





Research Article

Identifying and Prioritizing Aspects of the Educational Services Quality in the Faculties of Mazandaran Univesiry of Medical Sciences

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ABSTRACT

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Background and Objectives: The sustainable development of the higher education system, which is a dynamic system, requires the balanced, proportionate and balanced growth of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions in parallel. Accordingly, identifying and prioritizing aspects of the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences is of great importance and necessity.

Methodology: Using a quantitative approach, the study was conducted through a field study and the information was collected using two stages of a researcher-made questionnaire. The statistical population included all professors and students in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in Payambareazam Branch including 15 professors and 15 students to identify and prioritize aspects of the quality of educational services. To analyze the data, the Analytic Hierarchy Process or AHP was used.

Results: The teaching quality of the professors in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences was about 0.257 and had the highest impact among the main components.

Conclusion: In order to develop an educational system, it is very important to evaluate the quality of educational services from its applicants. The research results show that special attention should be paid to the clinical education section. And that the clinical education section is one of the critical stages of medical education, which plays a major role in creating the professional capabilities of students. Improving the quality of clinical education requires continuous review of the current situation, recognition of strengths and correction of weaknesses.

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Introduction

The quality of educational services is conceptually linked to the field. Ensuring the quality of education is one of the existing problems in the healthcare system. It aims to help students learn, achieve secondary goals, understand the needs of students and other educational stakeholders, value individuals, leadership and communication, support institutional operations, measure effectiveness, plan for improvement, and create collaborative relationships. Teaching quality can be considered as one of the important factors in meeting the needs of students and assessing the competence of professors. Researchers suggest that one of the main problems in universities is the neglect of teaching and its quality compared to research activities (Alipour et. Al, 2020). In fact, it can be said that the quality of education is a dynamic and multi-dimensional matter that is constantly changing. This dynamism and variability of quality necessitate educational planners to strive for its continuous improvement.

Quality in higher education has become a crucial factor in the competition and excellence of university systems in the global higher education arena. Despite the shortcomings and deficiencies in the teaching process and implemented programs in each educational institution, investigating the factors affecting the quality of education and teaching is considered a sensitive and important issue that requires in-depth research and examination. As quality education and teaching are of great importance for the competitiveness of universities today, students of educational institutions always seek high-quality education and services (NocheNaser, 2023). Among them, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, due to its mission-oriented role among the country's medical higher education institutions in training efficient human resources for the health sector, has a concern for raising the quality of the teaching and training provided by its faculty members. The education system can be considered one of the most complex subsystems of social, economic, and cultural systems. Given the extensive activities of the education system, evaluating educational organizations, programs, staff, and the services provided by them can

play an effective role in providing the educational quality (Enayati Novinfar et.al, 2023). Based on this, the components examined in this study in the basic services section include teaching quality, university physical environment, clinical training facilities, hospital facilities, theoretical training facilities, laboratory equipment, and skills training centers, human resources utilization, attractive services, and motivational factors such as organizing various celebrations and welfare services.

The quality of educational services is assessed in terms of reliability and responsiveness (Heidari et al. 2023). The main priorities of the quality aspects of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in the fields of medicine, public health, pharmacy, paramedicine, nursing, and midwifery are essential for educational information at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. Such research, using experts in various educational fields at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, is of special importance and necessity for educational and service improvements. It can be said that paying attention to comprehensive quality in service organizations, especially universities, is not only important but also vital, and this importance is also felt in medical universities due to the nature of their services. It is necessary to continuously assess the quality and provide solutions to enhance it in medical universities.

Heidari et.al (2023) concluded that in all aspects of providing educational services, there were seen some shortcomings that necessitated planning to reduce or eliminate them. To be more aware of the educational needs of students, periodic surveys were needed to identify the deficiencies as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to improve the situation.

Sadeghzadeh et al. (2023) found that the current status of the quality of educational services in the virtual education system of Azad University was favorable. The general conclusion of the research showed that the best way to ensure the current and desired quality of educational services in the virtual education system of Islamic Azad University was to use virtual education standards.

