

Multicultural Education

Research Article

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STUDENTS' VOICES OF EDUCATION SERVICE QUALITY AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

In the arcade of higher education, a university is considered as a market and student as a customer. Education service quality (ESQ), therefore, has become a central point of focus for universities making them competitive in the global market of higher education. This research applied quantitative method to explore ESQ at general public universities of Pakistan and delimited to most populous province i.e. Punjab, having 29 general public universities. Research data were collected from a convenient sample of 826 students of randomly selected six general public universities. The HEdPERF model (Abdullah, 2006) consisted of six indicators including 51 items was adapted in this study. Pilot testing yielded a reliability of instrument with Cronbach value 0.88. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Overall level of ESQ was perceived moderate at all of its six indicators i.e. admissions, academic aspects, non-academic aspects, reputation, access and program issues. University and gender wise comparison of ESQ showed significant difference in students' perceptions; whereas, it was not in case of program analysis. ESQ was suggested to be improved by taking students' voices in to account incessantly; and observing the trends and demands in contemporary higher education market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector has taken the leading role in reshaping economy, social order, and political process across the globe. The vibrant and well reformed higher education system of any country guarantees the progress of coming decades. Moreover, universities over the globe are ranked on the basis of their quality of educational experiences being offered to the graduates. This quality of education includes the quality of academic services, productive research, collaboration and industrial linkages, global outlook of institution and outreach programs etc. Since, last three decades the higher education has shifted its paradigm from a traditional

education institute towards market oriented higher education which deals with their students as customers and prepares them as marketable product. Conclusively, education service quality (ESQ) has become important area of interest for researchers and practitioners. Gruber, Fuß, Voss, and Gläser-Zikuda (2010) state students are key and indispensable group of stakeholders; therefore, management of universities should have capability to recognize their service needs. These practices will able universities to make better reputation in higher education market. Recently, the research reveals the performance of higher education is now highly dependent on the quality of services being offered in the universities (De Jager & Gbadamosi, 2010). There are multiple dimensions of ESQ; therefore, it is difficult to define and measure service quality through a single definition and/or measure (Giese & Cote, 2000; Al-Dulaimi, 2016), and different researchers have diverse opinion on their relevance with ESQ. However, some common dimensions are: academic aspects, staff competence, institution reputation, access, administrative services, and physical resources (Elliot & Shin, 2002; Clewes, 2003; Narang, 2012; Onditi & Wechuli, 2017).

Pakistan is a thickly populated state having sufficiently large higher education system with 207 (124 public and 83 private) universities HEC (2019, October 26) HEC Recognised Universities and Degree Awarding Institutions. HEC.GOV.PK. www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx.

Table 1: Detail of universities of Pakistan (HEC, 2019)

Chartered By	Public	Private	Total
Federal	27	10	37
Punjab	34	26	60
Sindh	23	33	56
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	27	11	38
Balochistan	8	1	9
Gilgit Baltistan*	0	0	0
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	5	2	7
Pakistan	124	83	207

Note. Gilgit Baltistan has total 02 universities but these are chartered by Federal Government

HEC (2019, October 26) HEC Recognised Universities and Degree Awarding Institutions. HEC.GOV.PK. www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx

Unfortunately, no university of country has been able to make its place among top 500 universities of QS World Ranking 2019. Such a disappointing situation indicates that massive reforms are required to improve higher education sector in Pakistan because the country has large youth cohort approximately 63 % of its total population (United Nations Population Fund Report 2016-17). Higher education besides other public institutions in Pakistan is, likewise, facing issue of service delivery. This area has been ignored and no special measures have been taken to improve it. Further, very limited research have been carried out on this dimension in Pakistan, which reveal that perceived service quality is poor (Afridi, Khattak & Khan, 2016; Saleem, Moosa, Imam & Ahmed Khan, 2017), therefore, in-depth studies are required in this area (Shah, 2013) for better understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, it is important to explore ESQ in Pakistani universities and to take serious measures based upon the findings of the study. Resultantly, higher education sector with better ESQ will start impacting the economic growth, political process, and reduction of unemployment. The researchers in this study intend to explore the education service quality (ESQ) at general public universities of Punjab (Pakistan). The findings of the study are ready reference for the authorities for strategic planning and management for improvement of ESQ in universities of Pakistan.

