

Elevating excellence: How service quality drives student satisfaction

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Abstract: The study examines how service quality drives student satisfaction to elevate excellence in Hinatuan Southern College. Service quality dimensions are evaluated across assurance, communication, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. In contrast, student satisfaction components were evaluated through academic services, administrative services, campus environment, social services, and support services. In this study, the relationship between service quality dimensions and student satisfaction components is investigated. Moreover, this study also sought to answer which service quality dimension best predicts student satisfaction. Using a quantitative research design, 254 students participated in the study. Findings revealed that the level of service quality dimensions gained an agree rating, while the extent of student satisfaction achieved a satisfied rating. Meanwhile, statistical research employing Pearson's correlation revealed a significant association between service quality and student satisfaction. These findings highlight the necessity of augmenting service quality to enhance the overall student experience and achieve the highest scale of rating. The report advocates for the creation of a strategic intervention framework to address the highlighted deficiency. This framework must prioritize enhancing staff training, among others, to guarantee ongoing institutional advancement and student achievement.

Keywords: Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, Higher Education Institution, Hinatuan Southern College, Excellence

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INTRODUCTION

In higher education, service quality is crucial and has been given significant consideration over the years. It is pivotal in determining and shaping students' contentment and overall academic achievement, especially since competition among HEIs is high. Service Quality is composed of several dimensions, such as tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, communication, and reliability, that help to meet and exceed students' expectations and satisfaction. Student Satisfaction refers to their general contentment with learning opportunities. The study about service quality and student satisfaction underscores how the services offered influence the students' overall satisfaction by fulfilling the requirements and meeting the expectations of the students.

Evaluating student satisfaction with educational quality has become a fundamental component of the educational process (Fuchs & Fangpong, 2021). Higher education institutions must possess a competitive advantage and establish robust relationships by delivering high-quality services (Huliatunisa et al., 2022), which is one important factor in generating and

maintaining students' interest (Amoako et al., 2023). Twum and Pephrah (2020) state that student satisfaction gauges how a student feels and expects a service offered, as they will likely be delighted when the service offered meets or exceeds their expectations (Stankovska et al., 2024). Thus, student satisfaction and service quality correlate significantly (Rajput et al., 2019; Borishade et al., 2021; and Das and Gochhayat, 2023)

According to the pre-survey responses, students from Hinatuan Southern College claimed that personnel have low social skills and have poor interpersonal interactions with students. Some personnel are unapproachable and inconsiderate. Some of the services offered, and even those offered by college personnel, are unreliable. The tangibility of the school is not good; chairs are inadequate and damaged, there is no computer equipment, and some classrooms and restrooms are untidy. The parking space is small, and internet connectivity is poor. The school gymnasium is small and not well-ventilated. Seeing these situations, it is vital to determine the quality of services offered and evaluate the extent of student satisfaction at Hinatuan Southern College.

This study seeks to fully understand the factors influencing student satisfaction, allowing administrators to maintain the quality of student services. The results of this study directly affect how students learn and enhance the school's reputation, ultimately benefiting everyone and improving their overall educational experience.

Problem statement

The study examines the service quality and student satisfaction of Hinatuan Southern College. Specifically, the study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of the service quality of Hinatuan Southern College in terms of the following: (a) assurance, (b) communication, (c) empathy, (d) reliability, (e) responsiveness, and (f) tangibles?
2. What is the extent of student satisfaction in terms of the following: (a) academic services; (b) administrative services; (c) campus environment; (d) social services; and (e) support services?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of service quality and the extent of the student's satisfaction with Hinatuan Southern College?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality

Quality is a critical factor that must be thoroughly assessed in providing services, particularly within the education sector (Budiyanti et al., 2019). To measure service quality, researchers widely use the SERVQUAL model (Masa, 2021; Genove & Tayco, 2023), but the efforts in defining and measuring quality primarily come from the merchandise sector (Parasuraman et al., 1985), and knowledge relative to this is not enough to understand what service quality is (Najimdeen et al., 2021). Conducting semi-structured interviews to assess students' satisfaction with the college was an effective strategy to enhance the institution's competitiveness by identifying its strengths and weaknesses and implementing targeted improvements (Juan, 2020). Kanwar and Sanjeeva (2022) claimed that SERVQUAL is the most popular model for measuring student satisfaction worldwide. This is also embraced and accepted in marketing and business (Chuenyindee et al., 2022, and Jou et al., 2023) and in the production and service industries (Mustapha et al., 2021) because the ServQual model is considered a good tool when measuring the service quality in service industries (Libo-on, 2021).

