Students' Perspective towards Educational Service Quality in Ethiopian Public University: A Triangulation Approach

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Abstract

In higher education, evaluating educational service quality from students' perspective is vital to pinpoint institutional strengths and identify areas for improvement. The main purpose of this study was to examine students' perspective towards education service quality of a public University in Ethiopia. Using qualitative case study design, the study employed purposive sampling technique to select participants including regular undergraduate students, student union representatives, teachers, department heads, college deans and student service directorate director. Semi-structured interview was conducted with twenty participants, consisting of six teachers, four student union representatives, five department heads, four college deans and one student service directorate director. Meanwhile, focus group discussion was conducted with twelve purposefully selected students. The thematic qualitative data revealed that students' perception towards educational service quality of the University was found to be poor. This study further uncovered that poor provision of educational services affects students' learning. Based on the findings, conclusions, recommendations and directions for further studies were forwarded.

Keywords: *Perspectives, Service Quality, Quality Assurance, Academic Achievement, Higher Education*

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been influenced by marketization. In fact, different push factors affect higher education to apply marketing practices such as increased competition among higher education, decreased government funding, and the increased cost of education (Guilbault, 2016). In today's dynamic higher education sector, educational service quality is considered as a fundamental element to the success of any higher education (Sandhu & Bala, 2011). As educational service quality is broadly defined in the educational settings (Schneider & White, 2004), it refers to the difference between students' expectations and their actual perceptions of service delivery (Silva et al., 2017).

Educational service quality is considered as an important element to assure the quality of higher education. According to Onditi and Wechuli (2017), it is a key determinant to measure the quality of higher education performance while Malik et al. (2010) pointed out that it is fundamental and an important parameter of educational excellence in general and higher education in particular. While Raju and Bhaskar (2017) argue that educational service quality is essential for high standard of education and good image of HEIs, Al-Dulaimi (2016) concludes that it is important to achieve universities' objectives and promote the effectiveness of the education system. In a nutshell, measuring higher education service quality is one of the key elements to ensure the quality of an HEI.

During the last fifteen years, Ethiopia has experienced rapid expansion of HEIs in different parts of the country (Kedir, 2009). The number of public universities increased from 2 in 1991 (Tesfaye, 2011) to 36 in 2015 (MoE, 2016). In total, there are 49 public universities and 128 accredited private HEIs in the country (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018). The number of undergraduate students more than doubled from 326,318 (263,001 males and 63,317 females) in 2007/8 to 729,028 (475,971 males and 253,057 females) in 2014/15 (MoE, 2016). The most recent data released by Ethiopian MoE (2018) show that the total number of undergraduate students who are attending their education in different Ethiopian public universities reached more than 825,003 (520,177 males and 304, 826 females) in 2018. This indicates that the annual intake rate of undergraduate students is dramatically increasing.

The radical expansion of higher education in Ethiopia had mainly affected the quality of higher education in general and the provision of necessary educational services in particular.

In recognizing these challenges, the government introduced various quality improvement initiatives and reform programs in higher education. For example, establishing supporting agencies such as the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency [HERQA], a Higher Education Strategic Centre [HESC], introducing new courses and curricula, making new funding arrangements, acquiring student contributions by means of cost sharing, building necessary infrastructure, recruiting new staff, improving service quality through the implementation of Business Process Re-engineering [BPR], developing and procuring teaching materials have been applied in the country (Ayalew, et al., 2009). Though different quality improvement initiatives and reform programmes have been implemented to improve the quality of Ethiopian higher education, the recent empirical studies found that these have brought low impact on Ethiopian higher education quality (Alemayehu & Solomon, 2017; MoE, 2018).

In the past two decades, the higher education service quality has received an increasing research attention from scholars and researchers (Al-Dulaimi, 2016). Although the issue of educational service quality has attracted considerable attention within the higher education sector, few research has been conducted from students' perspective about higher education service quality (Abdullah, 2006a). Abbas (2020) further contended that a qualitative aspect of service quality in HEIs is not well studied in academic settings, especially from students' perspectives. Furthermore, earlier quantitative studies heavily focused on the methods of measuring higher education service quality.

