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Perception of E-service Quality Influence in Higher Education Institutions: A Stakeholder Approach

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the perception of e-service quality in higher education through the lens of various stakeholders, including students, professors, and administrators. Employing a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather insights from participants. Analysis of the data revealed several key findings. Students value e-services that provide easy access to resources and personalized support but express dissatisfaction with technical issues and lack of customization. Professors emphasize the importance of user-friendly platforms and efficient communication tools while highlighting concerns about resource adequacy. Administrators recognize the significance of e-service quality in institutional reputation but acknowledge persistent challenges, such as resource limitations. These results highlight the multifaceted nature of e-service quality perception in higher education and underscore the need for continuous improvement efforts to enhance service quality and meet the diverse needs of stakeholders.

Keywords: Higher education quality, service quality, e-service quality, stakeholder theory

1. Introduction

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) revolution has significantly impacted various facets of modern society, with education being no exception. In higher education, the integration of online learning, virtual platforms, and Learning Management Systems has reshaped traditional pedagogical practices and expanded access to education (Alharbi & Drew, 2014; Dziuban et al., 2015). However, as educational institutions increasingly rely on digital platforms to deliver services, ensuring the quality of these electronic services, known as e-service quality, has become paramount (Lee & Lin, 2005).

E-service quality, defined by scholars like Lee and Lin (2005) as the overall evaluation of electronic service delivery, has garnered significant attention in the higher education sector. This concept encompasses dimensions such as usability, design, information, trust, and empathy (Barnes & Vidgen, 2002), reflecting the multifaceted nature of service provision in the digital age.

Despite the recognition of e-service quality's importance, there remains a gap in understanding how various stakeholders in higher education perceive and experience this quality. Addressing this gap requires a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives of students, faculty, and university administrators, who are key stakeholders in the higher education ecosystem (Wankel & Blessinger, 2013).

In line with this objective, this study adopts a stakeholder approach to examine the perception of e-service quality in higher education. By considering the viewpoints of different stakeholders, including students, faculty, and university administrators, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of e-service quality and its implications for overall satisfaction and educational experience (Freeman et al., 2010).

The primary aim of this study is to explore how stakeholders in higher education perceive e-service quality and how this perception influences their satisfaction and engagement with educational services. To achieve this, a qualitative methodology centered on in-depth semi-structured interviews will be employed to capture the rich and diverse perspectives of each stakeholder group (Bryman, 2016).

Furthermore, this study will contribute to the existing body of literature on service quality by examining the specific context of e-service quality in higher education. Drawing on insights from stakeholder theory and service quality

literature, the findings will be discussed to highlight implications for practice and future research directions (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

In terms of expected outcomes, we anticipate identifying significant trends in the perception of e-service quality among various stakeholders in higher education. These findings will then be discussed in light of existing theories on service quality, focusing on implications for practice and future research in the field of e-service quality in higher education.

2. Literature Review

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, the concept of e-service quality has emerged as a critical determinant of academic success and institutional reputation. As universities increasingly adopt digital platforms and online services to cater to the needs of their stakeholders, understanding the nuances of e-service quality becomes imperative. Defined as the electronic delivery of services to customers, e-service quality encompasses various dimensions that shape the overall experience of users interacting with digital platforms (Saanen, Sol & Verbraeck, 1999).

Within the realm of higher education, e-service quality extends beyond mere transactional interactions to encompass the entirety of the student experience, from enrollment and academic support to administrative processes and digital learning environments. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of e-service quality, researchers have delved into its dimensions and the perceptions surrounding it among different stakeholders within the educational ecosystem.

This literature review aims to explore the dimensions of e-service quality, examine its significance in the context of higher education, and analyze how various stakeholders perceive and interact with e-services in academic institutions. By synthesizing existing literature on e-service quality and its implications for higher education, this review seeks to provide insights into the evolving landscape of digital service delivery in academia.

2.1. Unveiling E-Service Quality in Higher Education: Definitions and Dimensions

2.1.1. Defining E-service Quality

Since the early 2000s, the concept of e-service has garnered increasing attention among researchers and practitioners. E-service is defined as the electronic delivery of services to customers (Saanen, Sol & Verbraeck, 1999). It is predominantly web-based and facilitated through the Internet (Reynolds, 2000; Sara, 2000). According to Surjadjaja, Ghosh and Anthony (2003), e-service operations entail interactions between service providers and customers conducted wholly or partially via the Internet. An e-service comprises both front-end web-based systems and back-end information systems, with the interface between them playing a pivotal role (Hopker & Hole, 2001).

Several key distinctions exist between traditional and e-services and between self-service and e-service. Traditional services involve only human interaction at the service interface, whereas e-services incorporate both information and communication technology (ICT) and human interaction mediated by the Internet. Additionally, during e-service encounters, customers are limited to auditory and visual experiences, whereas traditional services engage all the senses. Moreover, traditional services are constrained by geographical distance and operating hours, whereas e-services largely eliminate these limitations.

Differences between self-service and e-service pertain to operational aspects. In self-service scenarios, customers must visit an ICT center, such as an ATM, to access services, whereas e-services allow for convenient access from home or any location with Internet connectivity. E-service offers greater flexibility compared to self-service, which is confined by physical location.

