

## Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Customer Service Delivery Quality and Its Influence on Loyalty: Insights from Undergraduate Students at a private University in Upper East Region

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**Abstract:** The aim of the research was to assess students' perceptions of customer service delivery quality and its influence on loyalty. To achieve these aims, the study employed a cross-sectional research design and the Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) and recruited a sample of 385 from a population of 635. The study collected primary data via a closed-ended survey questionnaire instrument, which was piloted and produced a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .862, demonstrating that the constructs of the questionnaire were highly internally consistent. Data analysis instruments included descriptive statistics for the questionnaire and inferential statistics for objective two and the null hypothesis. The findings from the study show a high level of agreement among respondents towards the university's customer service delivery, with perceptions predominantly occurring in the high or very high range, with mean scores consistently between 3.0 and 4.0. This means that undergraduates have positive feelings toward a number of service dimensions overall, but particularly toward service dimensions of reliability and responsiveness (mean scores approximately 3.6 and 3.8). For instance, key dimensions like responsiveness received the highest agreement with a frequency of 316 (M=3.74), which suggests that students feel the university is generally responsive to their needs in a timely and proactive manner, which is a critical aspect in helping to create a caring and nurturing environment. Also, empathy had a mean score (M=3.65), suggesting that there is room for improvement with regard to authentic interactions. Additionally, the scores on reliability indicate that students' perceptions regarding services reliability are, at best, high, which suggests that services may meet expectations of students. Again, assurance scored (M=3.59), giving a clear indication of students believing that staff have the skills and abilities to help them, which is a positive. Additionally, the inferential results revealed a positive correlation between satisfaction with customer service delivery and students loyalty  $r(385) = 0.125$ ,  $p = 0.14$  (Sig. 2-tailed). This suggests that as satisfaction levels increase, loyalty levels also tend to increase, even though the relationship is not strong. The study concluded that the university successfully fulfills students' core academic and community expectations, with most students indicating that they would choose the university again and support its mission. The students' willingness to recommend the university and participate in fundraising efforts suggests a strong foundation of loyalty.

**Keywords:** Customer Service, Students' Satisfaction, Students' Loyalty, Educational Quality, Expectancy Theory.

### INTRODUCTION

In the competitive landscape of higher education, the quality of customer service delivery has an important impact on students' experiences and loyalty. Customer service delivery in the context of this study defined as providing service and support to students beginning at the outset of their time with the institution and continuing throughout their academic journey as it relates to faculty, administration, and

support staff, via response to questions, availability of resources, and the overall atmosphere of care and engagement the institution has to offer. Loyalty, in this context, refers to the students' commitment to the university by recommending it to potential applicants, and being involved in the university culture. Thus, it is important to consider how students view the quality of customer service delivery, as it is a driver of students' loyalty and advocacy or support for the institution,

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ultimately affecting the reputation of the university and ability to attract and retain students.

For universities (Aritonang, 2014; Bergamo *et al.*, 2012; Borishade, Worlu, Ogunnaike, Aka, & Dirisu, 2021; Brown & Mazzarol, 2008; Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010; Gunarto, Hurriyati, Disman, & Wibowo, 2018; Gunarto, Wibowo, & Hurriyati, 2016) and corporations (Griffin, 2002), devoted students are as valuable assets as devoted customers are to any business. Four characteristics of loyal customers are as follows: (1) they frequently make repeat purchases; (2) they purchase from a range of product and service lines; (3) they refer others; and (4) they lack competition. Numerous studies have shown that high levels of customer satisfaction do not always result in increased sales or recurring business. Compared to customer satisfaction measurement techniques, customer loyalty measurement provides a more accurate indication of repeat business (Griffin, 2002; Gunarto, Hurriyati, Disman, & Wibowo, 2018). Customer loyalty is defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2014) as a customer's repeated purchases as a result of their commitment to a company or brand. Customer loyalty is the dedication that customers have to choose a certain company or brand over competitors in the same industry and to make repeat purchases. Institutions are now mainly focused on two issues: student satisfaction and loyalty. Universities in developed countries place a high priority on these two principles. Student satisfaction and loyalty are the two main objectives that universities must achieve (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Peng & Li, 2021).

Lerbin and Aritonang (2014) demonstrated that many higher education institutions have student loyalty as a top priority from a marketing perspective. A devoted student body gives schools a significant competitive edge. Strong student loyalty increases retention rates and promotes positive word-of-mouth advertising for the institution. Loyal students are more inclined to tell their peers or potential students about their great experiences, which enhances the school's reputation and appeal in general. In the end, organic promotion lowers marketing costs and increases overall enrollment, allowing schools to further enhance the student experience. In an increasingly competitive market, a deliberate emphasis on fostering loyalty will help the institution stand out from the competition and eventually generate income.

Customers who are students typically wish to remain faithful to the higher education school. Their allegiance is influenced by a number of underlying constructs (Bergamo *et al.*, 2012). According to research, 46% of student loyalty characteristics are accounted for by perceived quality, satisfaction, emotional behavior, and trust (Bergamo *et al.*, 2012). This emphasizes that in order for students to believe that their experience has been good, they must receive high-quality instruction, support services, and any other quality component. Along with the excellent quality of the educational experience, their relationships, habits, and experiences

will shape their emotional behavior and affect their allegiance to the institution. Additionally, a student's loyalty to an institution is greatly influenced by trust. Knowing the role of underlying constructs is important for stakeholders of the institution, including academic and management personnel, because there are strategic initiatives, policies, and resources stakeholders can implement to increase loyalty, retention, and possibly improve the institution's reputation. A student's loyalty is proxied by their trust that their institution will provide them with the educational support they need.