Enayati Novinfar et al. (2023) found that students' perceptions of the quality of education services are at low level and with high levels of expectations, and also perception and expectation gap mean of students of the quality of model was negative and significant in the educational services. In fact, results revealed that students are not satisfied with the quality of educational services of above – mentioned university and these services do not grant the expectations of the students.

Noche Naser (2023) stated that higher education institutions, as one of the types of service organizations, should try to identify the expectations and needs of students, maintain and attract their loyalty and gain a competitive advantage, and provide them with quality services. Examining the methods and approaches proposed in quality assurance systems has been considered as a suitable strategy to maintain and improve the quality of the higher education system and a suitable response to the challenges ahead in providing quality services.

Heidari et al. (2023) found that there was a gap in all aspects of the quality of educational services and related terms, showing that the expectations of students were completely met. In order to resolve this gap, meticulous planning and effective management of educational services should be enacted.

Jafari et al. (2022) concluded that for all 6 components of quality of education services including educational aspect, educational performance, program, non-educational aspect, access and reputation between service recipients and service providers, there was a significant difference of 99% confidence level. In other words, in all six mentioned aspects, the service providers evaluated the current situation better than the service receivers. They concluded that there was a gap between the views of service providers and recipients as most of the service providers evaluated the quality of their services more favorably than the service receivers, and the service receivers usually had more critical opinions about the various dimensions of the services provided.

Marimon et al. (۲۰۱۹) proposed a model for measuring the quality of educational services. The measurement tool of this model is a questionnaire for educational

service quality, consisting of 17 closed-ended questions with five-point criteria. The UnivQual scale consists of three criteria, with the distribution of questionnaire questions in these nine criteria as follows: Empowerment includes curriculum, services, and facilities, while outcomes include the development of students' skills.

Therefore, periodic measurement of service quality in determining the level and continuous improvement of the quality of service organizations, including universities, is highly effective. Higher education faces significant pressures to improve its activities, and continuous evaluation is necessary to achieve continuous improvement in activities. The results of Mohammadi and Vakili's study (2009) at Zanzan University of Medical Sciences also showed that the highest mean gap was in the dimension of empathy, followed by response, reliability, and tangibles, and the lowest mean gap was related to assurance. There was a significant difference in perceptions and expectations in all dimensions of services.

On the other hand, due to the complexity of the concept of quality, especially in the field of higher education, there is still no general consensus on this matter. It seems that evaluating services is one way to help with this matter. Students, employees, faculty members, the community, and industries are major customers of higher education, among whom the opinions of students can play a significant role in improving the quality of services. Overall, there was a gap between expectations and realities in all dimensions, indicating the failure to meet students' expectations of the services provided and the low quality of educational services in this university, which is consistent with the aim of this research.

Methodology:

Being conducted in early 2023, the research methodology in this study was based on applied objectives and is considered as a survey method in terms of obtaining the required data. Field research method is used to gather information. The main data collection tool in this research is a questionnaire. The statistical population for identifying and prioritizing the aspects of educational service quality in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences includes

professors and students of the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, and the sampling method is purposive random sampling.

The purpose of this research, according to the opinions of the aforementioned experts, is to determine the components, then prepare the questionnaire, distribute the questionnaire, rank using Expert Choice software, prioritize, and finally model the aspects of educational service quality in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. To validate the validity, the questionnaire questions are extracted from the theoretical foundations of the research, which after modifying the questionnaire by experts who are knowledgeable in the field, is distributed among the statistical population.

In this study, first, the components of educational service quality in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences were identified based on the first questionnaire, and then prioritization of the aspects of educational service quality in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences was carried out according to the second questionnaire. This cross-sectional descriptive-analytical study was conducted on students of various disciplines and academic levels at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, including Nursing, Midwifery, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Para-medicine faculties. The validity of the research instrument is confirmed through formal and content validity based on the opinions of a number of experts in educational management and medical education. The reliability of the research is also examined for the dimensions of services, identification, and prioritization of the quality aspects of educational services at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. After obtaining the necessary ethical approvals and introduction letters for sampling, the questionnaire was distributed to students and professors. They were asked to select their level of importance for each item in terms of enhancing the quality of educational services and the importance currently given to those items in their respective universities. The statistical population included all professors and students in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. A sample size of 15 professors from the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and 15 students from

