

# CRITERIA OF SATISFACTION WITH UNIVERSITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CZECH STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

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## Abstract

The environment in which current universities operate is globalized and highly competitive, both nationally and internationally. To succeed in this environment, the issue of student satisfaction as a factor that determines the loyalty of students and is also an important indicator of the quality of a university is of prime interest to universities. Research interests of researchers who deal with university management then focus on identifying students' expectations and criteria of their satisfaction with universities. The objective of the research presented in the article was to identify the criteria of satisfaction with universities from the perspective of Czech students of economy-oriented study programs. Using the qualitative research methods, the following general categories of student satisfaction criteria were identified: academic quality, organization of teaching and the attitude of the study department, organizational climate, facilities and equipment of a faculty, library services, catering services, and faculty reputation. The identified categories and their corresponding attributes can serve as the basis for practical reflection on improving the quality of services provided by universities as well as the basis for developing a tool to measure student satisfaction.

Keywords: service quality, customer satisfaction, higher education institutions, criteria of students' satisfaction

## INTRODUCTION

The environment in which universities operate has changed significantly over the last decades.

There has been a rapid growth in the number of universities and degree programs on offer (International Trends in Higher Education 2016–17). The Bologna process has enabled the free movement of students among European higher education institutions (HEI) and national governments and HEI institutions have been increasingly promoting student mobility. On the other hand, government pressure on the quality of educational services has increased and students' demands are changing too (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Sharabi, 2013). Due to these circumstances, the competition between higher education institutions has increased significantly, both nationally and internationally. Universities compete for students and funds, and higher education is now perceived as a business-like service industry (DeShields Jr. *et al.*, 2005; Gruber *et al.*, 2010). To succeed in this environment, higher education institutions are beginning to adopt the philosophy of customer orientation (e.g., see Koris and Nokelainen, 2015) and researchers and HEI managers are beginning to pay their attention to students' satisfaction as the key determinant of student loyalty (Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002; Helgesen and Nasset, 2007; Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Fernandes *et al.*, 2013; De Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2017; and others) and as an important quality indicator of higher education institutions. Activities aiming to achieve students' satisfaction have become tools for universities to reach a competitive advantage and measuring students' satisfaction is becoming more popular in the academic sphere (Anghel and Orîndaru, 2014). In this context, research into students' expectations related to services provided by universities is gaining importance as well as the identification of their criteria of satisfaction with the services.

The objective of this paper is to identify the criteria of satisfaction with universities from the perspective of Czech students of economy-oriented study programs. The paper is organized as follows: first, the authors define the basic concepts, formulate the conceptual basis of the paper and briefly outline the state of knowledge related to the research into the students' satisfaction criteria. The following part presents the methodology of the research, the results of the research and the discussion of findings. At the end of the paper, the authors formulate recommendations for further research.

## Literature review

The term "service" refers to "any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything" (Kotler *et al.*, 2008, p. 597). The management and measurement of service quality is determined by the unique characteristics of services known as intangibility (services are intangible), inseparability (services are produced and consumed simultaneously), heterogeneity (the same services may be provided differently depending on by whom, to whom and when they are provided), and perishability (services cannot be stored) (see Moeller, 2010). Moreover, the services provided by universities are specific because they are high-contact services (Tamuliene and Murzaite, 2013) that are long-term and continuous (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016b) and that play a central role in students' life (Gruber *et al.*, 2010).

Authors who deal with service quality do not agree on a uniform definition of this term. In general, however, service quality is currently associated with an organization's ability to meet customer expectations and it is most frequently defined as "the difference between customers' expectations of service and their perceptions of actual service performance" (Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 2004, p. xi). The quality of the services provided by universities is defined in this context as "the difference between what the student expects to receive and his/her perception of actual delivery" (O'Neil and Palmer, 2004, p. 42).