For universities to survive and prosper in the face of competition in the educational sector, student loyalty is a crucial component (e.g. Latif *et al.*, 2021). A university can enroll and retain students in their educational experience while also encouraging them to recommend the university to others by building a good rapport with them and attending to their demands regarding their visit. Having a good experience at university encourages students to tell others about their positive experiences, which is crucial when prospective students are choosing their course of study. Good word-of-mouth can have a significant impact on the university's appeal and reputation, which in turn influences enrollment. Building student loyalty is not merely a choice; rather, it is essential to the university's future and continued relevance in a field that is undergoing ongoing change due to engagement, competition, and technology (e.g. Latif *et al.*, 2021).

A strong rapport between students and teachers is a crucial element of the educational environment that may influence students' satisfaction and dedication to their university (Gunarto *et al.*, 2022). Student-faculty interactions that lead to meaningful and productive conversations create networks of mutual support that support students' academic and personal growth. Moreover, context-based discussions can enhance the educational experience by making students feel appreciated and a part of the school, and students are more likely to become committed to their school and spread positive opinions about it if they feel included. In general, focusing on interactions between students and faculty will only make college more engaging for students and their community.

Institution social responsibility (USR) initiatives can be a marketing tactic that encourages student loyalty, according to research findings by Latif *et al.*, (2021), as long as they enhance students' perceptions of service quality, satisfaction, and institution trust. It's critical to keep in mind that the increasing demand for higher education is both quantitative and qualitative, and that educational institutions must adapt to meet the higher academic performance standards required to accommodate the larger graduate pool (Kwegyiriba, 2021). Higher education institutions, especially private ones, must thus focus more on the quality of customer services they offer students in order to address the issue

of quality education. At the University of Arusha, Matanga (2020) investigated the connection between customer satisfaction and customer service and discovered that one of the factors contributing to students' dissatisfaction was a lack of facilities, such as computer lab equipment. Kwikwega (2018) examined the customer service provided to students at Tanzanian public and private universities in an effort to attract students. Although demographic and political shifts may still affect university student mobility in Tanzania, the authors pointed out that St. Augustine University, especially Jordan University College has the capacity to draw and keep more students on campus than Mzumbe University. The authors recommended that colleges address the main obstacles to enhancing customer service, including insufficient staff training requirements and rules and procedures.

Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016) examined the connection between service quality and student loyalty in order to determine the mediating function of student satisfaction. They discovered that student satisfaction was significantly impacted by service quality. This suggests that in order to meet the expectations and satisfaction of students, university administrators must employ more successful tactics. This could include a deeper comprehension of the relationship between service quality, contentment, and loyalty, claim Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016).

The importance of service quality and the university's image, especially in higher education, was highlighted in a study by Chandra *et al.*, (2019) on service quality and university image in relation to student satisfaction and loyalty in Indonesia applied to higher education. The study concluded that both service quality and the university's image have a statistically significant impact on student satisfaction, and that student satisfaction has a positive and statistically significant impact on student loyalty to the university. In conclusion, universities should be concerned not only with the quality of education but also with the possibility of providing a quality atmosphere for the student. Understanding these circumstances enables the university to better tailor services, potentially increasing marketability among price-sensitive students. According to this study, providing high-quality services has a favorable effect on student loyalty and satisfaction, and it's probably one of the few long-term benefits available to higher education institutions today. Chuah and colleagues' (2011) study investigated service quality and student satisfaction by involving 100 undergraduate students, the dissertation found a positive relationship between service quality and student happiness. Student satisfaction was found to have an impact on service quality. In conclusion, it is critical that institutions of higher learning adopt customer service delivery to enhance students' experiences.

Globally, universities are in charge of creating and sharing knowledge for a country's socioeconomic benefits (e.g. Twum & Peprah, 2020). Higher education institutions have recognized how critical it is to enhance their operations in order to meet the expectations and perceptions of students, since sustaining service quality is essential to their capacity to compete and grow. Higher education is therefore essential to any nation's economic growth and development (e.g. Twum & Peprah, 2020). Since student satisfaction is a major determinant of service quality, higher education institutions must establish stronger relationships with students by providing value for service delivery (e.g. Twum & Peprah, 2020). Universities must prioritize quality as one of the most important success criteria in the industry in the twenty-first century if they hope to establish and maintain a respectable degree of competitiveness (Arokiasamy, 2012). Farahmandian *et al.*, (2013) state that since students are the primary clients of higher education institutions, meeting their wants and expectations while providing high-quality services is essential for universities to thrive in the increasingly competitive higher education sector. They also state that a population of satisfied students will give universities ongoing advantages through positive word-of-mouth communication and also put them in a better position to deal with rival institutions. Some scholars believe that offering exceptional service values can help institutions increase student happiness, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in the current global education, market (Huang *et al.*, 2012). Administrators in these institutions have implemented a plan that includes creating strategies to attract students and creating effective and efficient learning environments in order to connect academic success to ideas like retention and recruitment (DeShields *et al.*, 2005, Helgesen and Nettet 2007). Research indicates that because education is now viewed as a marketable service, more students are enrolled in full-fee programs, students' expectations of higher education institutions are rising, higher education has become more internationalized, and, finally, there is fierce competition currently taking place in the higher education sector, universities and all other educational institutions are focusing more on evaluating how well their students perceive the quality of the services they provide (Oldfield and Baron 2000).

Kara *et al.*, (2016) looked at the connection between student satisfaction in Kenyan public institutions and the quality of educational services provided. The study also ascertained the connection between university students' satisfaction and aspects of the quality of educational services. A cross-sectional research design was used in the study. We used stratified random sampling to select eight colleges. 1062 undergraduate students in their third and fourth years who were chosen through proportionate stratified random sampling were included in the study. Perceived learning gains, the quality of administrative services, the availability of textbooks in university libraries, the

quality of teaching facilities, the dependability of university exams, and the quality of student welfare services were all found to be significantly and directly correlated with student satisfaction.

