Academic and Demographic Factors Related to Assessing Quality of Educational Services in Lorestan University, Iran

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Abstract—The purpose of the current study was to recognize relationship between quality of educational services of Lorestan university (Iran) as well as its dimensions i.e., tangibles, avouchment, responsibility, assurance and empathy and students' academic and demographic variables such as gender, faculty, schooling year, native and non-native and mean score of students. The final sample included 330 under graduate students who were selected by randomized stratified sampling method. In order to collect the required date, questionnaire of measuring the quality of educational services were used. In addition, to analyze the date inference statistics such as one way analyze of variance, independent sample t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient were used.

Results showed that there were significant differences among different faculties with regard to the quality of educational services. In addition, Results indicated that there was a significant difference among first, second, third and fourth year students in connection with the quality of educational services. Results demonstrated that generally there was a significant difference concerning the quality of educational services among the native and non-native students. Moreover, outcomes indicated that generally no significant difference was found between the male and female as well as mean scores of students regarding the quality of educational services.

Keywords—Quality of educational services, academic, demographic, university, Iran.

I. INTRODUCTION

UNDOUBTEDLY, quantitative development of higher education systems will result in various matters such as inefficiency of education, educational decline, and decrease in motivation to study among students, excess of human resources and eventually a waste of financial as well as human resources when qualitative development is overlooked. Thus universities as one of the organizations playing an important role in scientific as well as cultural growth and development and in educating expert human resources must continuously improve their process of educational services in harmony with scientific and educational advances and in keeping with worldwide needs and criteria (Hoveyda & Molavi, 2008).

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A number of organizations have been able to improve the quality of their products. Though, this has not been renowned sufficient in educational as well as academic institutes (Abadimehr, 2005). This is why higher education, particularly in developing countries, is faced with thoughtful problems of improving quality (Oliveira, & Ferreira, 2009). The key duty of universities is to educate expert human resources, generate new knowledge through directing research as well as increase and spread knowledge. Accordingly, there is resulted the development of higher education and rapid increase numerous universities, majors and levels of study as well as number of students (Farasatkhah, & Kebriyaie, 1998).

Likewise, higher education in Iran has been faced with numerous problems and challenges throughout the last two decades. challenges such as quantitative development of universities, increase in the number of students and the enormous excess of unemployed graduates are included among the problems that higher education's system of Iran is faced with development of higher educational system without talking into consideration the current capabilities and economic, social and cultural potential of society will certainly lead to a decline in the quality of higher education (Zeinabadi & Pourkarimi, 2007). Educational systems as the most remarkable representation of human resources investment in order for the potential talents of human resources to blossom play a key role in a society. A great portion of budget and financial resources is allocated to these systems and considering its significance and role in the scientific, economic, social, cultural and political growth and development of society.

Baker (1999) describes quality in education as a set of outlines of an educational period. He assertions that a period can be considered with quality which resulted in such outputs as production of a particular level of capability at the least possible time, meeting of skill needs and job career development needs. Unesco specialists also assert that quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept which is highly dependent upon the condition of the academic setting, duties, standards and conditions of the academic fields of study (Bazargan, 2001). As was stated, quality is among those concepts that was first developed in industrial as well economic section and later focused on customers and then quality came to be considered in such services as educational services. Therefore it can be asserted that activities, elements

and resource of educational services of universities are different from other services adducted by other organizations. Consequently the assessment of quality of educational services in educational organizations might be deferent from quality in other organizations. As Salis(1993) said, quality resources in education include well- protected buildings, outstanding teachers, purposeful and powerful value, care of learners, appropriate educational courses or a combination of these elements. On the other hand, purposes of program, educational program, the time and place where education is held, participants, teachers, educational tools, educational programs, educational activities, management and support, educational facilities, budget and educational credits are among the most important elements of quality of educational services.

Service is an activity or advantages that represent by one individual to another which is essentially unnoticeable and encompass no possession of anything which therefore may be a material or immaterial product (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). In fact, service in a university as a nonmaterial need required by students. Awareness of service quality and attempt to improve it would lead to the offering of services of high quality in universities by which means an increase in the students, satisfaction can be expected through increase of quality level which can also affect the achievement of scientific, technical, economic and social goals. On the other hand, it can be asserted that measurement of service quality offered in any organization is the infrastructure and prerequisite for any action and reform aimed at partial quality of the services offered. thus it can be said that quality of educational service indicate a process during which individuals learn skills, knowledge and tendencies specific to them to play their own roles including various activities such as educational programs, learning research, social services, equipment, professors and educational staff.

Quality of higher education services offered can be evaluated from various viewpoints and by using numerous models. Birnbum considers three viewpoints of competency, socialism and individualism. Ratcliff (1997) suggests different examples of quality evaluation in higher education in various countries. In a number of countries the evaluation method is based upon the external critics, in some others upon effectiveness of programs as well as teaching and learning improvement of quality while in a few it is based upon common patterns. Clearly, one of the most important matters that organizations contract with in competitive contexts is awareness of customers, satisfaction and of their opinions regarding the performance and services of organizations.

