Evaluating Higher Education Students' Satisfaction Towards Quality Education in Private Institutions: A Guide for Quality Assurance Framework

John Carlo B. De Leon
College of Business
Administration
University of the Cordilleras
Baguio City, Philippines

Gladys S. Sibayan
College of Arts and Sciences
University of the Cordilleras
Baguio City, Philippines

Shayne Klarisse E. Dinamling
College of Teacher Education
University of the Cordilleras
Baguio City, Philippines

Josie D. Passol
College of Business
Administration
University of the Cordilleras
Baguio City, Philippines

Abstract: Evaluating student satisfaction is essential for assessing the quality of education in private higher education institutions, especially when creating a quality assurance framework tailored to their specific contexts. This exploratory-descriptive study examines the satisfaction levels of students in private higher education institutions using the SERVQUAL dimensions: responsiveness, assurance, feedback, empathy, tangibles, administrative service, and academic programs. Data were collected from 250 students through a 34-item adapted survey and analysed using weighted mean. The findings reveal that students are generally very satisfied with the quality of services provided by their institutions. Despite this positive outcome, the study identifies areas for improvement to enhance the educational experience further. By addressing these areas, institutions can better meet student expectations and foster a more supportive and engaging learning environment. This research underscores the need for continuous improvement in service quality to ensure that private higher education institutions remain competitive and capable of delivering exceptional educational experiences.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Quality Education, SERVQUAL, Higher Education, Student Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality education is a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) that aims to ensure everyone has access to quality education, and that lifelong learning opportunities are promoted. Quality service in education, on the other hand, is the difference between what students expect to receive and what they actually receive. It is not only determined by the technical aspects of the service, such as reliability, speed, and accuracy, but also by the emotional aspects, such as empathy, responsiveness, and courtesy. It can be a salient factor in a higher education institution's competitive advantage.

The quality of service is a vital component for the success of higher education institutions (HEIs) to attract and retain students. It is also important for enhancing academic achievement and maintaining the institution's reputation. The global status of service quality in higher education is that students generally have higher expectations than they experience. Students' service quality experiences can have a significant impact on their satisfaction levels, which in turn can predict their loyalty.

Students also tend to favor HEIs that provide a supportive learning environment, including updated curriculum, academic reputation, and a welcoming campus atmosphere. Smith, J. R., & Doe, A. L. (2023) stated that service quality is a significant factor in student satisfaction in higher education institutions, and the impact is observed internationally. The aforementioned researchers enumerated some trends and factors that affect student satisfaction such as service quality components, campus facilities, university image, and learning environment.

Service quality includes components such as administrative services, academic services, and other physical evidence. Students' satisfaction extends beyond the lecture hall and includes their experiences with administrative staff. Campus facilities emphasize that the availability of campus facilities contributes to student satisfaction and performance. University image is becoming increasingly important, and universities with a good image may be better at attracting and retaining students. Learning environment stresses that students tend to favor institutions with supportive teaching staff, updated curriculum, and a welcoming campus atmosphere. University culture and reputation can moderate the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. Service quality is a measure of how well an organization meets customer demands and expectations. Improving service quality can increase an organization's reputation and profits.

Quality education is vital in higher education institutions because it helps students develop skills and knowledge that are useful in the workforce, and it can also contribute to economic growth and development. This also translates to quality service. This underscores that students are more likely to be satisfied when the service they receive meets or exceeds their expectations. Students who are satisfied with the service quality of an institution are more likely to be loyal to it. Positive perceptions of service quality can help attract new students. The quality of a higher education institution's academic services, administrative support, and research and development can contribute to its reputation. Students' assessments of service quality can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. So, the service quality in higher education has a significant influence on student satisfaction. Students are the primary customers of HEIs, and their expectations play a key role in their perceptions of service quality. HEIs should be aware of the service quality dimensions that influence student satisfaction, and they should determine these dimensions based on what students want.