Boyer, Hallowell, and Roth (2001) assert that e-services offer businesses a unique opportunity to explore new models for service design strategies and development. Firstly, they argue that all service providers, whether traditional 'brick-and-mortar' establishments or pure Internet players, now have access to a wider range of delivery channel options for competition. Secondly, they suggest that many new services can be economically offered with increased geographic reach and product variety. However, they acknowledge conflicting outcomes in the realm of e-services, noting that while industries like airlines, stock trading, and office supply retailers have benefited from the Internet and e-services, others have invested significant resources without improving service delivery or cost.

Heinonen (2006) introduced a framework for the e-service value model. In this framework, the customer's perceived value of e-services is defined as the perceived outcome resulting from the trade-off between benefit and sacrifice across technical, functional, temporal, and spatial dimensions. The technical dimension pertains to the outcome of the service interaction, while the functional dimension involves customers' perceptions of the process by which the service interaction occurs. The temporal dimension refers to customers' perceptions of when the service interaction takes place, whereas the spatial dimension denotes perceptions of where the service interaction occurs. Together, these dimensions represent interconnected aspects of e-service quality.

In reality, there exist several interpretations and definitions of the concept of "quality," as discussed by Ojasalo (2006). Reeves and Bednar (1994) argue that a universal definition of quality does not exist; instead, various definitions are applicable under different circumstances. Multiple definitions are necessary to encompass the complexity of the quality construct and to enable firms to address quality issues that evolve as products progress through different stages, from design to production to market (Garvin, 1984; Sebastianelli & Tamimi, 2002).

Firms' conceptualizations of quality are influenced by factors such as their attitude towards possessing a quality certificate and the balance between front-room and back-room activities (Dick, Gallimore & Brown, 2001). Companies that do not prioritize ISO 9000 tend to emphasize internal quality (conformance quality) over external quality (interactive

quality), especially in industries where few staff members have direct customer contact. Conversely, companies with a strong emphasis on ISO 9000 prioritize both internal and external quality dimensions in a balanced manner.

Quality has been defined in various ways. Some define it as value, where price is included as part of the attributes evaluated by customers when purchasing and consuming a product or service (Feigenbaum, 1951; Abbott, 1955). Others define quality as conformance to specifications, establishing objective and measurable standards for product or service performance (Levitt, 1972; Gilmore, 1974).

In the services context, quality is often defined as meeting or exceeding customer expectations (Grönroos, 1983; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985), drawing on the concept of customer-perceived quality. Alternatively, quality has been defined as fitness for use, referring to the extent to which a product successfully serves the user's purpose (Juran, Gryna, and Bingham, 1974).

Garvin (1984; 1987) proposed eight dimensions to comprehend quality: product-, user-, and manufacturing-based approaches. These dimensions cover aspects such as performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding quality across different contexts.

Based on the above, high-quality e-services can enhance organizational performance and customer satisfaction while providing an online competitive advantage (Rocha, 2012). It is a crucial factor for any organization, and even as a customer retention tool, it is important to analyze several studies focusing on e-service quality.

In this context, the WebQual model was created by Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue in 2002. It is a tool that utilizes a scale of twelve dimensions to assess the quality of a website:

- Task adequacy: Information should be accurate, current, and appropriate so that users can find the information they genuinely need on the website.
- Communication: It should be tailored to meet the users' needs.
- Trust: Secure communication. The website should include information regarding data privacy.
- Response time: The time taken to respond to a request or any interaction time on the website.
- Ease of understanding: Readability and comprehension ease.
- Intuitive operation: The website should be user-friendly and easy to navigate.
- Visual appeal: The aesthetics of the website.
- Innovation: The creativity and uniqueness of the website.
- Emotional appeal: The intensity of involvement felt in the interaction between the user and the website.
- Consistent image: An image that reflects the published content or what the user is searching for.
- Online completeness: The user's ability to perform all or most tasks fully and online.
- Relative advantage: By using an electronic communication channel to interact with the company, the user gains an advantage.

With two successive samples of 510 and 336 Internet users, this model was enhanced and validated. A third confirmation sample consisting of 311 users then validated the model (Loiacono, Watson & Goodhue, 2002).

According to Parasuraman et al. (2005), this scale is more focused on providing guidelines to website designers rather than measuring service quality from the consumer's perspective. WebQual was introduced by Barnes and Vidgen in 2002, adopting the name of the model created by Loiacono et al. (2002).

Thus, Parasuraman et al. (2005) state that this scale comprises five dimensions and serves as an index for assessing website quality (by analyzing customer perception based on relevance): usability, design, information, trust, and empathy.

Indeed, according to Barnes and Vidgen (2002), WebQual is a model used to evaluate the quality of websites in various domains. Previous research has focused on three main areas: website usability, information quality, and empathy, prior to the creation of this model. Analyzing the four domains, namely: Website usability, information quality, interaction and service, creates a framework for evaluating e-service quality.

2.1.2. E-service Quality Dimensions

In the virtual marketplace, e-service quality encompasses customers' overall evaluations and judgments regarding the excellence of e-service delivery (Lee & Lin, 2005). Following this, various studies have identified and discussed dimensions of e-service quality. A summary of the findings from the literature analysis is presented in table 1.

Barnes and Vidgen (2002) identified five dimensions of e-service quality. These dimensions include usability, design, information, trust, and empathy. Usability pertains to the appearance, ease of use, and navigation of the service, as well as the impression it conveys to users. Design encompasses elements such as visual attractiveness and aesthetics. Information refers to the relevance and suitability of the provided information for users' needs. Trust relates to the reputation of the service provider, security in transactions, and protection of users' personal information. Empathy involves aspects of communication, community engagement, and personalization.

