



Student Satisfaction Survey as an Instrument of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A NAAC Perspective

Rukhsana Jabeen Wani

Govt. College for Women, Nawakadal Srinagar, 190002, India

Abstract

Student feedback constitutes an important source of evidence for understanding the quality of the teaching-learning experience in higher education. In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) incorporated the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) within its assessment and accreditation framework under Criterion II: Teaching-Learning and Evaluation. The survey was designed to obtain students' responses regarding different dimensions of the teaching-learning process and to provide evidence relevant to institutional quality assessment. This paper examines Student Satisfaction Survey as an instrument of quality assurance, with particular reference to the NAAC framework applicable up to December 2021. It discusses the conceptual relationship between student satisfaction and educational quality, the structure and purpose of the NAAC survey, methodological considerations, the role of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), and the distinction between compliance and quality improvement. The paper argues that student satisfaction should not be treated as a complete or independent measure of educational quality because it represents students' perceptions of their educational experience. Rather, it should be considered one component of institutional evidence and interpreted in conjunction with other academic and quality indicators. The paper further argues that the value of SSS is maximised when its findings are used for institutional reflection and improvement rather than merely for fulfilling an accreditation requirement. A meaningful feedback mechanism can contribute to a culture in which student experiences inform the review and strengthening of teaching-learning processes.

Keywords: Student Satisfaction Survey, NAAC, Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Teaching-Learning, IQAC, Student Feedback, Continuous Improvement

1. Introduction

Quality assurance has become an important component of higher education governance. Higher education institutions are expected not only to possess appropriate academic and physical resources but also to demonstrate the effectiveness of the processes through which education is delivered. Teaching-learning, assessment, academic support and student engagement are therefore important dimensions of

institutional quality. Students occupy a distinctive position within this process. They are direct participants in classroom teaching, assessment, mentoring and other academic activities. Their experiences can consequently provide information about aspects of institutional functioning that may not always be evident from administrative records or formal academic documentation. Research on quality in higher education has identified student learning, engagement, service quality and satisfaction among the major constructs examined in the quality literature [1]. Student satisfaction, however, should not be regarded as synonymous with educational quality. Satisfaction represents students' perceptions and experiences, whereas educational quality encompasses a wider set of academic and institutional considerations. Research has accordingly emphasised the multidimensional nature of student satisfaction and the importance of examining the different attributes of the educational experience rather than relying solely upon a single overall satisfaction question [2,3].

In the Indian higher education system, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) incorporated Student Satisfaction Survey into its assessment and accreditation framework. Under Criterion II: Teaching-Learning and Evaluation, Key Indicator 2.7 dealt with Student Satisfaction Survey, while Metric 2.7.1 related to the online Student Satisfaction Survey concerning the teaching-learning process [4]. The incorporation of SSS represented an attempt to bring students' perceptions into the quality-assessment process. The NAAC questionnaire did not restrict itself to an overall question on satisfaction. It addressed several aspects of teaching-learning, including syllabus coverage, teacher preparedness, communication, teaching practices, assessment, mentoring and opportunities for learning [5].

The present paper examines Student Satisfaction Survey as an instrument of quality assurance and institutional improvement, with particular reference to its role within the NAAC assessment and accreditation framework..

2. Student Satisfaction and Quality in Higher Education

Student satisfaction is a multidimensional construct that develops from students' perceptions of different aspects of their educational experience. These may include classroom teaching, teacher-student interaction, curriculum, assessment, academic support, learning resources and opportunities for intellectual and personal development. A systematic review of the literature on quality in higher education found that student learning, engagement, service quality and satisfaction were among the constructs that received substantial attention in research on quality in higher education institutions [1]. Other research has similarly demonstrated that students' perceptions of different educational attributes can provide more useful diagnostic information than a single general satisfaction question [2]. Student satisfaction nevertheless requires careful interpretation. A student's response is influenced by perception and experience and may therefore differ from an externally measurable indicator of academic quality. A student may be satisfied with a particular academic arrangement because it is convenient or less demanding, while the same arrangement may not necessarily represent high academic standards. Conversely, rigorous academic expectations may not always result in high satisfaction. Student satisfaction should therefore be treated as stakeholder evidence rather than as a complete measure of educational quality. This distinction is particularly important when SSS results are used in the context of accreditation. The appropriate question is not simply whether students are satisfied but what their responses reveal about the teaching-learning experience. Feedback can draw institutional attention to

particular areas, after which the institution can consider whether those areas require further examination or improvement.