This study tackles a significant geographical gap in the literature on student loyalty and customer service delivery in higher education specifically in the Bongo District of Ghana. While other scholars have studied the variables service quality, student satisfaction, and student loyalty in different parts of the world, there has been little to no research examining these variables in higher education in Ghana's Upper East Region, particularly in under-researched areas like the Bongo District. This study aims to contribute to this geographical gap by examining the role of customer service delivery on student loyalty in educational institutions such as Private universities. In doing so, this study is aware of and can highlight the challenges and cultural dynamics faced by students in Ghana's educational space. Not only does this study seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of student loyalty in emerging economies, but it also aims to develop some practical use for this research in terms of shaping strategies to enhance service delivery in higher education based upon reflected student needs in the country. In conclusion, the objective of this research project may be viewed as a student loyalty measure which can improve the student educational experience and cultivate a loyal bond between students and institutions in Ghana.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the increasing demand that prospective students have for higher education, new higher education providers are constantly cropping up, creating a competitive landscape in Ghana and other West African countries. The growing number of universities allows students to experience a sort of liberalization in their academic decisions, or rather; they are being provided a larger pool of options to choose from. It is believed that providing a higher quality of customer service delivery in the field of higher education is pivotal in attracting prospective students (e.g. Lestari, *et al.*, 2024). These potential applicants often evaluate their options based on feedback from alumni and current students regarding their experiences at various institutions. Thus, it is paramount that universities recognize the importance of customer service delivery in fulfilling the expectations of students. Therefore, if students feel satisfied with the service delivery of the institution, they are more likely to be loyal enough to recommend the institution to prospective applicants. Universities must thus recognize that assessing and improving customer service delivery is essential for increasing the knowledge of potential new students in the pursuit of wanting to attract more students to the university. In higher educational institutions like the universities, students are regarded as customers Watjatrakul (2014) and the universities as customer service providers. It is thus crucial that from time, universities who are customer service providers assess

their services through exploring students' perception about their customer service delivery. This is critical for quality improvement, policy direction and to stimulate and enhance high sense of loyalty among students.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### The Study Aimed:

1. To assess the key dimensions of customer service delivery at a private university, focusing on student perceptions and satisfaction levels across various service facets, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, accessibility, communication, competence, academic support, and administrative support.
2. To analyze the relationship between perceived customer service delivery quality and student loyalty, assessing how variations in service quality impact students' commitment to recommending the institution to potential applicants.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

**H<sub>0</sub>:** there is no significant relationship between perceived customer service delivery quality and student loyalty.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between perceived customer service delivery quality and student loyalty.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

The Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) served as the foundation for this study and can be used to measure customer satisfaction based on its intrinsic capabilities (Oliver, 1980a; Spreng & Jr., 2003; Patterson & Johnson, 1997). EDT has been used by numerous researchers in the literature to increase customer satisfaction, repurchase behavior (loyalty), and retention (Picazo-Vela, 2009; Hsu & H., 2006; Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004). For example, Elkhani and Bakri (2012) examined the popular theory for measuring customer satisfaction based on the perceived quality of goods or services. The authors emphasized how EDT could assess the caliber of information and services offered by B2C e-commerce from the perspective of the client. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory of citizen satisfaction with public services, which maintains that people evaluate public services based on the quality of services they have actually received as well as an implicit comparison of service quality with prior expectations, was also supported by evidence from a number of earlier studies, according to Van Ryzin (2013). In the author's work, the expectancy-disconfirmation hypothesis of public service satisfaction was examined experimentally. Participants in an online survey experiment (N = 964) were randomly assigned to view images of streets with low- or high-performance cleanliness and to hear comments from a fictitious government official that were either low- or high-expectations. The results largely confirm the key links of the concept and are consistent with earlier



studies. Once again, Van Ryzin (2006) tried to determine the findings' sensitivity to two different disconfirmation criteria (i.e., the discrepancy between expectations and performance). The fundamental expectancy disconfirmation paradigm is supported by results using subtractive disconfirmation, but not by results using perceived disconfirmation. In an effort to create a thorough framework for assessing library service quality and satisfaction at the same time, Hossain (2018) pointed out that academic library administrators may find it easier to carry out synchronized assessments of service quality and satisfaction if they use the recently modified "Disconfirmation of Expectation's theory" in conjunction with the LIS SERVQUAL + model. Although Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) has been widely researched in many different contexts, little is known about how it is applied in Ghana's Upper East Region's higher education system, particularly with regard to gauging student satisfaction with the caliber of services offered by universities and whether or not this influences student loyalty. Since higher education in this field has special characteristics, there is a significant gap in the literature because most of it focuses on commercial or public services (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012; Van Ryzin, 2013).

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

### Customer Service Quality and Student Satisfaction

In order to determine how satisfied students were with the International Business School in Malaysia and the caliber of services they received, Farahmandian *et al.*, (2013) carried out a quantitative analysis. The authors' sample consisted of 225 individuals. Data was collected by the authors using a questionnaire, and correlation and descriptive statistics such as mean and factor analysis was employed for analysis. The results of the study showed that almost all students were satisfied with the quality of services the university offered. Furthermore, the findings showed that student happiness was positively and considerably impacted by the services provided. Hasan *et al.*, (2008) examined the relationship between service quality parameters, student satisfaction, and total service quality. This study used a set of questionnaires to gather information from 200 bachelor's degree candidates at two private universities. The study's conclusions show that service quality has an impact on students' satisfaction. Onditi and Wechuli (2017) looked into the quality of services and student satisfaction in postsecondary educational settings. There are reviews of the research on the idea of service quality in higher education and how it impacts student satisfaction. Both the gap model and the hierarchical service quality model were included in the theoretical framework of this paper. Institutions of higher learning should put in place mechanisms to collect student input so they may determine which elements of service quality are significant to their students and modify the relevant elements as needed. The review served as the foundation for the study's findings, which concluded that student happiness in higher education is significantly impacted

