

Building Indonesia's Private Universities as Centers of Excellence

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Abstract

As centers of excellence, institutions of higher education are continuously challenged to adapt to rapid social changes. In doing so, they require the ability to improve the quality of their educational services. This study seeks to provide an understanding of how Indonesia's private universities manage the quality of their services to become centers of excellence. In doing so, this study utilizes quantitative data that were collected through questionnaires/surveys. Complementary data were collected through interviews. Analysis was conducted using a nonparametric statistics approach as well as a descriptive qualitative approach. This study finds that the quality of educational services is an important factor for improving institutional quality. Services must regularly be adapted to consumers' needs to avoid pitfalls and gaps. Consumer satisfaction with educational services affects how universities are perceived by society; as such, the quality of said services is inexorably related to universities' use of resources. This study recommends that universities, particularly private universities, use their resources synergistically to face the ongoing challenge of globalization and provide necessary educational services.

Keywords: Quality of service, Quality assurance, Higher education, Private university, Center of excellence

I. INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning not only provide education, but also quality services. Such institutions have used various approaches to meet society's needs and to improve the quality of their services (Quinn et al., 2009). Such efforts must be seriously considered by

administrators, particularly those charged with Indonesia's private universities, in order to improve the quality of their staff and students. As of 2019, 4,113 private universities were recorded in the Database of Higher Education; these consisted of 3,131 universities under the purview of the Research, Technology, and Higher Education, 981 universities under the Ministry of Religion, and 1 university with official higher education status (DIKTI, 2019). Competition between this multitude of universities is fierce, even as institutions are urged to compete healthily and professionally.

Many researchers have investigated quality assurance in education. These studies tend to fall into three categories. First, studies may frame educational institutions as learning and teaching media (Anih, 2016; Mubasyaroh, 2016; Muhammad, 2016; Usman, 2017). Second, studies may focus on educational institutions' strategies for improving the quality of their services (Bendriyanti, 2015; Rabiah, 2019; Siram, 2015). Third, studies may examine the effectiveness of quality assurance programs and educational services ("Efektifitas Kinerja Lembaga Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan (LPMP) dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan," 2012; Martasubrata & Suwatno, 2016; Shaylide, 2014).

This study seeks to complement existing research by examining the private universities' quality assurance and management efforts. As such, it will not only discuss the quality assurance strategies of Indonesian higher education, but also analyze these institutions efforts to improve the quality of their educational services. These issues will be discussed further below.

This study departs from the assumption that institutions of higher learning, as providers of services, must continue to improve themselves in order to remain competitive. Such quality assurance strategies cannot be separated from stakeholders' interests and their ability to shape institutional policy. Institutional quality is the prime consideration when high school graduates choose a university, and as such failure to address any shortcomings will have a detrimental effect on universities' continued existence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review shows that quality education has no singular definition. Interpretations vary not only between countries, but also between studies and researchers (Othman & Muijs, 2013). Referring to a classic text by Garvin (1987), Shahidi & Seyedi (2012) define quality as consisting of eight dimensions: performance, features, reliability, congruity, endurance, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. A study by Othman & Muijs (2013) identifies four elements that determine educational quality, at least in Malaysia: resources, environment, leadership, and parental involvement. Damirchili & Tajari (2011), referring to students' own perspectives, identify several factors that can improve educational quality; the most important of these are related to teachers. Other studies have emphasized the importance of implementation and evaluation, such as Kluczniok & Roßbach (2014) in German kindergartens.

Globalization has caused rapid changes in human society, and scholars have thus been interested in examining its effects on education. Shahidi & Seyedi (2012), for example, shows that education quality is significantly affected by globalization, something that has been reinforced by network technology. For example, Asongu & Nwachukwu (2018) have shown that information technology can improve the quality of education. Several models

have been offered; Ghislandi & Raffaghelli (2015), for example, have proposed a forward-oriented design, using it as a mediational instrument for exploring learning methods, transforming educational systems to realize expected goals, and to ensure that educational goals are realized in the everyday activities of students and teachers.

The effect of decentralization on education quality has also been widely discussed, as have the implications of the equal distribution of resources and powers (Channa, 2016; Wijayanto, 2015). This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, which implemented decentralization after political reform began in 1998. Literature on developing countries has focused primarily on the shortcomings of rural areas; see, for example, the comparison of urban and rural education in Malaysia conducted by Othman & Muijs (2013). In Indonesia, education has been perceived as one of many problems plaguing the nation, but nonetheless is considered necessary for the betterment of society (Wijayanto, 2015). Several Indonesian scholars have advocated for involving communities in quality assurance; for example, Pradhan et al. (2014) argued that school committees must take a significant role in the administration of state schools.

