

The quality of higher education: an analytical reading

الجودة في التعليم العالي: قراءة تحليلية

La Qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur: Lecture analytique
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ملخص:

لقد شهدت مؤسسات التعليم العالي في السنوات الأخيرة اهتماما متزايدا بجودة التعليم في مختلف التخصصات و ذلك من أجل مواكبة مختلف التغيرات و التطورات المعرفية و التكنولوجية التي تشهدها المجتمعات المعاصرة، ولهذا هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على ماهية جودة التعليم العالي والعوامل التي دفعت مؤسسات التعليم العالي لتبني الجودة فيها و تبيان أبرز أشكال هاته الجودة و الأهداف المرجوة منها و الأهمية الناجمة عنها و كذا الوقوف على المراحل و المعايير اللازمة لتطبيق جودة التعليم العالي و التعرف على المؤشرات الدالة على تدني جودة مؤسسات التعليم العالي الجزائرية وإبراز مختلف التحديات التي تواجه تطبيق جودة التعليم العالي في المجتمع الجزائري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجودة؛ التعليم العالي؛ جودة التعليم العالي؛ التحديات.

Abstract :

In recent years, higher education institutions have witnessed an increasing interest in the quality of education in various specializations in order to keep pace with the various cognitive and technological changes and developments witnessed by contemporary societies. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the nature of higher education quality and the factors that prompted higher education institutions to adopt quality in them and to clarify the most prominent forms of this quality and the desired goals and the resulting importance, as well as to identify the stages and standards necessary to implement the quality of higher education and to identify the indicators indicating the decline in the quality of Algerian higher education institutions and to highlight the various challenges facing the implementation of higher education quality in Algerian society.

Keywords : quality; higher education; quality of higher education; challenges.

Résumé :

Ces dernières années, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur ont été témoins d'un intérêt croissant pour la qualité de l'enseignement dans diverses spécialisations afin de suivre le rythme des divers changements et développements cognitifs et technologiques dont sont témoins les sociétés contemporaines. Cette étude visait donc à identifier la nature de ces changements. la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et les facteurs qui ont poussé les établissements d'enseignement supérieur à y construire de la qualité et à clarifier les formes les plus marquantes de cette qualité, les objectifs souhaités et l'importance qui en découle, ainsi qu'à identifier les étapes et les normes nécessaires pour y parvenir. Mettre en œuvre la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et identifier les indicateurs indiquant la faible qualité des établissements d'enseignement supérieur algériens et mettre en évidence les différents défis auxquels est confrontée l'application d'un enseignement de haute qualité dans la société algérienne.

Mots clés : qualité ; enseignement supérieur ; la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur ; Défis.

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Introduction:

Higher education is a primary concern for most societies, representing the pinnacle of knowledge and expertise across various fields and academic disciplines. This is due to its pivotal roles in developing human capital, which is essential for economic, cultural, and social development, as well as serving the community as a whole. Consequently, countries, including Algeria, have focused on achieving quality in higher education, recognizing the importance of creating an academic environment capable of producing graduates who can effectively respond to the rapid developments of the current millennium, characterized by digital revolution and knowledge explosion. Our era is one of quality, which is no longer optional but has become a societal necessity.

In the current millennium, developing countries face challenges regarding quality in higher education and its implementation mechanisms. The quality of higher education institutions is directly linked to the type of education provided and societal development indicators, which determine the future of these countries. There is an urgent need to reconsider the inputs of Algerian higher education (students, faculty members, administrative staff, etc.) to achieve educational outcomes that align with our contemporary society. This shift is necessary to move from the stagnation experienced by higher education institutions toward a dynamic and profound transformation of the societal structure that meets its needs and aligns with the job market, which is facing deterioration and a shortage of positions compared to the continually increasing number of graduates. These graduates often experience a disconnect between their studies and the skills, experience, and effectiveness demanded by the labor market and digital transformations.

Based on this, our study is centered around the following questions:

- What is meant by the quality of higher education, and what are the driving factors for its adoption?
- What are the goals of this quality, and what significance does its implementation hold?
- What are the forms, stages, and criteria for its application?
- What indicators reflect the decline in quality within Algerian higher education institutions, and what are the main challenges faced in implementing quality in higher education?

