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Students' Satisfaction with Academic Service Quality in Guidance and Counseling Study Program

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Abstract

To demonstrate their contribution to society, guidance and counseling study programs in higher education must ensure that they meet the defined quality standards. One measure of this standard was the level of satisfaction among students with academic services. The objective of this study was to examine the level of student satisfaction with academic services provided by the study program. To achieve the objective, we utilized a survey method and administered the SERVQUAL-based Student Satisfaction Scale (SSS) to assess students' expectations and perceptions of academic services across five distinct dimensions. The respondents were undergraduate students enrolled in guidance and counseling program under the Education Science Department. We selected the students as respondents by using simple random sampling. Following data collection, we conducted descriptive and statistical analyses to assess variations in expectation and perception scores within and across academic years. The main findings were that students expressed satisfaction with teaching services but highlighted deficiencies in administration and facilities, underscoring the need for ongoing service improvements. Finally, the study highlighted the usefulness of utilizing SERVQUAL model as one of frameworks for assessing students' satisfaction with academic services in study program.

Keywords: Academic Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, Higher Education, Guidance and Counseling

1. Introduction

In the higher education system in Indonesia, the academic discipline of guidance and counseling offers a range of academic qualifications, including undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate degrees (Kemendikbud, 2023). The program provides a wide array of courses, hands-on learning experiences, and research prospects aimed at delivering a comprehensive and rewarding educational journey for students. By focusing on such tailored experiences, the program seeks to attract students who are interested in attaining specialized expertise in the field. This program holds a crucial position as its graduates will become school counselors designated with multifaceted responsibilities, encompassing various duties related to serving students, parents, school staff, and the local community (Davis, 2017).

In the field of higher education, guidance and counseling is an important study program that provides public services in research and education (Althaus et al., 2021) subjects to meet the quality assurance standard. Ensuring its quality is essential, and one significant indicator to measure this is student satisfaction. Student satisfaction should be a higher priority than institutional rankings, as it serves as an important indicator of service quality (Harvey, 2022). By collecting feedback from students, the study program can gather evidence-based ideas to improve its services and meet students' needs (Floden et al., 2017; Zaky, 2023). Additionally, satisfied students are less likely to drop out, which emphasizes the importance of their feedback (Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023). Several studies have pinpointed students' feedback on their satisfaction as a significant contributor to improving the overall quality of higher education (Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022; Zaki, 2020). These findings urge study programs to consider student satisfaction to enhance their quality.

It is crucial to understand and measure students' satisfaction with the academic services delivered by guidance and counseling study programs in order to improve their overall quality. However, study programs face the challenge of determining which aspects and instruments are appropriate for assessing satisfaction. Some studies have identified various dimensions of student satisfaction in higher education, such as teaching and learning quality, academic support, facilities, administrative services, and the overall learning environment (Dugenio-Nadela et al., 2023). Other studies have focused on assessing students' satisfaction with successful studies (Ahmad et al., 2022). Unfortunately, these assessment methods do not fully consider students' needs and the reality of the services, which means that students' satisfactions are not fully understood. Without comparing both factors, assessment results may not accurately capture what should be and what has been. Therefore, an alternative model, such as SERVQUAL rooted in the expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Parasuraman et al., 1985) is adequate to consider.

The use of the SERVQUAL model in market and industrial settings makes it reasonable to apply it in an academic context. However, there has been limited research on assessing students' satisfaction with SERVQUAL-based instruments in such an study program environment. This study aims to expand previous research on student satisfaction with academic services by using the model to evaluate students pursuing bachelor's degrees in guidance and counseling. The main objective is to investigate their satisfaction level with academic services comprising teacher services, academic administration services, and facilities. This research can be a valuable tool for study programs seeking to enhance academic quality assurance and ensure they meet students' expectations and perceptions. The study hypothesizes that students in guidance and counseling program are satisfied with the available academic services.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Study Program

In the Indonesian education system, higher education institutions such as universities and institutes offer various study programs. These programs focus on core activities including teaching, research, and community services in specific field (Kemdikbudristek, 2023). The university provides various degree programs, such as bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in guidance and counseling by different program learning outcome levels. Graduates are expected to enter the workforce according to their academic competency level, continue their education for advanced degrees, or pursue other opportunities.