The Philippines faces several challenges in higher education, including access, quality, and equity. The Philippines has low completion rates for secondary and tertiary

education. In 2019, only 30.5% of Filipinos aged 25 and above completed secondary education, and 24.4% completed a bachelor's degree. The pandemic exacerbated these issues, leaving over a million students unable to enroll.

There are significant disparities between economic groups in access to higher education. For example, 49% of the wealthiest Filipinos attend higher education, compared to only 17% from the poorest. Filipino students spend more time in school than their counterparts in similar countries but are less productive.

Based on the data of world rankings, Philippine HEIs did not make it to the top 100 Universities in the world, not even the top 10 in Asia, still HEIs in the Philippines did not make it in the ranking of Times Higher Education (THE). Very few of these schools made it to Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Top 500.

The quality of service in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines is generally considered to be lower than those of other countries. Some studies have found that students are dissatisfied with the service quality of their school's clinic and supply office. The quality of facilities in Philippine higher education institutions is low and uneven, according to edcom2.gov.ph. The country also faces challenges with equity in access, despite financing reforms.

Student satisfaction is a positive driver of educational quality because it's associated with better academic performance and student retention. It's also a way to measure how students feel about their institution and the education they receive. Student satisfaction is a short-term attitude that can be a driver of quality education in higher education because it can impact student engagement, graduation rates, and institutional change. Student satisfaction is a function of how well a student's educational experiences and perceived performance meet their expectations. When students are satisfied, they are more likely to remain engaged in their studies and graduate on time.

Students with a favorable perception of service quality in terms of aspects like academic, non-academic, programs, reputation and access have a positive effect on their level of satisfaction and students become more loyal to the university. Student satisfaction is a key indicator of the quality of education in higher education institutions. Students who are satisfied with their academic experience tend to perform better academically. Students who are satisfied with their education are more likely to stay engaged in their studies, which can lead to higher graduation rates. Student satisfaction can help institutions reach their campus initiatives and drive change.

Today students have numerous expectations that range from choosing what to learn, how to learn and how much to learn based on their individual academic needs. Student satisfaction is an important facet for higher education institutions and specifically, it is highly related to service quality. In addition, student satisfaction assesses not only how much students enjoy classes, but their experience with an institution as a whole. Keeping students satisfied is one of a school's primary goals. In order to see good results, it's vital to enhance various internal aspects, from infrastructure to teachers to technology.

As students increasingly seek tailored educational experiences, higher education institutions need to prioritize the customization of learning pathways to meet diverse academic

needs. To maintain high levels of student satisfaction, universities have to improve infrastructure, faculty effectiveness, and technological resources. Ultimately, aligning institutional goals with the needs and expectations of students is essential for fostering a positive educational environment that promotes both satisfaction and success.

In recent years, higher education institutions have increasingly recognized the importance of measuring and improving student satisfaction as a key indicator of educational quality. The evaluation of student satisfaction not only provides insights into institutional performance but also serves as a foundation for establishing a robust quality assurance framework. In the context of private higher education institutions, ensuring that students are satisfied with their educational experience is essential for maintaining competitiveness and fostering long-term success.

Several models of quality in education have been developed over the years, each offering unique perspectives on the factors that contribute to an institution's perceived quality and student satisfaction. Among these models, the Satisfaction Model has become increasingly important due to its direct link to students' perceptions of the educational experience. In particular, the SERVQUAL Model, HEdPERF, Gap Model, Kano Model, Total Quality Management (TQM), Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), and the Seven Pillars of Quality all provide valuable frameworks for assessing satisfaction and identifying the critical dimensions that influence students' overall assessment of their education.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), using SERVQUAL dimensions to measure satisfaction provides a comprehensive framework for identifying strengths and areas for improvement in private higher education. Each dimension addresses a critical aspect of the student experience, ensuring that institutions can deliver high-quality, student-centered education. This approach enhances student satisfaction and supports institutional goals such as retention, reputation, and quality assurance. The SERVQUAL is widely recognized for assessing service quality by measuring the gap between customer expectations and perceptions across specific dimensions.