Objectives of this research are to (1) explore graduate students voices of education service quality, (2) make university wise comparison of education service quality and (3) explore students' suggestions for improving education service quality in universities. Subsequently, the research questions are as follow

1. What are undergraduate and graduate students' perspectives on ESQ?
2. What is difference among universities in terms of ESQ?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

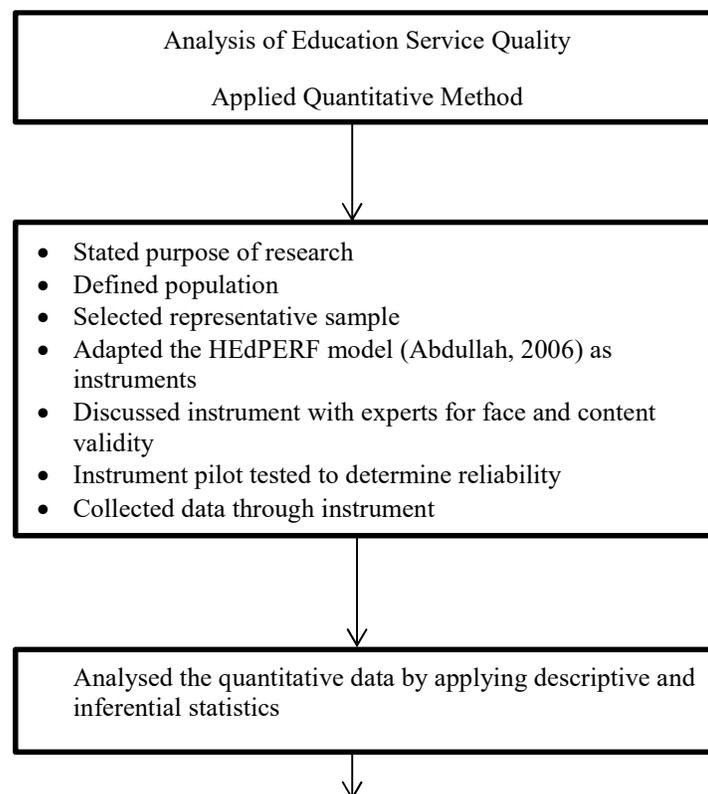
Defining education service quality (ESQ) is challenging in higher education (Quinn, Lemay, Larson & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, measurement of ESQ seems demanding. However, in present research ESQ is defined as perceived quality of education services by the students and service delivery staff. The Suuroja (2003) stated that perceived service quality was outcome of comparison of standard of services and its actual performance. The Athiyaman (1997) further explained that perceived service quality was assessment of service in term of goodness and badness.

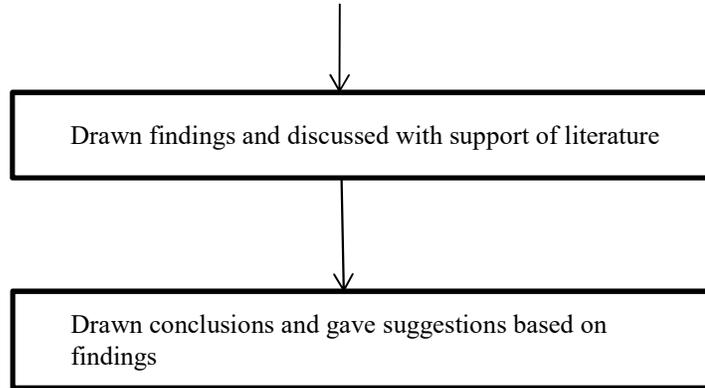
Present study included the services – Admissions, Academic Aspects, Non Academic Aspects, Reputation, Access and Program Issues – and, which were mainly adapted by the HEdPERF (Higher Education Performance-only) Model (Abdullah, 2006) except Admissions. The Admissions included important services (scholarships, guidance and counseling, accommodation, online admissions services etc.) offered to the applicants during their admission process. This was the basic need of prospective student; and the university deemed responsible to provide better service quality. The Academic services referred to the services pertaining to academics – their attributes such as qualification, attitude, consultation, feedback and pedagogical skills. The Non-academic services included efficiency of administrative staff to facilitate the students with greater care and respect; it also included staff knowledge of administrative processes and professionalism in doing job. Moreover, this related to availability of e-management system and students specific need of health and counseling services.