In order to be eligible to offer their services, study programs must meet accreditation requirements as part of external quality assurance, either at a national or international level. In Indonesia, the accreditation agency for education study program is managed by Education Accreditation Independent Agency (LAMDIK). Typically, the accreditation by LAMDIK is valid for five years (LAMDIK, 2021). After this period, the study program must submit accreditation documents for renewal. As stated by Wagner & Mapp (2023), accredited study programs have more opportunities to increase student enrollment and signify program excellence. Given its significance, LAMDIK's accreditation instrument mandates that study programs regularly measure three aspects of student academic satisfaction: teaching services, academic administration services, and facilities for further improvement. The programs are also required to use validated instruments to assess student satisfaction and publish the results publicly.

The quality of a study program's performance is not only determined by its accreditation status, but also by the success of its graduates. After completing their studies, graduates may enter the job market and apply the skills they acquired during the program. Conducting a tracer study enables the program to gather information about the performance of its graduates. Study Heijke & Meng (2011) indicated that individuals who graduate from programs with a more international focus generally have a higher likelihood of securing employment in areas that emphasize generic competencies, which tend to be associated with a higher concentration of international companies. In addition, regardless of their specific field, graduates from internationally oriented programs tend to receive higher salaries.

2.2. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory.

The study program plays an important role in educating future human resources and in functioning as a public service provider for higher education institutions. Students, in this context, act as consumers who anticipate receiving the best possible services. So, their behavior can be better understood through the expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980). Introduced in the marketing field, the theory focuses on consumer satisfaction and decision-making processes. Its basic idea is that consumer satisfaction is formed based on a comparison between expected and actual performance of a product or service. Initially, based on various sources, consumers set expectations for a product or service. If in fact, the expected product or service is below or deviates from their expectations, they develop negative attitudes and beliefs about them (negative disconfirmation). Vice versa, if the product or service fulfills their expectation they will be satisfied (positive disconfirmation).

According to Oliver (2010), in forming their initial expectations about a product or service consumers consider various sources, including their knowledge and past experiences. Meanwhile, Zeithami et al. (1993) described more clearly that the determinant of customer expectation of service is not only previous experience but also explicit and implicit service promises, and direct communication. A study by Wang and Fan (2022) provides examples of consumer expectations in public services, illustrating that trust, service awareness, and bureaucratic responsiveness significantly influence their expectations. In the context of guidance and counseling study programs, these sources can include accreditation status published by an accreditation agency, tracer studies, the track record of lecturers and students, recognition by the educational community and government, stakeholders, and media reports. Expectations may also be shaped by previous experiences and input from friends and family (Tomlinson et al., 2023). When students have access to accurate information, they can form realistic expectations, but inaccurate information can lead to unrealistic expectations. The consumer's perception of their experience contributes to their overall satisfaction. According to this theory, the satisfaction level is analyzed by comparing consumers' expectations with the perceived performance. The closer students perceive the actual performance to their expectations, the more satisfied they are with the services.

2.3. Service Quality Model.

Taking into account its relevance, Parasuraman et al. (1985) expand the Oliver theory practically and known as the Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL). It widely is respected for its capacity to evaluate both consumer expectations and perceptions. This model is particularly esteemed for its ability to gauge customer satisfaction by examining the disparities between these two factors. It systematically pinpoints the gaps between expectation and perception across various dimensions. The model initially consisted of ten dimensions of service quality but was later revised to focus on five core dimensions. These include tangibles, which refer to the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. Another core dimension is reliability, which pertains to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Additionally, responsiveness, which is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service, is a key dimension. Additional aspect is assurance, which relates to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Lastly, empathy, which refers to the caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers, is also emphasized (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

In later developments, variations to the model have emerged, such as SERVPERF (service performance) (Cronin & Taylor, 1994) and HESQUAL (higher education service quality scale) (Teeroovengadum et al., 2016). The SERVPERF model follows the SERVQUAL model but excludes the expectation aspect. Its performance-only scale comprises 22 items, based on the assumption that higher perceived performance indicates higher service quality. On the other hand, HESQUAL was developed with the understanding that higher education differs from the industrial environment. The scale includes five qualities: administrative, physical, core educational, support facilities, and transformative qualities, totaling 53 items. Several studies have used the SERVQUAL model to assess student satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lijun & Yin, 2021) and service quality in higher education (Goumairi et al., 2020; Hoque et al., 2023). The results were impressive as they allowed respondents to compare their expectations and perceptions based on their service experiences. Despite the model being originally designed for use in the market or industrial environment, it is still appropriate for application in a study program-level environment.