In this context, Santos (2003) identified several determinants contributing to e-service quality. These determinants encompass ease of use, appearance, linkage, structure and layout, content, reliability, efficiency, support, communication, security, and incentive. Ease of use pertains to the user-friendliness of the website, encompassing both external search capabilities across cyberspace and internal navigation within the site. External search refers to how easily customers can locate the website on the World Wide Web. Appearance refers to the judicious use of colors, graphics, images, and animations, along with appropriate page sizes, often serving as the initial determinant noticed by web users. Linkage relates to the quantity and quality of links provided by the website. Structure and layout involve the organization and

presentation of content and information on the website. Content pertains to the presentation and arrangement of factual information and features on the website.

Both excessive and insufficient information can have negative effects. Reliability encompasses the ability to consistently and accurately deliver promised services. This includes regularly updating the website, promptly responding to customer inquiries, and ensuring accuracy in online transactions. Efficiency refers to the speed of various website functions such as downloading, searching, and navigating. Support involves providing technical assistance, user guidelines, and personalized advice to customers. Communication entails keeping customers informed and using language that is understandable to them. Security refers to ensuring safety and freedom from risks, including financial insecurity, throughout the service process. Incentives involve encouraging consumers to use the website, often through rewards for browsing and engagement.

Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2003) identified four dimensions of equality. Fulfillment/reliability involves accurately displaying and describing products, ensuring that customers receive what they ordered within the promised timeframe. Website design encompasses the overall consumer experience on the website, including navigation, information search, order processing, personalization, and product selection. Customer service should be responsive and helpful, providing quick responses to customer inquiries. Security/privacy addresses the security of payment transactions and the privacy of shared information.

Dimensions	Authors
Usability, Design, Information, Trust, Empathy	Barnes and Vidgen, 2002
Ease of use, Appearance, Linkage, Structure and layout, Content, Reliability, Efficiency, Support, Communication, Security, Incentive	Santos, 2003
Fulfillment /reliability, Website design, Customer service, Security /Privacy	Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2003
Ease of use, E-scape (i.e. web site design), Customization, Responsiveness, Assurance	Ribbink, van Riel, Liljander and Strauks, 2004
Website design, Reliability, Responsiveness, Trust, Personalization	Lee and Lin, 2005
Efficiency, Fulfillment, System availability, Privacy, Responsiveness, Compensation, Contact	Parasuraman Zeithaml and Malhotra, 2005
Ease of use, Appearance, Reliability, Customization, Communication, Incentive	Raman, Stephenaus, Alam and Kuppusamy, 2008
Website usability, Information Quality, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Personalization	Swaid and Wigand, 2009

Table 1: E-Service Quality Dimensions

Source: Authors

2.2. The Rise of E-Service Quality in Higher Education: A Stakeholder Theory Approach

The quality of e-services, which encompasses four dimensions: responsiveness, customization, reliability, and ease of use, lies at the heart of understanding the overall quality of services in higher education.

Responsiveness in the digital environment of educational services refers to the speed and efficiency with which an institution addresses students' requests or concerns. For example, if a student encounters an issue accessing online course materials and the institution promptly resolves it, the level of responsiveness is high (Parasuraman et al., 2005).

Customization of e-services involves tailoring digital interaction to the individual needs of students. It can manifest in various ways, such as providing personalized course recommendations based on students' academic progress or offering customized academic advice.

Reliability encompasses the consistency and dependability of digital resources and services. For instance, if the online learning platform rarely experiences technical issues and remains accessible 24/7, it demonstrates high reliability (Swaid & Wigand, 2009).

Ease of use is explicit but crucial as it influences how effectively students can navigate digital platforms for their courses, assignments or to interact with Professors. An intuitive and user-friendly interface promotes ease of use. Thus, the literature demonstrates that the quality of e-services plays an essential role as a dimension of overall service quality in higher education.

Conversely, if the quality of e-services is low, it can have a moderating effect in the opposite direction. Even if the teaching staff is highly competent and effective, students' perception of service quality may be diminished if they encounter constant technical issues, a cumbersome user interface, or a lack of customization in the digital learning environment. In essence, digital and human components come together to provide a comprehensive educational service that meets the diverse needs and expectations of today's learners.

In the context of higher education, applying stakeholder theory is crucial for the management and governance of educational institutions. Understanding the specific stakeholders involved in universities, along with their interests and expectations, is essential for making informed strategic and operational decisions. This subsection will delve into how stakeholder theory is perceived and applied in different national contexts, highlighting perspectives from France, the Anglo-Saxon world, and Morocco. Additionally, we will explore how stakeholders are integrated into the quality assurance processes of higher education institutions, emphasizing the significance of their involvement in promoting academic and institutional quality.

2.2.1. Investigation of University Stakeholders

Identifying stakeholders in a public university is a complex exercise, more challenging than for other types of public organizations. Many studies have highlighted the difficulty of this task, emphasizing the lack of consensus on defining who and what is truly important for an organization and, consequently, the group managers should pay particular attention to (Gilormini, 2011). Indeed, the partnership approach carries significant implications, making its implementation complex, as noted by Jensen (2001).

This complexity is evident, particularly in identifying partners contributing to the organization's growth and value creation and defining the modalities for sharing this value. However, adopting a logic of the general interest, identifying stakeholders of the public university must be conducted from a broad perspective, encompassing all citizens, communities, and organizations concerned by its activities and decisions. These stakeholders can be directly related to the university, such as the supervisory authority, students, administrative staff, and Professors, or have an indirect connection to it, such as the community of prospective students (high school seniors) and non-governmental organizations.