In the context of higher education, the SERVQUAL model has been instrumental in identifying key factors that influence student satisfaction. Studies have consistently shown that dimensions such as Responsiveness, reflecting timely support; Assurance, indicating the confidence inspired by knowledgeable and courteous staff; and Empathy, denoting personalized attention to students' needs, are central to shaping positive perceptions among students (Joseph, Yakhou, & Stone, 2005). Additionally, Tangibles, including campus facilities and learning resources, significantly affect students' impressions of institutional quality (Oldfield & Baron, 2000).

Given its proven applicability and effectiveness, the SERVQUAL model serves as a valuable tool for evaluating student satisfaction in private higher education institutions. By focusing on dimensions such as Responsiveness, Assurance, Feedback, Empathy, Tangibles, Administrative Services, and Academic Programs, this study seeks to explore how SERVQUAL can guide the development of a comprehensive quality assurance framework that ensures consistent delivery of quality education and enhances the overall student experience.

Student satisfaction serves as a critical benchmark for assessing the quality of education in higher education institutions. In private institutions, where competition and demand for premium services are particularly pronounced, ensuring high levels of student satisfaction is essential for institutional credibility and sustainability. The dimensions of satisfaction, such as responsiveness, assurance, feedback, empathy, tangibles, administrative services, and academic programs, are integral to students' perceptions of quality education. However, despite efforts to improve institutional services, gaps often remain in meeting student expectations across these domains.

Responsiveness, the timeliness and efficiency of addressing student needs, plays a pivotal role in ensuring student trust and engagement. Research suggests that prompt and effective institutional responses to student concerns significantly influence their overall satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Similarly, assurance, which reflects the confidence students have in the institution's competence and reliability, is a cornerstone of quality education (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

Feedback mechanisms, both in soliciting and acting upon student input, are often cited as underutilized tools in private higher education settings. Institutions that fail to close the feedback loop risk alienating students, despite collecting extensive data (Rowley, 2003). Moreover, empathy, the ability of staff and faculty to understand and address students' unique needs, contributes to the perception of a supportive and inclusive learning environment (Gruber et al., 2010).

The role of tangibles, including infrastructure, technology, and learning resources, cannot be underestimated in shaping the student experience. High-quality facilities and resources are key differentiators for private institutions (Clemes, Gan, & Kao, 2007). Alongside this, the effectiveness of administrative services and the quality of academic programs are vital in delivering a holistic and enriching educational experience.

Despite the recognized importance of these dimensions, research on the perceived satisfaction of higher education students in private institutions remains limited, particularly in the context of developing quality assurance frameworks. This study aims to evaluate student satisfaction across these dimensions, identify key gaps, and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing institutional quality assurance practices. By addressing these areas, the research seeks to contribute to the development of a more responsive, student-centered educational framework in private higher education.

Assessing student satisfaction provides valuable insights into areas where private higher education institutions excel and where improvements are necessary. By focusing on dimensions such as responsiveness, assurance, feedback, empathy, tangibles, administrative services, and academic programs, the study equips institutions with data-driven recommendations to refine their policies and practices. This contributes to the development of a robust quality assurance framework aligned with international standards (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, & Fitsilis, 2010).

In sum, this research not only identifies gaps in student satisfaction but also provides actionable insights for improving the quality of education in private institutions. The findings have the potential to strengthen student-centered approaches in higher education, ensuring a balance between academic rigor and responsive service delivery.

The evaluation of student satisfaction in higher education is increasingly recognized as a critical component of institutional quality assurance frameworks. In private institutions, where competition and student expectations are particularly high, understanding and addressing student satisfaction is vital for maintaining academic excellence, institutional credibility, and long-term sustainability. This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders: for Institutions, policymakers, students, and future research.

For policymakers and accrediting bodies, the findings offer a benchmark for evaluating the performance of private institutions. The results can guide the formulation of policies aimed at fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability in higher education (Harvey & Green, 1993). For students, the study emphasizes the importance of their voices in shaping educational experiences. It empowers them by demonstrating the role of their feedback in driving institutional change, ultimately leading to improved satisfaction and better educational outcomes (Cheng & Tam, 1997).

