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ORIGINAL PAPER

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The Students' Viewpoint on Quality of Educational Services in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background: Recently, focusing on higher education quality has got increasingly critical. The novel managerial attitudes have defined the customer-demanded quality. Based on this, recognizing the receivers' perception of the quality of the services offered and evaluating the quality of the service is considered of the basic measures taken in order to develop quality promotion programs. Therefore, this is a qualitative research conducted for students' viewpoint on quality of educational services. **Material and Methods:** This qualitative study has been performed by the phenomenological method. The samples have been selected based on goal-oriented approach. In this qualitative research, the required data have been collected in two phases (90 individual interviews and 30 focus group discussions) at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences during which the participants have conveyed their experiences and expectations encountering the educational quality topic. All the interviews have been recorded and implemented. The interviews analysis has been carried out simultaneously with the implementation and using theme analysis by Smith method. **Results:** According to the findings regarding the definition of quality, the students have emphasized two important aspects including "educational services standards by the teacher" and "the students' satisfaction". Thus the final education quality resulted from the students' experiences and perception is this way: "Presenting the students educational services in class and out of class compatible with the educational services standards so that it results in the students' satisfaction". When a person views her/himself rightful as a customer, whatever seems necessary to them appears like a requirement. Then regarding paying attention and reflecting on the customers' perceived needs, it is possible to determine their expectations limit to some extent. **Conclusion:** Therefore, designing educational quality standards in order to evaluate the teachers' function

without taking the stakeholders' perspective into account is not practical. This research-extracted finding can present the stakeholders' perspective encountering the educational quality.

Keywords: phenomenology, students' perception, educational quality, faculty members.

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of the teaching-learning process at the universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad depends mainly of infrastructure that includes an optimal teaching space, personnel and equipment, in accordance with existing standards and norms. For the assessment of teaching at the faculties, the opinion of students is very important (1-3). Measurement of the quality of medical education and assessment of students' satisfaction in today world are necessary and it is of priceless importance. Students' requests are increased and traditional way of education is insufficient in the "era of information". New technologies change the way of our perception of the world, how we think, and communicate with others (1). Extensive and fast advancements in biomedical sciences created a significant delay in receiving relevant and updated information in medical practice - physicians use old techniques and treat patients incorrectly (4). Students and university community are social and human resources of the country (5). The higher education systems in most of the countries worldwide have increasingly been focusing on the educational quality. The reasons why they do so are the increasing information and communications technology and more demand for higher education (6). As the global movement trend changes from quantity-oriented to quality-oriented in the third millennium, lots of attention has been drawn towards quality in providing health-treatment services. Today the importance of focus on educational quality, particularly in the professions operating in the services required by people is agreed by all involved (7). The higher

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educational system shoulders some critical responsibilities in the economic, social, cultural and educational development and growth in the communities; in our country also it is in charge of educating professional human workforce in every field and if the education is optimal in terms of quality, it is capable of carrying out its responsibilities. Considering this issue, the necessity behind discovering some strategies to uplift the quality of education will be clarified (8). By increasing the courses and establishing universities and higher education centers, the countries around the world have generated more opportunities for learning. Regarding to evaluating services quality considered as the major measures taken to develop programs to promote quality and also due to the shortage of resources, evaluating the services quality enables the management to allocate the limited financial resources available in the best way (9). At the present time, the students' perspective is globally analyzed about all aspects of education presented in the institutes and is taken as the necessary factor of quality in university (5). The prior studies comparison indicated that the educational services aren't optimal in terms of quality and in another research, the students' lack of sufficient motivation for studying and their despair of future are considered some of the drawbacks (8).

Thus the present study is a qualitative one whose goal is termed as "the phenomenology of the students' perception of the quality of education". Since the studies carried out so far have more concentrated on comparative studies and the education quality and quantity evaluation and they have less paid attention to the stakeholders' participation in expressing their expectations for standardizing the meanings and concepts, we have decided to shed light on the issue of the students' perception as the main stakeholders of the faculty members educational quality so that it could bring about a more comprehensive recognition about this subject from this perspective resulting in the quality processes reform by the educational authorities and finally, in the stakeholders' satisfaction.