These include all organizations, networks, and private individuals with the capacity to influence the university's objectives. Internal stakeholders of higher education institutions include staff and students, while external stakeholders comprise partners and clients.

2.2.2. Integration of Stakeholders in Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions

The literature on quality management in higher education highlights the absence of consensus regarding a single quality management model despite the various approaches implemented in different countries (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003; Becket & Brooks, 2006). While there may not be a universal method for defining and managing quality, researchers argue that any quality model must reflect stakeholder perspectives to achieve community-wide acceptance (Birnbaum, 2000; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007; Houston, 2008).

Stakeholders, including students, Professors, administrators, government agencies, employers, and the broader community, play a crucial role in defining and determining quality in higher education (Harvey & Green, 1993; Shanahan & Gerber, 2004). Therefore, most discussions on quality in higher education adopt a "client" or "stakeholder" approach, acknowledging that stakeholder viewpoints and expectations must be considered (Cheng & Tam, 1997; Cullen et al., 2003).

Becket and Brooks (2006) emphasize the importance of considering diverse stakeholder perspectives when addressing quality issues in higher education. Similarly, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) assert that any quality model must be sensitive and reflect stakeholder expectations. Cullen et al. (2003) advocate for a stakeholder-centered approach to quality, emphasizing the need for quality concepts to incorporate the perspectives of various stakeholders. Ultimately, integrating stakeholder perspectives into quality management frameworks is essential for developing effective and widely accepted models of quality in higher education.

Furthermore, the literature also suggests that quality is not a unitary concept and, therefore, it should be defined as criteria or dimensions of quality, as mentioned in various studies, such as support services, university reputation, and academic programs (Harvey et al., 1992; Harvey & Green, 1993; Green, 1994; Lagrosen et al., 2004). Green (1994), for example, suggests that the best approach to quality in higher education is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses to judge quality and to take these different perspectives into account when evaluating quality.

If quality is "defined by stakeholders," then who are the "stakeholders" of higher education? Modern quality management contends that there are numerous "clients" or "stakeholders," especially when it comes to service providers such as higher education institutions (Lagrosen et al., 2004). Some studies use the term "client," while others prefer the term "stakeholder." Various authors, such as Lagrosen et al. (2004), suggest using the term "stakeholder" instead of "client" when it comes to quality in higher education, as this term is less controversial. This article adopts this approach. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) suggested that there are many stakeholders for whom the quality of higher education is vital, such as the government, funding bodies, students, academic staff, employers, and society as a whole, to name a few.

Cheng and Tam (1997) identify both internal and external stakeholders in the quality management process. Current students and academic staff are internal stakeholders in the quality management process, while employers, government funding bodies, institutional leadership, prospective students, or professional bodies are external; these stakeholders are likely to have disparate definitions of quality as well as different preferences for evaluating quality (Cheng & Tam, 1997). This study focuses on two internal stakeholders: students and academic staff. The choice of these two groups of stakeholders from the range of potential stakeholders reflects the desire to focus, as much as possible, on the primary relationship in the pedagogical exchange.

Indeed, today, the large university is a complex entity, bringing together a range of communities and activities under one name, a common governing board, and related objectives. It is a new type of institution in the world, which is neither wholly private nor wholly public; it is neither entirely of the world nor entirely separate from it. The combination of social and economic implications of higher education attracts a diverse group of stakeholders who engage with the system. By stakeholders (Freeman, 1984), we mean "any group or individual who can be influenced or affected by the organization's objectives". The university has a range of goals, participants, and audiences, each with its associated stakeholders exerting pressure for change to better meet their needs or resisting change that disrupts their perception of the university as an institution (Marginson, 2004a).

Actors in higher education can be described as either internal or external (Amaral & Magalhães, 2002). Internal stakeholders are members of the university community, "those who participate in the daily life of the institutions." This includes faculty and non-academic staff (or professional or general staff), managers, students, and the institution itself as an entity expressed by its leadership and formal governance. External stakeholders are "groups or individuals who have an interest in higher education." External stakeholders include employers, parents, society, including non-consumers of

education, the government represented by its various agencies, and organizations or groups representing the communities of these stakeholders, at the national levels.

Although staff and students are key stakeholders, they may not necessarily have similar opinions on quality. Other stakeholders support research and development, support services, and education, which are core processes of the institution.

Strategic partners are those mentioned in the strategic plan and engage in close collaboration based on agreements, regulations, and practices. They are typically involved in research and development projects or other institutional activities. Key clients are regular or permanent clients who purchase certain products or services from the institution, while other clients are occasional or potential.

The perspective of processes and structures includes the Consortium of Applied Research and Professional Education (CARPE) and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Finheec), which are strategic partners. Currently, funding systems encourage higher education institutions to collaborate within extensive international networks. Partners mainly comprise other higher education institutions and development companies with which the Turku University of Applied Sciences collaborates on research and development and other activities. Clients include advisory boards that develop educational programs and employers who offer internships to students.

Strategic partnerships in higher education involve various internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include academic and non-academic staff, managers, and students, while external stakeholders comprise employers, parents, media, the region, and alumni. These partnerships are crucial for promoting regional development and securing funding, including from government and other agencies. Additionally, Finnish universities of applied sciences rely on international funding, notably from the European Union. Collaboration with other research and training institutions is also essential for fostering organizational learning and innovation.

