The quality of educational and research services to MSc. students of nursing and midwifery: A qualitative study

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Abstract---Goal: For over two decades, the world's educational centers have worried about the educational efficiency of their medical science graduates and their level of efficacy. Feedback from students can provide planners with valuable information regarding improving the quality of the educational services. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate the quality of educational and research services for MSc. students of Nursing and Midwifery in Arak University of Medical Sciences. Methods: The present study is a qualitative study. In the study, WhatsApp messenger was used to interview 11 MSc. students of Nursing and Midwifery in Arak University of Medical Sciences from different years of education. Participants were selected through purposive sampling which was continued until data saturation. All interviews were recorded and then verbatim written. A semi-structured interview began with raising a general question and continued based on the views and experiences expressed. In cases where it was necessary, guide questions were used. Following the preliminary analysis of the gathered data, coordination was made for the follow-up interviews. In all stages of the research, Helsinki declaration principles and ethical considerations were met. Results: 3 themes, 6 subthemes and 20 codes were derived through data analysis. The themes include education challenges, research challenges, and welfare services challenges, subthemes included theoretical education challenges, clinical education, University's research amenities, professors' research performance and University's welfare amenities. Conclusion: Participants stated their own views. For this, it is required to carry out interventions to improve the quality of educational, research and welfare services at the University.

Introduction

Post graduate education constitutes the key element of human development in every society. In fact, post graduate education is a major form of human resource investment that contributes to the widespread development in societies. Therefore, it plays a crucial and an undeniable role in the advancement of societies (1). On the other hand, we are witnessing serious changes in the technology domain, and Universities are required to take steps for survival and efficacy (2). In the third millennium, the speed and continuation of knowledge development make it necessary to continuously develop ICT production and to include it in the educational curricula (3). Competition among organizations has led to a growing attention to the quality of services as a major factor for their survival and success (4). Balderston maintains that post graduate education, as the main institution of human resource developer, plays a pivotal role to the globalization-based sustainable development (5).

However, the subject of quality of educational services at Universities is becoming a critical factor for the growth, success and a strategic issue that is taken up by organizational management and other post graduate educational centers (6).

Sustainable development of this system requires balanced growth of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The quantitative expansion of the post graduate education system, without regard to the qualitative development, could culminate in such outcomes as educational drop-out, educational exhaustion, scientific dependence, brain drain, lack of entrepreneurship and poor knowledge production (7). As defined by Parasuraman, service quality refers to the conformity of the services offered to the client's expectations (6).

It is suggested that attention to the comprehensive quality at service organizations, especially Universities is not only critical, but also the need for this at medical Universities is more significant due to the different nature of their services (6). It is for over two decades that the global educational centers have expressed concerns over the efficiency of medical science graduates and their efficacy. Numerous studies have also raised revisions to their own educational curricula using learners' feedback and needs (8). Since students` feedback at most Universities is a major factor for quality of their services, the feedback derived from the students and a survey of their expectations can provide planners with an immense source of information for the improvement of the educational services. A study conducted among midwifery students at Ghazvin University of Medical Sciences suggested that educational services offered did not have a good quality. In another study done at the Kerman University of Medical Sciences, it was determined that the confidence over educational quality held the best, and the accountability held the worst score among various dimensions of educational services quality (9). It is demonstrated that the distance between expectation and real and practical educational experiences can affect the motives, education and performance of the students (10). There are some studies in our country regarding the status of the students' education, with each addressing some parts of it. In a

study, it was found that new nursing and midwifery students did not enjoy sufficient proficiency to work in clinical settings, despite their strong theoretical basis, thereby facing problems when dealing with real situations (11). Thus, to achieve a desirable University and attract the satisfaction of the students, it is needed to provide more desirable services at Universities, and academic management must pay more attention to the way services are provided (5). The use of qualitative methods can help to highlight some aspects, which quantitative methods fail to do (12).

The use of qualitative methods can help identify educational and research challenges among MSc. level and determine their challenges, their causes and planning solutions. Thus, in view of the significance of the education (theoretical and clinical) and academic research, especially at MSc. level, researchers decided to perform a study with the aim of investigating the quality of educational and research services from the view of MSc. Nursing and Midwifery students in the Arak University of Medical Sciences.