The present study mainly focuses on students' perspective towards educational service quality of a research university in Ethiopia. Even though it is argumentative to consider students as a pure customer in educational organization, any educational institutions have no worth without students because they are the most essential assets for educational institutions (World Bank, 2009). Students are the ones for which education has been primarily designed and they are primary recipient of educational services (Ali et al., 2009) as the customer and main stakeholders. Thus, it is essential to investigate student experiences of service quality in HEIs (Abbas, 2020). In higher education, evaluating educational service quality from students' perspective is vital to pinpoint institutions' strengths and identify areas for improvement (Hameed & Amjad, 2011). Hence, this study aims to examine how students perceive the educational service quality of the University and investigate the influence of educational service quality to students' learning.

2. Literature Review

In the existing literature, there are various definitions of 'service quality' both marketing and education concepts (Schneider & White, 2004). In the educational setting, defining and measuring educational service quality has turned to be problematic (Eshghi et al., 2008). Service quality in HEIs refers to the quality of factors considered when students select an institution, and failure to comply with perceived quality is the main reason for student withdrawal (Mahmood et al., 2014). Research by Silva et al. (2017) suggests service quality in higher education as the difference between students' expectations and their actual perceptions of service delivery.

There is no generally accepted dimension or model to measure higher education service quality. Different researchers propose different dimensions of higher education service quality. For example, Kara et al. (2016) identified the quality of administrative service, quality of instructional practices, perceived learning gains, quality of students' welfare services, quality of teaching facilities, library service environment, lecturer quality, internet services, reliability of university examinations, quality of computer laboratory services, availability of text books in the library as facets of higher education service quality. On the other hand, Manzoor (2013) indicated that academic resources, teaching quality, administrative service quality, and quality of student support services as dimensions of service quality in higher education while Jain et al. (2011) summarized higher education service quality in two primary categories, namely, (1) programme quality (curriculum, university–industry interaction, input quality and academic facilities) and (2) quality of life (non-academic processes, support facilities, campus and interaction quality).

The other well-known higher education service quality researchers like Abdullah (2006a,b), Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2012) and Teeroovengadum et al. (2016) designed different models to measure higher education service quality. Abdullah proposed the new measure of higher education service quality called Higher Education Performance [HEdPERF]. The model adapted the Cronin and Taylor (1992) performance-only or Service Performance [SEVPERF] approach. The HEdPERF model has six dimensions, namely, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, programme issues and understanding. In his later work, Abdullah (2006b) modified the existing HEdPERF instrument by comparing three service quality measurements, such as, HEdPERF, SERVPERF and the moderating scale of HEdPERF-SERVPERF within a higher education setting. In the modified HEdPERF

instrument, Abdullah indicated five distinct factors, namely, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access and programme issues by excluding understanding from the former HEdPERF instrument. The modified HEdPERF consists of 41 items of which 13 items were taken from SERVPERF, and the remaining 28 items were developed via literature review.

Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2012) developed another new higher education service quality measure called Higher Education Quality [HiEdQUAL] model. Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2012) also contend that since higher education services are complex combination of various factors, using the existing generic service quality measures such as Service Quality [SERVQUAL], Service Performance [SERPERF] and Evaluated Performance (EP) are not easy to apply in higher education sectors. Annamdevula and Bellamkonda introduced Higher Education Quality [HiEdQUAL] model which consists of 27 items, with five dimensions, viz., teaching and course content, administrative services, academic facilities, campus infrastructure and support services.

Other higher education service quality researchers like Teeroovengadum et al. (2016) argue that although the existing higher education service quality models are empirically tested in higher education, none of them integrated the notion of the transformative quality in the development of service quality models. In response to this argument, Teeroovengadum, et al. (2016) introduced the new higher education service quality measure called Higher Education Quality [HESQUAL]. The HESQUAL model consists of five primary dimensions and nine sub-dimensions such as administrative quality (attitude and behavior, administrative processes), support facilities quality, core educational quality (curriculum, attitude and behavior, competence and pedagogy), transformative quality and physical environment quality (support infrastructure, learning setting and general infrastructure) and included a total of 48 items.

Higher education institutions [HEIs] across the world have been experiencing quality assurance processes (Hasbullah & Yosuff, 2017). Measuring higher education service quality is one of the important elements to assure the quality of higher education. Based on the assessment results of educational service quality, an improvement plan should be made and this plan includes human resources, infrastructure improvement and they can be considered strategic goals for HEIs (Đonlagić & Fazlić, 2015).