The diagnostic value of student feedback is supported by research indicating that satisfaction is influenced by multiple aspects of the higher education experience rather than by a single factor [2,3].

3. Student Satisfaction Survey within the NAAC Framework

Under the NAAC framework Student Satisfaction Survey is located within Criterion II: Teaching-Learning and Evaluation under Key Indicator 2.7, with Metric 2.7.1 relating to the online Student Satisfaction Survey regarding the teaching-learning process [4]. For colleges, the NAAC survey consisted of 20 objective questions and one subjective/open-ended question. The objective questions were assessed on a scale ranging from 0 to 4, with 4 representing the most positive response and 0 the least positive response [5]. The questionnaire addressed a range of dimensions of the teaching-learning process. These included:

- the extent of syllabus coverage;
- teacher preparation for classes;
- communication by teachers;
- teachers' approach to teaching;
- fairness of internal evaluation;
- discussion of students' performance in assignments;
- opportunities for internships, student exchange and field visits;
- contribution of teaching and mentoring to students' cognitive, social and emotional development;
- opportunities provided for learning and growth;
- communication of expected competencies and learning outcomes;
- mentoring and follow-up;
- use of examples and applications in teaching;
- identification and encouragement of students' strengths; and
- assistance provided to students in overcoming weaknesses [5].

The questionnaire therefore addressed several dimensions rather than treating student satisfaction as a single undifferentiated construct. The inclusion of an open-ended question was particularly significant. It provided students with an opportunity to offer observations and suggestions concerning improvement of the teaching-learning process. Thus, the survey combined structured quantitative responses with qualitative feedback [5]. The NAAC framework also specified a response requirement for the survey. For colleges, responses were to be received from at least 10% of the student population or 100 students, whichever was less. If the required response level was not achieved, the metric was not taken up for evaluation [6]. This provision demonstrates that NAAC treated adequate participation as an important condition for the use of the survey as an assessment metric.

4. Ensuring Genuine Student Feedback

The reliability of any perception-based survey depends partly upon the conditions under which respondents provide their answers. The NAAC SSS instructions explicitly sought to promote sincere responses and indicated that the identity of the respondent would not be revealed [5]. The survey guidelines also contained provisions intended to prevent inappropriate influence. Institutions could encourage students to participate in the survey, but the purpose was to obtain genuine responses rather than responses directed towards a predetermined outcome [6]. These provisions are important because students may modify their responses if they believe that their identity is known or that their feedback could adversely affect their academic relationship with teachers or the institution.

It is therefore useful to distinguish between confidentiality as a survey principle and the broader methodological characteristics of student satisfaction research. The NAAC questionnaire specifically addressed non-disclosure of respondent identity, while the broader literature establishes that student satisfaction is a perception-based and multidimensional construct [2,3]. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as students' reported perceptions of their educational experience.

5. SSS: Compliance Requirement or Quality-Improvement Instrument?

The incorporation of SSS into an accreditation framework creates two possible approaches to its use. The first is a compliance-oriented approach, in which the institution conducts the survey because it is required for accreditation, calculates the resulting score and completes the documentation. The second is a quality-oriented approach, in which the institution uses the feedback to understand students' experiences and identify opportunities for improvement.