One of the models for measuring services quality used is many studies is the service assessment inventory or SERVQUAL which was presented by Parasuraman, Zethaml and Berry in mid- 1980. The servqual inventory, in its general status, includes 22 components; the first series of which measures the level of desired of particular service by the respondents while the second series of which measures the recognized current level of services offered by the

organization (Aarabi & Esfandiari, 2005). It is noteworthy that SERVQUAL is combining of the two words of service and quality. Using the SERVQUAL model to evaluate the quality of services offered in any organization, many different reforms and modifications can be carried out and benefited from in order for the organizations to achieve their goals. for example, evaluation of quality of educational services at Lorestan university can lead to improvement and enhancement of quality based on the students' viewpoints and attitudes, meeting of students expectations in advance, benefit from a comparison of various student groups expectations and also from partial quality of educational services of university also reducing the distance between the students, views and expectations would result in the solving of large number of problems and challenges of the university and provoking the feelings of loyalty and empathy among them. The final form of the SERVQUAL model consists of the five dimensions of tangibles, avouchment, responsibility, assurance and empathy as follows (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985): Tangibles: this dimension in assessing the services quality consistent modern equipment, remarkable physical equipment, staff with tidy appearance and organized documents. Avouchment: focuses on accomplish tasks promised to be carried out till a definite time, demonstration of honest interest in solving customers' problems, modification of services as soon as possible and presentation of true and correct reports. Responsibility: The staff tells the customers exactly what services they do, are always willing to help the customers and in general they are ready to answer the customer's questions. Assurance: in this dimension, the staff's behavior leads to the customers, trust gradually, customers feeling of security in their interaction with the organization, staff's constant courtesy towards customers and enough knowledge of staff to answer the customer's questions. Empathy: with regard to this dimension, the staff's features include individual attention to customers, appropriate working hours for all customers, willingness of most benefit for customers and consideration of the customer's special needs. Service quality in higher education has been considered by many scholars, e.g., Ham and Hayduck (2003), Arambewela and Hall (2006), Barnes (2007), Ilias, Harson, Rahman and Yasoa (2008). Demographic variables such as age, gender, level of study and so forth can play a role in the process of evaluation of service quality. In brief, the role that demographic factors play in impacting on the expectation and perception of service quality is a critical area of investigation (sited to Min, & Khoon, 2014).

Up till now, few researches have studied relationship between qualities of educational services with academic variables. Mohammadi and Vakili (2009) in their study used Servqual questionnaire showed that the quality of educational services in various faculties of Znajan University was different. Zavvar and others (2007) resulted that there were no relationship between gender and schooling year of university

students with regard to qualities of educational services, only, computer students evaluated qualities of educational services high as compare to other students. In addition, Arboni and Others (2008) in their research resulted that the senior students had evaluated quality of educational services low in compare to juniors. Bradley concluded that the quality of educational services offered at the Chinese's universities had a negative gap with what expected (Bradley, 2006). Chua conducted a research at Rison university of Canada. He demonstrated that at the management college the most negative gap was related to the dimension of avouchment while the least negative gap was observed at the dimension of assurance (Chua, 2006). Similarly, Ruby (1998) in his study found out that students had reported negative gap at such dimensions as assurance, responsibility, avouchment and empathy and positive gap at tangibles.

Taking into consideration the literature concerning the variable under study, the main aim of this research is to understand the relationship between quality of educational services at Lorestan University and academic as well as demographic variables of students. Accordingly, the hypotheses of the current research are as follows:

1. There is a difference in the quality educational services of offered by the faculties of basic sciences, humanities, engineering, agriculture, veterinary medicine and management of Lorestan university.

2. There is a difference among the first, second, third and fourth year students with regard to the quality of educational services offered at Lorestan University.

3. There is a difference between male and female students regarding the quality of educational services offered at Lorestan University.

4. There is a difference between native and non-native students regarding the quality of educational services offered at Lorestan University.

5. There is a relationship between the quality of educational services and the student's educational mean scores.

II. DESIGN

The current research is descriptive and its variety was survey study. In a descriptive research, the researcher does not interface with the situation, state and role of variables nor does
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he or she tamper with or control them and simply studies and describes what is there. Participants in this study included all of Lorestan university undergraduate students being up to some 6500 students. A number of 364 students were selected as the statistical sample by using Chertsey and Morgan table. In order to select the sample, the randomized stratified sampling method was used, because taking into consideration the various colleges and demographic variable as place of residence, academic year and gender of students, the randomized stratified sampling method is the most appropriate method to select the subjects. To collect the required data for analyzing the hypotheses, the quality of educational services questionnaire that developed by Sarhangi (2010) was used. This questionnaire consistent 37 short statement, rated within a five-degree Likert range (very high, high, middle, little and very little).The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated as 0.91 using Kronbach's alpha; this shows that the reliability of the questionnaire is acceptable. After distribution of adequate questionnaires, some of these were not returned while some were turn incomplete filled in. consequently at last 330 usable questionnaires were included in the analysis. In addition, to analyze the date, inference statistics such as paired- sample t-test and one-sample t-test were used.

