

Factores condicionantes de la calidad de la enseñanza universitaria: un análisis empírico

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in the quality of university education from an academic and managerial point of view. The Spanish higher education sector has undergone considerable social, economic and political changes during last years, which have prompted universities to take a more proactive approach and the quest for student satisfaction. As a result, many institutions have focus on service quality. This concern for quality within universities has opened an emerging stream of research.

In this Thesis the university organisation is first analysed from the viewpoint of organisation theory, focusing on the characteristics of its organisational structure and their decision-making processes. The concept of quality and the application of total quality management in relation to higher education are addressed. The perceived quality approach is adopted. This approach is linked to the definition of quality as meeting the needs and requirements of the customers. The study has four parts that analyse the perceptions of the main customers of the university. Six programmes from four faculties of a large university were selected. The sources of information were documentary review, in-depth interviews, focus groups, assistance to meetings and survey instruments.

A measurement scale has been developed to evaluate university students' perceptions of educational service quality. We tested the scale with a random and degree-stratified sample of 811 students. Five quality dimensions have been identified, called (1) attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff, (2) competence of the academic staff, (3) content of the studies, (4) facilities and equipment, and (5) organisation of the studies. The psychometric properties of the scale designed have been analysed. The constructs show acceptable levels of reliability, with validity also being satisfactorily established. The relative importance of the service quality dimensions vary according to the cycle of studies, the academic performance, and the field of study of the student. The factor called 'attitudes and behaviours of the academic staff' was found as the most important in explaining the overall educational quality.

This study also focuses on similarities and differences in the way academic staff perceive their work and organisation. The results obtained on the basis of a survey to 388 university teachers indicate that they are most satisfied with the dimension of inner rewards, and least satisfied with the economic compensation. However, there are significant differences in faculty job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and organisational commitment, according to their age, sex, rank and department. Moreover, the faculty perceptions of the quality correlates positively with their attitudes. The results also show that the students have lower scores on several aspects related to the educational quality than the academic staff.

The formal processes of evaluation and improvement of the quality of university education are then analysed. We outline the main strengths and weaknesses of these processes, as well as the existing difficulties for quality improvement.

The effects of the implementation of quality improvement teams in the university are investigated. We develop an instrument for measuring the three core principles of total quality (i.e. customer focus, continuous improvement, and teamwork) using the perceptions of a sample of 74 team members. The results show that each of the three dimensions are, separately, positively and significantly related to the motivation and satisfaction of the participants. The results also show that there are some contextual key factors for a successful

implementation of quality improvement teams.

Managerial implications, limitations of the study, and further research directions are finally discussed.