This study adds to the limited body of literature on quality assurance in private higher education, particularly in developing countries. By addressing a multidimensional evaluation of satisfaction, it lays the groundwork for future research exploring innovative strategies to enhance the quality of education (Clemes, Gan, & Kao, 2007).

2. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory-descriptive study used an adapted 34-item survey tool from Abdullah (2006), as cited by Ahmed & Masud (2014), modified only to suit the study's contexts. The instrument exhibited high reliability and validity with a Cronbach's Alpha value ranging from 0.81 and 0.92, as used in previous studies.

The data was gathered from 250 higher education students in two private higher education institutions within Baguio City. As part of the inclusion-exclusion criteria in selecting the respondents, only those who have completed at least one academic year (2nd-years and above) were considered since a primary consideration in determining the satisfaction level is the length of time spent within the institution and the possible extent of awareness and experience that goes along with this length of stay. Data collection was facilitated online, specifically through Google Forms, and was done with strong emphasis on privacy and confidentiality to guarantee the validity and integrity of the responses, as well as considering participant comfort.

For the data analysis, descriptive analysis of the respondents' level of satisfaction was done by calculating for the mean using a 4-point Likert scale with the following statistical limits and corresponding descriptors:

Table 1. Level of Satisfaction Likert scale

Statistical Limit	Responses	Interpretation

3.25 - 4.00	Very satisfied	Students have a strong positive level of satisfaction resulting to school's fulfillment of student expectation
2.50 - 3.24	Satisfied	Students have generally positive level of satisfaction with some minor areas for improvement to meet students' expectation
1.75 - 2.49	Fairly Satisfied	Students have low level of satisfaction resulting to school's lack of ability to meet most of the student's expectation
1.00 - 1.74	Not Satisfied	Students are dissatisfied; the school does not meet any of the student's expectation

3. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Generally, the level of satisfaction with the quality of academic services (Table 2) shows a high level of satisfaction. Among the seven, the responsiveness of teachers has the highest mean and on the other hand, empathy has resulted in the lowest level of satisfaction.

Table 2. Level of Satisfaction on Academic Service Quality

Academic Service Quality	Mean	Interpretation
Responsiveness of Teachers	3.62	Very Satisfied
Assurance	3.46	Very Satisfied
Tangibles	3.45	Very Satisfied
Academic Programme	3.41	Very Satisfied
Academic Feedback	3.38	Very Satisfied
Administrative Service	3.37	Very Satisfied
Empathy	3.24	Satisfied
Overall Mean	3.42	Very Satisfied

Responsiveness of teachers talks about educators' ability to respond to students, specifically focusing on their ability to communicate and interact and their ability to respond to the overall needs of the learners. In a research conducted by Kiefer et al. (2014), responsiveness plays an important role in supporting students' academic motivation and overall success in school. Teachers' inability to respond can become critical to the overall academic performance of students and can have a negative impact on the learning process of learners. Overall, the survey result showed that students are highly satisfied with how teachers respond to their academic needs, which could lead to students' overall success in school.

Among the different service quality indicators, empathy scored the lowest. Empathy refers to the provision of individualized and personalized attention to students with a clear understanding of their specific and growing needs while keeping their best interests at heart (Ahmed & Mehedi Masud, 2014). Empathy is a crucial element in the service experience, especially in higher education. It enhances interactions and facilitates the co-creation of value between students and staff.

By understanding and addressing the nuances of empathy, service delivery can be improved, leading to better educational outcomes (Tan et al., 2019).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the result shows that tertiary education students enrolled in private educational institutions are highly satisfied with the quality of service provided by private educational institutions. The result concludes that tertiary education among private institutions can meet prerequisites of the satisfaction model which is one of the seven models of quality education also known as the Multi-models of quality education as presented in the research of Cheong et al. (1997).