Educational quality requires careful delineation and definition to develop universities into centers of excellence. According to Scheerens & Hendriks (2004), the quality of education may be ascertained through several factors: (1) the number of students and graduates; (2) the competencies and achievements of graduates; (3) the distribution of education; (4) the quality of education funding; (5) the quality of physical and human resources.

Often, the quality of education is measured through its output—particularly students' achievements—rather than its other aspects. Nonetheless, Williams (2001) argues that these other aspects must still be considered to properly ascertain educational quality. Students must recognize their own culture, be prepared to handle social interactions, and develop themselves to achieve maximal results (Thijs & Van den Akker, 2009). Educational quality is dynamic, being influenced by various external and internal factors over time.

Specific factors that contribute to the quality of education include administration and management, government monitoring, student involvement, infrastructure, funding, and technology (Yirdaw, 2016). The workplace environment within an institution of higher education also significantly influences its ability to provide quality services. As such, states produce education through lengthy processes that involve diverse elements (Metelkina & Gezalyan, 2006). According to Schildkamp et al. (2009), the quality of education is determined through five central concepts: evaluation instruments, teams, portfolios, processes, and reports. Yirdaw (2006), meanwhile, argues that education quality is influenced by three factors; (1) hardware, namely financial and capital resources, infrastructure, and teaching and learning facilities; (2) software, involving the interactions of students, administrators, and instructors; (3) and adhesive, a combination of individual, leadership, management, and institutional factors.

The effectiveness of public services has likewise been examined by various scholars. According to Mihaiu et al. (2010), effectiveness can be ascertained based on the degree to which desired goals are achieved. George et al. (2013) argue that this is a central component of educational quality. Studies at various levels have also shown that the effectiveness of the education sector is influenced by state authorities (Curristine et al., 2007; George et al., 2013; Moore, 2015; Sanderson, 1996), as educational policy affects such important elements as

teacher–student ratios, classroom sizes, availability of textbooks, etc. (George et al., 2013). Similarly, Ntho et al. (2013) have shown that regular inspections of schools and evaluations of their results are necessary to ensure effectiveness; anybody with a degree in education may contribute by becoming an inspector (Ntho, 2013).

Frank (2008) argues that the literature on effectiveness evaluation has tended to offer two approaches: direct and indirect. The former relies on the direct observation of education, measuring the results of education by evaluating student performance and knowledge. The latter, meanwhile, allows students to report what they have studied (Frank, 2008); as this approach invites respondent bias, the direct approach is preferred. Mihaiu et al. (2010) argue that the effectiveness of education cannot easily be ascertained, as education services are non-physical and thus cannot be easily quantified. This reflects Frank's argument that educational services are primarily intangible, a fact that is often ignored by researchers who focus on graduation rates, publication levels, and external funding (Frank, 2008).

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

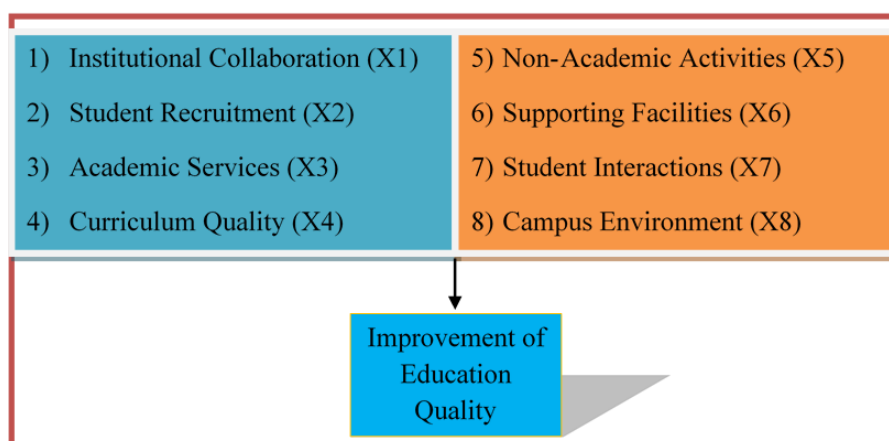
Research Design

As humanity has advanced, its need for education has increased. This study thus employs a SERVQUAL model to identify the quality criteria that must be improved to bridge the gap between performance (facts) and students' expectations as consumers of higher education services. This model consists of two elements: evaluation and weighting. Evaluation was conducted by distribution questionnaires to ascertain performance (facts) and respondents' expectations (Widyanti, 2019). Weighting, meanwhile, was conducted by asking students to weight the five main dimensions of education using a constant sum rating scale.