For many years, literature has been discussing the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, and whether and how these two concepts should be distinguished. At present, most authors agree that service quality and customer satisfaction are closely related, but distinct constructs (Sultan and Wong, 2010). The difference between them is that while perceived quality is the result of a customer's evaluation of a product or service based rather on cognitive processes, satisfaction is associated with a customer's emotions (Schneider and White, 2004; Roszkowski *et al.*, 2005; Grönroos, 2007; and others). Thus, authors define customer satisfaction as, for instance, "an emotional reaction to a product or service experience" (Spreng and Singh, 1993, in Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016b, p. 448) or as "a summary psychological state or a subjective summary judgment based on the customer's experiences compared with

expectations” (Helgesen and Nettet, 2007, p. 43). Students’ satisfaction is then similarly defined as, for example, “the favorability of a student’s subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education” (Oliver and DeSarbo, 1989, in Elliot and Shin, 2002, p. 198). Thanks to the improvement of conceptual foundation and empirical evidence, researchers nowadays agree also on what is the causal order between these two constructs (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016b). The majority of authors agree that service quality is an antecedent to customer satisfaction and that it plays a key role in its relation to satisfaction (in the context of HE, e.g. Elliot and Shin, 2002; Sultan and Wong, 2013; Āado *et al.*, 2013; Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016a; Meštrović, 2017; and others).

If organizations providing services are to reach customer satisfaction, they need to have a good understanding of customer expectations and know what determines customer satisfaction and what attributes should be used to measure it. Much of the research that has been conducted over recent decades has therefore focused on identifying critical attributes and key dimensions of service quality. In works from the early 1980s, the authors distinguished only between two or three basic theoretically defined dimensions. For example, Grönroos (1982, in Grönroos 2007) mentions the technical dimension (i.e., the dimension related to service output) and the functional dimension (the dimension related to the process of service delivery). Rust and Oliver identified the technical dimension, functional dimension, and physical environment in which a service is provided (in Grönroos, 2007). The pioneer research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, published in the 1980s (1985, 1988), became largely known to the researchers out of empirical research that has been conducted to identify service quality dimensions. Based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, the authors identified five service quality dimensions, known as reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). This set of dimensions has become the basis for the development of the world-renowned quality measuring tool called SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The tool is based on Oliver’s expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980) and operationalizes service quality by comparing the perceptions of the service received with the expectations. Later, following the above-mentioned research, the performance-based alternative to

the SERVQUAL measure called SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) was developed. It is referred to as a performance-only scale (Sultan and Wong, 2010). The authors present the SERVQUAL model as a universal model, which can be used in a wide range of services. They emphasize, however, that the five dimensions should be only a starting basis for choosing the quality criteria and that the criteria of a given model should be tailored to suit a particular service area (Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 2004).

A number of studies have been conducted in the higher education sector by adopting the SERVQUAL model (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016a). However, as stated by Sultan and Wong (2013, pp. 72–73), although “a number of studies examined the SERVQUAL scale in the university environment”, ..., “none of these studies were able to replicate the five factor structure of the SERVQUAL scale”. There are also studies, whose authors adapted the SERVQUAL model or attempted to create an alternative model, i.e., to identify the service quality dimensions in the specific university environment (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis and Fitsilis, 2010; Zineldin *et al.*, 2011; Āado *et al.*, 2013; and others). Based on the results of the research, some authors have developed and tested tools for measuring the students’ satisfaction/quality of services provided by the HEI, such as SSI developed in USA (the Student Satisfaction Inventory marketed by Noel-Lewitz; according to Roszkowski, 2003), in Indian higher education settings – EduQUAL (Mahapatra and Khan, 2007) and HiEduQUAL (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016a), in Malaysian HE institutions – HedPERF (Firdaus, 2006a, 2006b), or the HESQUAL tool tested at the University of Mauritius (Teeroovengadum *et al.*, 2016).

Even though many surveys mapping students’ expectations towards higher education institutions and identifying the dimensions/criteria of quality of services provided by the HE have been conducted (see e.g. Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Tsinidou *et al.*, 2010; Zineldin *et al.*, 2011; Āado *et al.*, 2013; Vouneagu *et al.*, 2017; Bell and Brooks, 2018; Jereb *et al.*, 2018; and others) the synthesis of the obtained results is problematic. The authors who attempted to compare the studies aimed at identifying key dimensions of student satisfaction and summarizing their findings conclude that since service quality is a contextual issue, its dimensions and the definitions of the variables identified as significant predictors of satisfaction vary widely among the various studies (Gibson,

2010; Sultan and Wong, 2010). As stated by Gibson (2010), most studies identified the quality of teaching (quality of study programs/curriculum and quality of academic staff/teaching) as a crucial determinant of student satisfaction. The results of the studies also agree that student satisfaction is not only determined by academic quality, or the quality of the core service, respectively, but that many other non-academic factors also significantly contribute to the overall satisfaction of students (Gibson, 2010). It is therefore pointed out that the social climate, the quality of the services provided by administrative staff, supporting services, the physical infrastructure, etc., should not be underestimated if student satisfaction is to be increased (see, for example, Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002).

