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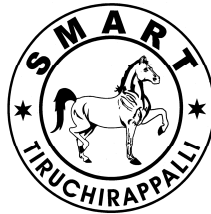
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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF QUALITY PRACTICES IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN TAMILNADU AND PUDUCHERRY STATE

D. Aravazhi Irissappane

Associate Professor of Commerce, PG & Research Department of Commerce
Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for PG Studies, (Autonomous), Govt. Institution
College with Potential for Excellence, Puducherry, India

P. Buvaneswari

Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of Commerce
Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for PG Studies, (Autonomous), Govt. Institution
College with Potential for Excellence, Puducherry, India

Abstract

This paper has made an attempt to analyze the Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Practices in Higher Learning Institutions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States. This study was based on primary data collected through questionnaire administered to 500 students in NAAC accredited Arts & Science Colleges, in both Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States. The quality practices followed in these colleges were tested from the students' viewpoint by using Service Quality Techniques and 't' test. From this study, it is found that the perception of students on NAAC Quality Practices is highly positive in respect of Male Students, Private College Students and Arts Students in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Keywords: NAAC, Higher Learning Institutions, Students' Perception, Service Quality.

Introduction

Education is an instrument of integrated human development. The key objectives of education are to develop one's cognitive, conative and affective abilities, to develop critical and higher order thinking skills and capacity-building of students so that they meaningfully participate in major activities of the society, leading towards healthy and holistic development of society and nation¹. Higher Education (HE) is defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as "All types of education (Academic, Professional, Technological, or Teacher Education) provided in institutions such as Universities, Liberal Arts Colleges, Technological Institutions, and Teachers' Colleges, for which the basic entrance requirement is completion of secondary education; the usual entrance age is about 18 years; and in which the courses lead to higher studies resulting in a named award (degree, diploma, & certificate of higher studies)"².

Today, quality is an imperative concern in every organization, be it a manufacturing concern or a Higher Learning Institution (HLI) all over the world. Harvey (1997) identified five broad approaches for defining quality in HE. These are (i) quality means exceptional, where quality is related to the conception of excellence; (ii) quality means perfection, where quality has consistent and error-free attributes; (iii) quality means fit for purpose, where quality fulfils the perceived requirements of stakeholders; (iv) quality means value for money; and (v) quality means transformation, i.e. quality necessarily involves a change from a current to an ideal end state³.

The quality issues in HE will be considered as pivotal for the achievement of the social objectives of any country. India, which is considered as an emerging economy, only next to China, is confronting many issues in the field of Human Development. India, which aims at

the growth rate of 7-8 per cent in the coming financial year, is expected to plug all the holes. Hence the policy makers are expected to identify the reasons for the decline in the contributions made by the human resources of our country. It is learnt from the CII Report (2010) that the strength of students going abroad for seeking quality HE is on the increase every year. India is topping the list of students going abroad for HE to countries like the US, UK, Australia, Germany. These countries are greatly benefitted in terms of flow of foreign currency into their country. On the contrary, India is facing the problem of dearth of foreign currency to pay for their imports. If this trend is not reversed soon, it will end up in a great catastrophe. Countries like China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, etc. have drastically brought down the number of students going abroad for seeking quality HE by improving the quality of education offered by their universities and colleges. India has to wake up fast and learn from the experiences of these small countries by establishing the fact that the quality status of Indian HLIs is satisfactory from the viewpoint of various stakeholders, more specifically, students. The Times Higher Education, which is considered as the most dependable rating agency for the HLIs world wide, has published its rating for the year 2011, in which no Indian Institution has found place in the list of 200 quality HLIs in the world. Even countries like Malaysia, Taiwan, Korea, not to make a mention of China and Japan, have got few institutions included in the list of 200. Considering these facts, the quality status of Indian HLIs is in great danger. At this juncture, this study, which makes an attempt to investigate the level of Students' Perception on the quality status of HLIs in Indian States, may be considered as very appropriate and a timely one.