2-Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify the essence of quality in higher education and the key driving factors for its implementation.
- To clarify the goals and importance of quality in higher education.
- To highlight the forms of quality in higher education and the stages and criteria for its application.
- To emphasize the indicators of declining quality in Algerian higher education institutions.
- To understand the challenges faced by Algerian society in applying quality within its higher education institutions.
- To propose recommendations for effectively implementing quality in Algerian higher education institutions.

3-Importance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its analytical examination of quality in higher education from various dimensions and aspects, as the future of Algerian society is fundamentally determined by its higher education institutions, where the elite of society are produced. The outputs of higher education represent the main inputs for development across all fields, facilitating the transition from dependency and the status of developing countries to those that are more advanced and developed. Additionally, this study aids higher education institutions in improving their performance by taking the proposed recommendations into account.

4-Conceptual Foundations of the Study:

4-1 Quality:

In Webster's Dictionary defines quality as a characteristic or degree of excellence possessed by something, as well as a degree of superiority. (Shnaq & Belkhiri, 2017, p. 02)

The Oxford Dictionary defines it as a high degree of quality or value. (Ben Zahi & Dadan, 2012, p. 100)

- The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines quality as "the total characteristics of an entity (activity, process, product, organization, system, individual, or a mix of these) that reflect its ability to satisfy explicit or implicit needs". (Al-Ta'i & al, 2008, p. 28)

- The American Society for Quality defines it as a set of plans, activities, and events provided to ensure that products, processes, and services will satisfy specific needs. (Ben Nadir & Khira, 2018, p. 224)

4-2 Higher Education:

- Higher education is defined as the educational phase that follows secondary education or its equivalent, typically starting with the completion of secondary education, allowing students to enroll in public or private colleges, institutes, or universities, qualifying them for academic degrees based on the duration of their studies. (Fadli & al, 2020, p. 56)

- It is also described as the final and highest stage of education that equips individuals with high qualifications and skills that assist them in obtaining jobs and grants them a prestigious social status. (Fard, 2018, p. 92)

- Another definition states it is all forms of academic, professional, and technical education that prepare workers and educators in institutions such as universities, teacher training institutes, and technological institutes. (Ben Ghanima, 2018, p. 25)

- Additionally, higher education is defined as the actual product of competencies and knowledge that transforms individuals into human capital, which plays a role in producing new knowledge and expertise that can subsequently become national wealth when realized and applied in practice.

Through these definitions, it is clear that higher education is an advanced approach to dealing with knowledge according to specific standards, deriving its value from scientific effort and human competencies in systems and research that lead to tangible outcomes, playing a key role in achieving material well-being and employing and developing technology. (Dardan, 2020/2021, pp. 80,81)

4-3 Quality of Higher Education:

- Defined as a strategic system used to improve services that meet the needs of users (such as students) to fulfill their future expectations, ensuring the quality of educational programs, facilities, services, and internal education.
- It is also defined as the ability of a set of characteristics and features of the educational product to meet the requirements of students, the labor market, and society, as well as all internal and external beneficiaries. (Fadli & al, 2020, p. 56)
- Additionally, it means performing work correctly and expertly according to a set of necessary educational standards to enhance the quality of the educational product with minimal effort and cost, achieving educational goals. (Al-Kasr, 2018, p. 419)
- Another definition describes the quality of higher education as the continuous improvement of educational management processes through review and analysis, seeking ways and means to elevate performance and productivity within the educational institution, reducing the time required to complete the educational process by eliminating unnecessary and unproductive tasks for the student, thereby lowering costs and raising quality. (Shnaq & Belkhiri, 2017, p. 04)

2-Factors Driving Quality Adoption in Higher Education Institutions:

Several factors encourage higher education institutions to adopt quality standards, including:

- An increase in the number of students enrolling in higher education institutions.
- Growing conviction among government officials that economic success requires a well-prepared workforce, achievable only through quality educational and training programs in higher education.
- The revolution in information and communication technology and its impact on the educational process.
- Intense competition among higher education institutions such as colleges, universities, and institutes. (Qataishat, 2022, p. 36)
- Administrative requirements to reduce costs and better invest human and material resources. (Qarumi & Farhat, 2016, p. 327)
- The emergence of e-learning and distance education (Shnaq & Belkhiri, 2017, p. 07)

5-Forms of Quality in Higher Education:

There are several forms around which quality in higher education revolves, including:

5-1 Quality of Faculty Members:

- The teaching process should be conducted by qualified, competent, and adequately trained professors, who must possess the following traits:
 - Personal Traits: A good professor should demonstrate flexibility in thinking, self-confidence, effective communication skills, and the ability to explain and clarify concepts.
 - Scientific Competence: Professors should have the knowledge and experience necessary to provide students with accurate and sound information.