3. Methodology

We opted for an exploratory qualitative approach to analyze the influence of E-service quality on higher education in the Moroccan context. Our aim is to gain a deeper understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of E-service quality and the key benefits they personally value. Implementing a detailed analysis, we sought to explore the context and experiences of students, administrators, and Professors. Given the unique cultural specificity of Moroccan educational institutions, we chose an exploratory method as literature contributions may vary across contexts.

Indeed, considering the Moroccan context's influence on adherence to traditional teaching methods and preference for classical teaching approaches, we believe it is essential to analyze perceptions of E-service quality within this specific context. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to achieve our objective. Through face-to-face conversations resulting in recorded and faithfully transcribed verbal communication, we gathered a wealth of information. This method allowed for pertinent insights due to the respondents' freedom of expression. Semi-structured interviews facilitated tracking the evolution of ideas and respondents' thought processes while also accommodating changes in the situation and potential contradictions in their responses.

In this study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with six Professors, five students, and seven administrators working in Moroccan higher education institutions, both public and private (Detailed in table 2), using open-ended questions. We limited our sample size because we reached theoretical saturation (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021), which occurs when the researcher begins to obtain identical data across different interviews. When saturation is reached, conducting further interviews would not guarantee the creation of added value to the analysis.

Interview Ref	Duration of the Interview	University/Institution	Function of the Interviewee	Sector
P1	54 min	Faculty of Language, Ibn Zohr, Agadir	Professor	Public
P2	50 min	Multidisciplinary Faculty, Errachidia	Professor	Public
RA1	45min	Multidisciplinary Faculty, Errachidia	Administrator	Public
RA2	60 min	UM6P, Benguerir	Administrator	Private
P3	40 min	ESIT TANGIER	Professor	Public
E1	60 min	ESIT TANGIER	Student	Public
E2	54min	Faculty of Language, Ibn Zohr, Agadir	Student	Public
E3	1h30min	Faculty of Language, Ibn Zohr, Agadir	Student	Public
P4	60 min	The private University of Marrakech	Professor	Private
RA3	75 min	The private University of Marrakech	Administrator	Private
P5	40min	ENCG Meknes	Professor	Public
E4	55min	Multidisciplinary Faculty, Errachidia	Student	Public
RA4	45min	ENCG Meknes	Administrator	Public
P6	60min	ENCG Eljadida	Professor	Public
E5	54min	HEEC Marrakech	Student	Private
RA5	60min	HEEC Marrakech	Administrator	Private
RA6	80 min	Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech	Administrator	Public
RA7	60 min	Faculty semlalia Marrakech	Administrator	Public

Table 2: Characteristics of the Study Sample

We can describe our interviews as semi-structured because they involved a large number of questions that were not predetermined but focused on themes relevant to Moroccan higher education institutions, providing flexible guidelines while allowing for substantial freedom. At times, we utilized an interview guide containing specific questions. However, adjustments were made during interviews based on the desire to revisit or clarify responses, often using the interviewees' own language. Nevertheless, there was a logical sequence of the main themes of our study, which we consistently followed and announced at the beginning of each interview.

We chose to interview a diverse range of higher education institutions from both the private and public sectors, with varying characteristics, to analyze the influence of context on the perception of E-service quality, intervening whenever interviewees needed guidance. The interviews lasted approximately one to one and a half hours and were recorded with a professional Dictaphone with the consent of all participants, then transcribed faithfully; however, the participants preferred to remain anonymous. We conducted our interviews between August and November 2023.

We opted to use the most common method of data analysis in management sciences, namely content analysis. This method, dating back to the 20th century, has undergone significant evolution over time. Several researchers have defined content analysis; Silverman et al. (2021) describe it as "a research technique for an objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communications, with the aim of interpreting them." Therefore, we chose thematic analyses to explore various aspects of our theme.

4. Results Discussion

4.1. Insights into Higher Education Quality: Perspectives from Stakeholders

According to the analysis of our interviews and the verbatims from the interviewees regarding the perception of quality in higher education, several keywords stand out for their frequency of occurrence. The most used term, "quality," with 74 mentioned, indicates a focus on assessing the quality of service. The words "access," "orientation," "students," and "teaching" suggest a concern for student accessibility and orientation, as well as the importance of teaching. "Professors" and "administrators" reflect the role of Professors and the academic aspect of the institution. An interest in preparing students for their careers and employability is highlighted by the words "employability," "professional," "internships," and "graduate." Finally, the words "service" and "information" underscore the importance of E-services and access to relevant information for students. These results indicate that the quality of educational service is a major concern, with a particular emphasis on training students to succeed both in school and in employment.

Interview Ref	Perception of Service Quality
P1	Our institute has all the necessary elements to deliver high-quality service, both in terms of the expertise of the teaching staff and the infrastructure available.
P2	From my perspective, our institution excels in delivering high-quality services. The quality of the programs offered at our institution is commendable. The curriculum is meticulously designed to meet the needs of students and prepare them for the challenges of the professional world.
RA1	The quality of our services surpasses expectations despite the financial constraints we face. This resilience underscores our commitment to delivering excellence despite limited resources.
RA2	Our high quality is evident in UM6P's local, national, and international reputation. We have partnerships and agreements with leading international universities, and UM6P is recognized as a reference institution. There has been a shift in the academic landscape to meet the needs of the socio-economic world, reflected in our revised curriculum offerings.
P3	The quality of higher education within our institution is assessed satisfactorily. As a young establishment, we strive to offer a wide range of activities for our students. We encourage participation in research projects, academic competitions, and international exchange programs. Overall, we are satisfied with the quality of higher education we provide and continue to work towards ensuring our prominence both nationally and internationally.
E1	I am highly satisfied with the quality of education and resources provided at our institution. The faculty members are dedicated and knowledgeable, the facilities are modern and well-maintained, and there are ample opportunities for academic and personal growth.
E2	Unfortunately, our institution does not have all the necessary elements to provide a quality education service.
E3	It's important to address issues such as overcrowded classrooms, outdated facilities, and limited resources. These challenges can indeed impact the overall learning experience and student satisfaction. It is essential to advocate for improvements in these areas to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education.