Statement of the Problem

The issues of quality cannot be separated from the quest for excellence and the need to

establish evaluation criteria. Such criteria must be revised to take into account the variety of situations and the academic culture in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States. The key factors influencing the quality of HE are the quality of faculty, curriculum standards, technological infrastructure available, research environment, accreditation regime and the administrative policies and procedures and they have to be given prime importance in HLIs. It is absolutely critical to regulate the growth of sub-standard HLIs in both the States.

Literature Review

There are many studies in the area of assessing the status of quality practices in the colleges and universities in India and different countries of the world. This part of the paper makes an attempt to review similar studies undertaken by various agencies and researchers for better understanding the earlier scenario and the present status of the HLIs.

Gilaninia, et al. (2012) have investigated the relationship between readiness level of managers for the implementation of *TQM* and organisational culture and effectiveness of managers in the Azad University of Guilan Province. This study considered the faculty and staff and administrators based on random class sampling method. The results show that there is a significant relationship between studied variables and some aspects of *TQM* and organisational culture. **Quraishi, et al. (2010)** investigated the levels of satisfaction amongst faculty members in *HE* in Pakistan. Five hundred faculty members from leading Public and Private Universities were surveyed through an instrument developed by the authors and Percentage Method was used to analyse and interpret data. The results highlighted the value of the survey as a strategy for management and human resource planning in Universities. **Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad and Othman (2009)** have discussed the background of

Malaysian Private HLIs and career challenges like uncertain career path of academics, problem of tasks in teaching vs. research due to lack of funding, opportunities for sabbatical leave and participation in conferences abroad. The authors have suggested that the most vital tasks for the academics are to prepare, plan and develop their career challenges. **Khan (2008)** has examined the quality status of Private HE Sector in Pakistan. The author has concluded that experienced, permanent and more highly qualified male administrators have indicated favourable opinion about the quality of HE, particularly quality of management and quality of curriculum.

Riznić, et al. (2011) have explored the suitability of SERVQUAL, generic multiple-item scale, within the context of HE. Reliability and validity of the scale were tested on a sample of 234 Engineering Management Students. The findings indicate that the SERVQUAL framework is suitable for SERVQUAL evaluation in HE setting. **Kwek, et al. (2010)** have investigated the determinants of students' perceived SERVQUAL for Private HLIs in Malaysia, based on the process model of HE Quality. A total of 458 undergraduate business students from a Private University in Malaysia participated in this research. They found that quality of librarians, staff responsiveness from the Division of Examinations and Awards, curriculum, amount of recreational activities and the process model of HE quality are positively related to the students' perceived SERVQUAL.

From the related studies cited above, it is evident that though many studies have been undertaken in this area, no specific study has been carried out in connection with assessment of the status of students' perception on the quality practices followed in accredited HLIs with regard to the NAAC Quality Dimensions in these States. Hence this study which makes

an attempt to identify whether there is any significant difference between Male and Female, Government and Private, UG and PG Degree and Arts and Science Students, with regard to overall perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in HLIs.

Objective of the Study

Against the background of all the above issues discussed above, this study has framed the objectives of the study:

- ❖ To identify the perception of Male and Female Students towards the quality practices in NAAC Accredited Colleges in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.
- ❖ To identify the perception of Government and Private College Students towards the quality practices in NAAC Accredited Colleges in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.
- ❖ To identify the perception of Arts and Science Students towards the quality practices in NAAC Accredited Colleges in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Hypotheses

Based on the above objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H₀¹: There is no significant difference between Male and Female Students with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

H₀²: There is no significant difference between Government and Private College Students with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

H₀³: There is no significant difference between Arts and Science Students with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Methodology

This study has identified eight NAAC accredited Arts and Science Colleges which are situated in different parts of Tamil Nadu and two Colleges from Puducherry State. Convenient Sampling Technique was used for choosing the sample. 500 students from 10 colleges were contacted and the requisite information for the study was gathered through questionnaire.

1. Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Villupuram.
2. Bishop Heber College (Autonomous) (Re-Accredited), Tiruchirapalli.
3. C. M. S. College of Science & Commerce, Chinnavedampatti, Coimbatore.
4. Cardamom Planters Association College, Theni, Bodinayakanur.
5. Government Arts College (Autonomous) (Re-Accredited), Coimbatore,
6. Gobi Arts & Science College, (Autonomous) (Re-Accredited), Gobichettipalayam.
7. Government Arts College, C. Mutlur Village, Chidambaram.
8. Hajee Karutha Rowther Howdia College, Dist. Theni, Uthamapalayam.
9. Kanchi Mamunivar Centre for Post-Graduate Studies, Lawspet.
10. Tagore Arts College, Lawspet, Pondicherry.

The study used Service Quality (SERVQUAL) Techniques to measure the level of students' perception on the quality status of colleges situated in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The Questionnaire consisted of 7 NAAC Quality Dimensions

Curricular Aspects (CA),

Teaching, Learning and Evaluation (TLE),

Infrastructure and Learning Resources (ILR),

Research, Consultancy and Extension (RCE),

Student Support and Progression (SSP),

Governance and Leadership (GL) and Innovative Practices (IP).

Tools used

For testing the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was applied to the items. Finally, in order to find out the significant differences between Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions, 't' test was applied by using SPSS Software.

Analysis

The data were processed by using statistical tools such as reliability analysis and 't' test. The results of the analysis are tabulated in the following paragraphs.

Table-1 shows the Reliability Analysis performed in order to determine the data reliability for testing the Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in HLIs.

It is evident from the above Table that the reliability coefficient of the Perception on all the NAAC Quality Dimensions ranges from 0.689 to 0.878. Therefore, it can be concluded that the dimensions for evaluating the Students' Perception on NAAC Quality were found to be valid.

Table -2 shows the difference in Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions between Male and Female Students in HLIs.

It is clear from the Table that since P value is less than 0.01 and 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% and 5% level, with regard to the Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in respect of ILR and IP. Hence,

there is significant difference between male and female students, Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in respect of ILR and IP. Male students recorded higher positive perception on ILR and IP than the female students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Table-3 shows the difference in Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions between Government & Private HLIs.

It is evident from the Table that since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level with regard to the Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions except in respect of CA. Hence, there is significant difference between Government and Private College Students with regard to the Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions except in respect of CA. The Government College Students registered higher positive perception towards NAAC Quality Dimensions in respect of TLE than the Private College Students. The Private College Students have higher positive perception towards NAAC Quality Dimensions in respect of ILR, RCE, SSP, GL and IP than the Government College Students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Table- 4 shows the difference in Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions between Arts and Science in HLIs.

It is evident from the Table that since P value is less than 0.01 and 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% and 5% level with regard to the Overall Perception on all NAAC Quality Dimensions. In other words, there is significant difference between Arts and Science Students with regard to the Perception on all NAAC Quality Dimensions in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States. The Arts Students recorded higher positive perception on all the NAAC Quality Dimensions than the Science Students with respect to HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Findings and Suggestions

The Study has made inferences, by testing the hypotheses, with the help of the statistical tools such as reliability analysis and 't' test, towards the Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Hypotheses and Inferences

H₀¹: There is no significant difference between Male and Female Students, with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

In order to find out the difference between the Male and Female Students, the Researcher had used 't' test. It is inferred that the male students recorded higher positive perception on ILR and IP than the female students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

H₀²: There is no significant difference between Government and Private College Students, with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

In order to find out the difference between Government and Private College Students, the Researcher used 't' test. It is inferred that the Private College Students registered higher positive perception towards NAAC Quality Dimensions in respect of ILR, RCE, SSP, GL and IP than the Government College Students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

H₀³: There is no significant difference between Arts and Science Students, with respect to Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

In order to find out the difference between Government and Private College Students, the Researcher used the 't' test. It is inferred that the Arts Students recorded higher positive perception on TLE & SSP than the Science

Students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Suggestions

From the above findings, it is evident that out of the seven NAAC Quality Dimensions, students recorded higher positive perception on TLE, ILR and SSP. Hence this study suggests that HE initiatives such as UGC and NAAC should adopt healthy practices in respect of CA, RCE, GL and IP in HLIs in these States. This study also suggests that every Institution should create facilities for an enabling intellectual environment for their students, which is conducive for free, open and respectful exchange of ideas.