2. MATERIAL & METHODS

This qualitative study has been done by using a novel descriptive phenomenological method. Descriptive phenomenology includes studying and directly analyzing a phenomenon as much as possible independently from the unconfirmed presuppositions. Descriptive phenomenology emphasizes the experiences depth and increases our perception of the experiences encompassing three stages as direct perception, analysis and description (6). The criterion for selecting statistical community is the educational classes' number in various colleges during the first semester in 2010-2011 in different majors and levels chosen based on the census and samples according to the goal (55 women and 35 men) at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. In this qualitative research, the required data have been gathered in two phases (90 individual interviews and 30 focus group discussions). The main method to collect data is semi-structured open interviews with one general question about the study subject, for example, it starts this way, "what does the teacher's instruction's quality mean from your point of view? "And also what definition do you present for the educational quality as a student?". All the recorded interviews have been taken and

written down. Throughout the interview, the students were assured that their information will be kept confidential and have kept anonymity of the population. Thematic analysis (7) used during the stages "a) the primary encounter with the text: reading and reading out a case; b) recognizing and labeling the themes; c) listing & clustering the themes; d) making a table and summarizing and e) incorporating the cases" have been carried out. In order to make sure of the summarized information being accurate and precise, the final comments of the educational designing course's teachers with some qualitative research background have been applied. Also during the study, especially the stage of interviewing, in order to respect the individuals, the interview has been done without mentioning the teacher's name.

3. RESULTS

In analyzing the obtained data in this research, two major classes of the students' perspectives regarding the quality of education have been revealed as: "the teacher observing the educational services standards" and "the students' satisfaction", thus it can be asserted that the final definition of the quality of education resulting from the students' experience and perception includes: "presenting the students educational services inside and outside of the classroom consistent with the educational services standards so that it leads to their satisfaction "in such a manner that about "the educational services standard", considering the importance of presenting the minimum optimal, the students have highly emphasized the repetition of the material more with "cheerfulness" in turn. About satisfaction, many themes have been extracted and classified termed as "empathy, positivism, protection and equality" as the most vivid and obvious themes described in the following.

A: Cheerfulness

The themes concluded from the students' statements put in this category are: transferring the material combined with expressing feelings and thinking, self-confidence, treatment with the students, describing and opening the contents frequently. These themes have manifested themselves in many of the interviews in such a way that we got to review some of the participants' statements in this respect:

"They teach and go away. They don't ask if we got it or not, we don't know maybe there is something wrong with them, thus, they have no confidence, they aren't firm in speaking, they aren't high-spirited when dealing with us"

The teachers should keep it in mind that the educational settings are the best organizations where the students keep learning; in such an environment they don't study alone rather they witness treatments we have with them. Therefore, our self-esteem induces self-esteem in them in order to feel good about themselves and their future. What has been extracted and analyzed from the theme is interpreted this way that if this component isn't realized, it results in the students "getting nervous, stressed out, repeating their mistakes, avoiding conveying their creative ideas and not building a clear communication."

B: Empathy

Of the goals this study pursues is one of Deming 14-fold principles based on empathy and respecting the cus-

tomer. Regarding the general question format "How much mutual respect do they consider for the students and have a correct perception of intimate behavior?" they stated as the following:

"They are not at all willing to at least listen to our problems, we don't expect it to be solved, but we get at least encouraged if they listen to us, they are very tough and apathetic in their treatment, they take us as kids in the classroom, they forgot that they had spent all these stages, they look at us in a strange manner"

"Once I said something to Mr..... but he didn't like it; so I apologized to him, now it is three semesters that he has been picking up a game with me, is it fair? I hate him"

"It seems as though Mr..... broke up with himself, he avoids looking at us, he looks around and cuts us dead; when he enters, the whole students stand up in respect; he seems as if he doesn't know to say thank you and please take your seats"

It is worth to mention that the mutual relationship along with respect between the provider and the receiver of service leads to increasing the quality of interpersonal communication, winning the receiver's trust in effective consultation and education.

C: Positivism

Of the other goals is that "have they planned a correct and positive working future for the students?" Depending on the expressed statements by the students, it seems that some of the faculty members don't cooperate enough to propose any explanation & the enlightenment for the students' working future regarding their educational course of study and or they are pessimistic even about the classroom atmosphere, the students' educational major and etc.

The pointed out statements in this regard are as the following:

"Some of them are really honorable like Mr.... while the other ones are so peevish so that you think as if there is something wrong with them; their supporting a special group is vividly understood. They are very negative about the classroom atmosphere, it is true that there may be a person who doesn't have the right behavior in the class but the one in the position of the teacher shouldn't be cynical about all of us and shouldn't create a repressive situation in the class. Anyway in your mind, is it right to call us the failed ones in the university entrance exam and then say that be thankful to God for being admitted to this university instead of heartening us and raising our spirit? What's wrong with us? What is the difference between us and Mr....who studied discontinuously and got to this level?"