The Reputation represented the attributes which cause the projection of good and professional image of university in the eyes of students, parents and employers. For example academic facilities, campus location and appearance, hostel facilities, market oriented academic programs, employability of graduates, marketable sports and co-curricular facilities. The Access was taken as students ‘freedom and socialization, ease in access to staff and faculty, inclusion in university improvement of service quality, confidentiality of student record and ease and standardization of procedures. The Programs issues described the flexibility in programme structure and study plans and availability of emerging specializations.

3. METHODOLOGY

Figure 1: Explains the research methodology.





This study applied quantitative method to explore education service quality (ESQ) at universities of Punjab (Pakistan). Researcher has sufficient experience of educational services as a PhD scholar and being part of university administration as employee, however, gathering of data is necessary through well-structured questionnaire in quantitative research (Ghuri & Gronhaug, 2005). Pakistan has 207 universities (124 public and 83 private) in its five provinces Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (HEC 2019). And, total 1,576,087 students are enrolled in Pakistani universities (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2018-2019). Punjab is the biggest province of Pakistan and it has total 60 universities under its administrative control. About 515,155 students are enrolled only in Punjab province. This study is delimited to 29 general public universities of Punjab because these universities possess the similarities in academic faculties and administrative processes. These 29 universities have enrolled 77% (approximately) of total universities student enrolment in the province and one fourth of total student enrolment at national level. These figures have been sourced from Economic Service Pakistan (2018-2019), HEC Islamabad and the information from universities.

Multistage sampling was used to select the sample. First, researcher randomly selected following six general public universities which are named (for confidentiality and anonymity) as University I, University II, University III, University IV, University V and University VI. Second, researcher relied on the concept of homogeneity and similarity to ensure the coherence in the recommendation and suggestion to improve the ESQ. Therefore, total 59 academic departments (10 from each university) were selected which were common in all sample universities; however, only department of education was not available in University IV. These departments were; Department of Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, Business Administration, Education, Islamic Study, English, Urdu and Zoology. Finally, researcher conveniently selected 14 students (07 of BS and 07 of MA/MSc) from all 59 academic departments thus making the sample of 826 students. The students of last academic years were purposefully selected because it is perceived that they have enough experience of ESQ offering the universities.

The HEDPERF model (Abdullah, 2006) was adapted for data collection with its five indicators and one indicator admissions was added to explore the perceptions of students. Service quality literature revealed that the research relied on the perceptions of customers to explore service quality (Nadiri, Kandampully, & Hussain, 2009). The HEDPERF has been found 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). The Zafiroopoulos and Vran (2008) stated that the HEDPERF is a wide-ranging performance measuring scale which possesses the important indicators of service quality pertaining to higher education. In this research, ESQ include the following indicators – admissions, academic aspect, non-academic aspects, reputation, access and programs issues. Highly relevant demographical questions were added i.e. name (optional), program of study, department, semester and

university. Finally, the research questionnaire was consists of six indicators and 51 items and seven point rating scale was used i.e (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = undecided, 5 = agree somewhat, 6 = agree and 7 = strongly agree).

The draft of the adapted questionnaire with addition of one indicator was discussed with the panel of experts to determine face and content validity. Panel of experts comprised Director Admission, Director Academics, Director Co-curricular, three Chairpersons of Academics Departments and 05 senior academics of the field. . For statistical evidence of reliability of the research tool of present study, the pilot study was conducted on exclusive sample of 60 students of BS and MA/MSc programs. Pilot testing yielded an internal consistency of items Cronbach value 0.88 which established the reliability and indicator wise reliability is given in table 2.

Table 2: Detail of indicators and items and reliability

Sr.No	Indicators	Items	Cronbach α
1.	Admissions	07	0.63
2.	Academic aspect	09	0.74
3.	Non-academic aspects	15	0.65
4.	Reputation	11	0.76
5.	Access	07	0.68
6.	Programs issues	02	0.59
	Overall	51	0.88

Table 2 shows the detail of indicators, items and reliability (indicator wise)

Quantitative data were analyzed by applying appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures i.e. mean, frequencies, percentages and Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis, respectively.

4. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

Table 3: Detail of respondents of the study

		Univ. I	Univ. II	Univ. III	Univ. IV	Univ. V	Univ. VI	
English	Male	11	5	5	1	4	8	34
	Female	3	10	8	13	10	7	51
Physics	Male	9	5	4	7	12	4	41
	Female	5	9	10	7	2	10	43
Education	Male	6	3	3	0	3	10	25
	Female	9	11	11	0	11	4	46
Business and Administrative Sciences	Male	8	7	5	9	6	9	44
	Female	6	7	9	5	8	5	40
Islamic Studies	Male	7	6	7	7	5	10	42
	Female	7	8	7	6	9	4	41
Computer Science	Male	6	3	8	5	9	9	40
	Female	8	11	6	9	5	5	44
Chemistry	Male	9	4	5	7	6	4	35
	Female	5	10	9	7	8	8	47
Zoology	Male	8	1	4	8	4	4	29
	Female	6	13	10	6	10	10	55
Urdu	Male	9	6	6	8	8	9	46
	Female	5	8	8	8	6	5	40
Mathematics	Male	8	8	7	5	9	9	46
	Female	6	6	7	8	5	5	37
Total		141	141	139	126	140	139	826

Table 3 shows that total 826 graduate respondents participated in the present research. Among them 382 and 444 were male and female, respectively.

5. RESULTS

The results of the study are stated below in tables with interpretations.

Table 4: Overall Students’ perceptions of education service quality

Indicators	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean Range(1-7)	Level
1. Academic Aspects	8.34	9.37	7.88	10.84	15.91	23.51	23.12	4.81	Moderate
2. Admissions	9.91	8.12	7.81	9.73	13.49	26.07	23.54	4.70	Moderate
3. Program Issues	7.50	7.90	11.10	15.95	17.50	23.40	16.65	4.65	Moderate
4. Reputation	8.65	12.07	7.66	15.65	18.05	20.4	17.53	4.54	Moderate
5. Access	8.90	15.10	11.34	15.23	15.01	16.67	17.86	4.33	Moderate
6. Non-Academic Aspects	14.04	14.99	9.45	16.49	18.41	13.53	13.07	4.03	Moderate
Total ESQ	9.56	11.26	9.21	13.98	16.40	20.60	18.63	4.51	Moderate

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 4 reflects the indicator wise satisfaction level of ESQ as perceived by the students. Data in the table shows that more than fifty per cent (55.63%) respondents were satisfied with the ESQ and thirty per cent (30%) respondents were not satisfied, whereas, 14.08 per cent respondents remained neutral. Overall, level of ESQ was reported moderate (mean 4.51).

Table 5: Students’ perception on admissions

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1. All admission related information is available on the university website	4.0	5.7	6.7	8.0	14.4	30.5	30.8	5.38	High
2. The University admission process is transparent	5.7	6.1	3.0	11.9	11.6	28.6	33.2	5.36	High
3. The University admission system (online) is easy to use for potential students	5.3	8.0	4.0	8.0	12.2	34.5	0	5.29	High
4. The guidance and counseling services are available during admission process	6.8	1.04	5.9	9.0	14.5	33.7	19.7	4.94	Moderate
5. The admission staff is trained to respond prospective students queries	5.1	17.2	10.9	12.1	16.6	20.7	17.4	4.50	Moderate
6. The University has sufficient number seats in program of my interest	14.2	18.8	8.7	13.2	13.4	18.5	13.2	4.01	Moderate
7. Financial aid and/or scholarships are available for students	28.3	0	15.5	5.9	11.7	16.0	22.5	3.39	Moderate
Total Admissions	9.91	8.12	7.81	9.73	13.49	26.07	23.54	4.70	Moderate

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

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Table 5 reveals that more than sixty per cent (63.10%) respondents were satisfied and twenty five per cent (25.85%) respondents were not satisfied, whereas, only nine per cent (9.73%) respondents were neutral with quality of Admissions services. However, overall level of admissions service quality was perceived moderate (mean 4.70).