Prior quantitative studies have examined the nexus between service quality and students' satisfaction (e.g., Hanaysha, et al., 2012; Son et al., 2018) and found positive link

between service quality and student satisfaction. Furthermore, studies noted that students who are dissatisfied with educational service delivery may cut back on the number of courses, perform low academic results, withdraw or drop out from institution, re-enroll at another university and pass negative comments to their friends or relatives that affect the university's enrollment and retention of students (Ong, 2013). On the contrary, students who receive better service quality can perform good academic results and retain in the university as compared with students who experience or get low educational services (Ahmed et al., 2010; Dhaqane & Afrah, 2016).

3. Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted in one Ethiopia's research University. The participants of the study include regular undergraduate students, student union representatives, teachers, department heads, college deans and student service directorate director. Among regular undergraduate students, the study targeted Graduating Class [GC] students because they have ample experiences regarding the provision of university's educational services. A purposeful sample of twelve (eight female and four male) students were recruited to participate in focus group discussion (FGD). Furthermore, twenty (sixteen male and four female) interview participants, consisting of six teachers, four student union representatives, five department heads, four college deans and one student service directorate director were recruited to participate in the study in order to triangulate data collected via FGD. All study participants were recruited from six different campuses of the University so as to get comprehensive information regarding the educational service quality of the university.

The data for the study collected via FGD and in-depth interviews. FGD was conducted with undergraduate regular students to get a rich data and to compare results among different groups (Neuman, 2007). It was conducted in Amharic language to reduce communication block and later translated into English language. To facilitate the sub-groups, the researchers assigned two department heads from the department of pedagogy and psychology as moderator and note-taker as per the suggestion of Mack et al. (2005), focus groups work best if the focus group is conducted by two researchers, often called facilitators (one person acts as the moderator of the discussion and the other is the note-taker).The researchers were playing researcher's role in encouraging the discussion open and interactive; preventing dominance and steer the group away from irrelevant ideas (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, the researchers were also partly sharing the responsibility of some moderator's role like taking

additional notes and recording discussants' response so as to reduce information gap. In order to maintain confidentiality in the focus group, the researchers implemented name substitution and assigned numbers to each participant before formal FGD sessions.

Upon the completion of FGD sessions, an interview session was conducted with teachers, department heads and college deans so as to triangulate focus group data collected from students. For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interview was prepared as it allows the interviewer free to conduct the conversation as he/she thinks fit (Corbetta, 2003). During the interview session, the researchers took detail note and record the interview response via tape recorder in order to reduce the loss of audio information. The interview session lasted from one to two hours with each participant, including breaks and that was done as per the suggestion of Mack et.al (2005) who notes in-depth interviews should last from one to two hours.

The researchers employed qualitative aspect of data analysis using the following procedures. Firstly, the researchers read all the interview and focus group transcripts thoroughly many times to sense major related ideas that raised in both interview and FGD sessions and evaluated whether they are related to study objectives or not. Secondly, the researchers adjusted two columns word processor and typed all interview and focus group transcripts in the left column from hard copy. Thirdly, the researchers identified and labeled the major related ideas from interview and focus group transcripts via highlighting those using different colors. Fourthly, the researchers reviewed and examined the labeled concepts or categories critically to identify whether related concepts are cluster together or divide the existing concepts into sub-dimensions. Fifthly, the researchers coded major concepts in the right column that derived from each interview and focus group transcripts using descriptive coding system based on participants' pseudo name and the number assigned to them as suggested by Saldaña (2009). For example:

There is shortage of laboratory equipment at our campus. In addition, there are also inadequate rooms for laboratory equipment. For example, our university has been graduated students three batches for three rounds in the veterinary science department. As veterinary science department teacher, I am not confident enough that our graduates are well trained in practical skills. In my perspective, if students are not attending the practical lesson in well-organized laboratories, their academic performance in practical course is poor (Female, Interview Participant-7) = Delivery of Practical Lesson.

Sixthly, the researchers organized and grouped these major related concepts as major and sub-themes that emerged from the interview and focus group transcripts. Finally, the researchers described and analyzed the data thematically using verbatim and direct quotations.

This study adhered to ethical considerations. The main ethical principles that were considered in conducting this research are: obtaining permission from the University where the study was conducted, securing the respondents' oral and informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm. In addition, the respondents were oriented that the information gathered from them will be kept confidential and individually focused report will never occur in any parts of the paper. Finally, the researchers debriefed that nothing will harm the study subjects by being a participant of the study.