Numerous authors have come to varying results not only in terms of the number and structure of the dimensions identified by the individual studies, but also regarding the importance students attach to individual dimensions/attributes. The results show that the factors perceived as the most important for student satisfaction vary across institutions and subject-fields (Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002) and that the national culture plays its role too (Randheer, 2015; Kashif *et al.*, 2016).

The above listed findings have significant implications for the practice of service quality provided to university students. Since service quality is a contextual issue, it is necessary (1.) to take this fact into account when considering the applicability of the tools for students' satisfaction measurement developed in different socio-economic and cultural conditions and (2.) to apply knowledge on students' expectations and their quality criteria obtained in a relevant context. In this context, it is vital that the quality criteria and students' expectations have been formulated from the students' perspective. Should the measurement of students' satisfaction conducted in an attempt to improve the quality of services provided not be based on criteria formulated from students' perspective, as it often happens in practice where the service providers' perspective is used, the feedback gained through satisfaction surveys could be misleading. The aspects of the services that are not critical for students could be overestimated, which could lead to an unsuitable choice of improvement measures, an ineffective allocation of sources (Lukášová *et al.*, 2009), and ultimately, to students' dissatisfaction (Borghi *et al.*, 2016).

As regards the expectations and satisfaction criteria of Czech university students, this issue has been devoted attention in the Czech environment

only in the last decade and the number of published empirical studies is still quite low. There are studies published by Mareš and Ježek (e.g. 2013) who concentrate on the development of tools for an external quality assessment of universities, and publications by Schüller *et al.* (2013) or Schüller and Rašticová (2014); however, their research sample included not only Czech students, but also students from Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Austria. Therefore, the identification of the criteria of satisfaction of Czech students with university services seems topical, both in terms of research and needs of managerial practice.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of the research, which is presented in the following text, was to identify the criteria of satisfaction with universities from the perspective of Czech students of economy-oriented faculties. Due to the purpose of the research, the qualitative research procedure was used and the method of semi-standardized interviews was selected to collect the research data. The interviews were conducted with the total of 46 respondents – undergraduate students of two leading Czech universities (22 students from HEI 1 and 24 students from HEI 2, out of which there were 14 men and 32 women). All respondents were higher than first-year students.

The basic question asked by the interviewer was: What is important for you – as a student – to be satisfied with the services provided by the faculty? The interviewer let the respondents talk freely about what they themselves considered important and relevant, and asked suitable supplementary questions only when necessary. The purpose of the procedure was to support the depth and specificity of the utterance and, above all, to uncover and understand the respondent's perspective and way of thinking. The reason why this method of determining students' expectations and requirements was chosen was to establish a comprehensive list of all the important quality attributes that define the quality of a university services from students' perspective. Knowledge of customer requirements is essential from two reasons: (1.) it provides a better understanding of the way the customers define the quality of services, (2.) knowledge of customer requirements facilitates the development of the customer satisfaction questionnaire (Hayes, 2008).

Respondents' responses were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The written text was subsequently analyzed by identifying specific

statements containing a message regarding a service attribute that the respondent considers important for his/her satisfaction. The identified statements were then categorized using two to three hierarchical levels (as needed). In this way, general categories and more specific subcategories of respondents' answers were obtained, which were subsequently identified by relevant names (as listed in Tab. I.).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the Tab. I shows, the following general categories of student satisfaction criteria were identified: academic quality, organization of teaching and attitude of the study department, organizational climate, facilities and equipment of the faculty, library services, catering services, and faculty reputation.

Academic quality seems to be an important criterion for student satisfaction based on the interviews conducted. In the context of academic quality, the range of offered courses is important for students (the answers show that students want to be able to choose, they appreciate the possibilities of signing up for courses from other faculties of their university and the possibilities of signing up for optional courses without limits), the quality of the content of courses (complexity of the concept of courses, the contribution of courses to the field of study and the assumed use for the labor market, adequate difficulty – the requirements should be neither too high nor too low) and relevance in relation to the needs of the students (for example, the following statements were recorded: *“there should be a higher emphasis on mathematics”, “higher emphasis on languages”, “more native speakers should be employed”* for courses taught in English). Another important attribute for students is the contribution of teaching in terms of knowledge acquired (*“it is important if the courses are useful, if a person learns enough there”*), and especially the benefit for future practice (*“to teach us what we can then use”, “to have courses that prepare us for practice”, “to give us the chance to try it out”, “to invite experts from practice”, etc.*). As for the quality of teaching, which is another attribute of academic quality from students' perspective, students find important the professional level of teachers (*“that the teachers are experts in the subject, ideally with some practical overlap”, “that teachers are qualified and educated, that what they teach us is of high quality”*) and the quality of the teaching process itself (*“the teachers should be able to present the subject-matter, motivate students, engage them”,*

