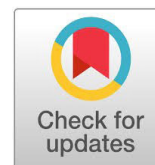
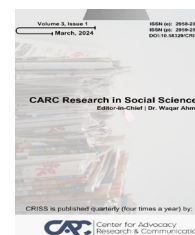




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Quality Education and Students' Satisfaction: Perceived Perception of Students at Higher Education Level in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring the quality of education stands as the primary objective for universities in the 21st century. Student satisfaction serves as a pivotal element when evaluating the quality of educational services, as the entire educational framework revolves around the student. This current study aims to explore the perception of students regarding quality education at higher education level and to explore the perception of students regarding satisfaction at higher education level, thus serving as a component of quality assurance for universities. This descriptive study utilized survey methodology for data collection, employing a questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert scale, validated through pilot testing. Data were collected from 50 university students, ensuring a reliability of 0.9. The study was delimited to public sector universities of Southern Punjab. The target population included university students from Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Multan districts. A total of 300 male and female students participated in the questionnaire survey through simple random sampling. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. The study findings highlighted that the faculty expertise, teaching-learning process, curriculum, institutional infrastructure, effective teaching methods, transparent assessment and evaluation systems are key indicators of students' satisfaction, reflecting their perception and satisfaction of quality education in public sector universities in Pakistan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the quality of education within higher education institutions has become a primary focus for education stakeholders. Students' satisfaction with the quality of services serves as a crucial tool in improving the quality of teaching and learning in these institutions. Kazeroony (2012) highlights various factors such as technological advancements, evolving student

characteristics, and financial considerations, emphasizing the need for reform in educational strategies. Higher education institutions worldwide are adapting their services to meet customer demands (Aydin, 2014). In line with this, universities are deliberately crafting strategic plans to ensure the provision of quality education. This objective is achieved through the integration of quality education plans within the broader framework of institutional management (Manatos, Sarrico, & Rosa, 2017).

Within a customer-centered education system, the delivery of quality services is deemed a fundamental objective of higher education institutions. Viewing the university as an organizational entity, clients encompass parents, society, and learners, for whom the entire suite of quality services is tailored (Sharma, 2006). Under this paradigm, the creation of a quality product or service is aligned with the needs and preferences of the customers. In this philosophy, the entirety of the quality process revolves around the customers, with customer satisfaction regarded

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as a pivotal element of the process.

Quality assurance in educational institutions is intricately linked to the expectations and perceptions of learners regarding the standard of services provided by the institution. According to Sallis, (2014), quality education is essentially about ensuring that customers hold positive sentiments towards the organization's endeavors.

In today's educational landscape, students harbor diverse expectations regarding the quality of educational services. They express concerns about the learning materials, time allocation for learning, and the provision of an effective teaching-learning environment tailored to their academic needs and preferences (Kember & Hong, 2010). Within universities, the assessment of educational services by students is viewed as a potent tool for internal quality assurance, aimed at enhancing the quality framework. As emphasized by Abdullah, (2006), educational institutions that prioritize students' assessment of service quality typically demonstrate higher performance levels and are more successful in meeting students' satisfaction to a considerable extent.

Quality in higher education institutions encompasses various characteristics, including students' satisfaction, institutional infrastructure, competent faculty, effective top management, a transparent evaluation system, and skilled students. To ensure the delivery of quality education and meet international standards, institutions must carefully analyze their quality management systems.

The primary determinant of students' satisfaction with the quality of education is effective teaching, which underscores the crucial role instructors play in enhancing educational standards. A successful institution is characterized by proficient teachers who possess the necessary skills to cultivate an effective teaching and learning environment. Teachers who exhibit passion and dedication to their profession contribute significantly to elevating the institution's quality framework. In the 21st century, institutions are increasingly prioritizing the professional development of faculty to meet education quality standards. A proficient teacher is adept at tailoring the teaching-learning environment to meet students' needs and preferences, fostering an atmosphere where students can freely express their opinions and ideas. It is incumbent upon teachers to establish a context where the desire and capacity for learning operate effectively (Nagoba & Mantri, 2015).

Quality-focused institutions recognize that teachers are pivotal in delivering quality education and thus invest heavily in their professional development. They understand that only by nurturing professional educators can they create an environment conducive to effective teaching and produce satisfied students.

The second crucial indicator for evaluating students' satisfaction lies in the quality of learning materials. To ensure the delivery of quality education, it is imperative for university administrations to select engaging and intellectually stimulating learning courses for students. These courses should foster creativity and promote the development of critical thinking skills, emphasizing

learning of the mind rather than mere rote memorization or skill training.