by service quality. Examining the relationship between service quality and student happiness at Gorontalo University was one of the objectives of Suyanto *et al.*'s (2019) study. An explanatory design was employed in the study. Students at Gorontalo University, who made up a sample of 200 out of the 3,726 total population, were given questionnaires. In order to use both quantitative and descriptive analysis to explain the hypothesis, the sample used partial least squares (PLS). The results of the study showed that service quality had an effect on student satisfaction. The study by Twum and Peprah (2020) assessed students' satisfaction with the services provided by the School of Business at Valley View University. The SERVQUAL Model, which comprises five aspects of service quality—tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and reliability—was used to administer a cross-sectional survey to 100 students. The data was analyzed using SPSS software, which also produced the mean and standard deviation and the regression results. Students' satisfaction with the School of Business's promise, tangible and responsive service quality was evident from the study's conclusions. This result showed that customer satisfaction may be entirely explained by the elements of service quality—assurance, tangible, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. Recent empirical research consistently demonstrates the critical relationship between service quality and student satisfaction in higher education. According to a study by Ali *et al.*, (2021), responsiveness ( $\beta = 0.389$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and reliability ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were the most important factors influencing service quality and the happiness of international students at numerous Malaysian universities. In a thorough investigation of 350 students in Denmark, Shahsavari and Sudzina (2017) discovered that service quality accounted for 63% of the variance in student satisfaction, with administrative support and faculty engagement serving as the best predictors ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The significance of prompt and accurate service delivery in academic administration was particularly emphasized by the study. The survey showed that overall satisfaction levels were significantly impacted by reliable service delivery and efficient handling of student concerns. In order to investigate service quality in the African context, Oluwunmi *et al.*, (2020) polled 419 students in private universities in Nigeria. Their study focused on how digital service delivery platforms may enhance the educational experience and discovered a strong correlation between administrative efficiency and student satisfaction ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

### Satisfaction versus Loyalty

In the field of higher education, student loyalty aids college administrators in creating suitable initiatives that support, create, cultivate, and preserve fruitful, long-term connections with both present and past students (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016). Recent research has established strong links between service quality and student loyalty in higher education. Latif *et al.*, (2019) conducted a comprehensive study of 600 students in

Pakistan, finding that service quality significantly influenced student loyalty both directly ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and indirectly through satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Their structural equation modelling revealed that satisfaction played a crucial mediating role in the service quality-loyalty relationship. Hameed *et al.*, (2021) examined the impact of service quality on student loyalty in UAE universities, surveying 427 students. Their findings showed that administrative service quality was a significant predictor of student loyalty ( $\beta = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with trust and satisfaction acting as mediating variables. The study particularly highlighted the importance of digital service delivery in building long-term student relationships. Supporting these findings, Qayyum *et al.*, (2021) investigated the relationship between service quality and student loyalty in Malaysian universities, studying 389 international students. Their research revealed that service quality dimensions explained 71% of the variance in student loyalty, with reliability and assurance being the strongest predictors.

Kunanusorn and Puttawong (2015) looked at the effects of student satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and institution image on students' loyalty. One hundred students from private universities in Thailand provided the empirical data. Data was gathered using the questionnaire approach and multi-stage sampling techniques. To test the hypothesis model, data analysis using descriptive statistics and structural equations model analysis were employed. The study's findings showed that loyalty among students was positively impacted by their level of satisfaction, among other factors. Through student pleasure, the impact of perceived value was also pertinent to student loyalty. The authors came to the conclusion that student satisfaction was a mediating variable, which suggested that it was the primary factor influencing students' loyalty.

Ng and Priyono (2018) investigated how service quality affected student loyalty and satisfaction at Riau Province's higher education institutions. One thousand students from thirteen colleges and universities make up the study sample. In addition to SPSS21 and AMOS21, the analytical tools utilized in this work were Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Despite finding a strong positive correlation between service quality and student satisfaction as well as between service quality and student loyalty, Ng and Priyono (2018) did not find a strong positive correlation between service quality and student loyalty.

The goal of Annamdevula and Bellamkonda's (2016) study was to suggest the application of a mediation model that uses student satisfaction to establish a connection between service quality and student loyalty. The authors gathered information from India's three oldest state universities using a survey study design. This study examined the suggested research paradigm and demonstrated how student satisfaction

functions as a mediator between service quality and student loyalty.

Mulyono *et al.*, (2020) examined how students' loyalty and happiness were impacted by the caliber of services they received. 312 pupils in all were chosen by the authors to serve as the study's sample. In this work, structural equation modeling was employed as a data analysis tool. The findings demonstrated that the relationship between academic performance and student loyalty, between non-academic performance and student loyalty, between reputation and student loyalty, and between campus access and student loyalty was considerably mediated by student satisfaction.

Higher education institutions' sustainability and survival rate are improved by the loyalty of their students. Investigating the mediation effect of a few important long-term connection antecedent variables between perceived service quality and latent variables related to student loyalty was the goal of Ismanova (2019). The outcomes of this research demonstrated that perceived service quality increases loyalty primarily through commitment. Commitment has a big impact on students' loyalty. However, loyalty is not much impacted by student satisfaction.