*“to make seminars active so that they can be held more in the form of a discussion”, “so that the lessons are well-thought, e.g. in relation to students' continuous preparation”*). What students also find important is their teachers' attitude (it is important for students that teachers like teaching and are interested in it, that they care about students, communicate and discuss issues with them, that they have a human, friendly and helpful attitude to them, are willing to help, are available to students, make time for them, and provide them with a sufficient extent of consultation hours) and the way students are evaluated. As for the evaluation, the complexity of the assessment, its objectivity and clear and fair rules are important for students (*“to know what will be assessed and how”, “to have clearly defined conditions of what needs to be done during the semester”*). In relation to the quality of teaching, students also stated that study materials represent an essential criterion of their satisfaction; more specifically, it is mainly important for them that study materials actually exist (*“so that it doesn't occur that there are no publications for a course”*), they are easily accessible (*“so that we can find everything in the information system”, “to have them accessible on the portal”*), and they are of high quality (they should be clear, comprehensible and *“define what the student should know”*).

Another important determinant of student satisfaction is the organization of teaching and attitude of the study department. In relation to the organization of teaching, it is essential for students to have stable conditions (*“so that the rules wouldn't change often”*), to have the flexibility to create their own the schedule (*“it is important that we can make the schedule as we like it”, “so that the school offers more time options for different courses”*), and to ensure that the faculty coordinates well teaching and examination dates (*“it shouldn't occur that I sign up for e.g. two third-semester courses and their lecture times overlap”, “so that there are enough dates for individual exams”, etc.*). As far as the attitude of the study department is concerned, the interviews revealed that it was important for students that the staff of the study department communicate sufficiently and effectively with students (including replying to emails and having enough office hours for students) and that the behavior of the study department staff is helpful and cooperative (*“the study department officials should be more helpful...”, “the staff of the study department should be available even outside their office hours in crisis situations”, etc.*).

The interview results presented above related to the first two identified categories of responses



## I: An overview of identified categories and subcategories of student satisfaction criteria

Category	Subcategory	Sub-subcategory
<b>Academic quality</b>	Offer of courses	Range of offer of courses
		Quality of offer of courses in relation to the needs of students
		Possibility of enrolling for optional courses without restrictions
	Curriculum quality	Concept of course content
		Adequate difficulty
	Benefits of courses	Benefits of courses in terms of acquired knowledge
		Benefits of courses for practice
	Teaching quality	Instructors' expertise
		Quality of the teaching process
	Attitude of instructors	Interest in students, communication with students
		Human approach, a friendly way of communication
		Responsiveness and willingness to help
		Sufficient range of consultation hours
	Assessment quality	Clear rules
		Fair rules
		Complexity of assessment
	Study materials	Existence of study materials
		Accessibility of study materials
		Quality of study materials
<b>Organization of teaching and attitude of the study department</b>	Organization of teaching	Stability of conditions
		Student flexibility in making their timetable
		Quality of coordination of teaching terms and examinations
		Sufficient number of examination terms
	Attitude of the study department staff	Helpfulness of the study department staff
		Effective communication with students
<b>Organizational climate</b>	Atmosphere at the faculty	Friendly atmosphere
		Personal approach
	Attitude to students	Partner approach and behavior to students
		Interest in students' opinions and cooperation with them, possibility of student participation
	Quality of providing information	Quality of web pages and other information channels
		Quality of the study system
		Providing opportunities for oral consultations (e.g., foreign department, vice-deans, etc.)