Table 6: Students' perceptions on academic aspects (Abdullah, 2006)

Statement	Strongly Disagreed	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1.The teaching staff is knowledgeable for answering my questions regarding course syllabi	3.3	5.2	6.4	7.4	15.9	28.2	33.7	5.47	High
2.The teaching staff communicates well in the classroom	3.8	5.4	5.8	10.5	14.6	33.3	26.6	5.33	High
3.The teaching staff has a positive attitude towards students	3.6	5.9	7.4	10.5	13.6	30.1	28.9	5.31	High
4.When I have a problem, the teaching staff is sincerely interested in solving it	4.1	7.3	5.1	14.5	13.8	26.6	28.6	5.21	High
5.The teaching staff is never too busy to refuse my requests for assistance	4.8	6.9	5.7	14.9	16.9	28.0	22.8	5.07	High
6.The teaching staff assists me in a careful and polite manners	12.8	6.6	18	11.5	15.4	15.9	19.9	4.37	Moderate
7.The teaching staff provides feedback on my progress	10.0	15.4	8.7	12.7	18.5	19.9	14.8	4.33	Moderate
8.The teaching staff is highly qualified and experienced in its respective field of knowledge	16.1	14.9	5.8	11.4	15.9	13.0	23	4.27	Moderate
9.The time available for consulting the teaching staff is sufficient and convenient	16.6	16.7	8.0	13.7	18.6	16.6	9.8	3.90	Moderate
Total Academic Aspects	8.34	9.37	7.88	10.84	15.91	23.51	23.12	4.81	Moderate

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 6 reflects that more than sixty two per cent (62.54%) respondents were satisfied with the service quality of academic aspects; twenty five point five nine per cent (25.59%) respondents were not satisfied, whereas, only 10.84 per cent respondents remained neutral about service quality of academic aspects. Hence, overall level of service quality of academic aspects was reported moderate (mean 4.81).

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Table 7: Students' perceptions on non-academic aspects (Abdullah, 2006)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1. I feel honour in my relationships with this university	5.6	5.4	7	13.3	18.2	24.1	26.4	5.11	<i>High</i>
2. The working hours of administrative services are convenient	13.2	2.1	7.9	16.1	20.0	18.0	22.8	4.73	<i>moderate</i>
3. The clerical staff communicates well with the students	6.4	15.6	8	15.6	18.8	16	19.6	4.51	<i>moderate</i>
4. The clerical staff has a positive attitude towards their work and the students	14.8	5.8	9	15.6	18.8	16	19.6	4.35	<i>moderate</i>
5. The clerical staff is knowledgeable of its systems and/or procedures	4.8	26	7.6	16	19.2	7.6	18.5	4.16	<i>moderate</i>
6. The clerical staff keeps accurate records that can be referred to	14.3	10.4	8.4	17.2	20.0	23.1	6.7	4.14	<i>moderate</i>
7. The clerical staff is never too busy to take my requests for assistance	5.8	22.0	9.2	21	20.0	9.4	12.6	4.06	<i>moderate</i>
8. The University provides an excellent counselling service	6.3	17.6	18.5	14.5	20.6	14	8.5	4.02	<i>moderate</i>
9. The health care services provided by the university are adequate and necessary	19.5	14.9	8.5	16.2	17.7	12.7	10.5	3.78	<i>moderate</i>
10. When the clerical staff promises to do something within a certain time, they do it	15.6	17.2	10.3	16.9	19.4	14.0	6.5	3.76	<i>moderate</i>
11. The University has E-system for services e.g. (online admissions, results and attendance etc.)	18.5	20.1	7.7	15.0	14.4	13.3	10.9	3.70	<i>moderate</i>
12. Questions and complaints are dealt with quickly and effectively	14.3	20.9	9.2	18.9	18.9	11.0	6.8	3.67	<i>moderate</i>
13. The University provides services within the expected deadlines	22.4	6.7	16.7	16.5	18.9	15.4	3.5	3.63	<i>moderate</i>
14. The University's clerical staff provides individual attention	23.4	17.7	6.4	18.0	13.0	7.9	13.7	3.58	<i>moderate</i>
15. When I have a problem, the university's clerical staff is sincerely interested in solving it	25.7	22.4	7.3	16.7	18.2	0.4	9.4	3.18	<i>moderate</i>
Total Non-Academic Aspects	14.04	14.99	9.45	16.49	18.41	13.53	13.07	4.03	<i>moderate</i>

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 7 shows that forty five per cent (45%) respondents were satisfied and thirty nine per cent (38.48%) respondents were dissatisfied, whereas, only 16.49 per cent respondents remained neutral about service quality of non-academic aspects. Overall, service quality of non-academic aspects perceived moderate by the students

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(mean 4.03).