Similar to effective teaching and creative learning courses, transparent assessment and evaluation serve as crucial indicators for assessing students' satisfaction. Every student has the right to have their academic performance assessed without bias, and they should be fully informed about the assessment and evaluation criteria. Institutions aiming to enhance instructional quality should ensure transparency and fairness in their assessment and evaluation processes. The administration must ensure that their grading system is equitable and that students' performance is evaluated based on fair criteria. The grading system and criteria should be transparent to students, enabling them to develop satisfaction with the quality of assessment. It is primarily the responsibility of the teacher to provide feedback on students' learning activities, enabling students to identify and address their learning difficulties. A transparent and fair evaluation system is instrumental in guiding an organization toward excellence (Van et al., 2001).

The infrastructure of educational institutions is also recognized as a crucial factor in assessing students' positive perceptions of educational quality. Universities with well-equipped facilities, including ample classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, are typically associated with better learning outcomes for students. High-quality infrastructure not only reduces dropout rates but also increases students' engagement in both curricular and extracurricular activities, improves the overall teaching-learning environment, and contributes to the delivery of quality education. Chakacha et al. (2014) concluded that well-equipped educational institutions operate more effectively and enhance the entire teaching-learning environment. Smallhorn et al. (2015) emphasized that the development of science laboratories enhances students' satisfaction, while Oakleaf, (2015) highlighted that libraries contribute to increased student involvement and the development of critical thinking skills. Insufficient learning resources, poorly equipped laboratories, and inadequate libraries are observed to hinder the improvement of students' learning outcomes.

In the 21st century, universities recognize the importance of assessing students' satisfaction with the quality of services provided in educational settings to fulfill their institutional objectives. The assessment of satisfaction is primarily based on students' perceptions of educational services, which are considered a fundamental indicator of a quality-centric institution.

The primary objective of higher education is to contribute to a knowledge-based economy, achieve societal goals, and cultivate successful members of society. Kumar, (2009) emphasized that the primary aim of higher education is to foster individuals who are more refined and capable of navigating successful careers. He further suggested that higher education institutions should devise policies that attract students to pursue knowledge. Achieving these goals relies heavily on students' satisfaction with the quality of education and addressing any issues hindering their personal development.

The quality of education is widely acknowledged as a crucial aspect for fostering relationships and satisfying students. Many institutions are increasingly focusing on enhancing their quality standards by refining their strategies to attract new students and improving relationships with existing ones (Hightower, et al., 2011). Consequently, students' satisfaction holds significant monetary value for educational institutions in a competitive environment (Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010). Success for any educational institute is largely contingent upon meeting or exceeding students' needs and expectations. From a holistic quality perspective, all institutional decisions are guided by the needs of the students.

To gauge students' satisfaction, it is vital to analyze their feedback, which serves as a determinant of a successful educational institution. Students' feedback encompasses their opinions about the facilities and services they experience as students, including teaching and learning methods, the provision of learning resources, and the overall learning environment. Many researchers concur that ongoing assessment of students' feedback regarding the "quality of higher education" is instrumental in advancing the educational institution and improving the educational process.

In Pakistan, the pursuit of quality assurance has become a paramount necessity as the country strives to meet international standards of education.

Research Objectives

The study was conducted with two objectives:

- To explore the perception of students regarding quality education at higher education level.
- To explore the perception of students regarding satisfaction at higher education level.

2. METHODOLOGY

For the current study, a descriptive research design was

employed, utilizing a survey method for data collection. A questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale, comprising two main sections. The first section focused on gathering demographic information, including gender, university name, university type, and department of the student. The second section consisted of five main constructs containing 35 closed-ended statements, aligning with the study objectives. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed through pilot testing, involving 50 students from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, to evaluate reliability and validity, yielding a tool reliability of 0.9. Face and content validity were established by subject specialists, and necessary adjustments were made based on their recommendations. The target respondents for the study were under graduate students enrolled at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Ghazi University and BZU Multan, Punjab. A total of 300 students were selected using a random sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS), wherein mean, standard deviation, and percentages of agreement and disagreement were calculated.

Results

Table 1
Demographic Statistics

Variables	f	Percentage
Gender		
Male	149	49.7
Female	151	50.3
University		
IUB	100	33.33
GU	100	33.33
BZU	100	33.33

Note: IUB= The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, GU= Ghazi University, BZU= Bahaiddin Zakariya University

Table 1 reveals that 49.7% of the respondents were male, whereas 50.3% were female. Additionally, 33.33% of the respondents were affiliated with each university of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Ghazi University and Bahaiddin Zakariya University.

Table 2
Students' Satisfaction with the Quality of Teaching at their University.