Connection between Research Variables

The conceptual framework of this study is provided below:

Figure 1. Correlation between Educational Service Quality Variables



This conceptual framework refers to the five main dimensions of educational services identified by Jain (2014; see also Kotler, 2012; Tjiptono, 2016). These dimensions are divided into eight variables, which may be categorized as follows:

- 1) Supporting Facilities (X6) and Campus Environment (X8), being tangibles
- 2) Curriculum Quality (X4), being part of reliability
- 3) Academic Services (X3) and Student Interactions, (X7) being part of responsiveness
- 4) Student Recruitment (X2), being part of quality assurance
- 5) Institutional Collaboration (X1) and Non-Academic Activities (X5), being part of empathy in service

Data Collection Method

Two approaches to data collection were collected through two approaches. First, questionnaires were distributed to respondents (i.e. students of private universities), with their responses being used to understand the research matter. Afterwards, interviews were used to collect data from university administrators regarding their approaches to quality assurance.

Data Measurement

A Likert 5-point scale was used to measure students' perceptions of and reactions to education. Respondents were asked to answer every question with one of five responses: (1) Very Dissatisfied, (2) Dissatisfied, (3) Neutral, (4) Satisfied, and (5) Very Satisfied.

Data Sampling

As its population, this study has taken students at private universities. Sampling was conducted using a simple random sampling approach, with respondents being chosen randomly without any specific considerations or criteria (Sugiyono, 2007). A population of 291 students was available when research was conducted in June 2018. Sample size was determined using the formula offered by Slovin, Krejcie & Morgan (in Sugiyono, 2016):

$$\text{Formula Slovin : } n = \frac{NZ_{\alpha/2}^2 P(1-P)}{(N-1)d^2 + Z_{\alpha/2}^2 P(1-P)} \quad (3.1)$$

With:

n = Sample size

N = Population size = 291 people (students at private universities)

α = margin of error = 5%

Z = standard deviation for standard normal curves

$Z_{5\%}$ = 1.96 of Table 1 (Sugiyono, 2007: 371)

P = Proportion of population = 0.5 (Sugiyono, 2007: 70)

d = Estimation error = 5%

producing:

$$\text{Formula Slovin : } n = \frac{(291)(1.96)^2(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(291-1)(0.05)^2 + (1.96)^2(0.5)(1-0.5)} = 167.15$$

As such, this study has a sample size of 167 respondents.

Factor Analysis Technique

When employing factor analysis, the validity and reliability of the construct must be tested first (Sugiyono, 2007). Validity testing is used to ascertain the quality of the research instrument. For this study, validity was tested as follows: (Ghozali, 2011)

- 1) *Kaiser Meyer Olkin* (KMO) testing was used to ascertain the sufficiency and validity of the sample. Factor analysis is considered valid if the KMO is greater than 0.5, with a measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) > 0.5.
- 2) Barlett's test of sphericity was used to ascertain the reliability of the items, with items being deemed reliable if their significance < 0.05.

Factor analysis requires the transformation of data from the ordinal scale to the interval scale using the successive interval method. To address the research problem, data were analyzed using SPSS v23 for Windows. This study employs exploratory factor analysis, in which items remain distributed rather than categorized. Latent variables are thus identified based on these items.

The number of factors has been determined based on the eigen value of the identified factors. Factors with an eigen value > 1 have been chosen for discussion. Factor rotation was used to facilitate interpretation and identify the correlation between items and factors. Some items are correlated with multiple factors, although some are below the loading factor threshold (0.55) and thus excluded. This study employs varimax rotation, an orthogonal rotation approach that minimizes the number of items with a low loading factor. Factor interpretation was conducted by grouping items that have a high loading factor.

IV. RESULTS

Results of Validity and Reliability Testing

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) testing produced values of 0.819 (performance) and 0.815 (expectation), both of which were above 0.5. As such, all items were deemed valid and factor analysis was possible. Using the Bartlett Test of Sphericity produced a value of 4166 for performance (with a significance of 0.000) and 4179 for expectation (with a significance of 0.000). Items were thus correlated (significance < 0.05), and all items were reliable.