Category	Subcategory	Sub-subcategory
<b>Organizational climate</b>	Student support	Promoting participation in international exchange programs
		Support for athletes
		Promoting employment in the labor market
		Support for students in specific situations
	Providing opportunities for student development	Offer of lectures and other educational events outside classes
		Opportunity to practice
		Offer of further activities
<b>Facilities and equipment of the faculty</b>	Faculty environment	Nice and esthetic environment
		Appropriate temperature in the building
		Sufficient capacity of the faculty building (teaching in one building)
		Sufficient capacity of classrooms
		Sufficient capacity of student facilities
	Technical equipment of the faculty	Equipment of the faculty with technologies
		Technical equipment of the classrooms
	Opportunities for self-study	Existence of study rooms / places to study, writing seminar papers
		Possible to use of computer classrooms
<b>Library services</b>	Library offer	Sufficient number of books in the library
		Relevant offer of books in relation to the study programs
	Library environment	Silence
		Places to sit and read
		Adequate temperature
	Using modern technologies	
	Kind and helpful library staff	
<b>Catering services</b>	Provision of catering and refreshments	Dining at the faculty or nearby
		Discounted prices
	Possible choice of the dining facility	
	Range and variety of meals	
<b>Faculty reputation</b>	Good reputation of the faculty	
	Good external evaluation of the faculty / faculty results	

thus show that the satisfaction of Czech students is strongly determined by the academic quality of the faculty. This finding is fully consistent with research published in the literature (see Gibson, 2010). The respondents often emphasized the orientation of teaching towards practice and providing practice opportunities, which may be related to the fact that the research was conducted in students of economy-oriented study programs. The identified subcategories of respondents' answers related to academic quality and teaching organization also correspond to the trends reported by e.g. Stukalina (2014) in the literature. She, referring to the COM material, states that modern students expect to choose "what they learn, how they learn and when they learn, according to their individual needs and interests" (COM, 2013, in Stukalina, 2014, p. 129).

Further categories of responses identified in the research presented (see Tab. I) confirm the fact that the student satisfaction is not determined only by academic quality, or the quality of the core service, respectively. In accordance with the studies of foreign authors (Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002; Zineldin *et al.*, 2011; and others), it was found that even other aspects of their university experiences are important for students, i.e., the atmosphere they study in and opportunities for their self-improvement (see the category marked as "organizational climate" in our research), the physical environment they study in, and the conditions they have (see our category "facilities and equipment of the faculty") or the quality of supporting and related services (see library and catering services in our research).

As far as the organizational climate is concerned, the research reveals that the atmosphere in which students study and the attitude of the faculty staff is important for students. They want the faculty to treat them as partners (*"to treat us as equals"*), to be interested in students' opinions and communicate with them (*"take into account the opinions of the students"*, *"to involve students in the direction in which the school should go"*), and to make the environment at the faculty friendly and personal (*"personal approach is probably most important to me"*, *"there is an impersonal environment here"*, *"I miss a personal approach here"*, *"I like the possibility of having a contact with foreign students here at the faculty"*). What students also find essential is the quality of providing information by the faculty through its web sites and other information channels including the study system (content quality, accessibility), providing support (sufficient opportunity and support for

international mobility of students, support for athletes, support for students in specific situations, support concerning the employment, e.g., through *"communication of information on vacancies"*), and providing opportunities for further development of students. As for the last mentioned subcategory, the students namely mentioned the offer of lectures and other educational events beyond common teaching (*"the possibility of getting to the languages"*, *"an additional offer of interesting lectures, ..., it is really cool that they invite interesting people from different fields"*, *"an offer of lectures by experts, e.g., people from the practice"*), providing possibilities for practice (*"so that the students can have some kind of practice and that the school supports and arranges for it more"*), and the offer of other, non-educational activities (*"the possibilities of doing sports, getting in touch with interesting people and companies, offering seminars like Career, Chance"*, etc.).

As far as the facilities and equipment of the faculty is concerned, the analysis of the students' responses led to the identification of the subcategories marked as faculty environment (aesthetic aspects of the environment were mentioned, such as *"nice facilities are definitely important"*, *"school environment is important so that one can feel good there"*, *"the environment is gloomy, it should be painted differently"*), the appropriate temperature in the building, the capacity of the building (*"all teaching situated in one building"*), classroom capacity (so that classroom capacity is not exceeded), the technological equipment of the faculty (WI-FI throughout the faculty, enough sockets, the possibility of streaming lectures), and the functional facilities of the classrooms. In terms of classroom facilities, the students mentioned window shields, sound system resolution (*"so that air conditioning doesn't disturb and teachers use microphones"*), teaching and computer equipment, and ensuring that learning is as interactive as possible. Other attributes of the faculty environment that are essential for student satisfaction proved to be the conditions for self-study and the conditions for spending free time between classes (it is important for students *"to have some background at school"*, *"have a place to sit and relax"*, *"to have a place to write papers"*, *"there is no place to study here"*/*"I like that we have a lot of places here where we can study"*).