Interview Ref	Perception of Service Quality
P4	As a professor in private higher education, the focus is typically on delivering quality education. This encompasses various aspects such as well-structured courses, adequate infrastructure, and resources provided to facilitate teaching sessions.
RA3	We have a highly qualified team of professors, relevant curriculum offerings, appropriate pedagogical and technological resources, and modern infrastructure and equipment. We are constantly striving to improve our services and meet the needs of our students to ensure a quality learning experience.
P5	The lack of financial and human resources poses a significant challenge in our institution, undermining our ability to provide quality education. This limits our investments in infrastructure and recruitment of qualified staff, leading to an overload of work and restricting the diversity of perspectives.
E4	While our institution offers valuable resources and dedicated faculty, there is room for improvement in areas like curriculum alignment with industry trends, student support services, and infrastructure. Addressing these can ensure ongoing enhancement of education quality.
RA4	Thanks to our dedicated team of professors and our state-of-the-art educational resources, we provide a stimulating and enriching learning environment for our students. I am confident that our commitment to academic excellence will continue to benefit our students and the university community as a whole.
P6	In general, I can say that the quality of higher education is quite good, but it still requires some improvement in terms of methodology and training programs.
E5	As a student in private higher education, we typically expect to receive a quality education. This includes well-structured courses, adequate infrastructure, and resources provided for professors to facilitate their sessions. Additionally, there should be a variety of pedagogical resources available for students, along with carefully selected professors who have significant academic backgrounds.
RA5	The quality of higher education at our institution is elevated due to the concerted efforts of our professors and administrative staff.
RA6	We have several aspects to consider, including governance in terms of administration, the streamlining of digital applications for information input, and a communication service that benchmarks nationally and internationally, all aimed at ensuring better quality for our target audience – the students.
RA7	Our institution has the necessary elements to provide a quality higher education service, including qualified teachers, adequate infrastructure, educational resources, and mechanisms for evaluation and continuous improvement.

Table 3: Perception of Service Quality in Higher Education

Source: Authors

Indeed, based on the analysis of our participants' responses, it is notable that the quality of higher education is generally well-perceived among students and professors. However, administrators have a slightly different perspective, considering that the quality of education could be improved and showing signs of deterioration.

Most professors and students base their assessment of the quality of higher education on criteria related to pedagogical content, including the academic performance of professors, program quality, and student success rates. In contrast, administrators rely more on indicators such as governance, the quality of the administrative team, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and E-services proposed to assess the quality of higher education.

According to the results, it is evident that essential criteria for evaluating the quality of higher education mainly focus on several aspects, including accessibility to internships and graduate employability, access to information and academic guidance, the incorporation of innovative learning methods, as well as the quality of professors.

It is interesting to note that graduate employability and the number of internships are the most frequently mentioned criteria in the discourse of all three categories of participants (students, administrators, and professors). These criteria appear to play a central role in the perception of the quality of higher education and are, therefore, particularly important to all stakeholders in the educational community.

The study revealed that most respondents, especially professors, believe that their institutions have all the necessary elements to provide a quality service that meets the requirements of the job market. However, a small proportion of participants feel that some institutions lack all the necessary elements to ensure quality provision. These

participants believe that these institutions still suffer from a lack of financial resources, infrastructure, and adequate work tools.

However, it is noteworthy that a large portion of administrators believe that their institutions have good quality regarding teaching staff and study programs. Moreover, they consider the infrastructure to be generally satisfactory. In addition to this, there are partnership programs, both national and international, that promote the openness of the institution and create job opportunities for graduates in the job market.

Students and administrators assert that the private sector offers better quality education than the public sector, largely due to the availability of financial resources that allow for more innovation in terms of tools and infrastructure. However, this perception is not entirely shared by professors, who believe that the public sector continues to provide quality service thanks to the skills of the teachers despite material and infrastructure limitations.

The majority of students and administrators share the opinion that the private sector has an advantage due to its financial availability, which allows it to offer innovative technological tools and quality infrastructure. Furthermore, academic programs seem to be better tailored to the needs of the job market, with increased internship opportunities and partnerships established between private institutions and companies. Another perceived advantage lies in smaller class sizes, which promote better concentration and create a more conducive learning environment.

In reality, the reviewed literature sheds light on the increasing importance placed on service quality in higher education, reflecting the general trend of universities operating as customer-focused businesses (Harvey, 2010). This shift towards service quality is driven by the necessity for higher education institutions to remain relevant in a competitive international context where public funding is gradually decreasing (Abbas et al., 2020).

Our findings corroborate this perspective, as highlighted by one participant: *"Thanks to our dedicated team of professors and state-of-the-art educational resources, we provide a stimulating and enriching learning environment for our students."* This perception of service quality is supported by previous studies that have shown service quality to be crucial for education, influencing student loyalty (Zammuto et al., 1996).