Service quality dimensions

These dimensions describe how customers experience the service (Ighomereho et al., 2022), and delivery systems typically produce service quality that correlates with customer satisfaction, perceptions, and opinions based on elements or references (Vu, 2021).

Assurance relates to student satisfaction through a cohesive system of procedures, schedules, and support mechanisms that ensure the success of their studies (Sembiring& Rahayu, 2020). According to Lewicka (2022), trust is crucial to a more favourable overall university assessment, which is one of the assurances in HEIs. Communication, however, is essential to help students succeed more and feel more self-sufficient in communicating with their instructors, where respect and gratitude will be satisfied through positive and enhanced interactions within the faculty to facilitate student achievement and enhance self-efficacy(Terzić&Aščić, 2018). Salamondra (2021) states that strong communication abilities- listening, transparency, trust, and a readiness to have difficult discussions- are essential for effective educational leadership.

Empathy is a dimension used for effective interaction between persons encompassing cognitive and affective components (Bove, 2019). Phung and Nguyen (2023) claimed that students greatly value empathy, indicating their satisfaction with the level of services offered by the educational institution. In addition, the compassion of educational institutions is evidenced by their committed support for students to receive an education, grow holistically, and realize their full potential. Reliability deals with providing the promised services, reliably handling customers, close-to-perfect delivery service for the first time, and proper document storage (Setiono& Hidayat, 2022). Arlen (2022) added that this dimension of service quality is the ability to deliver the promised service accurately and dependably to the customer.

Responsiveness is considered the most active part of service since it entails preparedness and timely assistance to clients on service (Syumantra& Aslami, 2022; Shukri et al., 2020) through being vigilant and honest when responding to inquiries and demands (Syumantra& Aslami, 2022). Tangibles are the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, communication materials, and technology that give customers an idea of an institution's quality of service (Ramya et al., 2019; Anwar & Shukur, 2015) and offerings - these offerings are a key component influencing student expectations and satisfaction at these schools. Universities with commendable tangible attributes would likely exhibit high levels of student satisfaction, leading students to regard the institution as possessing quality, particularly in terms of physical services (Al Kadri et al., 2023).

Student satisfaction

According to Feifei et al. (2021), student satisfaction is measured from two different views because their fulfillment has either directly or indirectly become a problem (Juan, 2020). The first view of student satisfaction is the evaluation process from enrollment to graduation, and the second is the evaluation of results after students have received educational services, like consumers after buying and using purchased goods (Khairusy&Febriani, 2022). Consequently, their feedback on various aspects of educational services, including programs, facilities, support services, and the quality of teaching, is highly valued (Hoang et al., 2022).

Academic is frequently considered a subjective and global cognitive assessment of students' learning experience at university (Zalazar-Jaime et al., 2022). According to Ozcan (2021), the student's academic accomplishment is indeed one of the most fundamental purposes of educational institutions and is also a societal expectation.Maintaining the integrity of

academic services significantly enhances universities, particularly in terms of their competitiveness and the positive perception held by stakeholders (Ali et al., 2020).

Administrative in HEI is defined as the ability of the institution to facilitate everyone's participation in high-quality research, teaching, and learning experiences, a center of services for staff, instructors, and students (Teixeira, 2023). Administrators are crucial to the development and prosperity of all organizations, especially educational institutions (Mawudeku&Ankumah, 2021). Campus environment, as perceived by Ying-Ying (2018), is the entirety of the environmental elements: the cultural environment and the interpersonal environment that affect students' learning and campus life. Ding et al. (2024) claimed that the university setting can improve students' well-being, and student experiences are significantly shaped by the university campus environment (Sitarz, 2023; Kassab et al., 2024), which includes physical areas, interpersonal relationships, and academic resources (Kassab et al., 2024).