Items	SDAf	%	DAF	%	Nf	%	Af	%	SAf	%	M
The faculty members of the institution are extremely hospitable.	17	5.7	23	7.7	57	19.0	151	50.3	52	17.3	3.66
The teaching faculty excels in elucidating concepts.	14	4.7	10	3.3	39	13.0	174	58.0	63	21.0	3.87
The teachers demonstrate expertise in their respective subjects.	22	7.3	20	6.7	42	14.0	156	52.0	60	20.0	3.70
Teachers employ diverse teaching strategies to foster an effective learning environment.	15	5.0	26	8.7	55	18.3	145	48.3	59	19.7	3.69
Teachers are knowledgeable about contemporary trends within their field of expertise.	19	6.3	12	4.0	60	20.0	163	54.3	46	15.3	3.68
Teachers succeeded in making complex subjects engaging and captivating.	15	5.0	23	7.7	47	15.7	169	56.3	45	15.0	3.86
Teachers endeavor to address and alleviate students' learning difficulties.	16	5.3	25	8.3	58	19.3	158	52.7	43	14.3	3.62
Teachers demonstrate high levels of cooperation and supportiveness towards students.	18	6.0	30	10.0	64	21.3	132	44.0	56	18.7	3.59
Teachers strive to foster strong interaction and engagement with students.	11	3.7	33	11.0	52	17.3	148	49.3	56	18.7	3.68
Teachers offer valuable career guidance and support to students.	18	6.0	31	10.3	61	20.3	149	49.7	41	13.7	3.54
Total											3.62

Note: SDA= strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, N= Undecided, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, f= frequency, M= Mean

Table 2 presents the results of students' satisfaction with the quality of teaching. The group statistics indicate that teachers are perceived as hospitable (M= 3.66), proficient at elucidating concepts (M= 3.87), possessing expertise in their subjects (M= 3.70), having diverse teaching strategies (M= 3.69), and staying informed about contemporary trends in the subject (M= 3.68). Additionally, they are seen as

making complex concepts interesting (M= 3.86), addressing learning difficulties (M= 3.62), fostering cooperation (M= 3.59), promoting strong interaction (M= 3.68), and providing career guidance to students (M= 3.54). Overall, the total mean score for this factor is 3.62, indicating that students are satisfied with the quality of teaching.

Table 3
Students' Satisfaction with the Learning Courses

Items	SDAf	%	DAF	%	Nf	%	Af	%	SAf	%	M
The learning courses are intellectually stimulating.	7	2.3	21	7.0	52	17.3	194	64.7	26	8.7	3.70
The learning courses inspire students to achieve their goals.	16	5.3	14	4.7	60	20.0	176	58.7	34	11.3	3.66
The learning courses offer opportunities for students to explore new ideas and conduct in-depth studies on various concepts.	16	5.3	32	10.7	43	14.3	167	55.7	42	14.0	3.62
Learning courses enhance logical thinking skills.	13	4.3	25	8.3	44	14.7	158	52.7	60	20.0	3.75
Learning courses facilitate the development of new ideas by integrating information and concepts.	17	5.7	18	6.0	61	20.3	160	53.3	44	14.7	3.65
Learning courses empower students to apply their knowledge in real-life situations.	11	3.7	24	8.0	43	14.3	135	45.0	85	28.3	3.86
The learning courses are aligned with modern trends in education.	16	5.3	31	10.3	38	12.7	153	51.0	62	20.7	3.71
Total											3.71

Note: SDA= strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, N= Undecided, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, f= frequency, M= Mean

Table 3 depicts students' satisfaction with the learning courses. The overall statistics illuminate that learning courses are intellectually stimulating (M= 3.70), inspire students (M= 3.66), chances to search for new concepts and in-depth studies about different concepts (M= 3.62), increases logical thinking (M= 3.75), assist students to develop new ideas (M= 3.65), enables to apply practical knowledge (M= 3.86), and learning courses are aligned with modern trends of education (M= 3.71). The overall mean of the factor is 3.71 which concludes that students were satisfied with the quality of learning courses.