D: Protection

In answering this question as "what do you expect the teacher about protecting the students?", these themes have been drawn: creating an effective relationship, making the resources available, understanding the problems and encouraging and motivating the students to get to higher levels.

The statements are as it follows:

"Most of the teachers create a very frightening feeling in us at the onset of the class about our presence and studying, for instance, Mr....put absent mark for me in the calling roll for two sessions last semester when my grandfather

died and for this, he reduced my grade in the final exam .Of course, I need to add that all of them are not like this, some like Mr....are very respectable while some other ones don't take trouble to introduce useful references to us and analyze to see what references are valid for higher levels and are more valuable, we begged the head of the department to put a makeup program and describe the future major and higher courses for us, he has put it off and until yet nothing happened in this regard."

E: Equality

Concerning Deming 14-folded principles of quality in presenting superior services and not discriminating against the customers, this question has been posed that "do you discriminate against girls and boys when managing the class or when having given and take discussion or giving marks? these are some of the responses given:

"Once some teacher I can't name asked the students a question, several students raised their hands but we saw that he just wanted the girls to answer; we told it to the class representative, he conveyed it to the teacher but the following session he confronted us with this issue with a very nasty and biting tone of voice, we are able to prove that at the end of the semester, our marks were very lower than that of the girls."

In answering the same question that "does the teacher discriminate against the girls and boys in class? one of the girls said so: "all of the teachers have more attention to boys, they don't talk at all, they don't even look at us, and they have fun with the boys..."

"As usual the days announced by the teacher as the consultation appointment, my friend and I got curious and went there 8 times, there were always girls in his room and he said to us he didn't have free time said to get to him another time."

4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

When someone views him-/herself rightful as a customer, they will demonstrate whatever seems necessary for them as need, then with respect to the attention and contemplation on the customers' perceived requirements; it is possible to determine their expectations limit to some extent. The students' perception of their needs is based on their personal experiences during the educational period and free from being informed or not of the expectation considered for them in terms of the organization(8). Based on the findings of this study, it can be stated that the participants more pay attention to their expectation naturally rather than legally; in other words, without recognizing any right for themselves even organizationally and legally, they consider themselves deserving human and natural rights. Human believes that claiming quality is of such basic rights granted by God and no one even the governments aren't allowed to deny them such rights (9, 10). Many philosophers such as John Lock, Jean Jacques Rousseau have supported the issue called natural rights in their papers. While civil rights were mainly originated from the western revolutions and have been established with social growth and development and focus on customer-orientated trend (11) .

Quality has been emphasized and focused on as the es-

sence and basis of customer-orientation in many cultures and by many authorities in management sciences. Deming writes in this respect: "quality is not just confined to the modern world rather it will get a unique affair in the future corporate competition. The main body of quality consists of respect, paying attention to need, priority, effective communication and attaching importance (12). In the study conducted in Zanjan Medical Science university, providing educational services, training the teacher and learning skill by the teacher are necessary since the educational services presented don't satisfy the students' requirements and also the results of the research on determining the educational services quality in the U.S.A indicated that from the students' perspective, the services provided aren't qualified for them (13).

The necessity behind cheerfulness and empathy is considered of the key customer characteristics as the themes emerging from this study and as the subset of quality. This issue has been emphasized in many studies by many researchers. The customers' perception of "quality" is the educational services being presented to them consistent with the customers' needs, along with cheerfulness and respect, considering customer-orientation trend, at the right time and the right place and by a competent and efficient person (14). To explain the optimal education from the students' perspective, these findings confirm the present study results in describing and explaining the quality of education from the students' view that the themes as customer-orientation, perception based on empathy, effective communication, protection and positivism have been obtained as the students' expectations. The higher education department of the health, treatment and medical education ministry has run into lots of challenges in the past two decades. The universities qualitative expansion, the students number increase and occasionally, the huge numbers of jobless graduates are of the challenges causing the educational system to face various problems. The qualitative development of the educational system without considering the existing capacities and the society economic, social and cultural context would bring about the reduction of the higher education quality (15, 16). In fact, we can't consider the qualitative development and the students and the graduates number increase as the reasons proving optimal quality. These challenges will result in the requirements for accountability and responsibility of the educational system and will induce the academic system to review its structure, the goals mission, functionalities and the process. Thus in order to satisfy the customer's needs and expectations, transparency, accountability and the existing condition's quality improvement are critical.

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