3. Methods

3.1. Procedures

In order to achieve the study's objective, we utilized a web-based survey method based on the approach outlined by Cohen and Swerdlik (2017). This involved gathering data from a sample population of students using a structured web-based instrument. The procedural steps included selecting a suitable student satisfaction scale, identifying the target sample, conducting the web-based survey, collecting and analyzing the data, and finally reporting the findings.

3.2. Respondents

The research was carried out in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FTTE) at Sriwijaya University, Indonesia. It included 200 undergraduate students enrolled in the academic year 2023/2024. They were chosen by using a random sampling technique (Leavy, 2017). Following was the demography data of the samples:

Table 1: Demographic data of Respondents

Years									
Freshmen		Sophomore		Junior		Senior		Total	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
5	45	6	44	6	44	5	55	22	178
50		50		50		50		200	

Note: M=male and F=Female

3.3. Instrumentation

The study utilized the Student Satisfaction Scale (SSS) developed based on the SERVQUAL model (Yosef et al., 2023). Its objective was to assess students' satisfaction with academic services, including teaching services, academic administration services, and facilities, by comparing their expectations and perceptions across five service dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The scale consisted of 32 items, divided into three subscales: teaching services (10 questions), academic administration services (10 questions), and facility aspects (12 questions). The first 16 questions measured students' expectations, while the next 16 assessed their perceptions. Participants utilized a Likert-style scale with four levels (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree) accessible through a web-based platform. The validity and reliability of the SSS were confirmed through a validation process involving 949 samples during the main test phase. The validation process employed the analysis of the corrected item-total correlation method, and the criterion validity coefficients of its items ranged from .649 to .834, indicating the extent to which each item correlates with the overall scale. Additionally, the coefficient of Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal

consistency reliability, ranged between .936 and .953 for the SSS items, indicating good reliability and validity (Taherdoost, 2016). The study invited students to participate through their social media networks.

3.4. Data Analysis

For analyzing data, Individual responses were scored and recorded in a spreadsheet, categorized into five dimensions of expectation and perception in each subcategory. Before statistical analysis, the ordinal scores of all students were converted into interval scores using the method of successive intervals (MSI) (Richter et al., 1974). The service quality level was then determined by counting the difference between the mean scores of students' perceptions and expectations for each dimension and overall. In the initial analysis, the study identified the mean score difference for each measure by averaging the perception scores and subtracting this from the expectation mean scores using the basic formula (Parasuraman et al., 1985):

SQ = P – E
(SQ=service quality, P=perceptions, E=Expectations).