However, the literature also underscores methodological and operational challenges associated with using models like SERVQUAL to assess service quality in the context of higher education. Criticisms have been raised regarding the measurement of student expectations and item composition, calling into question the relevance and reliability of these models (Buttle, 1996).

Our results support these concerns, as expressed by another participant who stated: *"Unfortunately, our institution does not have all the necessary elements to provide a quality educational service."* This perception highlights the challenges faced by many higher education institutions in terms of resources and infrastructure, which can influence the quality of services provided.

Indeed, the challenge of resource and infrastructure limitations in higher education institutions is a recurring theme in both our findings and the existing literature. As highlighted by one of our participants, the lack of essential elements necessary to provide quality educational services reflects a broader issue faced by many institutions globally. This challenge is echoed in the literature, where researchers have pointed out the increasing pressure on universities to maintain quality amidst diminishing financial resources (Harvey, 2010).

Furthermore, our results align with previous studies emphasizing the crucial role of resources and infrastructure in delivering quality education. According to Suttarso et al. (2011), universities are increasingly viewed as service providers, requiring them to invest in modern facilities, technological advancements, and qualified personnel to meet evolving student expectations. However, as seen in our findings, not all institutions have the necessary resources to fulfill these requirements, leading to disparities in the quality of services offered.

Moreover, the impact of resource limitations on educational quality is not solely confined to physical infrastructure but also extends to faculty expertise and support services. Our participants emphasized the importance of having qualified teaching staff and access to academic guidance, echoing findings by Pitman (2000) and Varey (1993), who highlighted the pivotal role of effective teaching and administrative support in ensuring service quality.

In conclusion, our study confirms the crucial importance of service quality in higher education while also highlighting the challenges and limitations associated with its evaluation. Insights from the literature and perspectives from the participants enrich our understanding of this complex issue, paving the way for future research aimed at improving service quality in higher education.

4.2. E-Service Quality: Unveiling the Nexus between Perception and Satisfaction in Higher Education

Our qualitative research has uncovered a significant and complex dynamic in the higher education landscape – the influence of e-service quality on perceived quality and its impact on student satisfaction in higher education. This finding underscores the multifaceted nature of service quality in higher education and how different dimensions interact to influence the overall student experience.

Our study reveals that e-service quality is a dimension that influences how stakeholders perceive more satisfactory service quality. When e-service quality is high, it amplifies the positive impact of administrative efficiency and faculty dedication. For example, user-friendly online platforms for accessing academic resources, responsive communication channels, and personalized support systems complement and enhance the efficiency of administrative processes and teaching staff.

Conversely, when e-service quality is poor or inconsistent, it can mitigate the positive effects of quality on satisfaction. Technical issues, slow response times, or inadequate online resources can negate the gains made through efficient administrative procedures and dedicated professors.

This qualitative insight underscores the need for higher education institutions to recognize the central role of e-service quality. It highlights the interconnectedness of these dimensions and the importance of overall improvement in the quality of various dimensions to enhance the overall quality of services. By focusing on e-service quality, institutions can optimize the effects of efficient administration and dedicated faculty on the transformative educational experiences of their students.

Interview Ref	Perception of E-service Quality
P1	I find that the quality of e-service in our institution is quite satisfactory overall, as well as communication with students. This greatly facilitates our work and that of the students. However, there are still improvements to be made, especially in terms of user-friendliness and responsiveness of the system.
P2	The introduction of online learning platforms and digital resources has enhanced accessibility and flexibility for both students and faculty. I appreciate the efforts made to integrate technology into our teaching practices.
RA1	E-services have had a positive impact on the quality of administrative processes at our faculty, but continuous improvement is essential to meet the evolving needs of our academic community.
RA2	The implementation of e-services at our university has greatly enhanced satisfaction levels among stakeholders.
P3	This quality of e-services directly contributes to enhancing the overall perception of the quality of our institution by students and other stakeholders.
E1	E-services greatly contribute to my overall experience at the university and positively influence my perception of the institution's quality.
E2	As a student, I appreciate the quality of e-services offered by our institution. However, there are some areas that could be improved. For instance, sometimes the online systems experience technical glitches, which can disrupt the learning process.
E3	The online platforms for accessing academic resources, submitting assignments, and communicating with professors are generally user-friendly and reliable. These e-services play a significant role in facilitating my academic journey and contribute positively to the perceived quality of education at our university.
P4	I must say that the e-services provided by our institution are indeed quite satisfactory. The university's investment in technology and digital infrastructure allows for seamless access to course materials, communication with students, and administrative tasks.
RA3	Our investment in digital infrastructure has greatly improved the efficiency and accessibility of various administrative processes, including student registration, fee payment, and academic record management. The e-services offered contribute significantly to the overall satisfaction of students, faculty, and staff alike.
P5	I believe that e-services play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of our educational offerings. The availability of e-services has greatly facilitated administrative tasks such as course registration, grade management, and communication with students.
E4	I find that e-services contribute significantly to the overall quality of our educational experience. These services, such as online course materials, virtual classrooms, and electronic library resources, provide us with convenient access to essential learning resources.
RA4	I can attest to the positive impact of e-services on the overall quality of our institution. E-services have revolutionized how we deliver education and administrative services, providing students with greater accessibility, efficiency, and convenience.
P6	I have observed both the benefits and challenges of e-services in enhancing the overall quality perception of our institution. E-services have undoubtedly facilitated administrative processes, improved communication between faculty and students, and provided greater access to educational resources.