Out of support services that were identified as determinants of student satisfaction the students provided two types of services: library and catering services. As for the library, it is mainly important for students to have enough books they need for their study, the library environment (they often mentioned calmness in the library, enough places



for sitting and reading, and adequate temperature), the use of modern technologies (on-line reservations, etc.) and also helpful and friendly library staff. As far as catering is concerned, students consider it important to have the option of catering and refreshment arranged for by the faculty (either at the faculty or nearby), to have a choice of more dining options (e.g., “several cafeterias”, “not only a cafeteria , but also a university restaurant”, to have the option of “a dining facility where I can sit down”, to make the faculty equipped with vending machines), and to have a wide and varied choice of food, adapted to students’ needs (“so that the food is good”, “so that the food is also boiled, not just fried”, to have “healthy meals”, “vegetarian meals”, etc.). While some foreign surveys identified the options and level of accommodation, parking, faculty location, transport infrastructure in the city, etc. as the determinants of student satisfaction, our research only registered one response regarding accommodation and one response regarding parking.

The last category of student satisfaction criteria that was identified by the research was the reputation of the faculty. Some students stated that it is important for their satisfaction that the faculty has a good reputation (“so that people know about it and the faculty awareness is good”), the faculty is well assessed (“good evaluation by the Ministry of Education”, “good position within rankings”), and it has good results (“how are students able to find a job on the labor market”, “so that there is good research at the faculty”). It is possible that this finding is to a certain extent related to the fact that the research respondents were students of economy-oriented study programs, who face the highest level of competition regarding the number of economy-oriented faculties in the Czech Republic. Comparison with other studies, however, shows that even some foreign studies identified the reputation/prestige/image of a university as an important determinant of student satisfaction (see, e.g., Chan *et al.*, 2005; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Schüller *et al.*, 2013; Tamuliene and Murzaite, 2013; Suyanto *et al.*, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

When the quality assessment of universities from students’ perspective is conducted as external, it is usually based on aspects that are common for most universities and HEI. All universities and HEI are then assessed by the same criteria (allowing their comparison) and specifics of groups of universities with different focus are ignored (Mareš and Ježek, 2013). In an internal assessment, the results of which are used as a basis for the choice of service quality improvement steps and measures and building a competitive advantage, it is necessary to take the specifics of differently oriented universities/faculties into account. This means we need a better understanding of the way the students of these schools define the quality of HEI services.

The objective of the presented research was to identify the criteria of satisfaction with universities from the perspective of Czech students of economy-oriented study programs. Using the qualitative research procedure, the following general categories of student satisfaction criteria were identified: academic quality, organization of teaching and attitude of the study department, organizational climate, facilities and equipment of the faculty, library services, catering services, and the faculty reputation. These general categories of satisfaction criteria correspond to more specific sub-categories – attributes of services that determine student satisfaction.

The findings gained by the presented research can help managers of economy-oriented Czech HEI and faculties to understand students’ expectations and facilitate decision-making on the direction in which their efforts to improve the quality of services provided should be directed. At the same time, they can serve as the basis for developing tools to measure students’ satisfaction with the HEI that would be relevant for the Czech environment.

## Recommendations for further research

The presented research was conducted using a qualitative research procedure. The advantage of this procedure is the fact that it allows to identify the criteria of service quality from the perspective of students. However, this research approach does not allow us to obtain information about the importance of the individual criteria (how strongly individual attributes are related to the overall satisfaction of students). The qualitative research presented should therefore be followed by further

research of a quantitative character. Especially research identifying key dimensions of satisfaction and the development of a suitable multi-dimensional measuring tool appears to be appropriate. Such research should be based on the psychometric theory.

The student satisfaction criteria described above were based on the categorization of responses obtained through interviews. In order to increase the reliability of the results, it would be desirable to conduct further qualitative studies, using other (or a combination of) more qualitative methods, such as the critical incident technique or focus groups. Application of these methods could yield more information and identification of other, e.g. unconscious, aspects that cannot be captured in an interview.

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