various faculties was selected for the research. Considering the statistical population and sample size, a sample of 30 experts and informants on the research topic (15 professors and 15 students) was provided to identify and prioritize the quality aspects of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. After distributing the questionnaire, we did not receive 4 questionnaires from professors and 3 questionnaires from students. Among the received and completed questionnaires from professors, 2 questionnaires were found to be corrupted. One questionnaire had an inconsistency coefficient higher than 0.1, which is unacceptable. Therefore, 8 questionnaires from professors were used to identify and prioritize the quality aspects of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. Among the received and completed questionnaires from students, 3 questionnaires were found to be corrupted. Two questionnaires had an inconsistency coefficient higher than 0.1, which is unacceptable. As a result, 7 questionnaires from students were used to identify and prioritize the quality aspects of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. To prioritize and identify the quality aspects of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the variables examined in this research include the quality of teaching by professors in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the physical environment of the university and faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the clinical training facilities of the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the equipment of the affiliated hospitals of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the theoretical education facilities of the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the laboratory equipment and skill training centers in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the use of expert human resources in the faculty and academic staff of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the attractive services and morale-boosting activities including various celebratory events held in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, and the welfare services available in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.

Data was collected through field research using a researcher-developed questionnaire in two stages (the first stage consisting of 35 questions and the second stage, which received final approval, consisting of 8 pairwise comparison questions for two distinct groups of professors and students). The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method was used to collect primary data through a combination of documentary and field studies (observation and interviews), and the EXPERT CHOICE software was utilized for statistical and mathematical analysis.

Results:

Based on the proposal presented, the research components have been considered by experts in the field of the impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, similar to the opinions of both students and professors. The research components for providing a mathematical model are summarized and presented in the table using corresponding symbols for the relevant services. In the conceptual model, in the main component section, there are eight components that are similar to the opinions of professors. However, due to relatively high overlap or very minimal impact and based on the experience of examining professor opinions, some of these components can be combined. Nevertheless, it is better to separate these components in the sub-component section based on the proposed proposal.

Table 1. Various influential parameters on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, from the perspective of students.

No.	Services	Criteria weight
1	<i>The effect of teaching quality on the quality of educational services on the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.</i>	0.347
2	<i>The effect of university physical space on the quality of educational services on the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.</i>	0.203
3	<i>The effect of clinical education facilities on the quality of educational services on the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.</i>	0.127

4	<i>The effect of equipping hospitals on the quality of educational services on the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences</i>	0.123
5	<i>The effect of theoretical teaching facilities on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences</i>	0.102
6	<i>The effect of equipping laboratories and training centers on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences</i>	0.049
7	<i>The effect of using human resources on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences</i>	0.031
8	<i>The effect of attractive and inspiring services including holding various celebrations, welfare services on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences</i>	0.018

The findings of the above chart indicate that teaching quality has the most significant impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, according to students with an approximate score of 0.347. Additionally, clinical training facilities rank second in terms of their impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, with a significant difference according to students' perceptions. This highlights the close relationship between science and technology in advancing the educational goals of the faculties, as perceived by the students. However, the physical environment of the university and attractive and motivational services, such as organizing various celebrations and providing welfare services, have relatively little impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, perhaps due to the academic and work-related busyness of the students.

These two factors are points of agreement between students and professors in terms of their impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties. However, according to students' views, specialized human resources and hospital facilities have a significant impact on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. However, above all, attention should be focused on teaching quality and clinical facilities, according to the perspectives of students. Attention to the quality of services provided is one of the influential factors in the success and sustainability of systems, including higher

education systems. The quantitative expansion of higher education without attention to quality will have undesirable consequences. Students are the main customers of universities, and determining their perception and expectations of the quality of educational services can provide valuable information to planners for improving the quality of educational services. Throughout the history of education, the quality of educational services has always been a priority. However, the quality of educational services in universities is a multidimensional issue that needs to be addressed from various perspectives.