Table 8: Students' perceptions on reputation (Abdullah, 2006)

Statement	Strongly Disagreed	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1. The University location is ideal, and the layout and appearance of campuses are excellent	5.0	5.0	6.2	14	16.7	25.5	27.6	5.20	High
2. The University has adequate sports services	4.1	7.3	8.5	12.7	18.3	25.1	24.1	5.05	High
3. The University has adequate co-curricular services	6.8	5.3	6.7	13.2	17.9	26.5	23.6	5.04	High
4. The sizes of groups allow personal classroom assistance	6.9	5.7	7.0	15.7	18.9	26.8	19	4.90	Moderate
5. The recreational facilities are adequate and necessary	5.1	6.3	8.5	16.7	19.9	25.3	18.3	4.89	Moderate
6. Hostel facilities and equipment provided by the university are adequate and necessary	6.8	8.1	7.1	17.7	17.1	24.7	18.5	4.78	Moderate
7. The University executes programs of excellent quality	5.4	22.8	9.2	17.8	19.1	11.3	14.4	4.14	Moderate
8. The University has a professional appearance and/or image	14.2	16.5	6.4	15.3	18.5	16.1	13.1	4.08	Moderate
9. The University provides highly respectable programs	13.3	18.3	7.1	14.6	16.5	17.7	12.5	4.06	Moderate
10. The academic facilities are adequate and necessary	11.4	20.6	7.1	17.8	17.9	13.3	11.9	3.98	Moderate
11. The University's graduated students are easily employable	16.1	16.9	10.5	16.7	17.8	12.1	9.8	3.79	Moderate
Total Reputation	8.65	12.07	7.66	15.65	18.05	20.4	17.53	4.54	Moderate

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range 1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 8 shows more than fifty per cent (55.98%) respondents were satisfied and thirty per cent (28.39%) respondents were dissatisfied, whereas, only 15.65 per cent respondents remained neutral about reputation of their respective university. Thus, overall level of university reputation was reported moderate (mean 4.54).

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Table 9: Students' perceptions on access (Abdullah, 2006)

Statement	Strongly Disagreed	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1. The students are treated equally and respectfully by the university	5.8	6.8	7.4	15.7	16.4	26.3	21.9	4.96	<i>Moderate</i>
2. The clerical staff respects the confidentiality of information I disclose to them	9.8	7.7	6.8	13.1	12.2	27.6	22.8	4.84	<i>Moderate</i>
3. The University has a standardized and simple procedure for providing services	6.3	8.2	10.2	18.9	15.4	24.3	17.2	4.70	<i>Moderate</i>
4. The students are free to express their opinions	6.8	15.7	18	15.9	14	14.5	15	4.18	<i>Moderate</i>
5. It is easy to contact the clerical staff by telephone	13.9	23.7	7.5	10.9	14.3	13.1	16.6	3.93	<i>Moderate</i>
6. The University fosters and promotes the creation of student organizations	6.5	20.6	22.2	15.5	17.4	-	17.8	3.88	<i>Moderate</i>
7. The University appreciates feedback from students in order to improve the delivery of services	13.2	23	7.3	16.6	15.4	10.9	13.7	3.85	<i>Moderate</i>
Total Access	8.9	15.1	11.34	15.23	15.0	16.67	17.86	4.33	<i>Moderate</i>

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 9 shows Data in table shows that fifty per cent (49.54%) respondents were satisfied and thirty five per cent (35.34%) respondents were not satisfied, whereas, only 15.23 per cent respondents remained neutral on access. Moreover, university access was perceived moderate (mean 4.33).

Table 10: Students' perceptions on program issue (Abdullah, 2006)

Statement	Strongly Disagreed	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agreed	Mean	Level
1. The University provides a wide range of programs with several specialties	5.8	7.4	7.4	17.3	17.6	28.3	16.2	4.83	<i>moderate</i>
2. The University provides programs with flexible structures and study plans	9.2	8.4	14.8	14.6	17.4	18.5	17.1	4.47	<i>moderate</i>
Total Program Issues	7.5	7.9	11.1	15.95	17.5	23.4	16.65	4.65	<i>Moderate</i>

Note. All values are reported in percentages

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Table 10 shows that more than fifty five per cent (57.55%) respondents were satisfied and twenty six percent (26.50%) respondents were dissatisfied, whereas, only 15.95 per cent respondents remained neutral about program issues. Overall, level of program issues was reported moderate (mean 4.65).