In order to determine the connections between service quality, student satisfaction, and student loyalty in the higher education sector using structural equation modeling, Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016) used a survey research design and gathered data from three of India's oldest state universities. According to the study, a significant factor in student satisfaction was service quality. The study adds to the body of knowledge by bolstering the claim that, in the higher education sector, student happiness mediates the relationship between service quality and student loyalty.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional research methodology, a quantitative approach, and a single time point during the 2024–2025 school year. "Cross-sectional research is intended to collect data from a group of subjects at one point in time," Schmidt and Brown (2019) emphasized. Using a straightforward random sampling technique, 385 undergraduate students were chosen as study participants from a total accessible population of 635 students. A self-made closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather primary data from the respondents. According to the research, surveys and questionnaires are useful tools for gathering the necessary data for cross-sectional studies (Schmidt & Brown, 2019). A four-point Likert scale was used in the survey, and answers ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The instrument/survey was pilot tested for validity and reliability because it was self-developed. A number of academic professionals and scholars examined the questionnaire to verify that the statements accurately reflected the purpose of the study.

Regarding reliability, 10% of the suitable sample size was gathered for the instrument's pilot test during the first data collection. Cronbach's alpha analysis of the pilot data produced a reliability coefficient of 0.86, demonstrating the instrument's strong reliability in measuring the study's goals. Important ethical factors such as anonymity and confidentiality were included in the study. Every student was informed of the study's goal and offered to join; participation in the research was entirely voluntary. To preserve anonymity in this study, the research team made sure that no identifiable information (such as student names or ID numbers) was collected. By remaining anonymous, this was done to encourage students to submit accurate and reliable data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This aspect of the study presents the results which were obtained from the analysis of the primary data collected. The analyses results relate to the study objective one and two. Results in relation to objective one dealt with key dimensions of customer service delivery at the university and results in relation to objective two deals with relationship between students' satisfaction with customer service delivery quality and their loyalty. The results are represented using tables and graphs for easy visualization.

### Research Objective One:

To assess and analyze the key dimensions of customer service delivery at a private university, focusing on student perceptions and satisfaction levels

across various service facets, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, accessibility, communication, competence, academic support, and administrative support.

Understanding the perceptions of undergraduate students, regarding the delivery of customer service, is important in enhancing the overall educational experience and in building student loyalty. Quality customer service will have a role in a student's overall satisfaction and engagement in the competitive field of higher education today. As institutions aim to foster an environment supporting care and responsiveness, it is necessary to give attention to how students perceive the service experience at the university. This study focused on undergraduate student perceptions of customer service delivery, related to 4 distinct dimensions of customer service delivery: responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and assurance. The goal of examining the data collected from undergraduate students was to identify weaknesses and strengths in customer service delivery. The findings of the analysis were meant to contribute to the literature on student perceptions of service delivery, while also providing a basis for the university administrators to consider in helping to improve customer service delivery. The results from this longitudinal systematic observation of undergraduate student perceptions can be considered in the Table below, organizing the findings related to students' perceptions as to the overall quality of customer service delivery.

**Table 1: Perception of undergraduate students about customer service delivery**

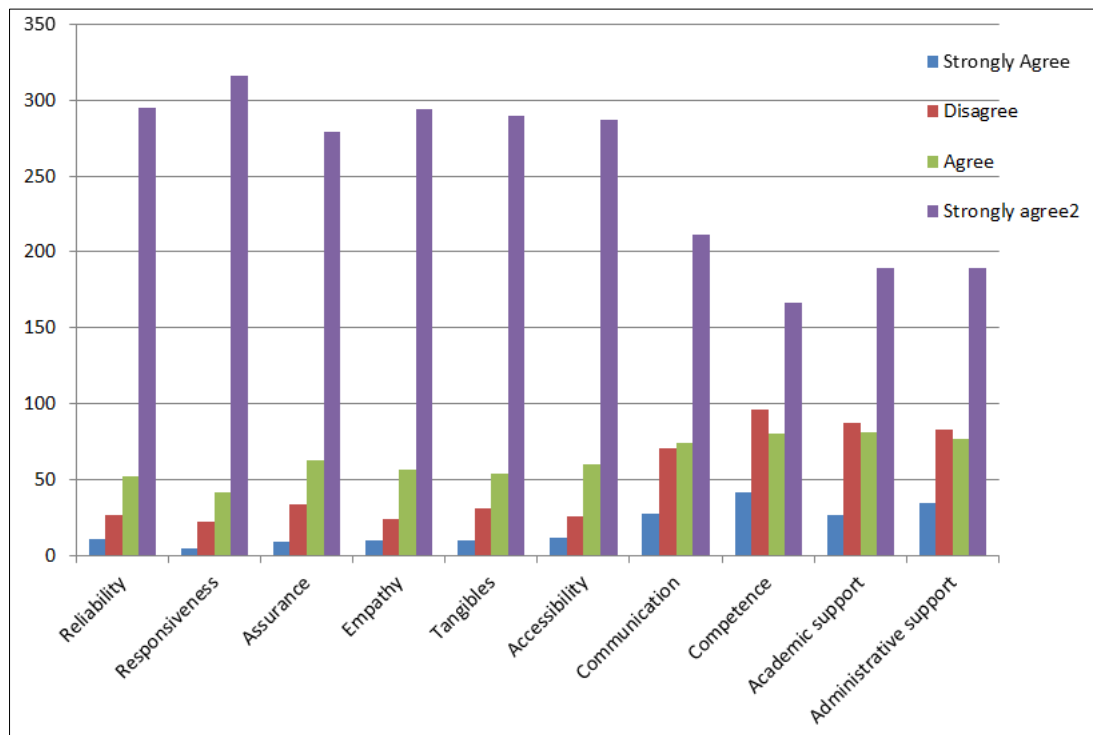
| STATEMENT  | SD (%)    | D (%)     | A (%)     | SA (%)     | $\bar{x}$ (std) |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Reliability:</b> The ability to provide promised services consistently and accurately   | 11 (2.9)  | 27 (7.0)  | 52 (13.5) | 295 (76.6) | 3.64 (0.73)     |
| <b>Responsiveness:</b> The willingness to help students and provide prompt service, including timely responses to inquiries and concerns             | 5 (1.3)   | 22 (5.7)  | 42 (10.9) | 316 (82.1) | 3.74 (0.62)     |
| <b>Assurance:</b> The knowledge and courtesy of staff, as well as their ability to inspire trust and confidence in students.                         | 9 (2.3)   | 34 (8.8)  | 63 (16.4) | 279 (72.5) | 3.59 (0.74)     |
| <b>Empathy:</b> The provision of caring, individualized attention to students, demonstrating understanding and compassion for their needs            | 10 (2.6)  | 24 (6.2)  | 57 (14.8) | 294 (76.4) | 3.65 (0.71)     |
| <b>Tangibles:</b> The physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel, including the overall environment of the institution              | 10 (2.6)  | 31 (8.1)  | 54 (14.0) | 290 (75.3) | 3.62 (0.74)     |
| <b>Accessibility:</b> The ease with which students can access services, including physical locations and online resources                            | 12 (3.1)  | 26 (6.8)  | 60 (15.6) | 287 (74.5) | 3.62 (0.74)     |
| <b>Communication:</b> The clarity and effectiveness of communication from staff to students, including the availability of information               | 28 (7.3)  | 71 (18.4) | 74 (19.2) | 211 (54.8) | 3.22 (0.99)     |
| <b>Competence:</b> The qualifications and skills of staff members that contribute to effective service delivery                                      | 42 (10.9) | 96 (24.9) | 80 (20.8) | 167 (43.2) | 2.97 (1.06)     |
| <b>Academic support:</b> the academic support provided by university enhances my learning experience   | 27 (7.0)  | 87 (22.6) | 81 (21.0) | 189 (49.1) | 3.13 (0.99)     |
| <b>Administrative support:</b> The university provides strong administrative support that fosters my sense of belonging to the university community. | 35 (9.1)  | 83 (21.6) | 77 (20.0) | 189 (49.1) | 3.10 (1.03)     |