Methods

The present study was a qualitative study. Sampling was purposive. Participants were MSc. students of Pediatric, Medical-Surgical and Intensive Care Nursing students, and Midwifery Consultation students in Arak University of Medical Sciences. Inclusion criteria were absence of crises or emergency conditions for the students such as loss of a beloved one in the past six months, divorce, childbirth. Exclusion criteria included absence for over a session in group sessions, creation of a critical situation, and unwillingness to continue participation.

Data were gathered via group interviews through the WhatsApp messenger due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 and impossibility of student gathering.

Participants were selected through the school of nursing and school of medicine. A summary of the method was explained to them through cellphone so that coordination could be made if they were satisfied for group sessions. After the initial agreement of the participants, a group was formed on WhatsApp messenger and the interviewees entered this channel for whom a form of consent was uploaded. The number of participants was 15; but, after the non-participation of four of them, a final 11-people made the cooperation. The interview was conducted in the form of voice loading of a general question in the group, followed by guide questions. The sessions were held live at 10 p.m. (With each session running for 45-60 minutes) once a week. The interviewees who could not attend the session at that time could check the voice and written messages and load their own voice and written responses. The semi-structured interview began with a general question "Which educational or research challenges did you come across during your education process?" When needed, guide questions were also used. Following the preliminary analysis of the gathered data, coordination was made to conduct the later interviews. Codes, subthemes and themes were derived from the gathered data. To ensure the validity of the data, the elicited findings were returned to the participants for confirmation. Also, findings in each stage were provided to another expert to get the process verified and revised, if necessary.

Ethical Considerations: In all research stages, Helsinki Declaration principles and ethical considerations were met, and the principle of confidentiality was considered. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee with the code No. of IR.ARAKMU.REC.1399.317 at the Arak University of Medical Sciences.

Results

The present study, conducted in 2021, involved 11 people who attended the study. Participants' characteristics are given in Table 1. Data analysis showed 3 themes, 6 subthemes and 20 codes. The themes included educational challenges, research challenges, welfare service challenges. Table 2 gives a summary of codes, subthemes and themes.

Theme 1: Educational challenges: This theme includes theoretical education challenges and Clinical education challenges subthemes.

1.1. Theoretical education challenges: This subtheme involves defective facilities and educational tools, problems with the physical space of the education, limited number of professors and little time allocated for the student, poor student-professor interaction and mismanagement and lack of coordination. In this part, participants also cited non-standard physical classes, lack of educational amenities, some professor's' inability to transfer their knowledge, professors' unfamiliarity with the academic virtual education systems, unpreparedness of the infrastructure for the exams, and low quality of online classes. Meanwhile, the students praised the flexibility of the time of holding online classes and saving costs and time, special knowledge of some professors and presentation of the courses using novel teaching methods. Some of the participants referred to the physical space problems, as one of them said: "*I am really unhappy with the physical setting of the classes; an MSc. class should have a good organization, though only one or two classes were held this way*" (Participant 4).

1.2. Clinical education challenges: This subtheme includes undesirable internship quality, lack of an accurate planning for internship, contradictory theoretical and clinical education and poor educational and amenities in the clinical environment. Participants also referred to some issues such as lack of an accurate planning for internship, limited internship time, lack of coordination with other centers, failure to provide feedback to the students. In the meantime, they enumerated the good and specialized knowledge of some professors. One of the participants described the poor education and amenities by saying: "*The more important problems in the clinical environment were the limited educational situations in hospitals, as we were just busy doing things we used to do at the BS level. The scientific level of the MSc. was good, but we lacked special pediatric units*" (Participant 10). Another participant said of the professors: "*Some professors did not have an acceptable planning for the internship; we didn't learn what we expected to learn during the process*" (Participant 2).

Theme 2: Research challenges: This theme includes subthemes of University's amenities challenges and professors' research performance

2.1. Research amenities challenges at the University: This subtheme involved the lengthy process of approving of research activities, failure to hold conferences and seminars, poor scientific and library sources and limited research fees. The participants expressed their views about the limited activities of the student research committees and poor performance of the students in writing proposals, as one said: "*The University's performance is weak; we have to wait for a long time to get an answer from the supervisor professors. It takes a month or so which will add to our problems*" (Participant 9). Some students emphasized the importance of the University being research oriented for the MSc. students.