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Table 11: Gender and program wise comparison of students' perceptions

Groups	N	Mean Rank	SD	Mann-Whitney U	P
Female	444	430.00	32.69	77381	0.032
Male	382	394.32			
MA	419	401.51	33.28	80386	0.155
BS	407	425.25			

df= 824, p>0.05

Table 11 Mann-Whitney test was applied to find out the mean difference between gender (male and female) and program (BS and MA) of student perceptions of six sample universities of Punjab. Results in table shows that (mean, female 430.00, male 394.32, U= 77381, and P >0.05) indicates that the null hypothesis "there is no significant different in students perception regarding Education Service Quality" was failed to accept. Whereas, (mean MA 401.41, BS, 425.25, U= 80386, and P<0.155 indicates that the null hypothesis "there is no significant different in students perception regarding Education Service Quality" was accepted.

Table 12: Indicator Wise Status of ESQ at Universities

University	Admissions	Academic Aspects	Non-Academic Aspects	Reputation	Access	Program Issues	Total mean	Level
University I	4.27	4.37	3.85	4.28	3.89	4.45	4.18	Moderate
University II	4.70	4.83	3.98	4.07	4.27	4.43	4.40	Moderate
University III	4.89	4.82	4.16	4.53	4.33	4.87	4.60	Moderate
University IV	4.91	4.74	4.10	4.66	4.68	4.56	4.61	Moderate
University V	4.66	4.99	4.10	4.47	4.39	4.98	4.61	Moderate
University VI	4.78	5.10	4.04	4.83	4.48	4.64	4.64	Moderate
Total ESQ	4.70	4.81	4.03	4.54	4.33	4.65	4.51	Moderate

Note. Values are the arithmetic means)

N=826, Low level (Range1- 3), Moderate level (Range 3.01-5), High level (Range 5.01-7.00)

Keeping in view confidentiality and anonymity of the universities it seems suitable not to mention their names. Therefore, here universities are labelled as University I, University II etc.

Table 12 shows that although the students perceived Education service quality (ESQ) at all six sampled universities at moderate level (mean 4.51) which was in range of 3.01-5. However, within this range a visible difference was observed among these universities. So, ESQ at University VI have been perceived high (mean 4.64) as compare to other five universities. After that University V and University IV were at same level (mean 4.61) and University III was with slight difference (mean 4.60). And, relatively University II was rated (mean 4.40) at second last. Whereas, it was remarkably noticed that ESQ at University I was perceived low (mean 4.18) unlike her sister universities.

Table 13: University Wise Comparison of Students' Perception

Variable	Groups	N	Mean Rank	df	K	P
Education service quality	University VI	141	469.41	5	40.117	0.000
	University V	139	442.41			
	University IV	126	440.38			
	University III	139	426.97			
	University II	140	397.32			
	University I	141	307.86			

df= 824, p<0.05

Table 13 shows that Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to find out the mean difference among selected universities, which indicates that $K = 40.117$, $P = 0.00$, therefore, null hypothesis “there is no significant mean difference among selected universities regarding ESQ” was failed to accept. It means significant different exist among the means of different selected universities of the Punjab.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Present research found that overall level of Education service quality (ESQ) was moderate on its indicators i.e. admissions, academic aspects, non-academic aspects, reputation, access and program issues. Mann-Whitney test found that male and female perceptions on ESQ were different, whereas, the students’ perceptions of ESQ were same with respect to programs (i.e. MA and BS) of study. The students of BS programs were more satisfied with ESQ than the students of MA program. Needs and expectation of students of higher studies are always high; therefore, present research also confirmed that students of MA program were found less satisfied. University wise comparison showed significant different among students’ perceptions of ESQ.