III. RESULTS

Results demonstrate that of the total number of the subjects being 330, 108 were male and 222 female. Also, 271 subjects were single and 59 ones married. A number of 70, 120, 71, and 69 students were first to fourth year students, respectively. In addition , 76 , 71 , 46 , 62 , 45 , and 30 subjects studied at the faculties of basic sciences , humanities , engineering , agriculture , veterinary medicine and management. 193 students were from Lorestan province while some 137 students were from other provinces. The mean of the students 'scores included in this study was 15/42.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN RELATION TO FACULTIES

Variables	Variance	S.S.	M.S.	df.	F	Sig.
Total QES	SSB SSW	16229/2 118657/1	3245/8 366/2	3 326	8/86	0/000
Assurance	SSB SSW	580/2 5524/3	116/0 17/0	3 326	6/80	0/000
Responsibility	SSB SSW	1125/3 5408/7	225/0 16/6	3 326	13/48	0/000
Avouchment	SSB SSW	1663/9 16952/5	332/7 52/3	3 326	6/36	0/000
Empathy	SSB SSW	215/1 7598/2	43/0 23/4	3 326	1/83	0/106
Tangibles	SSB SSW	691/0 3647/0	138/2 11/2	3 326	12/2	0/000

The faculties also differed at the dimensions of tangibles, responsibility, avouchment and assurance, and only on empathy variable didn't the faculties differ. Although the results demonstrated that faculties of veterinary medicine, humanities, agriculture, basic science, engineering and management were found to hold the highest to the lowest means regarding the quality of educational services as follows: 108/95, 99/33, 95/77, 93/00, 87/43, 84/60, results of test with regard to the significant difference among various faculties demonstrate that compared with faculties of basic sciences, engineering, management and agriculture, only the faculty of veterinary medicine held the highest quality of educational services. Furthermore, the faculty of humanities held a higher quality of educational services than that of management. No significant difference was observed between another various faculties

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN RELATION TO SCHOOLING YEARS

Variables	Variance	S.S.	M.S.	df.	F	Sig.
Total QES	SSB SSW	6659/1 128227/2	2219/7 393/3	3 326	5/54	0/001
Assurance	SSB SSW	316/4 5788/1	105/4 17/7	3 326	5/94	0/008
Responsibility	SSB SSW	486/2 6047/8	162/0 18/5	3 326	8/73	0/000
Avouchment	SSB SSW	562/1 18054/3	187/3 55/3	3 326	3/38	0/018
Empathy	SSB SSW	93/1 7720/2	31/0 23/6	3 326	1/31	0/271
Tangibles	SSB SSW	155/2 4182/9	51/7 12/8	3 326	4/03	0/000

Table II displays results of one –way ANOVA regarding difference of opinions among first, second, third and fourth year students with regard to the quality of educational services offered at Lorestan University.

Results showed that there was a significant difference among first, second, third and fourth year students with regard to the quality of educational services at a 99% level (F= 5/54, P<101). This significant difference is also the case with the dimensions of tangibles, avouchment, responsibility and assurance and only in the dimension of empathy no difference was observed. Although results indicated that first, second, second, third and fourth year students, with the averages of 103/75, 94/16, 92/95 and 91/08, respectively, had evaluated the quality of educational services from highest to lowest. Results also revealed that only the first year students compared with second, third and fourth year had evaluated the quality of educational services to be high. No significant difference was observed among the viewpoints of other students.

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES ACCORDING TO GENDER OF STUDENTS

Variables	Male students		Females students		d.f.	t-value	Sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Total QES	93/41	17/54	96/54	21/40	328	1/31	0/188
Assurance	15/13	14/10	16/31	3/74	328	2/35	0/019
Responsibility	15/01	3/94	15/56	4/68	328	1/04	0/298
Avouchment	32/25	6/67	34/11	7/84	328	3/11	0/035
Empathy	17/59	4/31	17/36	5/12	328	0/39	0/697
Tangibles	13/40	3/40	13/17	3/74	328	0/54	0/587

Table III displays results of t-test concerning difference regarding the quality of educational services between male and female students. Though the results indicated that generally no significant difference was between the male and female students regarding the quality of educational services (t=1/31, P>0/05), nevertheless, these differ with regard to the dimensions of avouchment and assurance observed. Looking at the means of male as well as female students, one can concluded that female students had evaluated the dimensions of avouchment and assurance of the quality of educational services to be higher compared with male students. No significant difference concerning other dimension, namely tangibles, empathy and responsibility, was observed among the students viewpoints.