4. Results

A detailed discussion summarizes the results in relation to each of the corresponding themes as associated with the research questions. In-depth descriptions with data from the FGD and interviews are presented next. The study participants were asked about their respective campuses' educational service quality and discussed how it affects their learning. Respondents of the study described their experiences towards service quality by focusing on their respective departments, institutes/ schools and colleges. The researchers summarized the major issues raised during focus group and interview into two major themes and ten sub or lower order themes. The major themes include: academic service quality and administrative or non-academic service quality. Table 1 shortly summarizes major and sub themes that emerged from focus group and interview transcripts.

Table 1
Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Major Theme-1	Major Theme-2
Academic Service Quality	**Administrative Service Quality**
Sub themes	**Sub themes**
➢ Availability of teachers ➢ Delivery of practical lesson ➢ Quality of general infrastructure ➢ Quality of library services ➢ Adequacy of teaching tools	➢ Quality of dormitory services ➢ Quality of cafeteria services ➢ Quality of support services (health services, availability of sport and recreation places and facilities, guidance and counseling services) ➢ Unnecessary bureaucracies in finance ➢ Availability of offices to teachers

4.1 Major Theme-1 Academic Service Quality

4.1.1 Availability of Teachers

Most study participants, especially from the Medicine and Health Sciences (MHS) and the Institute of Technology (IT), were raising the shortage of teachers to deliver some assigned courses. Below are some of the responses that reflect this sub theme. One of the focus group discussants from the department of Civil Engineering at IT felt that:

> We cannot complete some courses according to the university semester schedule because of shortage of teachers. When we reach to complete semester (for example, left with a maximum of one week), we start the delayed courses in the tighten time. This directly or indirectly affects our learning and academic performance *(Male, FGD Participant-9).*

Another focus group participant, from the MHS agrees with the earlier respondent's thought. "In our college, there is also a scarcity of teachers and hence we begin some courses out of the university schedule". Therefore, we are forced to go to clinical attachment without completing the classes and examinations" *(Female, FGD Participant-11).*

Furthermore, during the interviewing session, one of the deans at IT confirms the shortage of teachers as a common challenge. His response typically summarizes other's thought:

> All courses assigned to a certain semester are well communicated with students, but we did not begin some courses according to the university schedule due to lack of teachers. Therefore, we assign teachers to those courses for a maximum of one week as a block course and this in turn affects students' learning and their academic performance *(Male-FGD Participant-3).*

Given these responses, it is obvious that the participants opined that there is shortage of teachers to deliver some courses in the university, especially in the health sciences and technology colleges.

4.1.2 Delivery of Practical Lessons

Many focus group discussants explained that students properly learn theoretical lesson, but the delivery of practical lesson is very poor. Among focus group participants, one of students from the department of Chemistry at the Natural and Computational Sciences (NCS) expressed that "in our university, theoretical education is good but the practical lesson is very poor. In my opinion, theoretical knowledge without practical knowledge is not enough because

we will apply both theoretical and practical knowledge in the real work places" *(Male-FDG Participant-8).* Another FGD participant, from the Department of Medical Laboratory shares the thought raised by earlier respondent. In his own words:

> Even at the Diploma level, students learn theoretical lesson in the morning and learn practical lesson in the afternoon and vice versa. In our case; however, after completing the theoretical classes some teachers rarely try to teach practical lesson. Such kind of teaching method may confuse us and threats the practical lesson *(Female, FGD Participant-6).*

The other student from the Department of Computer Sciences supports these thoughts and she explains: "most applied science and technology education like ours highly demands practical lesson/demonstration but practical lesson is below our expectation in our university and this hampers students' learning" *(Female, FGD Participant-5).* The researchers further asked them whether there is adequate laboratory equipment in their respective colleges and institutes to deliver practical lesson. The study participants shared their respective college's service quality with regard to laboratory equipment. One of the FGD participants from the Department of Public Health instantly complains that: "in our college case; for example, we do not know because we have not that much more opportunity to enter into the laboratory class except clinical attachment" *(Male, FGD Participant-3).*