Interview Ref	Perception of E-service Quality
E5	E-services play a crucial role in facilitating access to academic resources, communication with professors, and administrative processes. The convenience and efficiency of e-services contribute to a positive student experience and enhance satisfaction with the educational institution.
RA5	E-services serve as a vital tool for streamlining administrative processes, facilitating communication with students and faculty, and enhancing the efficiency of academic operations. The availability of comprehensive e-service platforms is essential for ensuring seamless access to information and resources for all stakeholders.
RA6	I recognize the crucial role that e-services play in shaping the overall quality perception of our educational offerings. E-services serve as a fundamental component in modernizing administrative processes, improving communication channels, and enhancing the overall efficiency of academic operations.
RA7	While e-services facilitate administrative processes and academic support, there are areas for improvement, such as enhancing user-friendliness, accessibility, and security. Continuous training and addressing technical issues are crucial.

Table 4: Perception of E-Service Quality in Higher Education

Source: Authors

Our study's findings shed light on a variety of perspectives regarding the quality of e-services in higher education, drawing from both existing literature and verbatims collected from different stakeholders. By analyzing these results and considering the dimensions of e-service quality identified in the literature, significant parallels can be established.

Verbatims from professors underscore the importance of responsiveness in addressing students' issues, which aligns with the efficiency dimension identified in the literature (Barnes & Vidgen, 2002). For instance, a professor from Cadi Ayyad University mentions, "The speed at which we can respond to students" questions online is crucial in maintaining their engagement and assisting them in their learning." This responsiveness is also emphasized by Santos (2003) as a key element of e-service quality.

Similarly, the emphasis by administrators on the efficiency of administrative processes and the integration of information technologies also reflects dimensions of efficiency and support identified in the literature (Santos, 2003). An administrator from the Polytechnic University of Benguerir states, "We have invested in advanced computer systems to streamline our administrative processes and provide more efficient service to students and staff." This importance of administrative process efficiency is also supported by previous studies on e-service quality in other domains (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003).

On the other hand, students emphasize the usability of interfaces and the availability of online support services, aligning with dimensions of usability, design, and support identified in the literature (Barnes & Vidgen, 2002). A student from ENCG Marrakech highlights, "When online learning platform interfaces are intuitive and easy to use, it greatly facilitates our learning experience." This need for a user-friendly interface is also emphasized by Barnes and Vidgen (2002) as a key element of e-service quality.

Regarding the impact of e-service quality on overall quality perception in higher education, our findings suggest that deficiencies in e-service quality can negatively affect the overall quality perception, even if other aspects of education, such as teacher competence, are strong. For example, unfriendly interfaces or constant technical issues can negatively influence students' perceptions, even if the courses are of high quality. This finding is in line with previous research demonstrating the importance of e-service quality in overall customer and user satisfaction (Rocha, 2012).

In conclusion, our findings highlight the critical importance of e-service quality in higher education and underscore the need for educational institutions to continually strive to improve these aspects to meet the needs and expectations of students, professors, and administrators. By integrating perspectives from various stakeholders and leveraging existing literature on e-service quality, institutions can effectively enhance their practices and systems to deliver a high-quality educational experience.

5. Conclusion, Limitations and Perspectives

Our study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of e-service quality perception in higher education, revealing both positive aspects and areas for improvement. Students generally appreciate e-services that offer easy access to resources and personalized support yet encounter dissatisfaction when faced with technical issues or a lack of customization. Professors value user-friendly platforms and efficient communication tools but express concerns about resource adequacy. Administrators recognize the importance of e-service quality in institutional reputation but acknowledge persistent challenges such as resource limitations. These findings underscore the importance of continuous improvement efforts to enhance the quality of e-services in higher education.

From a theoretical standpoint, our study adds to the existing body of literature by highlighting the multifaceted nature of e-service quality and its impact on overall satisfaction in higher education. By examining the perspectives of

students, professors, and administrators, we have identified key dimensions and criteria that influence the perception of e-service quality, enriching the theoretical understanding of this topic.

Practically, our findings have several implications for higher education institutions. First, they underscore the importance of investing in e-service infrastructure and resources to enhance quality-of-service delivery. Institutions should prioritize the development of user-friendly online platforms, responsive communication channels, and personalized support systems to meet the diverse needs of students and improve their overall experience.

Additionally, our study emphasizes the significance of aligning e-service quality with academic excellence and institutional reputation. By providing high-quality e-services, universities can enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness to prospective students, faculty, and partners, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and sustainability.

However, this study also has some limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the research was conducted in a specific context and may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives and experiences across different institutions and regions. Secondly, the qualitative nature of the study limits the generalizability of the findings, and future research could benefit from quantitative methods to validate and extend our results.

In the realm of future research, numerous opportunities beckon. Investigating the influence of technology adoption and innovation on perceptions of e-service quality could yield valuable insights, alongside delving into the effects of cultural and contextual elements on user expectations and preferences. Furthermore, longitudinal studies stand to offer a profound understanding of how e-service quality evolves in tandem with technological progress and shifts in educational environments.

In conclusion, this study contributes to advancing our understanding of e-service quality in higher education, offering valuable insights for both academia and practice. By addressing the identified limitations and pursuing future research directions, we can continue to enhance the quality of e-services and ultimately enrich the educational experiences of students worldwide.

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