- Educational Competence: Professors should be knowledgeable about appropriate educational methods for dealing with students.
- Faculty members should contribute to community service and continuously seek to improve their own levels (Al-Ta'i & al, 2008, p. 276)
- Faculty members should update the topics and examples they present to students each semester by relying on the latest sources and references in their field.
- Faculty members are expected to prepare research or write and translate books in their area of expertise (Demouch & Masoudi, 2012, pp. 159,160)
- Identifying Contemporary Global Trends and Future Directions in Education.
- Familiarity with information and communication technologies in the context of educational development.

5-2 Student Quality:

The student is the focal point of the educational process. To ensure student quality, there must be adherence to the existing global standards. Students should engage in self-assessment and evaluation, and the evaluation process conducted by faculty or administration should encompass all aspects, not just the cognitive side. (Yaqoubi & Balia, 2013, p. 275)

5-3 Quality of Educational Programs and Teaching Methods:

Quality educational programs should be comprehensive, in-depth, flexible, and capable of addressing global challenges and the knowledge revolution. They should adapt to general changes and contribute to the development of a well-rounded personality, moving away from rote learning towards encouraging critical, dialogical, and creative thinking. (Al-Houshi, 2018, p. 193)

5-4 Quality of Buildings and Scientific Facilities:

Educational buildings and their facilities are crucial to the educational process. The quality of classrooms, their design, size, ventilation, lighting, seating, and various educational tools, as well as student clubs and gardens, significantly impact the quality of higher education and its outcomes. The more educational buildings meet the necessary requirements and equipment to keep pace with global developments, the better the educational quality will be. (Baddis, 2017, p. 346)

5-5 Quality of Educational Management, Legislation, and Regulations:

This includes the quality of strategic planning and the monitoring of activities that foster a culture of quality. Regulations and guidelines must be flexible, clear, and precisely defined to assist the educational institution's administration.

5-6 Quality of Funding and Educational Spending:

The quality of education depends on funding capability and the extent of educational expenditure. Insufficient funding or mismanagement of funds can lead to changes in educational plans and programs, adversely affecting education quality, and vice versa. (Ben Aila & Abdel Hafid, 2015, p. 62)

6-Objectives of Quality in Higher Education:

The quality in higher education aims to achieve several objectives, including:

- Raising the level of higher education and reducing teaching errors.
- Addressing issues faced by the higher education sector through scientific methods of analysis and the implementation of solutions.

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- Enhancing the performance of faculty members, administrators, and students through continuous monitoring and training programs.
 - Effecting a qualitative shift in the educational process by updating curricula, documenting programs and procedures, activating regulations, and raising student standards.
 - Establishing connections and communication between higher education institutions and their external environment for mutual benefit. (Ben Din, 2019, p. 85).

7-Importance of Quality in Higher Education:

The importance of quality in higher education is evident in the benefits it can provide:

- Continuous development of the educational institution's mission and objectives, as quality standards are ever-evolving. Higher education institutions must continually update their goals, plans, and strategies to remain relevant amidst rapid globalization changes.
- Optimal investment of financial and human resources, leading to effective management of higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries where financial and human management challenges are prevalent.
- Achieving the societal role of higher education institutions, as quality education directly impacts society through its outputs (students) who engage in scientific research, offer practical consultations, assist decision-makers, and propose solutions to environmental, technological, industrial, economic, social, and political issues.
- Developing the skills of those working in higher education, as institutions require high levels of professional competence and the ability to use information technology, along with leadership skills, positively impacting work performance and productivity, contributing to overall development. (Shnaq & Belkhiri, 2017, pp. 7,8)

8-Stages of Implementing Quality in Higher Education:

The process of adopting quality in higher education institutions involves five essential stages:

8-1 Stage of Conviction and Adoption: Initiated by the desire of senior management to undergo training programs about the quality system in higher education, its importance, and requirements.

8-2 Planning Stage: Involves creating detailed plans for implementation and identifying the requirements for applying quality in higher education institutions.

8-3 Evaluation Stage: Begins with critical questions that help create the right groundwork for implementing the quality system.

8-4 Implementation Stage: Involves selecting work teams responsible for execution and training them in quality-related methods.