Another participant from Water Institute Technology (WIT) explains: "the adequacy of laboratory equipment is perhaps varying from campus to campus. In our institute, there is ample laboratory equipment, but some of them are outdated (stayed for more than 20 years) and hence these are non-functional" *(Female, FGD Participant-1).* Likewise, one of the deans at AWIT during interview session uncovered that: "in our institute, some laboratory materials are outdated. For example, water quality testing instruments are purchased before 20 years. Thus, it is hardly possible to use it for a practical lesson" *(Male, Interview Participant-2).* Another student from the Department of Plant Science under Agricultural Sciences (AS) shared that:" in our college, there is also deficit of laboratory equipment. Due to that reason, we go to another institution but we cannot easily get the access from the university, according teachers' plan" *(Male, FGD Participant-2).*

During the interview session, one instructor from the Department of Horticulture shared similar complain. He admits that:

In our college, the availability of necessary laboratory equipment is very limited. Hence, we take out our students to another institution to deliver practical lesson. If there is shortage of laboratories in the university, students cannot gain practical lesson and this in turn affects their academic performance mainly in practical courses *(Male, Interview Participant-6).*

Likewise, another teacher in the department of Veterinary Sciences stresses on the relationship between availability of laboratory equipment and students' learning. In her own words:

There is shortage of laboratory equipment at our campus. In addition, there are also inadequate rooms for laboratory equipment. For example, our university has graduated three batches for three rounds in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine [DVM]. As Veterinary Medicine Department teacher, I am not confident enough that our graduates are trained in practical skills. In my perspective, if students are not attending the practical lesson in well-organized laboratories, their academic performance in practical course is weak *(Female, Interview Participant-7).*

Taking the study participants' response into consideration, one can understand that the University gives much emphasis to the theoretical lesson as compared with practical lesson.

4.1.3 Quality of General Campus Infrastructure

Most study participants from different campuses shared poor provision of general infrastructure. Among focus group participants, a graduating class student from the department of Radiology described the challenges related to Information Communication Technology [ICT]. She explains that:

Although there is one room reserved only for ICT services, many computers are non-functional in the room. Because of shortage of functional computers, those functional computers cannot serve all students who found on the campus. In addition, network connection is also very poor to easily access the necessary educational materials that we want *(Female, FGD Participant-7).*

The other focus group participants discussed the quality of classrooms. A third-year student from the department of Psychology felt that:

Because of the dearth of lecture rooms, sometimes we leave the class for other students while learning. As we know, formal teaching and learning processes can be conducted in the classrooms. So, how can we properly learn without classrooms? In addition, there

is no ventilator in each classroom. It has the hot air condition! If we have a lack of ventilator in each class, we cannot properly attend the lesson, especially in the afternoon session *(Female, FGD Participant-11).*

Moreover, from interview participants, a teacher and head in the Department of Midwifery raise the size of classrooms. She says: "we have a very small size classroom and students feel discomfort while learning due to the hot air condition" *(Female, Interview Participant-6).*

According to the study subjects' response, the participants opined that the quality of internet services and classrooms are poor among other general campus infrastructure.

4.1.4 Quality of Library Services

During focus group sessions, most study participants were complaining on the quality of the university's library services. One of the focus group participants and a third-year student in the Department of Public Health compares the quality of university's library services with preparatory school. ''When we were at preparatory school, we have well organized library with necessary reference materials, but in our university, for instance, we cannot easily find necessary reference materials in the library''*(Male, FGD Participant-14).* Similarly, another FGD participant in his own words declares:

> In the beginning of each semester, the course teachers provide course outlines before starting the course. In the course outline, there are many listed references. Our teachers order us to read those references books. However, we cannot find those reference materials in the library *(Male, FGD Participant-1).*

In addition, the other focus group participants were also sharing the poor internet connection in the library. One of focus group participants and fourth year student in the Department of Psychology were expressing how the library's poor internet access kills their learning time. His interview response typically summarizes others' thought: ''the internet connection is very poor in the library. We cannot easily access and download necessary materials. As a result, we kill our time while struggling with poor network connection'' *(Male, FGD Participant-7).*

4.1.5 Adequacy of Teaching Tools

Majority of study subjects discussed the inadequacy of different teaching tools in the university. Among focus group participants, a fifth year student in the Department of Computer Science shared that:

Lack of necessary teaching tools is another challenge to teachers. As a result, class representatives and teachers themselves, finding a Liquid Crystal Display [LCD] projector from another teacher and offices during class time and sometimes we kill our class period while waiting for an LCD projector. This directly affects our learning! *(Female, FGD Participant-12).*