Table 4
Students' satisfaction with the assessment and evaluation system

Items	SDAf	%	DAF	%	Nf	%	Af	%	SAf	%	M
The institution maintains a fair and transparent evaluation system.	21	7.0	37	12.3	58	19.3	139	46.3	45	15.0	3.50
There exists a well-defined systematic criterion for assessment and evaluation.	16	5.3	35	11.7	48	16.0	158	52.7	43	14.3	3.59
The marking criteria are transparent and easily understandable.	27	9.0	37	12.3	59	19.7	150	50.0	27	9.0	3.37
The institution employs a fair grading system.	23	7.7	32	10.7	44	14.7	158	52.7	43	14.3	3.55
Students are awarded grades based on their abilities and skills without any bias.	26	8.7	34	11.3	50	16.7	150	50.0	40	13.3	3.48
Teachers provide daily feedback on students' academic work.	21	7.0	61	20.3	38	12.7	149	49.7	31	10.3	3.36
Exams are conducted according to a predetermined schedule.	10	3.3	35	11.7	45	15.0	172	57.3	38	12.7	3.64
Marked papers are displayed to students.	19	6.3	46	15.3	45	15.0	155	51.7	35	11.7	3.47
Teachers communicate students' performance to their parents.	29	9.7	66	22.0	44	14.7	115	38.3	46	15.3	3.27
Total											3.47

Note: SDA= strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, N= Undecided, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, f= frequency, M= Mean

Table 4 illuminates the group statistics of students' satisfaction with the assessment and evaluation system of their university. The final results of the above factor displays institution have a fair transparent evaluation system (M= 3.50), a systematic criterion for assessment and evaluation (M= 3.59), transparency in marking criteria (M= 3.37), a fair grading system (M= 3.55), students awarded grades according to their abilities and skills without any biasness (M= 3.48), teachers give daily feedback about students' academic work (M= 3.36), exams are conducted on prescribed schedule (M= 3.64), marked papers are shown to students (M= 3.47) and teachers inform students' performance to their parents (M= 3.27). The total mean score of the factor is 3.47 which highlights that students were moderately satisfied with the quality of the assessment and evaluation system of their university.

Table 5
Students' Satisfaction with their University Infrastructure

Items	SDAf	%	DAF	%	Nf	%	Af	%	SAf	%	M
Institution building is very fascinating	24	8.0	45	15.0	41	13.7	141	47.0	49	16.3	3.48
There are enough classrooms for the students.	34	11.3	28	9.3	53	17.7	139	46.3	46	15.3	3.45
Sports complexes are available for students.	20	6.7	30	10.0	46	15.3	156	52.0	48	16.0	3.60
There is a cafeteria for students.	21	7.0	16	5.3	34	11.3	166	55.3	63	21.0	3.78
The institution offers health services to students.	18	6.0	29	9.7	40	13.3	172	57.3	41	13.7	3.63
There are well-equipped laboratories for students.	31	10.3	31	10.3	36	12.0	148	49.3	54	18.0	3.54
Transportation services are provided to students.	20	6.7	24	8.0	36	12.0	166	55.3	54	18.0	3.70
There are proper counseling centers for students.	24	8.0	34	11.3	56	18.7	155	51.7	31	10.3	3.45
The institution offers library resources (books, journals, e-library) to students	17	5.7	19	6.3	36	12.0	162	54.0	66	22.0	3.80
Total											3.60

Note: SDA= strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, N= Undecided, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, f= frequency, M= Mean

Table 5 depicts statistics results about students' satisfaction with their university infrastructure. The sub-factors of the infrastructure displays institution building is very fascinating (M= 3.48), number of available classrooms (M= 3.45), sports complexes for students (M= 3.60), cafeteria (M= 3.78), provision of health services (M= 3.63), well-equipped laboratories (M= 3.54), transportation services (M= 3.70), counseling centers (M= 3.45) and access of library resources (M= 3.80). The overall mean score of the factor is 3.60 which, concludes that students were pretty much satisfied with the quality of their university infrastructure.

3. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to investigate students' satisfaction with the quality of education at higher education level in Pakistan. The first objective was to explore students' perception regarding quality of higher education. The second objective of the study was to explore the students' perception regarding their satisfaction at higher education level. The study concluded that students expressed overall satisfaction and positive perceptions regarding the educational quality at their institution, aligning with Raab et al., (2016) notion that quality assurance hinges on customers' favorable impressions of organizational activities. The findings underscored the significant impact of teaching methodologies, subject expertise, awareness of modern trends, positive feedback, and interpersonal relationships on students' satisfaction levels. Holzberger et al., (2013) similarly observed that factors such as the transmission of creative knowledge, teaching methods, and teacher feedback influence students' satisfaction with instructional quality. Additionally, the study identified other influential factors including interactive and challenging learning courses, transparent grading systems, and institutional infrastructure. This correlates with Martín et al., (2019) study, which measures students' satisfaction by assessing coursework quality, infrastructure, teaching quality, and grading transparency. The study underscores the importance of instructors showing compassion and support to students, providing assistance when needed.

Recommendations

The study recommended that university management must continue the quality education for the satisfaction of the students. It is further suggested to conduct this study at private sector universities.

Conflict interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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