Today, more than ever, the quality of educational services in universities is considered an important factor for growth, success, and sustainability. It is a strategic, effective, and pervasive issue in the agenda of organizations and higher education institutions' management. In this regard, it is necessary to consider the requirements of the quality system of educational services in the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, especially in the face of profound economic and social changes in recent years, and especially in the current era with the COVID-19 pandemic and the transitional period from a centralized economic structure (market economy). It is obvious that neglecting this matter can create imbalances in the long run. In all scientific institutions around the world, students' perspectives on all aspects of educational services provided by higher education institutions are considered essential for monitoring the quality of education. Evaluating the educational services provided to students and determining the gap between the current situation and expectations can provide the groundwork for developing quality enhancement programs.

Discussion and Conclusion:

In order to develop an educational system, evaluating the quality of educational services by the applicants is of great importance. Research results indicate that special attention should be paid to the clinical education sector. The clinical education sector is one of the critical stages of medical education that plays a major role in developing professional competencies. Enhancing the quality of clinical

education requires continuous assessment of the current situation, identifying strengths, and addressing weaknesses. To improve and enhance the quality of clinical education, its status should always be evaluated. Since clinical professors are directly involved with clinical issues, evaluating the field of clinical education helps effectively identify hindering or negative factors in education. Moreover, although most patients nowadays receive outpatient care due to advances in diagnostic and therapeutic methods, in our country, education is mostly conducted in inpatient settings, with less emphasis on outpatient centers. Other results are as follows:

- The quality of teaching by professors in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences has the greatest impact among the main components on the quality of educational services in these faculties. Additionally, the equipment of hospitals affiliated with Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and the utilization of specialized human resources in the faculty of professors have assigned the next ranks of influential factors on the quality of educational services in these faculties. In other words, the sensitivity of professors in selecting experienced and efficient individuals is important. Educational selections for choosing professors at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences should be examined with higher sensitivity in the specialized and scientific fields. Concerns expressed by professors indicate that the quality of teaching by experienced professors has faced some issues, which they have identified as having a higher impact on the quality of educational services at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.

- The physical environment of the faculties at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and the attractive services and inspiring atmosphere provided within these faculties or the university do not have a significant impact on the quality of educational services. In other words, a larger and more beautiful complex, such as the Prophet Mohammad Complex, has little influence on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. It is possible that the academic and occupational concerns of

students at the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences have led to indifference towards the aforementioned two factors.

In order to have a significant impact on the sub-criteria of the main criterion of teaching quality in terms of faculty members' perspectives on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the main priority lies in the sub-criteria of the faculty's connection with work environments and the job market, familiarizing students with these environments, integrating knowledge and clinical skills, allocating dedicated and sufficient time to address student problems and issues by professors. Most faculty members in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences have a traditional approach to university teaching methods.

The quality of educational services must recently prioritize student satisfaction. The main research recommendations are as follows:

- For the effective impact of sub-criteria on the main criterion of the physical space of the university in terms of faculty members' perspectives on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, attention should be given to the faculty's connection with work environments and job market, familiarizing students with these environments, and ensuring quick and sufficient access to computers and the internet for both professors and students.

- In order to have an impact on the sub-criteria of the main criterion of clinical educational facilities in terms of faculty members' perspectives on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, special attention should be paid to the integration of knowledge and clinical skills of the faculty, the connection between the faculty and work environments and the job market, familiarizing students with these environments, teaching methods of the faculty, and the progress of the university's educational program.

- In order to have an impact on the sub-criteria of the main criterion of equipping hospitals affiliated with Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences,

for faculty members' perspectives on the quality of educational services in the faculties of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, special attention should be paid to the integration of knowledge and clinical skills, teaching methods, and the progress of the educational program.

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Conflict of Interest

No financial, scientific, or personal conflicts of interest were involved in the conduct of the present research.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of scientific research. Participants took part in the study with full awareness, and their information was considered confidential. The results were used solely within the framework of the research's scientific objectives, and the names or personal details of participants were omitted.

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