Social, according to Oberoi (2025), is one aspect of college life that students want to preserve. This is vital to achieving success since friends are essential to a support network (Sitarz, 2023). Students with strong social networks are frequently better equipped to handle stress and difficulties, which helps them adjust to life's demands and advance contentment with life, as stated by Cui (2022). Social support may, therefore, have a beneficial impact on college students' level of life happiness, as Chuter (2020) believes that students' ability to learn, retain, and apply knowledge is greatly impacted by their sense of belonging.

Support Services with the students are directly correlated with the quality of higher education to meet their needs (Shaheen et al., 2020), such as career planning throughout the enrollment process, which helps them earn degrees, find fulfilling employment, and close employment gaps (Hicks, 2024).

Service quality in higher education

Assessing the quality of services in a higher education context is becoming a crucial component of university administration procedures (Bartolo & Tinmaz, 2024), and understanding service quality has become essential to monitoring and enhancing service delivery and guaranteeing student satisfaction (Suru, 2024, as cited in Saravanan & Rao, 2007).

Rahman and Nasrin (2024) suggest that authorities must make a concerted effort to satisfy students' expectations and impressions of high-quality higher education to draw in, serve, and keep students in HEIs since different people may have different opinions about the quality of services in higher education from year to year, class to class, teacher to teacher, or student to student within the same school (Yilmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

Camilleri (2021) and Alemu (2023) claimed that finding out what their students and other stakeholders expect from service quality is a problem for HEI leaders; that is why higher education positions universities as service providers and students as consumers, aligning elements of the service sector by assessing the administrative and instructional activities that satisfy the needs and expectations of students from university services (Yidana et al., 2023).

Valencia-Arias et al. (2023) claimed that maintaining and enhancing service quality is vital for colleges and other higher education institutions given the current dynamic and competitive landscape, and it is mandatory now for higher education institutions to survive and stay ahead of the competition to remain in business (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021).

Service quality and student satisfaction

In higher education, "student satisfaction" refers to how happy students are with the caliber of the services and educational opportunities their universities offer them (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021). The student's requirements and expectations are often based on short-term objectives due to their incomplete understanding of quality components (Justin et al., 2019). The quality of the services had favourable effects on student satisfaction, indicating that raising the calibre of services can boost student contentment (Chandra et al., 2018) because they examine service quality before evaluating satisfaction (Brucal et al., 2022).

Students are happier with their university experience when they perceive greater value influence from their educational institution (Tleuken et al., 2022). The SERVQUAL framework is the most reliable tool and is more appropriate for evaluating service quality in higher education (Twum & Pephrah, 2020). Student views of service quality may lead to student satisfaction (Seitova et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A quantitative correlational research design was used. According to Adedoyin (2020), quantitative research is a collection of numerical data used for statistical, mathematical, or computational treatment to test causal relationships, find patterns and averages, and simplify results to broader populations (Bhandari, 2023).

Locale and respondents of the study

This study was conducted at Hinatuan Southern College, Hinatuan, Surigao del Sur, particularly in three (3) courses – Bachelor of Secondary Education majors in English, Mathematics, and Values Education, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in Financial Management, and Bachelor of Elementary Education from January to May 2025 with 254 respondents. A stratified sampling method determined the number of respondents answering the survey.

Research instrument

A survey-type instrument adapted from various authors was employed.

Data analysis

The researcher employed different statistical tools. Mean was used to analyze data about the level of agreement on service quality dimensions and the extent of student satisfaction. The Pearson Correlation was used to investigate the relationship between the two variables, student satisfaction and service quality dimensions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed that at specific objective 1, the service quality was rated as agree across all dimensions as perceived by respondents, with an overall mean of 3.983. This signifies a favorable emotion towards the topic. This further suggests that every aspect of service quality at Hinatuan Southern College exhibits significant strengths, with the greatest ratings indicating trust, transparent communication, respect, reliability, assistance, and resource accessibility. These factors jointly enhance the student experience and elevate perceived service quality.

For the second specific objective, the overall extent of student satisfaction is satisfactorily rated by respondents with an overall mean of 3.973. This indicates that, on average, students express satisfaction with the services rendered. This indicates that most students had a favorable perception of the services provided. Further, this expresses high levels of satisfaction across various service areas, particularly in academic clarity, orientation support, and departmental belonging. While all areas are rated positively, the campus environment shows the lowest top score, suggesting a potential area for improvement in physical facilities.