2.2. Professors' research performance: This subtheme involves subclasses of insufficient cooperation and impossibility of changing the supervisor professor. On quantity and quality of professors' cooperation in research and students' experiences in doing their theses, one said: "*My supervisor professor gave me good advices for the thesis. It was great" (*Participant 7). In the meantime, shortages in human resources were cited: "*The problem I see at the school of nursing is the shortage of professors for the research work; each professor I speak with, says he's got many theses to handle*" (Participant 3). The other said: "*My supervisor professor did not supervise my thesis well; his behavior was not good. He did not let me call him up. I applied for a professor substitution, but I was rejected*" (Participant 8).

Theme 3: Welfare service challenges: This theme includes the subthemes of dormitory and academic amenities.

3.1. Dormitory services: This subtheme involves inappropriate physical space, inappropriate space of the study salon, lack of sports amenities, crowded rooms unfit for the MSc. students, unsafe settings for the holding valuable tools such as laptops and the old dormitory building. However, the students described the health status of the dormitory and treatment and medical services, space and view, quality of the dormitory food, prices and behavior of the personnel of the dormitory to be good. One participant complained of dormitory problems: "*the dormitory environment depresses the student because it is old and unattractive; it lacks a study hall and there is no appropriate ventilation, with some insects like scorpions found in the study halls in the summer*" (Participant 2). Another respondent said: "*In general, 10-15 people rooms are assigned for the MSc. students which is very difficult; library and study halls are really not good for study*" (Participant 5). It should be stated that interviews do not reflect positive characteristics of the life at the dormitory, but one of participant said about its strength points: "*The …. dormitory has a secure and good environment, because it is outside the city. Its nature and view are attractive. The health status of the dormitory is satisfactory. It is cleaned each day and the transportation cost is cheap*" (Participant 3).

3.2. University amenities: In this subtheme, the participants referred to such issues as poor awareness-raising about student loans, failure to respond to student objections and suggestions made about the security of the dormitory. This is while, students enumerated enrollment and course selection, supervision of the students to enroll and select courses correctly, educational personnel's responsibility-taking, and observance of rules and laws. One student said of the

problems raised at the University: "*Strictness at the faculty is believed to be harsher than other schools*" (Participant 1). Another said: "*About the quality of the University's canteen, it was small with almost no empty tables. About the pursuit of students' problems, no one listened to our objections about the rooms and security of the appliances at the dormitory and repair and maintenance of the University systems*" (Participant 7).

Although one of the students spoke about the strengths of the welfare services of the University, saying: "*There was no problem with the enrollment and course selection as they were made on time. The guidance was good, the correspondence was appropriate, the responsibility-taking of the educational personnel was excellent, the rules and regulations were met, the discipline was good*" (Participant 1).

Discussion

The present study was aimed at investigating the quality of educational and research services provided to MSc. students of Midwifery and Nursing at the Arak University of Medical Sciences. According to this study, participants described the strengths and weaknesses of the education and research services and provided guidelines and suggestions for the University. Thus, an evaluation of the findings can help to understand the educational challenges of the MSc. students of Midwifery and Nursing. The themes identified in this study include theoretical education challenges, clinical education, University's research amenities, professors' research performance and dormitory and University's welfare amenities. Some of the participants cited limited instrumental and human facilities of the University as one of the major educational challenges in the MSc. education; this finding was consistent with the Namdar Ahmad Abad's study. Human forces have a pivotal role in the activities of educational institutions. Human forces should be capable of properly managing their own tasks so they can play roles based on their institutional duties. In general, management of human forces is a major part of the educational process (13).

In virtual education, some professors' unfamiliarity with the virtual education, unpreparedness of the virtual exams and infrastructure and low quality of the online classes were described as challenges. The Jahanian's study, done at the University of Tehran, showed that the professors were unfamiliar with the virtual educational content (14). In the meantime, students praised the flexibility of the time at which the classes were held and saving costs and time; positively describing the study of the books without time and place constraints, and lack of need for assigning special time for presence in the classes. This finding was also consistent with the Bakouei. The students taking part in the said study referred to the lack of need for holding compensatory classes following the closure of the classes and shut-down of the Universities. In this regard, authors refer to the findings by Dorrian who suggested the flexibility of online classes in students' learning under remote learning. To the contrast, the findings by Sharma can be referred to where he described the advantages of electronic learning process, while stating that this kind of education can disrupt the learning context due to failure to meet the learner's needs (15).