Another focus group participant and a fifth-year student from the Department of Mechanical Engineering agree with the thought of another participant. He further added that:

The classrooms are not equipped with necessary teaching tools. For example, there are permanent LCDs in each class but majority of them are not functional. In addition, for some functional permanent LCDs, the socket outlets that found in the classrooms are not functional *(Male, FGD Participant- 6).*

Not only students, but also teachers and department heads themselves were also raising the deficiency of teaching tools and equipment during interview sessions. An instructor and head in the department of Accounting and Finance under Business and Economics, explained that "most teachers have no laptops. So, it indirectly affects students' learning" *(Male, Interview Participant-7).* On top of his concern, another instructor from the Department of Midwifery added that:

For instance, in our department there are twenty-eight academic staff members. Out of these, only five teachers have a laptop and the rest twenty-three have no laptops. This is a higher education institution, how they teach the students without laptop? Obviously, this situation creates a big challenge in teaching and learning processes *(Female, Interview Participant-6).*

4.2. Major Theme-2 Administrative Service Quality

Respondents of this study described challenges associated with administrative service quality. The main administrative service quality challenges that the study participants shared during focus group and interview sessions include: the quality of dormitory and cafeteria services, student health related services, shortage of sports and recreation places, unnecessary bureaucracies in financial services and shortage of instructor's office. Though similar problems do not exist in all campuses, most campuses share at least some common challenges. During interview sessions, a student service directorate director expressed somewhat a comprehensive view with regard to the university's administrative service quality. In his own words:

In the provision of administrative quality services, there are differences from campus to campus because some campuses are newly established and some others are old. On old campuses, the administrative service quality is better than that of newly established campuses. In the newly established institutions, for instance, there are no fences and the thief cheating the student's educational materials like laptop from student's dorm *(Male, Interview Participant-5).*

Among focus group discussants, a third-year student in the Public Health Department explained that:

In my observation, all administrative services are poorer in our campus as compared with other campuses. For example, female and male students are living in one building. Because of this, most fresh female students drop out their education and leave the campus. Furthermore, the water supply is very poor and this mainly affects female students, including their education *(Male, FGD Participant-4).*

In the interviewing session, an instructor in the Department of Public Health also shared similar views on the quality of dormitory services to male and female students. Here are some quotes that taken from her interview response:

The worst thing in the MHS is the quality of dormitory services. The dorm for both male and female students is one block building and the only difference is the exit and entry gate of the building for male and female students. Consequently, female students' drop out is very high, particularly among fresh students *(Female, Interview Participant-8).*

Another focus group and interview participants were sharing the quality of cafeteria service in the university. Among focus group participants, a fifth year Civil Engineering Department student shared that:

In our university, for example the quality of food is not somewhat good. If the quality of the food is not, students are vulnerable to health-related problems. If the students are not healthy, how one student can properly attend his/her education? Thus, the quality of food plays a significant role to students' health, study habits and ultimately academic performance *(Male, Focus Group Participant -2).*

Similarly, another interview participant and a Student Union President expressed that:

Food is one of the most important basic needs for any individual. Students can properly learn when they fulfill this need. Most of the time, our university students are raising

complain regarding the quality of cafeteria services. The university provides of similar foods all the time. If the quality of the food is poor, that indirectly affects their health and learning *(Male, Interview Participant-6).*

Other interview participants responded that inflexible cafeteria service influences students' learning. One of the interview participants and a Psychology department teacher explained that:

The cafeteria service is not flexible in our university. There is only one hall for cafeteria service. All students irrespective their religion gets services in this one cafeteria hall. We can't begin classes at 2:00 AM Local Time [LT], because the lineup is too long and students are not available at class time. We kill about a one hour while waiting for students. This indirectly affects students' learning *(Male, Interview Participant-1).*

In the same vein, among focus group discussants, a fifth year student in the Department of Computer Sciences explained that:

Honestly speaking, there is a too long lineup to get cafeteria services. Due to that reason, we kill our class time. Some teachers not allow students to enter the classroom after class time. Thus, students are forced to cancel the regular classes and that affects students learning, including their academic performance *(Female, FGD Participant-2).*

Moreover, the respondents were expressing the availability of medicines in the student clinic. One of the interview participants and Students' Union Representative has shared the shortage of medicines as pressing challenge that limit students from getting proper medication in the university. He says:

In our university, there are available health professionals. However, there are shortages of medicines in the student clinic. The only medicines available on the student health center are Pain Killers, Malaria and Typhoid Medicines. We are ordered to purchase other medicines from outside Pharmacies. In addition, we observe similarity of disease findings for all students. For example, Typhoid and Malaria are the common disease findings for all students. How? *(Male, Interview Participant-8).*

Furthermore, the study participants were explaining were boldly sharing the influence of poor health related services on students' learning. One of the focus group discussants and a fifth year student in the Department of Computer Sciences felt that:

In my own understanding, students' health and learning are highly interconnected issues. If the students are not healthy, they cannot properly attend the regular classes

and vice-versa. For example, student clinic that found on our campus doesn't give proper medical service to students and that directly affects students' learning, including their academic performance *(Female, FGD Participant-2).*

Another interview participant and a Psychology Department teacher shares similar thought. In his own words:

Students can properly learn and attend the regular classes if and only if they are healthy enough. If students are not healthy, they can't attend the classes properly and achieve good academic performance. Thus, the health services play an imperative role on students' health and their learning *(Male, Interview Participant-1).*

Furthermore, study subjects also described the role of sports and recreation services on academic performance. Among interview participants, a Student Union V/President explained that:

Although sports and recreation services are somewhat good as compared with other universities, there are issues that need due attention, for example, making all sports and recreation facilities available in the university. Sports and recreation centers play a significant role on students' health. Healthy students can attend regular classes properly and study hard to pass exams and vice versa. Thus, poor delivery of sports and recreation services indirectly affect students' academic performance *(Male, Interview Participant-3).*

The Student Union President further added a similar concern:

Physical exercise is important for students to be healthier. If students are not healthier, they cannot properly learn their education. In addition, recreation centers are important to protect students from drug and substance abuse. The students spend their leisure times in recreation centers *(Male, Interview Participant-6).*

The other study participants, especially in interviewing sessions shared the quality of guidance and counseling services in the university. One of the interview participants and Institutional Quality Assurance Coordinator [IQAC] expressed that:

Our guidance and counseling service is not encouraging. The counseling service is not welcoming students who need the service. Some counselors assigned in each campus are not psychology graduates rather they are graduated from fields like sociology and anthropology. Our university's performance in guidance and counseling service is poor as compared with other universities. For example, in my observation [another

university] is performing better results in this sector than ours. In [another university], the counselors are professional to handle students' cases properly. If the client or counselee wants to contact with course instructors, the counselors easily connect them with teachers so as to solve the academic related problems *(Male, Interview Participant-5).*

The other interview participant and a Mathematics department teacher explained how poor delivery of guidance and counseling service affects students' learning. His interview response that taken from interview transcripts summarizes others' thought:

I regret that guidance and counseling service is properly given in our university. I know that there are freshman course coordinators. I understand that they handle different problems associated with freshman students. However, guidance and counseling services are very important for all students. As you know, students come to universities with different academic, economic, cultural, social and political backgrounds. Among these students, some students may face challenges in their learning and they need help to be successful in academic settings. Therefore, proper guidance and counseling services improve students' learning and their academic performance *(Male, Interview Participant-3).*

Finally, the interview participants were focusing on the finance procedure and shortage of the instructor's office. Among interview participants, one instructor from the department of Geography and Environmental Studies shared that: "finance procedure is not flexible in our university as there are unnecessary bureaucracies to get money to conduct research and other related academic activities. In my opinion, the university considers a *''challenge voice''* as a *''solution mechanism'' (Male, Interview Participant-1).* In the same way, another interviewee and instructor of the department of Animal Sciences additionally shares this thought. His response typically summarizes other's opinion: 'finance procedure is very common challenges across all campuses.' We need money to conduct research, take our students to another institution for field visit, but unnecessary procedures are high in our university to get money in the needed time'' *(Male, Interview Participant-4).*

Some other interview participants raised the shortage of offices in the campuses to teachers. A teacher in the Department of Midwifery expressed that:

For example, in our department, we have 28 academic staff members. But among these teachers, only 10 teachers have their offices and the remaining 18 have no offices. So,

they are unable to advise students, prepare themselves before entering into the classroom and so on *(Male, Interview Participant-3).*

Another interview participant and a Psychology Department teacher further added how shortage of offices for teachers indirectly influences students' learning. He says:

There is a severe shortage of offices for teachers. Due to the shortage of offices, teachers are unable to properly advise students, prepare themselves before entering the classrooms. See how even shortage of offices affect students' learning? If the teachers properly teach and advice students, the students' learning outcomes will be enhanced (*Male, Interview Participant-1).*

5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that students' perception towards educational service quality found to be poor. This finding is consistent with the earlier comparable study conducted by Solomon et al. (2018). In dealing with students' satisfaction regarding service quality at Ethiopian Public HEIs, Solomon et al. (2018) found that the majority of the elements that constitute the attributes of service quality were perceived by students to be very poor and that reflected in low satisfaction scores. Furthermore, according to the present study findings, there is a shortage of experienced teachers among different departments. Another educational service quality associated challenge found during this study was the poor delivery of practical lesson as compared with theoretical lesson. As evidenced by empirical data, the main challenges to deliver practical lesson are: a shortage of laboratory equipment, laboratory chemicals, support infrastructures and facilities. This finding echoes with the most recent empirical study conducted by MoE (2018) that found "most Ethiopian universities are confronted with insufficient supplies of text and reference books, laboratory and workshop equipment and access to ICT facilities" (p.49). In addition, a study carried out by Reisberg and Rumbley (2010) also observed that Ethiopian higher education quality is also constrained by support infrastructure and facilities. The construction of classroom space, expansion of library collections, the addition of computer labs, and the development of electronic networks lag behind enrollment expansion. The Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education MoE (2015) in its fifth Education Sector Development Programme [ESDP V] document also stated that, in spite of massive resources have been allocated to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process, universities are still report insufficient supplies of academic resources, such as ICT infrastructure, library facilities, laboratory and workshop equipment and so on.

The findings of this study also revealed that the administrative service quality was also found to be poor even though there are differences between newly established and old campuses. As indicated in the above findings, the researchers identified the main administrative service quality related challenges. These include: poor dormitory and cafeteria services, shortage of separate dormitory buildings for male and female students, particularly in the MHS, poor health and guidance and counseling services, shortage of sports and recreation places, high bureaucracies in financial procedures and lack of offices to teachers. Likewise, in relation to the administrative service quality of Ethiopian higher education, Alemayehu and Solomon (2017) also observed shortage of adequate dormitories, dining rooms, and other facilities.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' perspective towards educational service quality of a public University in Ethiopia. The findings of the study confirm that students' perception towards educational service quality was found to be poor. In some colleges and institutes, there is a shortage of experienced teachers to deliver some courses. Due to that reason, the departments invite teachers from another university to deliver those courses in block base about the end of the semester. Although an experimental analysis is not conducted in the present study, the qualitative findings confirmed that poor delivery of educational services can directly or indirectly affect students' learning. Other teaching and learning problems are associated with delivering a poor practical lesson. In different campuses, mainly, science and technology departments, there is a lack of available laboratory equipment and chemicals to properly teach practical lesson. Besides, there is scarcity in the delivery of academic resources and facilities. For example, there is lack of ICT facilities, lack of up-to date classrooms, lack of teaching tools, and lack of well-organized library services with necessary reference materials. In addition, the findings of this study also found poor administrative service delivery. Based on this concluding remark, the researchers make the following recommendations:

➤ Firstly, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education [MoE], the university should recruit additional teachers in the department where there is a shortage of experienced teachers.

➤ Secondly, the university should balance theoretical and practical lesson so as to produce competent graduates in both theoretical and practical knowledge.

➢ Thirdly, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance [MoF], the university should purchase available laboratory equipment and chemicals for practical lessons.

➢ Finally, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education [MoE] and the Ministry of Finance [MoF], the university should improve administrative service quality by building separate dormitories for male and female students and additional offices for teachers.

7. Research Limitations/Implications

In this study, the students' perspectives towards education service quality were examined using a public research University as a case site. The findings and conclusions of the study cannot be generalizable to all Ethiopian public universities. Future researchers and scholars should conduct their study in all Ethiopian public universities by taking a representative sample from the whole Ethiopian public universities. Furthermore, in this study a mere qualitative research approach was employed. Further comparable studies should conduct a mixed research using experimental design to better determine the influence of educational service quality on students' learning outcomes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. Corresponding author can be contacted at: zelalem.zekarias@gmail.com

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