Results of factor analysis

The matrix produced before factor rotation was unclear, and thus could not be readily interpreted. Rotation was thus used to facilitate the explanation of the factors analyzed in this model. This study used varimax rotation, which facilitates analysis and is regularly used in

similar studies. After rotation, it was found that the forty items on the questionnaire collectively represented eight factors, which could be used to ascertain students' satisfaction with the educational services of private universities.

Gaps in Service Quality

The gap value refers to the difference between universities' performance and respondents' expectations. The results of analysis are shown below.

Table 1: Average Gap in Service Quality Scores

	Variable	Performance	Expectation	Gap	Std. Deviation	Status
X3	Academic Services	3.79	3.60	0.19	1.20	Positive
X4	Curriculum Quality	3.58	3.52	0.06	1.40	Positive
X8	Campus Environment	3.56	3.51	0.05	1.34	Positive
X6	Supporting Facilities	3.62	3.68	-0.06	1.13	Negative
X2	Student Recruitment	3.58	3.60	-0.02	1.24	Negative
X5	Non-Academic Activities	3.64	3.57	0.07	1.26	Positive
X7	Student Interaction	3.61	3.69	-0.08	1.34	Negative
X1	Institutional Collaboration	3.56	3.59	-0.03	1.25	Negative

(Source: Primary data compiled by researchers, 2019)

Consumer Satisfaction

Students' satisfaction with the quality of private universities' services may be ascertained by multiplying the gap value by the weight of the factor. This calculation produces a value termed the "final gap".

Table 2: Student Satisfaction with Private Universities' Services

	Variable	Gap	Weight	Value	Status
X3	Academic Services	0.19	21.02%	0.040	Satisfied
X4	Curriculum Quality	0.06	20.64%	0.013	Satisfied
X8	Campus Environment	0.05	4.25%	0.002	Satisfied
X6	Supporting Facilities	-0.06	15.19%	-0.009	Dissatisfied
X2	Student Recruitment	-0.02	15.36%	-0.003	Dissatisfied
X5	Non-Academic Activities	0.07	4.08%	0.003	Satisfied
X7	Student Interactions	-0.08	9.74%	-0.008	Dissatisfied
X1	Institutional Collaboration	-0.03	9.70%	-0.003	Dissatisfied
	Average	0.02	12.50%	0.004	Satisfied

(Source: Primary data compiled by researchers, 2019)

This table shows that students had an average satisfaction score of 0.004. This positive score indicates that students are generally satisfied with the services they receive from their universities. This means that services are adequate, but not as expected by students, and as such it is necessary to improve services.

V. DISCUSSION

Quality of Educational Services

Service quality is central to survival of institutions, be they businesses such as banks (Pabbajah et al., 2019) or service providers such as educational institutions. Understandings

of education quality focus on the fulfilment of students' needs and desires, as well as students' ability to achieve expected results. Two main factors influence the quality of educational services, namely perceived service and expected service. As such, it may be surmised that the quality of educational services (or lack thereof) depends on the service provider's ability to consistently provide expected services. If students perceive educational services as meeting their expectations, said services are deemed good and satisfactory. If students perceive educational services as exceeding their expectations, said services may be deemed ideal or exemplary. Conversely, if students perceive educational services as falling short of their expectations, said services may be deemed as lacking.

According to Behdioglu (2014), the total quality of educational services is determined by three components. First are technical qualities, referring to the output of educational services received by students. Parasuraman identifies three types of technical qualities: a) search qualities, those qualities that may be identified by students before enrollment (such as price); b) experience qualities, those qualities that may only be identified by students during the course of their studies, such as speed of service; c) credence qualities, those qualities that cannot readily be identified by students even during their studies, such as quality of operations. Second, functional qualities, which are related to the ability to provide services. Third, corporate image, namely the profile, reputation, public image, and special appeal of the educational institution.

It may thus be concluded that the quality of educational services may be evaluated through the outputs of and approaches used by educational services. To avoid gaps in service quality, potential markets and consumer needs must be identified. Students are directly involved in their educations, and thus influence the quality of services received. In other words, quality assurance must not only consider providers' perspectives, but also those of students as consumers (Widyanti, 2019). At the same time, however, it is necessary to recognize that institutions are often inconsistent in their provision of services, and these inconsistencies are recognized by consumers (Septianti & Frastuti, 2019).