Educational challenges at Universities of Medical Sciences also include challenges pertaining to the clinical environment, which have been investigated in different studies; these studies have also enumerated the strengths and weaknesses of the challenges and proposed solutions for future planning and improving the quality of education. The present study also cited lack of a detailed program for practical education, the gap between theoretical and clinical education, and poor educational and welfare facilities in the clinical environment to be the key challenges hindering the practical education in the clinical environment for midwifery and nursing students. This finding was also in line with the Jannati's study. Students also suggested that failure to allocate an educational space for the students during their internship course in the said fields were other problems that caused problems for the effectiveness of the courses (16). With respect to the research, the lengthy process of approving of research activities, insufficient education and poor scientific sources and non-diversity of the libraries and limited research fees were raised. It is noteworthy that although the University is considered the main place for research and production of knowledge, an attention to research and development is thought of a main function of Universities, Universities have failed to meet students' demands. Although we are living in the age of technology and communications, many students are facing problems to access updated and credible references, equipped labs and many other relevant infrastructures. In this regard, Jafari Rad noted that students' satisfaction with the quality of research services at the University of Tehran was lower than the medium range (4), being consistent with the current study. About professors' research performance, the challenges included some professors' lack of cooperation with the students and inability to change the professors. The interviews and complementary questions reveled a high volume of the tasks of faculty members and limited number of them as other challenges. In relation to the quality of welfare services, the participants cited the inappropriate physical setting of the dormitories, as well as the inappropriate space of the study hall, shortage of sports facilities, and crowded and inappropriate rooms for the MSc. students. In the meantime, good health status, good medical and treatment services, attractive view, good quality of food and appropriate behavior of the staff, responsibility-taking of the University educational personnel and observance of the rules and regulations were described to be among the strengths at the University dormitories. In this case, according with the Jafari Rad's study, lack of student dormitories, low quality of student food, shortage of sports and recreational facilities were cited as low-quality welfare services provided at the University (4).

Conclusion

Postgraduate education is aimed at developing knowledge and improving the society. Therefore, Universities should meet the needs of applicants and users of their services. In this regard, it is highly important to evaluate the views of students as the main customers of the University about the quality of the services provided there. Thus, the minimum expectation from the Universities is to provide high-quality services to achieve their goals. The findings of the present study revealed that it is important to take necessary steps to improve the quality of educational, research and welfare services at the University.

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Conflict of interest

The researchers did not have any conflict of interest in any of the research stages.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the participants in the research

Educational terms	2-6
major	4 in Midwifery Counseling, 2 in Pediatric Nursing, 2 in Intensive Care Nursing, 3 in Medical-Surgical Nursing
year of admission to the University	2018-2020
gender	8 female and 3 male
age	25-40
work experience (year)	5-15
clinical work experience (year)	0 to over 21
Participation in other educational courses	7 no, 4 yes
total	11

Table 2. Themes and classes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
1. Education challenges	1-1. Theoretical education challenges (face-to-face and virtual)	Shortage of curricular and educational facilities
		Problems with the physical educational space
		Limited number of professors and allocation of little time
		Poor student and professor interaction
		Mismanagement and lack of coordination
	1.2. Clinical education challenges	Undesirable internship quality
		Lack of accurate planning for internship
		Conflicting theoretical and clinical education
		Poor educational and welfare services in the clinical settings
2. Research challenges	2.1. University research facility challenges	Lengthy process of approving of research activities
		Insufficient education on research methodologies, writing proposals and relevant activities
		Failure to hold workshops and seminars
		Poor new scientific and library sources
		Limited research assistance fees
	2.2. Professors' research performance	Insufficient professor cooperation
		Impossibility of selecting another professor
3. Welfare challenges	3.1. dormitory and welfare services	Physical space
	3.2. University welfare services	Costs
		Student commuting services
		Responsiveness