For the third specific objective, the analysis indicated a significant relationship between the level of service quality and the extent of the students' satisfaction with Hinatuan Southern College. The formulated hypothesis was rejected as there is a highly significant relationship between the level of service quality and the extent of the student's satisfaction with Hinatuan Southern College. The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, indicating a statistically significant result. The result is not just statistically significant, but very strongly so. This highlights the significance of preserving and improving service quality to guarantee student satisfaction in every facet of their academic and campus experience.

While all of the service quality dimensions and student satisfaction components were generally well received, there were still areas for improvement based on the survey results, as they did not receive the highest scale of ratings. By addressing these concerns, students may be able to experience the highest form of satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

The students perceived the overall service quality at Hinatuan Southern College positively. Each domain of service quality demonstrates distinct strengths, with communication and reliability garnering the highest ratings, indicating that these service quality dimensions significantly affect students' satisfaction. The students also highly regarded the assurance and responsiveness, indicating that these dimensions play a crucial role in students' fulfillment in college. Meanwhile, the empathy and tangibles are the recipients of the lowest mean score, suggesting that there is a potential area for improvement to be investigated by the administration. These high ratings across key indicators highlight a well-rounded and student-centered service culture, emphasizing trust, clarity, fairness, dependability, support, and resource availability. Collectively, these factors significantly enhance the overall student experience and reinforce the college's strong service quality reputation.

The overall extent of student satisfaction at Hinatuan Southern College is notably high, indicating that students are generally satisfied across all service areas. Students are most satisfied with the academic services offered by the school, where the clarity of instructors in explaining course goals and requirements reflects strong academic communication. The social services and administrative services of the school were also regarded as high, reflecting that student perceived these components as important indicators of their satisfaction at school. The support services were also rated high, indicating that the school satisfactorily enforces policies and regulations that help students to be more informed about institutional structure and governance. The school's campus environment, however, gained the lowest mean, while still positive, suggesting that there is a need for improvement in physical learning spaces. Overall, students express high satisfaction, especially in areas related to academic clarity, administrative support, and social belonging. However, the campus environment stands out as a potential area for enhancement to further enrich the student experience.

The significant relationship between the level of service quality and the extent of the student's satisfaction with Hinatuan Southern College indicates that a highly significant and favourable correlation between service quality and student satisfaction exists and perpetually enhances service quality, which is essential for providing a gratifying and fulfilling student experience. This underscores that student satisfaction is significantly affected by the quality of services rendered, positioning service excellence as a strategic need for the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends several actions. To assess the level of satisfaction in Hinatuan Southern College, students may be aware of what service quality means and what the key areas are to be considered. They can provide constructive feedback by participating in course evaluations and student surveys, using the official channel to report issues or suggest improvements, and being specific and respectful when giving feedback.

To maintain the quality of services, School Administrators and Personnel are recommended to cultivate a Student-Centric Environment by prioritizing the needs and experiences of students in the decision-making process, promoting transparent dialogue and attentive listening to student issues, and advocating for diversity, accessibility, and respect throughout all services.

To foster collaboration with the stakeholders, policymakers may define detailed quality standards by establishing national or regional frameworks for service quality in higher education, establishing benchmarks for academic, administrative, and student support services, and guaranteeing conformity with global standards and optimal practices.

To be ready for college life, future students may conduct research prior to enrollment, examine the service quality of the school under consideration by reviewing evaluations, rankings, and student testimonies, visit the campus when feasible, and inquire of current students regarding their experiences with academic assistance, amenities, and administrative services.

To establish gaps and have a deeper understanding about the topic, future researchers are recommended to identify research deficiencies by examining the current literature about models of service quality in higher education, such as SERVQUAL and HEdPERF, investigating under-explored domains such as digital service provision, student mental health services, or equity in accessibility, and exploring multidisciplinary strategies that integrate education, psychology, technology, and management.

The researcher may anchor her work in scholarly literature and perform a comprehensive literature review to situate it within the current body of knowledge. Also, the researcher should reference contemporary and pertinent research to substantiate the framework and conclusions.

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