8-5 Experience Sharing and Dissemination Stage: Focuses on leveraging experiences gained both within and outside the higher education institutions. (Qarumi & Farhat, 2016, pp. 322,323)

9-Standards for Implementing Quality in Higher Education:

Research efforts have shown consensus among researchers on the following ten criteria for quality in higher education institutions:

- Availability of sufficient physical resources to support higher education.
- Availability of adequate human resources to support teaching and learning.

- Clear objectives and goals understood by both faculty and students.
- Alignment of course content with the program's objectives and goals.
- Encouragement of active student participation.
- Honest, objective, and fair evaluation.
- Comprehensive evaluation covering a wide range of course objectives and goals.
- Providing students with constructive feedback from evaluations, continuously informing them of their progress and improvement.

Students graduate with transferable knowledge and skills applicable outside the university. (Baddis, 2017, p. 216)

10-Indicators of Quality Decline in Higher Education Institutions in Algeria:

Several indicators hinder higher education and contribute to its declining quality. The more prevalent these indicators are, the greater their obstructive effect on quality. Some of the main indicators include:

- Lack of ideological independence in higher education institutions, leading to the reproduction of the ruling political class's ideology.
- Existence of administrative centralization in management at all organizational levels, which obstructs pedagogical tasks.
- Failure of state social, educational, economic, and political institutions to utilize scientific results to improve their effectiveness.
- Selection of actors in higher education institutions not based on competence and global standards, but rather on favoritism. (Ararour, 2013, p. 198)

11-challenges confront the implementation of quality in higher education within Algerian society, including:

- Lack of effective information systems and mechanisms utilizing modern technologies for timely information transfer to decision-makers.
- Absence of qualified training personnel in quality management.
- Centralization in educational decision-making, limiting flexibility in interactions among all parties involved in the university.
- Financial constraints, as quality implementation in higher education requires a substantial budget.
- Rigid laws and regulations. (Boufaras & Bouflege, 2015, p. 96).
- Scarcity of curricula that meet labor market needs and comprehensive development plans based on well-studied scientific foundations.
- Limited contribution to enhancing educational quality by investing in diverse modern technological media that have proven effective in enriching education.
- Significant increase in the number of students attending higher education institutions.
- Weak faculty support processes.
- Poor alignment between higher education outputs and labor market requirements, resulting from low knowledge acquisition, inadequate specialized training, and weak analytical, innovative, and practical skills. (Mansourii & Yahiaoui, 2017, pp. 643,644)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is evident that quality in higher education is essential for ensuring effectiveness and efficiency across various social, economic, political, and technological domains by providing society with specialized competencies capable of addressing contemporary challenges. It also enables the anticipation of problems and the formulation of solutions. Therefore, it is imperative to reassess the strategies employed by the Algerian state to overcome the various obstacles it faces and to advance all active elements in the higher education system, including the heads of these institutions, administrators, faculty members, and students, while instilling principles of competence and merit to achieve equality of opportunity and social justice for all parties involved.

Therefore, this study concluded with a set of recommendations to enhance the quality of higher education, which are as follows:

- Reassess laws and regulations governing higher education to align them with quality standards.
- Develop plans and strategies for crisis and risk management that institutions of higher education may encounter.
- Establish a specialized body for managing and monitoring quality in higher education institutions.
- Pay attention to the necessary physical conditions within higher education institutions, such as ventilation, lighting, heating, computers, internet access, printers, dedicated offices for each active element within the institution, and all comfort conditions that ensure a creative work and learning environment that fosters innovation.
- Evaluate the competency of faculty members and subject them to training courses, accountability, and monitoring throughout their teaching careers.
- Activate laws related to supervisory processes for graduate students concerning the rights and responsibilities of supervising faculty for theses and dissertations, as well as the rights and responsibilities of students, and impose stringent penalties on violators to achieve high-quality academic outputs that adhere to standards of discipline and academic commitment, moving away from randomness in pedagogical management in higher education institutions.
- Regularly improve educational programs and adopt modern teaching methods centered on multimedia that meet students' needs and the demands of digital transformation.
- Encourage and provide financial and moral support for outstanding students.
- Study labor market requirements and accurately identify its needs regarding specialties, preparing the necessary human resources.
- Enhance partnerships between higher education institutions and other social, economic, cultural, educational, and political entities to serve Algerian society.

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