The results were displayed in charts that showed the gap between the mean scores of expectation and perception graphically. Next, a statistical analysis of the paired-sample test (Ross & Wilson, 2017) was used to determine the significance of the difference between the perception and expectation scores. The interpretation of the statistical results for service quality was as follows:
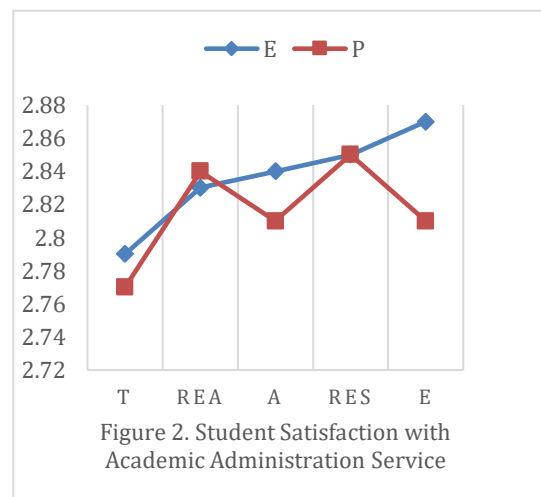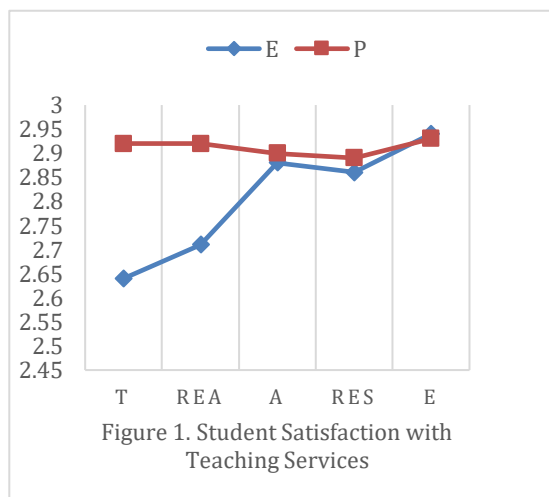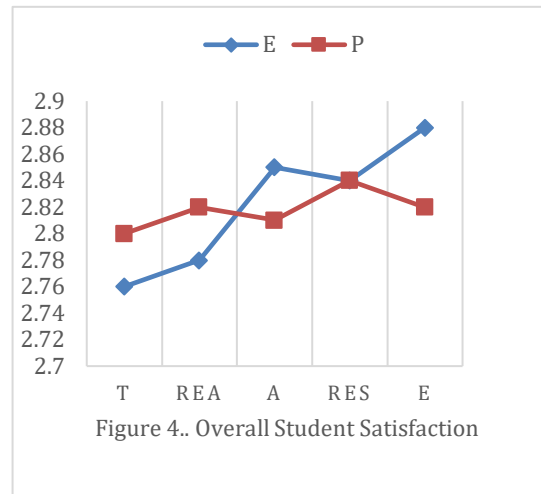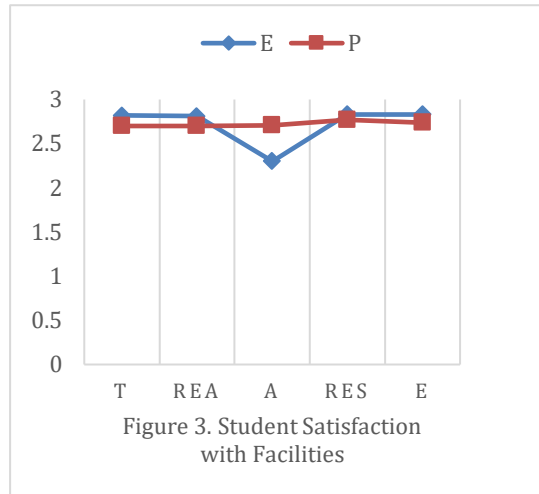
Satisfactory: E>P, sig. (2-tails) < .05;
Unsatisfactory = E<P, sig. (2 tails) < .05.

Thirdly, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to examine the differences in mean scores among students according to academic years, in relation to the disparities between perceptions and expectations from the second analysis.

4. Results

This study aims to investigate students' satisfaction with academic service quality using a SERVQUAL-based scale. We received a 100% response rate, with all students completing the scale, ensuring comprehensive data for statistical analysis. The following figures provide a detailed breakdown of satisfaction among freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, shedding light on the varying levels of satisfaction among students.

Figure 1. Student Satisfaction with Teaching Services

Figure 2. Student Satisfaction with Academic Administration Service

Figure 3. Student Satisfaction with Facilities

Figure 4.. Overall Student Satisfaction

The initial analysis focuses on comparing the expected and perceived aspects of three services. According to Figure 1, students' perception of the teaching service exceeds expectations in all dimensions. However, Figure 2 shows that students' perception of academic administration services is lower than expected, indicating dissatisfaction. Moving on to Figure 3, students' perception is slightly lower than expected across all dimensions except for assurance. Lastly, Figure 4 indicates that only three dimensions - tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness - meet student satisfaction. By examining the data trends in Figures 1 and 2, which represent students' experiences with services delivered by lecturers and staff, it is evident that students prioritize empathy over other dimensions.

Considering such data display, it is necessary to analyze in more detail the differences within and between groups. For within-group analysis, the *t-test* technique is utilized. Comparison between the four groups is made by using the Kruskal-Wallis test due to their non-homogeneity. Table 2 displays the results of the analysis.