The distinction can be summarised as follows:

Compliance-oriented approach

Conduct the survey to satisfy an accreditation requirement
 Emphasise the final score
 Complete the survey report
 Preserve the report for assessment
 Treat feedback as an external requirement
 End the process after reporting

Quality-oriented approach

Conduct the survey to understand student experience
 Examine patterns across individual dimensions
 Interpret the findings
 Discuss findings through institutional mechanisms
 Treat feedback as institutional evidence
 Consider appropriate improvement measures

The NAAC framework establishes SSS as part of the assessment process [4–6]. However, the broader quality-assurance literature suggests that evidence becomes meaningful when it contributes to institutional understanding and improvement [1]. The distinction is therefore important. The numerical

score has value within the accreditation framework, but it should not become the sole purpose of the exercise.

6. Methodological Considerations

6.1 Representativeness of Responses

The interpretation of survey results depends upon the students whose responses are included. The NAAC framework therefore specified a minimum response requirement for colleges [6]. Adequate participation does not, by itself, guarantee that the results represent every student equally. Nevertheless, a clearly defined response requirement provides a basic methodological safeguard.

6.2 Confidentiality and Respondent Identity

The NAAC questionnaire informed students that their identity would not be revealed [5]. This is an important feature of the survey process because it can support candid feedback. The confidentiality provision should, however, not be confused with a claim that student responses are objective measurements. The responses continue to represent individual perceptions.

6.3 Subjective Nature of Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is inherently perception-based. Research on student satisfaction has shown that different educational attributes can contribute differently to students' overall assessments of their experience [2,3]. Consequently, SSS results should be interpreted as evidence concerning students' perceptions, rather than as direct measurements of learning outcomes or teaching effectiveness.

6.4 Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

The NAAC questionnaire's combination of objective questions and an open-ended question permits both quantitative and qualitative examination of student feedback [5]. Quantitative responses can reveal broad patterns across the prescribed dimensions. Qualitative responses can provide additional context and suggestions that may not be captured by predetermined response categories.

6.5 Avoiding Overinterpretation

An institutional average can conceal important differences among individual questions. An institution may obtain a satisfactory overall score while particular dimensions receive comparatively weaker responses. Consequently, item-wise interpretation is more informative for quality improvement than reliance exclusively on an aggregate score. This approach is consistent with research that questions the diagnostic value of measuring overall student satisfaction through a single general response [2].

7. From Feedback to Institutional Improvement

The survey becomes more meaningful when the institution uses the findings as a basis for reflection. A useful conceptual cycle is:

Feedback → Analysis → Reflection → Action → Review

This cycle is an analytical model proposed in this paper; it should not be understood as a verbatim NAAC-prescribed procedure.

Feedback

Students provide responses concerning their experiences of teaching-learning through the prescribed SSS mechanism.

Analysis

The institution examines the distribution of responses and considers the qualitative observations.

Reflection

Relevant academic and institutional bodies consider what the findings indicate about existing practices.

Action

Where recurring or significant concerns are identified, appropriate and feasible measures may be considered.

Review

The institution can subsequently examine whether the measures undertaken have contributed to improvement. For example, recurring concerns about assignment feedback could prompt an examination of existing assessment practices. Similarly, concerns about mentoring could lead an institution to review the functioning of its mentoring mechanism. The objective is not to convert every negative response into an institutional fault but to identify patterns that warrant attention.

8. Role of the IQAC

The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) can provide an institutional mechanism through which student feedback is incorporated into broader quality processes.

The IQAC can facilitate the administration, compilation and analysis of the survey and can place significant findings before appropriate academic bodies. It can also encourage departments to consider recurring concerns and document measures undertaken in response.

The developmental use of feedback is preferable to using the survey as a mechanism for assigning blame to individual teachers. A recurring concern may arise from institutional factors such as inadequate learning resources, assessment procedures, mentoring arrangements or infrastructure rather than from the actions of a particular teacher.

For example, if students consistently identify insufficient learning opportunities outside the classroom, the institution may consider strengthening field-based learning, projects, internships or other appropriate activities. If students identify concerns about feedback on assignments, the relevant academic process may be examined.