*Source: Field study (2024).*

Key: Strongly Disagree = SD; Disagree =D; Agree = A; Strongly Agree = SA; Mean =  $\bar{x}$ ; Standard Deviation=std.  
Scale range: 1.0 - 1.49: Very Low (Strongly Disagree); 1.50 - 2.49: Low (Disagree); 2.50 - 3.49: High (Agree); 3.50 - 4.00: Very High (Strongly Agree)

The results in Table 1 revealed a high to very perception levels among students in relation to key customer service delivery dimensions. The students' responses showed a mean range from 2.77 to 3.74 with

standard deviation also ranging from 0.62 to 1.03 which also highlights a high level of variability in the students' responses.

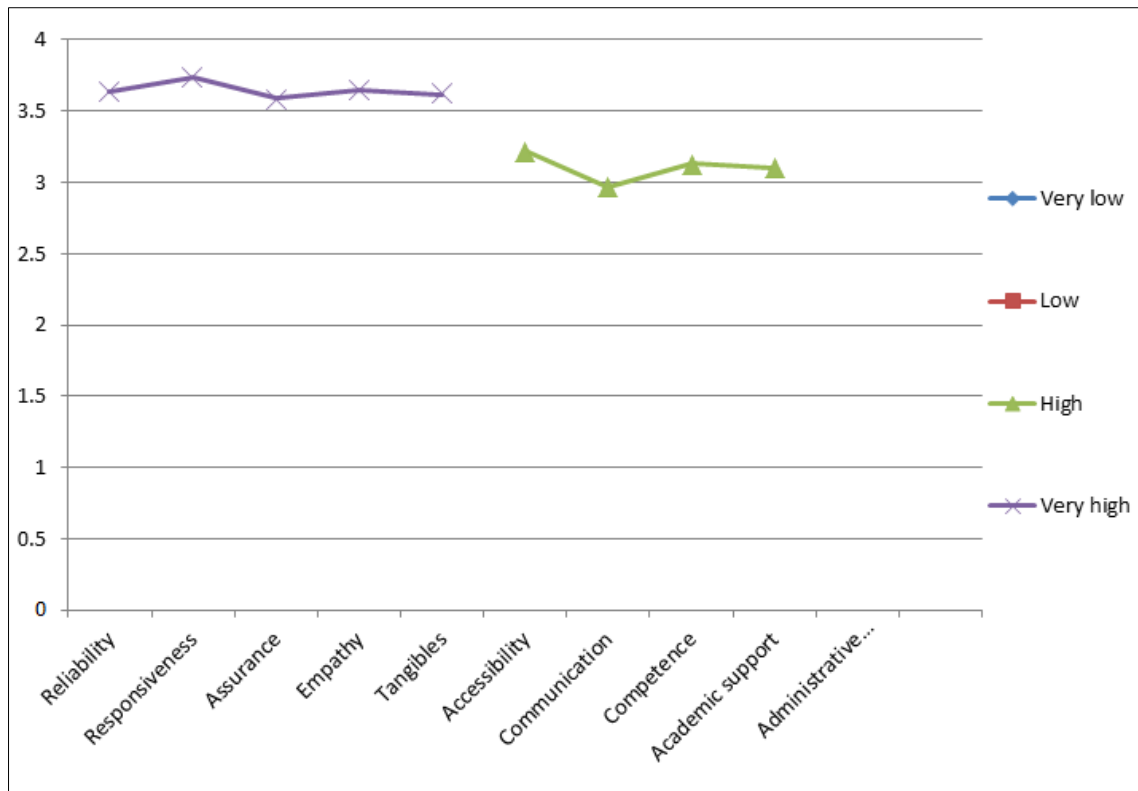


**Fig. 1: Bar Graph showing Students Ratings on Key Dimensions of customer service delivery**

From Fig.1, the graph reveals students ratings using the 4-point Likert scale strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4). The students' ratings help us in understanding the perceptions they have towards customer service quality delivery, which is important for improvement of the student's educational experience and building student loyalty. The bar chart provides information on student's ratings on major specific dimensions of service, these are: Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability, (M=3.64), Tangibles, Accessible (M=3.22), Communications, Academic and Administrative support and Assurance. Responsiveness received the highest agreement with a frequency of 316 (M=3.74), which suggests that students feel the University is generally responsive to their needs in a timely and proactive manner, which is a critical aspect in helping to create a caring and nurturing