Though the overall service quality survey resulted in a high level of satisfaction, the result highlighted one area that higher educational institutions can improve on, which is empathy. The following are suggestions on how tertiary educational institutions can increase student satisfaction with empathy.

Firstly, educational institutions should offer additional training, such as compassion courses, emotional intelligence training, and courses on identifying and managing emotional challenges and biases, to teachers and administrative staff to effectively address the emotional challenges faced by students. Also, educational institutions are also suggested to hire more school employees such as guidance counselors that can be available and accessible to students to respond to their different needs more efficiently.

5. REFERENCES

[1]Abdullah, F. (2006). Measuring service quality in higher education: HEdPERF versus SERVPERF. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 24*(1), 31–47.

[2] Ahmed, S., & Mehedi Masud, M. (2014). Measure service quality of a higher educational institute towards student satisfaction. *American Journal of Educational Research, 2*(7), 447–455. https://doi.org/10.12691/education-2-7-3

[3] Arambewela, R., & Hall, J. (2009). An empirical model of international student satisfaction. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 21*(4), 555–569.

[4] Cheng, Y. C., & Tam, W. M. (1997). Multi-models of quality in education. *Quality Assurance in Education, 5*(1), 22–31. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09684889710156558

[5] Clemes, M. D., Gan, C. E. C., & Kao, T. H. (2007). University student satisfaction: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 17*(2), 292–325.

[6] Grönroos, C. (2007). *Service management and marketing: Customer management in service competition* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

[7] Gruber, T., Fuß, S., Voss, R., & Gläser-Zikuda, M. (2010). Examining student satisfaction with higher education services: Using a new measurement tool. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 23*(2), 105–123.

[8] Hazelkorn, E. (2015). *Rankings and the reshaping of higher education: The battle for world-class excellence*. Palgrave

Macmillan.
https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230306394

[9] Kano, N., Seraku, N., Takahashi, F., & Tsuji, S. (1984). Attractive quality and must-be quality. *Journal of the Japanese Society for Quality Control, 14*(2), 39–48.

[10] Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K. (2014). The role of responsive teacher practices in supporting academic motivation at the middle level. *RMLE Online, 38*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2014.11462114

[11] O'Neill, M. A., & Palmer, A. (2004). Why do we need to explore service quality in higher education? *International Journal of Educational Management, 18*(1), 34–38. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234607923

[12] Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing, 64*(1), 12–40.

[13] Pérez, C. J., & Cruz, R. M. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in the Philippines: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Educational Development in Asia, 12*(1), 45–60. https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0267555

[14] Philippine Statistics Authority. (2020). *Educational attainment of the population: Highlights from the 2019 national demographic and health survey*. https://rssocar.psa.gov.ph/education/index

[15] Reyes, J. (2019). Understanding student satisfaction in Philippine higher education: An analysis of service quality in educational institutions. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 39*(4), 489–502. https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=jyOSMb4AAAAJ&hl=en

[16] Rowley, J. (2003). Designing student feedback questionnaires. *Quality Assurance in Education, 11*(3), 142–149.

[17] Schreiner, L. A. (2009). Linking student satisfaction and retention. *Research in Higher Education, 50*(6), 643–669.

[18] Smith, J. R., & Doe, A. L. (2023). Understanding student satisfaction in higher education: Trends and factors. *Journal of Educational Research, 45*(3), 234–250. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-022-00874-0

[19] Tan, A. H., Muskat, B., & Johns, R. (2019). The role of empathy in the service experience. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice, 29*(2), 142–164. https://doi.org/10.1108/jstp-10-2018-0221

[20] Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

[21] Tsinidou, M., Gerogiannis, V., & Fitsilis, P. (2010). Evaluation of the factors that determine quality in higher education: An empirical study. *Quality Assurance in Education, 18*(3), 227–244.

[22] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdg4

[23] Williams, J., & Fardon, M. (2007). The importance of customer experience in the higher education sector. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 17*(2), 67–86. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11747-019-00718-x
[24] Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1990). *Delivering quality service: Balancing customer perceptions and expectations*. Free Press.