Table 2: *Student satisfaction by Year* (N=200)

Year Group	Expectation		Perception		t-$_{test}$		Mean scores of P-E	Kruskal-Wallis Test	
	Mean	D	Mean	D	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)		Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.
Freshmen	2.676	849	2.717	784	.233	.817	-.11		
Sophomore	2.795	849	2.732	658	.522	.604	.04	1.313	.726
Junior	2.936	608	2.827	779	.890	.378	-.06		
Senior	2.877	754	2.989	634	.822	.415	.11		

Based on the t-test results, there are no significant differences between the mean scores for expectation and perception within each group (Column 7). All *p*-values are greater than .05, indicating that students in each group are satisfied with the available service quality. Additionally, the mean scores of P-E (Column 8) suggest that the perceptions of freshmen and juniors are lower than their expectations, while sophomores and seniors have perception mean scores that are higher than their expectations. However, the Kruskal-Wallis Test results show that the *p*-value is .726, which is greater than .05, indicating no significant difference in satisfaction among study programs. Based on this analysis, it can be confirmed that the hypothesis stating that students in the guidance and counseling study programs are satisfied with the available academic services is confirmed.

5. **Discussion**

The main goal of this study is to assess students' satisfaction with academic services, comprising teaching, academic administration, and facilities across five dimensions. The study successfully meet its goal, leading to a subsequent discussion on the interpretation of the findings. Analysis of demographic data reveals mixed results for student satisfaction. Specifically, students are satisfied with teaching services, but less with academic administration services and facilities. It seems that certain aspects of the services do not meet their expectations.

For instance, students feel that the individuals in charge of the services lack empathetic behavior. Upon closer examination, the findings suggest that there is no significant difference in satisfaction among freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors across the three types of services.

Teaching is one of the important parts in higher education services. Effective teaching provides meaningful learning experiences for students, while inadequate teaching can leave students feeling confused (Cho & Kim, 2021; Lodge et al., 2018). Lecturers who do not promptly and effectively address students' challenges are often associated with lower student satisfaction. Failing to address these issues can lead to stress, anxiety, frustration, and demotivation, ultimately resulting in dropout (Lorenzo-quiles et al., 2023). The current study finds that students expect lecturers to show empathy when they encounter learning difficulties. However, their expectations are only moderately met. This finding supports previous studies (Meyers et al., 2019; Zhou, 2022) that highlighted the importance of lecturers displaying empathetic behaviors. Demonstrating empathy can enhance student engagement in learning and foster self-regulation.

To assess whether student satisfaction with teaching services is consistent with previous research in that area, the studies by Weerasinghe et al. (2017) and Razinkina et al. (2018) provide valuable insights. These studies identified various factors that influence student satisfaction, such as academic performance (GPA), teaching quality, clarity of expectations, attitude towards higher education, teaching style, and the quality of lecturers. These factors directly impact students' perceptions of their academic experience and are important considerations in evaluating satisfaction levels. Additionally, a study by Zamri et al. (2021) revealed the primary factors that affect students' satisfaction with open and distance learning. The key factors identified were course design, students' expectations, timely feedback to students, and the quality of the lectures. The current study indicates that students are satisfied with all aspects of the teaching services, suggesting that the lecturers in the study program have delivered instruction beyond students' expectations, particularly in the tangible and reliability dimensions.

In addition to teaching services, study programs are expected to provide academic administration services to support specific academic operations. The scope of the services will vary among study program levels, but it is limited compared to the college or university level. These services may include how the staff behave when providing services associated with student needs, which according to Heck et al. (2000) are grouped into Category 6. The current study reveals that all students have high expectations, especially in the assurance and empathy dimensions. However, their perception is lower than expected. Given this finding, it is necessary to compare with previous studies to understand the importance of the services. For example, a study by Rizos (2022) found that students' perception of administrative services is below expectation, revealing gaps in all five dimensions. Meanwhile, Dhawan et al. (2022) found that administrative service quality, comprising responsiveness, management quality, and institutional factors, had the highest correlation with student satisfaction. Furthermore, some studies reviewed by Yidana et al. (2023) revealed the significant roles of administrative support services in higher education for quality assurance. They recommended regular assessment of student satisfaction to determine students' level of satisfaction with the provided services. The current study confirms such findings of important services that have not been fulfilled by the study program and highlights the importance of the services to improve.