environment. Empathy scores (M=3.65) suggest room for improvement with regard to authentic interactions, while Reliability scores indicate that students' perceptions regarding services reliability is, at best, moderate, which also suggests that services may not meet expectations. On the positive side of things, Assurance scores (M=3.59), suggest that students believe that staff have the skills and abilities to help them, which is a positive; however, this could be strengthened through staff professional development. Overall, the data yielded in this report offers evidence of strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of customer service but also offers a useful tool for administrators to develop stronger customer service strategies that results in a better student experience in a competitive higher education environment.





**Figure 2: Line graph depicting Key Dimensions of customer service delivery with high to very high perception levels expressed by students**

The findings from the line graph show a high level of agreement among respondents towards the university's customer service delivery, with perceptions predominantly occurring in the high or very high range, with mean scores consistently between 3.0 and 4.0. This means that undergraduates have positive feelings toward a number of service dimensions overall, but particularly to service dimensions of reliability and responsiveness (mean scores approximately 3.6 and 3.8). Such high ratings suggest that students value a university staff's ability to reliably deliver promised services, and that timely assistance from staff is also an important aspect of student experience. Overall, students have positive perceptions about customer service in general, and especially in regards to reliability and responsiveness; however, some additional investigation of some individual service dimensions reveals possible areas to build in future inspirational changes. For example, the assurance and empathy dimensions had a mean score of approximately 3.4 and 3.5 respectively; while students want a staff who is competent and knowledgeable about issues facing students, they also want personal attention that recognizes the unique needs of each student. This deserves emphasis upon the emotional connection in a service environment can help to positively enhance student satisfaction levels. Also, dimensions such as accessibility and communication, which had mean scores around 3.2 can demonstrate positively in a student interaction whether the university has effective or clear channels of information and services. While the university is continuously improving its service to

customers, concentrating efforts in these areas will be important to maintain high levels of satisfaction. The higher level of satisfaction in academic support and administrative support with means of 3.7 and 3.5, respectively, showed strong perceptions of belonging and support offered to students. This is of utmost importance to ensure their academic success and overall well-being. Taking a step back, these results generally present a promising picture of delivery of customer service at this university while offering relevant opportunity for improvement.

The evaluation of important aspects of customer service and the student responses are consistent with a number of previous studies in the literature that emphasize the critical role that customer service aspects play in the operation of postsecondary educational institutions. For example, Eberle *et al.*, (2016) carried out their research to determine and evaluate how students (clients) view the services offered by Brazilian universities by identifying the aspects or components associated with service quality. According to the authors, this could lead to improved administration and a greater competitive advantage in graduate programs. In order to develop strategies and actions for an effective management of graduate programs, they considered the current situation of increased competition among Brazilian universities to draw in and keep students, as well as the knowledge of student preferences and the aspects of quality service. According to Eberle *et al.*, (2016), each Brazilian university can prioritize its goals

and actions and support educational excellence by identifying the traits that indicate the quality dimensions associated to the services supplied.

Furthermore, Rachuonyo and Kiriri (2018) investigated the effects of assurance and responsiveness on customer satisfaction in the higher education industry, taking into account the difficulties that the nation's private universities confront, including a shortage of finance. Undergraduate students enrolled in Kenyan private universities made up the study's target demographic. The results showed a strong correlation between the degree of student satisfaction and the assurance and responsiveness aspects. Because of the consumers' (students') perceptions, the dimensions have an impact on the quality level, which in turn affects the satisfaction levels. The responsiveness component aids in reassuring service seekers that their demands and concerns are met at all times. It is crucial that service providers and those involved in the higher education industry concentrate on making their services appealing rather than only focus on productivity. 6.0 Suggested actions. According to the study, university administration and management should be cognizant of the factors that affect the provision of high-quality services; they should not only guarantee students that high-quality services will be provided, but also make sure that the assurance is followed through on.

One of the most crucial elements in the SERVQUAL model is the responsiveness dimension, which Raphael (2014) defined as "the willingness to help customers and provide prompt services" in his study on "service quality measurements in tertiary colleges in Kenya, a case study of Zetech College" (Raphael, 2014).

The objective of Ali *et al.*, (2022) was to determine the effects of service quality factors as responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, empathy, and dependability on customer satisfaction at University Utara Malaysia. Responsiveness (5 items), assurance (10 items), tangibility (5 items), empathy (6 items), and reliability (6 items) on customer satisfaction (6 items) were all measured by Ali *et al.*, (2022) using a 7-point interval scale. 160 postgraduate students at the

University Utara Malaysia (Sintok Campus) in northern Malaysia were given questionnaires in order to collect primary data. Adequate goodness of fit was found in measurement models using confirmatory factor analysis. Five direct consequences on customer satisfaction were identified by Ali *et al.*, (2022): (1) responsiveness and customer satisfaction; (2) empathy and customer satisfaction; (3) tangibility and customer satisfaction; (4) assurance and customer satisfaction; and (5) reliability and customer satisfaction. And this investigation comes to the conclusion that the updated model supports all of the hypotheses.