TABLE IV
COMPARISON OF QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES ACCORDING TO NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE STUDENTS

Variables	Male students		Females students		d.f.	*t*-value	Sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Total QES	98/20	21/93	91/74	16/97	328	2/88	0/004
Assurance	16/54	4/48	15/06	3/89	328	3/12	0/002
Responsibility	15/87	4/68	14/69	4/03	328	2/39	0/017
Avouchment	34/35	8/05	32/32	6/55	328	2/43	0/015
Empathy	18/08	5/24	16/53	4/14	328	2/88	0/004
Tangibles	13/33	3/67	13/13	16/97	328	0/506	0/613

Table 4 shows the results of t-test concerning difference among native and non-native students about the quality of educational services. Results show that generally there was a significant difference concerning the quality of educational services among the native and non-native students (t=2/88, p<0/01). This difference was also true of the dimensions of responsibility, avouchment, empathy and assurance. An overview of the students means, it can be said that native students with a mean of 98/20 had evaluated the quality of educational services to be higher compared with non – native students with a mean of 91/74. As for the dimension of tangibles, no significant difference was observed between native and non-native students viewpoints.

TABLE V
CORRELATION COEFFICIENT MATRIX OF QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES BY STUDENTS' MEAN

Variables	Students' Mean: 15/29		
	Mean	*r*	Sig.
Total QES	95/52	IV. 0/012	V. 0/828
Assurance	15/93	VI. 0/041	VII. 0/459
Responsibility	15/38	VIII. 0/047	IX. 0/393
Avouchment	33/50	X. 0/016	XI. 0/774
Empathy	17/44	XII. 0/025	XIII. 0/647
Tangibles	13/25	XIV. 0/059	XV. 0/288

Table V displays results of Pierson correlation coefficient test concerning the relationship between the quality of educational services and its dimensions, namely tangibles, responsibility, avouchment, empathy and assurance and the variable of the student's educational conditions (mean). Results showed that generally there was no significant relationship between the quality of educational services of the university and its dimensions with regard to the students average (r=0/012, p>0/05).

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Service quality is an important element in every service marketing program. Particularly, education services are required to evaluate their educational services' quality from the students' perspective (Mohammadi and Vakili, 2009). Results indicated that faculties of veterinary medicine, humanities, agriculture, basic sciences, engineering and management enjoyed the highest to the lowest mean with regard to the quality of educational services, respectively, in addition, compared with the faculties of basic science, engineering, management and agriculture, the faculty of veterinary medicine enjoyed a higher quality of educational services, and compared with the faculty of management, the faculty of humanities was of higher quality of educational services. In this connection, Mohammadi and Vakili (2009) concluded that the quality of educational services obtained using the Servequal questionnaire varied in the different faculties of Zanjan medical sciences university. Furthermore Zavvar et al. found out the quality of educational services offered to students, one of the reasons of this difference presumably related to the history of the establishment of the faculties mentioned.

Results also revealed that only first year students, compared with second, third and fourth year students assessed the equality of educational services, to be high. In other words, students of higher years (university education) did not evaluate the equality of educational services as suitable. Supporting the above – mentioned results, Arboni et al. (2008) concluded that students of higher years evaluated the schism in the quality of educational services to be significantly high with regard to any aspect. Put another way, the status quo of the quality of educational services was evaluated to be lower than the desirable condition. This refers to the fact that first year students are not currently fully acquainted with the university facilities, professors, the staff and the university setting in general and thus this variation in the students is natural to

some extent. In contrast, Zavvar et al. concluded in their study that there no difference in the evaluations of students of different years.

Another results showed that female students had evaluated the dimensions of avouchment and assurance of the quality of educational services to be high as compared with male students. Min and Khoon(2014) concluded that the demographic factor is generally important in the relationships among the elements of service quality. Among four demographic variables, nationality and gender were found as crucial variables in the evaluation of education services. Similarly, the results illustrate that the female students are more satisfied with the academic quality in comparison with the male group, regarding quality in higher education (Ivana, Pitic & Drăgan, 2013). Zavvar et al. resulted that the female as well as male students' evaluations regarding the quality educational services did not differ. Another results of the study demonstrated that compared with non-native students, native students had evaluated the quality of educational services and the dimensions of responsibility, empathy, avouchment and assurance to be high .One possible reason is that this referred to the native student's correspondence with the university conditions due to their being already familiar with the academic settings and facilities. Results also showed that generally there was no significant relationship between the quality of educational services of the university and the educational conditions or the average score of the students. In other words, students with different academic conditions evaluated the quality of educational services of the university to be the same.

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