In this way, the IQAC can help transform student feedback into institutional learning.

9. Limitations of Student Satisfaction Survey

Student Satisfaction Survey has considerable potential as a feedback mechanism, but its limitations should also be recognised.

First, student satisfaction is perception-based and therefore cannot directly measure learning outcomes.

Second, satisfaction may be influenced by students' expectations and individual experiences.

Third, different students may interpret the same educational experience differently.

Fourth, the aggregate score may conceal variations across individual dimensions of teaching-learning.

Fifth, student feedback should not be treated as the sole basis for judging educational quality. Quality in higher education is multidimensional and includes learning, engagement, service quality, academic processes and quality-assurance mechanisms [1].

Finally, the usefulness of feedback depends upon what institutions do with it. Repeated collection of feedback without appropriate consideration can reduce its developmental value.

These limitations do not diminish the importance of student feedback. Instead, they establish the need to use SSS as one component of a broader institutional evidence base.

10. Towards a Culture of Continuous Quality Improvement

The long-term value of SSS lies in its potential to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement. A compliance-oriented institution may primarily ask:

What score did we obtain?

A quality-oriented institution is more likely to ask:

What does the feedback tell us about students' educational experience, and what can we learn from it?

The second question gives greater meaning to the survey.

Student responses can help institutions identify areas that students perceive positively as well as areas that may require attention. Positive findings may provide opportunities to identify and share effective practices, while recurring concerns may inform academic planning and quality-improvement initiatives.

The research literature supports the value of examining multiple dimensions of student experience rather than relying on a single overall measure [1–3].

Within this perspective, SSS can function as a feedback mechanism within the institutional quality cycle. Its usefulness is greatest when feedback is examined, discussed and connected to appropriate institutional processes.

11. Conclusion

Student Satisfaction Survey represents an important mechanism for incorporating students' perceptions into the quality-assurance process of higher education institutions. Under the NAAC framework applicable SSS forms part of Criterion II: Teaching-Learning and Evaluation, under Key Indicator 2.7 and Metric 2.7.1 [4].

The NAAC survey consisted, for colleges, of 20 objective questions and one subjective question, with the objective responses rated on a 0–4 scale. The questionnaire addressed several dimensions of teaching-learning, including syllabus coverage, teacher preparation, communication, teaching practices, assessment, mentoring and learning opportunities [5]. NAAC also specified a minimum response requirement and incorporated provisions intended to support genuine student responses, including non-disclosure of respondent identity [5,6]. Student satisfaction should nevertheless not be regarded as a direct or complete measure of educational quality. It is a perception-based form of stakeholder evidence and must therefore be interpreted within the broader context of institutional quality [1–3]. The real value of SSS lies in what institutions do with the information generated. When student feedback is systematically analysed, discussed and considered in institutional improvement, the survey can contribute to a culture of responsiveness and continuous quality enhancement.

SSS should therefore be understood not merely as an accreditation-related requirement but as an opportunity for institutions to listen systematically to students and use their experiences as one source of evidence for improving the teaching-learning process.

References

- [1] Prakash, G. (2018). Quality in higher education institutions: Insights from the literature. *The TQM Journal*, 30(6), 732–748.

- [2] Elliott, K. M., & Shin, D. (2002). Student satisfaction: An alternative approach to assessing this important concept. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(2), 197–209.
- [3] Douglas, J., McClelland, R., & Davies, J. (2008). The development of a conceptual model of student satisfaction with their experience in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16(1), 19–35.
- [4] National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). (2020). *Revised Accreditation Framework: Manual for Universities*. Bengaluru: NAAC.
- [5] National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). (2020). *Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS): Questionnaire on Teaching-Learning and Evaluation*. Bengaluru: NAAC.
- [6] National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). (2020). *Guidelines for Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) under the Revised Accreditation Framework*. Bengaluru: NAAC.