Quality of Higher Education

Educational institutions seek to consistently improve their own services, often by identifying the services expected by their customers and translating these expectations into real services, with the expectation that students will receive the services they expect (Widyanti, 2019). Achieving such a goal necessitates a clear understanding of the various dimensions of quality educational services. As such, private universities must understand students' needs in order to become pioneers and centers of excellence.

Students generally evaluate the quality of educational services using five dimensions (Mansori et al., 2014). First is reliability, the ability to provide promised educational services on time and without discrimination or error. Second is responsiveness, the willingness to rapidly provide assistance and services to students as well as professionally address failures. Third is assurance, with staff having the knowledge and ability to do their duties spontaneously and adaptively in order to improve performance and cultivate trust. Fourth is empathy, a desire to provide personal services to students and recognize their individual personalities. Fifth are the tangibles, the physical facilities, equipment, and communication media of the university.

The above dimensions of education quality must not be simply recognized, but strived towards. This is a significant challenge for institutions of higher education, and students often complain that they are dissatisfied with the services they have received. This indicates that significant gaps exist between managerial and student perspectives.

The benefits of providing and maintaining quality services are must more significant than the costs incurred. Consistently exemplary educational services will improve student satisfaction, providing universities with a multitude of benefits, including:

- a. Harmonious university–student relations
- b. A good foundation for attracting repeat customers
- c. Student loyalty
- d. Word-of-mouth advertising
- e. Improved institutional reputation
- f. Increased profit

In other words, by improving their provision of services, institutions of higher learning will not only increase student interest, but also cultivate the competitiveness necessary for improving academic performance.

Performance of Institutions of Higher Learning

Every educational institution has its own vision and missions, which it consults in determining its future course and improving its performance. Wibowo defines performance as the process of providing customer satisfaction and creating a strategic environment (Afifah, 2017). Meanwhile, Rusyan et al. understand performance as achievement, something necessary to ensure the productive use of human resources (Baharun, 2016). Within the context of education, an institution's ability to successfully realize its mission is determined strongly by its ability to systematically promote institutional betterment—including in terms of facilities, funding, participation, and environment (Rusmini, 2015:23).

Quality is considered one of the foremost institutional elements, as it provides proof of a product's superiority relative to others (Fadhli, 2016). In improving educational quality, institutions of higher learning must consider: (a) input; (b) output; (c) outcomes; (d) benefits; and (e) impact. Meanwhile, to improve performance, these institutions must consider: (a) accountability, (b) evaluation; (c) fiscal responsibility (Afifah, 2017). Sallis, meanwhile, identifies several indicators of quality at institutions of higher learning, including: (1) high moral values; (2) excellent examination results; (3) the support of parents, business, and the local community; (4) plentiful resources; (5) the application of the latest technology; (6) strong and purposeful leadership; (7) the care and concern for pupils and students; and (8) a well-balanced and challenging curriculum (cf. Fadhli, 2016). All universities have their own quality assurance systems, which they apply in their own manner (Bancin, 2017; Muhammad, 2014; Nanang Fattah, 2018). Institutions determine their own quality policies, standards, parameters, and methods, doing so based on their vision and mission (Bancin, 2017). As part

of their quality assurance systems, institutions of higher learning must periodically evaluate the quality of their educational services through internal monitoring and evaluation activities.

From the above discussion, it is clear that institutions of higher learning require synergy and complex strategies to develop themselves into centers of excellence, as well as diverse indicators, clear visions and missions, strong human resources and managerial systems, and appropriate technological infrastructure.

VI. CONCLUSION

In recent years, education has advanced rapidly, as has competition between Indonesia's thousands of private universities. This study has identified three important factors that contribute to the development of institutions of higher learning into centers of excellence. First, educational institutions must prioritize their ability to provide quality educational services. Second, the public considers the quality of educational services when choosing an educational institution. Third, institutions will always face challenges and competition, and as such they must continuously strive to improve their performance and adapt to the changing times while maximally utilizing available resources. In other words, service and education quality are paramount for developing institutions of higher learning into centers of excellence.

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size, and its use of a Likert scale could potentially invite bias. As such, future studies should use a larger sample size and more comprehensive approach. Given the number of private universities in Indonesia and their varied access to potential and actual resources, a comparative study that considers several institutions would also prove fruitful. Synergy between all stakeholders is therefore necessary to ensure that national challenges are overcome and necessary human resources are provided.

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