Conclusions

From the above investigation, the Researcher has drawn inferences about the Students' Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States. Male students displayed higher positive perception on ILR than the female students in the Government College Students. They recorded higher positive perception towards NAAC Quality Dimensions only in respect of TLE than the students in Private College Students. The Private College Students exhibited higher positive perception towards NAAC Quality Dimensions except in respect of TLE than the Private College Students and the Arts Students recorded higher positive perception on TLE & SSP than the Science Students in HLIs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry States.

Limitations

1. This study was restricted to NAAC Accredited Arts & Science Colleges in two states only.
2. This study had collected data only from the students.
3. The size of the sample was small.

Scope for Further Research

Researchers can make an attempt to take up studies in connection with the quality status of HLIs covering Engineering, Management and other professional studies. Also, the perception of other stakeholders, namely, Teachers, Administrators, Alumni, Parents and Companies, etc. may also be assessed.

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Table- 1
Reliability Analysis of Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions

Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	No. of Items	No. of Sample	Cronbach's Alpha Score
CA	10	50	0.689
TLE	10	50	0.866
ILR	10	50	0.854
RCE	10	50	0.840
SSP	10	50	0.878
GL	10	50	0.795
IP	10	50	0.823

Source: Computed results based on primary data using SPSS.

Table -2
Difference in Overall Perception between Male and Female Students on NAAC Quality Dimensions

Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Gender	Mean	SD	t value	P value
CA	Male	37.82	4.85	3.345	0.333
	Female	40.51	4.91		
TLE	Male	38.45	5.84	1.206	0.095
	Female	39.70	6.41		
ILR	Male	28.04	5.80	4.350	0.001* *
	Female	24.69	4.26		
RCE	Male	30.61	4.88	2.123	0.235
	Female	29.07	4.27		
SSP	Male	26.10	6.12	1.697	0.343
	Female	24.23	6.90		
GL	Male	32.53	3.94	3.110	0.296
	Female	30.40	4.24		
IP	Male	27.39	4.01	0.811	0.046*
	Female	26.58	6.61		
Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Male	220.94	21.09	1.653	0.422
	Female	215.16	21.32		

Source : Computed results based on compiled data collected from primary sources

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level

* denotes significant at 5% level

Table -3
Difference in Overall Perception between Govt. and Private College Students on NAAC Quality Dimensions

Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Type of Institution	Mean	SD	t value	P value
CA	Govt.	40.28	4.51	1.212	0.059
	Private	39.42	5.46		
TLE	Govt.	40.30	5.50	2.062	0.005**
	Private	38.48	6.90		
ILR	Govt	24.18	3.98	3.984	0.000**
	Private	26.84	5.35		
RCE	Govt	27.93	3.27	5.086	0.000**
	Private	30.96	4.97		
SSP	Govt	21.95	4.53	15.887	0.001**
	Private	27.42	7.49		
GL	Govt	30.70	2.81	6.247	0.000**
	Private	31.14	5.33		
IP	Govt	25.14	3.73	0.729	0.000**
	Private	28.41	7.42		
Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Govt	210.48	13.31	3.936	0.000**
	Private	222.67	25.78		

Source: Computed results based on compiled data collected from primary sources

Table -4
Difference in Overall Perception between Arts and Science Students on NAAC Quality Dimensions

Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Branch	Mean	SD	t value	P value
CA	Arts	39.99	5.09	1.053	0.033*
	Science	38.83	4.38		
TLE	Arts	39.48	6.53	0.565	0.007**
	Science	38.71	4.14		
ILR	Arts	25.62	5.04	0.900	0.019*
	Science	24.67	3.54		
RCE	Arts	29.61	4.59	1.400	0.044*
	Science	28.25	3.22		
SSP	Arts	24.91	7.00	1.272	0.000**
	Science	23.04	4.34		
GL	Arts	31.01	4.48	0.769	0.013*
	Science	30.29	1.92		
IP	Arts	26.77	6.36	0.014	0.011**
	Science	26.79	3.46		
Overall Perception on NAAC Quality Dimensions	Arts	217.39	22.38	1.469	0.000**
	Science	210.58	9.64		

Source: Computed results based on compiled data collected from Primary sources