and development of non-teaching and supporting staff shall be effective in the provision of quality services to the students. This study found that administrative staff does not show readiness to respond to the students' queries and concerns. Working hours are reported to be appropriate for routine functioning and addressing their issues.

Faganel (2010) finds that provision of valid and workable information within defined timeline and knowledge of administrative staff about services are the most important things as perceived by the students. This research found that decision-makers do not act to respond to their promises and commitments with students. Green (2014) also found similar results and stated that the students of the university are not satisfied with administrative services. We concluded that the resistance in the adoption of new technologies in the provision of administrative services is the main cause of poor *ESQ*. Similarly, Afridi, Khattak and Khan (2016) conclude that universities should change the traditional approaches to address the students' issues and to create a friendly environment.

D. Reputation

This study reveals that the reputation of public sector universities is perceived low by the students. Universities are losing their image in producing skilful professional graduates. Therefore, the graduates perceived that universities have not a very good reputation in the job industry in terms of employability. Although, Ushantha and Kumara (2016) reveal that reputation has no significant impact on the perception of student about *ESQ*, whereas, Yavuz and Gülmez (2016), Zaim, Turkyilmaz, Tarim, Ucar, and Akkas (2010) and Kang & James (2004) report that reputation has a great influence on students' perception and satisfaction, which lead students towards institutional loyalty. It is found that universities have limited cafeterias and library resources but which are not well managed in delivering quality services to the students. The infrastructure of outdoor games and co-curricular activities is available. However, the relevant forums are not well connected with the national and international organizations to project the universities' positive image. Universities in our settings lack in the provision of proper lab facilities and the required skills. In research at

Durban University of Technology (DUT), Green (2014) states that university direly needs to provide modern scientific laboratories with the latest instruments to compete with their counterparts in the higher education sector. Furthermore, the present study indicates that universities do not have the permanent recreational infrastructure for social gathering and celebrations but arrange the routine recreational activities around the year. University has adequate photocopy, printing and transport facilities. Moreover, the university lacks in providing quiet and peaceful places within campus like research rooms and places for student's career counselling. Further, we found that universities have favourable ambient conditions (ventilation, etc.) prevailing within the campus and safety on campus. Whereas, Viraiyan et al., (2016) find that student is not satisfied with quiet places available on campus for study. The present study found that the appearances of building and grounds are developed up to the mark but not well managed on a daily basis. Green (2014) argue that the physical appearance has a lot of influence on the students' perceptions, but the students feel that DUT building appearance and physical facilities are not appealing to them. We found that universities are providing career counselling services but the overall efficiency of these services is perceived low by the students. The graduates believe that the career services are a key factor in helping to decide a future career.

E. Access

The present study indicates that students do not have fair and equal access to university services, and no opportunity to enjoy social freedom at the campus. Similarly, Saleem and Chaudhry (2017) had also found that students are dissatisfied with various services, while, Malik and Danish (2010) studied that the student satisfaction in the Punjab Province of Pakistan and found that students are satisfied with services. We found that

universities do not have the proper forum for students' social gathering and recreational purpose. Therefore, academic and social freedom of expression is compromised. Resultantly, higher education institutes have failed to produce social, political and academic leadership in the country. However, the students are dealt respectfully at university. Further, the students suffer a lot because of the unavailability of standard operating procedures to deliver the services. Hensley and Sulek (2007) state that student customers perceive negative and dissatisfied if they have to wait for a long time to get a service. The findings suggest that universities have not up to the mark health services for boarders and days scholars.

F. Program Issues

The study also reveals that universities are offering a wide range of academic programs in almost all fields and disciplines. However, the program structure does not offer different specializations within that very discipline to satisfy students' interest. The courses and specializations are already decided by the universities and students have zero degree of freedom in choosing a specialization of their interest. Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, and Fitsilis (2010) argue that the availability of diverse courses and specialization are well connected with market demand which does increase students' satisfaction. They further reveal that the number of elective courses and modules are important for a student because they provide the opportunity to customize their studies and gain experience of different specialization during their main course of studies.

Conclusion

The study investigated education service quality (*ESQ*) in six dimensions at six general public universities in (Punjab) Pakistan. Six dimensions studies here are the *admissions, academic aspects, non-academic aspects, reputation, access* and *program issues*. The study conclusively

reported low *ESQ*, except for the admission services. Academic staff is more focused on the theoretical aspects instead of focusing on imparting necessary skills which are required in the job market and/or for the entrepreneurship. The curriculum being exercised recently at the universities is not aligned with the demands of the market/entrepreneurship. Moreover, the teaching-learning practices are heavily divorced from using the latest technology. Unavailability of the campus management system is one of the causes responsible for this reported low *ESQ*. Further, universities' supporting staff is not trained enough to provide the services within the defined timeline. Universities are losing their reputation in their linkage with industry because they are not producing the skilful professionals as required in the market, and this is what threat to graduates job prospects. Universities have support services and physical resources i.e. cafeterias, library, sports, co-curricular and transportation services, but all these services are not well managed. Students do not have the opportunity to enjoy social freedom at the campus. Student unions and social forums are witnessing absolute absence in the universities which compromise overall development of the graduates as competent professionals. Although a wide range of academic programs are being offered in almost all the fields of study, these lack in offering emerging specializations within the academic disciplines which are very much needed to satisfy students' interest.

Implications

It has been so far established that concrete measures by accommodating student voices are required to improve *ESQ* from its present marginalized state to the highest echelon as per students' satisfaction as well as market demands in higher education sector. Universities must keep on continuously assessing their practices regarding *ESQ* for its improvement and to uplift the professional reputation of the institution.

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