Admissions services i.e. delivery of relevant information, ease of online process and transparency were perceived high by the students. University official websites are the most important source of information for the prospective students but the uploaded information and online system must be easy to understand by applicants and their parents (Al-Hawary & Batayneh’s, 2010; Sojkin, Bartkowiak, & Skuza, 2012). However, the availability of scholarships was reported moderate with comparatively low score. The financial support services offered by higher education institutes are one of the most important features, which prospective students expect from the university and/or college of your choice (Yusof, Ahmad, Tajudin, & Ravindran, 2008). Sampled universities of present research did not have, unfortunately, trained admission staff for facilitation and counsellor for guidance of prospective graduates. These universities also lacked in providing permanent infrastructure for admission services. Contrary to this, universities in the private sector have been marked ushering better marketing services for gaining greater portion of the business in higher education market within the country and beyond. Decidedly, competitive marketing among higher education institutes (Joseph & Joseph, 2000) have been a commonplace now-a-days. Bennett (2007) who surveyed 100 UK university students revealed that the admission guides, promotional material and other marketing strategies assured student satisfaction and improved university reputation.

It was not less than a surprise, as revealed in present study, that universities were found providing scholarships and financial help to the all deserving students like the orphans and the disabled. The Ismail (2009) found that financial services provided by the university, increased student retentions, satisfaction level and added to their confidence for their academic performance.

The academic services which include academics qualification, knowledge of syllabus, communication skills, positive attitude and sincerity in solving students’ issues were also perceived high by the students. The Lomas (2004) states that competent academic staff is indicator of quality services because this provide best academic services to student for their professional and skill development. However, present research reported that faculty members have not been found giving proper attention to postgraduate students in their studies and career counselling. Donlagic Fazlic, Nuhanovic (2015) and Angell, Heffernan and Megicks (2008) found that the students expect and require always a special consultation from their teachers to discuss future job prospects. Postgraduate students’ grievances found in present research were confirmed by the service delivery staffs’ responses which revealed that the faculty members did not consider students as customers, as the students were considered in advance countries. For example, Paswan and Ganesh (2009) found that many universities realized that they would have competitive advantage if they consider students as their client

Furthermore, non-academics services i.e. use of E-system in administrative services, delivery of services within due course of time, individual attentions by administrative staff and their sincerity in solving students’ problems was reported moderate but very low as compare to other services. In another study, Al-Dulaimi (2016) suggested that the modern technical instruments of information technology can be used to improve the ESQ in universities. The staff is required to be trained in all respect i.e. technical and professional training, marketing and customer care skills. Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales (2008) explored that sincere interest of staff in helping students will ultimately make them more satisfied. Students’ sense of security of their relation with university and the location of the campus were also perceived high. And, students of present study reported that they were not getting individual attentions by the administrative staff. Staff sincerity in solving students’ problems was also perceived comparatively very low by the students. Similarly, Afridi, Khattak and Khan (2016) concluded that universities of Pakistan should change the traditional approaches to address the students’

issues and to create friendly environment. And, Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales (2008) explored that the sincere interest of staff in helping students, ultimately, makes student more satisfy. Furthermore, supporting staff lacked in knowledge of processes and rules pertaining to students queries. In other research Faganel (2010) found that knowledge of administrative staff about services were most important things as perceived by the students. For example, Green (2014) also found that the students of university were not satisfied with administrative staff and their services.

7. CONCLUSION

This quantitative research explored undergraduate and graduate students' voices on education service quality (ESQ) at general public universities in Punjab (Pakistan). In a nutshell, overall ESQ is found moderate; but some services like admissions and academic service are perceived comparatively high, whereas, the quality of a few other aspects like non-academic services is comparatively low. It is being concluded from the findings that universities should immediately start working mainly in six areas i.e. (1) integration of service system with digital technology, (2) alignment of academic and research activities with relevant industry, (3) establishment of fully equipped laboratories, (4) professional training of academics and supporting staff, (5) up-gradation of student support services and (6) internationalization to improve their global outlook. Universities are always believed to be responsible for the skilled manpower, knowledge based economy, technological progress, and to give policy guidelines and vision to all segment of life. Therefore, high quality service delivery is to be expected from the universities to make student customers satisfied and which should be a model of services for the rest of public sector institutions.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Universities are required to keep an eye on evaluating unceasingly what they are doing for ESQ. Based on the results of this study, ESQ was suggested to be improved by taking students' voices in to account incessantly; and observing the trends and demands in contemporary higher education market.

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