In current study, the students rated the quality of the facilities slightly lower than their expectations, with the exception of the assurance dimension. This suggests that there is a group of students who are dissatisfied with the available facilities. Their ratings indicate that the facilities are crucial for their learning experiences, and therefore, study program should ensure that they are provided. This finding aligns with previous research that has identified facilities as an urgent aspect of higher education. In a broader sense, the quality of campus services and facilities, particularly the effective use of technology, has been found to be a significant determinant of student satisfaction (Pandita & Kiran, 2023; Phan et al., 2022). This extends beyond the classroom environment to encompass the overall campus infrastructure and support services available to students, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to enhancing their satisfaction. Additionally, several studies emphasize the role of non-academic factors, such as the quality of classrooms, relationships with lecturers, and interactions with peers, in shaping student satisfaction (Zheng, 2022). These non-academic services, in terms of their tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, contribute to the overall learning environment and students' sense of belonging to the study program.

To gain deeper insights into the subject, the relationship between the quality of educational facilities and various aspects of student learning based on previous recent research findings is compared. For examples, Ding et al. (2024) and Voisin et al. (2023) have identified a significant link between campus environment and student health. Additionally, the evident impact of facilities on shaping student satisfaction underscores their importance within educational institutions. Prospective students carefully assess the quality and availability of facilities as a key factor influencing their choice of higher education institutions (Rika et al., 2016). These facilities include a wide range of elements, from infrastructure and technological resources to recreational areas, libraries, laboratories, and overall campus atmosphere. In a study by Könings and Seidel (2022), students' perceptions of facilities were grouped into three profiles: optimistic, mixed optimistic, and pessimistic. The perceptions among the profiles evolved differently over time, showing that moderately optimistic and pessimistic students were at risk in different ways. In the current study, where 12 out of 32 items are related to the facility subscale, the emphasis on these aspects highlights their universal significance and undeniable priority in the decision-making process of potential students, affirming the integral role that facility quality plays in shaping the overall educational experience. The current study does not encompass all aspects, but it included the very basic ones, and the evidence shows that not all students are satisfied with the facilities.

The expectancy-disconfirmation theory can provide insights into how to enhance students' satisfaction. A study program could enhance essential services to ensure that students' perceived experience surpasses their expectations. Alternatively, study programs can manage students' expectations by gradually improving services over time. In the present study, high student expectations should ideally prompt the study program to exert greater effort to meet those expectations. This insightful analysis, as emphasized by Dan (2012), is crucial not only for enhancing service quality but also for identifying areas that may require improvements or adjustments to better align with students' expectations. Contrasting students' perceptions with their expectations allows for a more comprehensive understanding of their specific service needs. Thus, the SERVQUAL model not only gauges satisfaction but also provides meaningful insights into potential areas for improvement in academic services.

The assessment of students' satisfaction with academic services should be an ongoing effort for guidance and counseling study programs in order to improve their quality. While the current study is limited to one study program, uses a self-report survey method, and has not explore students' explanation of their expectations and perceptions, however, it provides valuable insights into the importance of assessing students' satisfaction to service quality at the study program level. The use of the SERVQUAL model is beneficial in examining the variance between students' expectations and perceptions of academic services. Study program must better understand students' needs in order to improve services (Jonkisz et al., 2021). Relying solely on a written scale for assessing students' satisfaction may not always be sufficient due to the limitations of the self-report method. Therefore, future research could incorporate other themes and approaches, such as students' consideration of their expectations and perceptions and direct observation followed by interviews to comprehensively assess students' satisfaction and more accurately portray delivered service quality of study programs.

6. Conclusion

Students' satisfaction with their academic services is a significant aspect of quality assurance in higher education. When a study program ensures consistent and high-quality services through clear quality control measures, it positively impacts student satisfaction. Meeting or exceeding student expectations regarding service quality often leads to increased satisfaction levels. This study assessed students' satisfaction with academic services based on the discrepancy between expectation and perception, which measure tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy dimensions. The findings revealed mixed results, with students generally satisfied with teaching services but less so with academic administration and facilities. It also emphasizes the importance of empathetic behavior from lecturers, high-quality academic administrative services, and adequate facilities. The findings suggest that the SERVQUAL model provides valuable assessment and predictive insights for improving the academic quality assurance of study programs, ensuring that students receive the best suitable learning experience. Finally, study demonstrates the practicality of the SERVQUAL model and recommends continuous

assessment and improvement of these services are crucial for meeting student expectations and improving overall satisfaction.

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