### Research Objective Two:

To analyze the relationship between perceived customer service delivery quality and student loyalty at a private university, assessing how variations in service quality impact students' commitment to recommending the institution to potential applicants.

It is essential for educational institutions that are trying to improve their reputation and attract new applicants to understand the relationship between customer service delivery quality and student loyalty. The relationship between perceived service quality and student loyalty is more meaningful, given the inferences that can be drawn about the institution's ability to satisfy its students. The objective two of this research aimed to analyze this relationship by determining how variations in customer service quality might impact students' intentions to recommend the university to other potential applicants. The hypothesis that guides this analysis ( $H_0$ ) is that there is no relationship between students' satisfaction levels regarding customer service delivery and their sense of loyalty to the university. By measuring this relationship we gain understanding regarding various dimensions of service delivery that could be improved upon, as well as understanding factors related to students' loyalty. The overall findings for this analysis aid the university in its policy development, but more importantly, contribute to developing a supportive educational environment fostering engagement with students' learning, retention, and loyalty. The following table illustrates the data collected for analysis.

**Table 2: Correlation between students' satisfaction with customer service delivery and their loyalty**

|   |                     | <b>Satisfaction Level</b> | <b>Loyalty Level</b> |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Satisfaction Level  | Pearson Correlation | 1                         | .125*                |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                           | .014                 |
|   | N                   | 385                       | 385                  |
| Loyalty Level   | Pearson Correlation | .125*                     | 1                    |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .014                      |                      |
|   | N                   | 385                       | 385                  |
| *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). |                     |                           |                      |

The correlation table examines the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty using Pearson correlation analysis. The results indicate a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.125, suggesting a weak

positive correlation between the two variables. This means that as satisfaction levels increase, loyalty levels also tend to increase, but the relationship is not strong. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.014, which is less than the

significance threshold of 0.05. This confirms that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance. The sample size (N) for both variables is 385, providing adequate data to support the findings. The asterisk (\*) next to the correlation coefficient emphasizes the significance of the relationship at the 0.05 level.

Although the relationship is statistically significant, the weak correlation suggests that satisfaction alone may not be a strong predictor of loyalty. While higher satisfaction levels are associated with increased loyalty, the small magnitude of the correlation coefficient implies that other factors, such as trust, perceived value, or emotional connection, might also influence loyalty. This highlights the need to consider satisfaction as one of many variables that contribute to fostering loyalty.

The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty has been explored extensively in literature. Oliver (1999) argues that satisfaction often serves as a precursor to loyalty by fostering trust and positive experiences. However, the strength of this relationship can vary depending on individual circumstances or context. Similarly, Reichheld (2003) points out that satisfaction, while necessary, is not sufficient to guarantee loyalty. For example, even satisfied customers may switch to competitors if they perceive better value elsewhere. In organizational and educational settings, Hallowell (1996) found that loyalty is often influenced by a combination of factors, such as emotional connection, perceived fairness, and satisfaction. These insights align with the weak correlation observed in this study.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that efforts to enhance loyalty should not focus solely on improving satisfaction levels. While satisfaction is important, strategies must also address other aspects of loyalty, such as trust-building, providing consistent value, and fostering emotional connections. Organizations should adopt a holistic approach to loyalty improvement by addressing multiple factors simultaneously. Additionally, further research is needed to identify other variables that influence loyalty. Conducting a multiple regression analysis could provide deeper insights into how satisfaction and other factors interact to affect loyalty.

Despite the statistical significance of the results, the weak correlation coefficient indicates that satisfaction accounts for only a small portion of the variation in loyalty. This underscores the need to explore additional factors, such as trust, emotional satisfaction, or perceived value, which may play a more substantial role in shaping loyalty. Furthermore, the analysis does not establish causation, meaning it is unclear whether satisfaction directly leads to loyalty or whether the relationship is mediated by other factors.

In conclusion, the correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant but weak positive relationship ( $r=0.125$ ,  $p=0.014$ ,  $r=0.125$ ,  $p=0.014$ ) between satisfaction and loyalty. While satisfaction contributes to loyalty, its influence is limited, suggesting that other factors are also important. These findings align with existing theories, such as Oliver's and Reichheld's work, which highlight that satisfaction alone is insufficient to ensure loyalty. To foster stronger loyalty, organizations must focus on a combination of factors, including trust, emotional connection, and perceived value. Further research is needed to explore these factors and their interactions with satisfaction.

At Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Mulyono *et al.*, (2020) examined the relationship between student satisfaction and loyalty and the quality of services they received. The findings demonstrated that, while students' satisfaction was not significant in mediating the relationship between program issues and students' loyalty, it was a significant mediator of the relationships between academics and students' loyalty, non-academics and students' loyalty, reputation and students' loyalty, and campus access and students' loyalty. The results indicate that in order to enhance students' academic performance and communication skills, instructors' quality must be improved. Conducting training and development initiatives and raising awareness programs for administrative workers are crucial from a non-academic perspective.

Purgailis & Zaksa (2012) investigated the elements that favorably influence students' perceptions of the quality, loyalty, and satisfaction of Latvian higher education institutions. While facilities, libraries, administrative staff, and information systems have no discernible impact on students' perceptions of quality or loyalty to higher education institutions, the results indicated that student-perceived quality correlates with elements like academic staff, study content, preparedness for the labor market, and acquired skills.

The impact of student perceived quality of service (PSQ) on continuation intention and willingness to suggest a course in a completely online institution was investigated by Martínez-Argüelles & Batalla-Busquets (2016). The authors discovered that each of these services significantly affects the students' loyalty and readiness to promote the university based on a survey that 1,870 students completed and an analysis that followed using structural equations. According to the study, student happiness may be more impacted by the perceived quality of administrative services than by other services.

A study conducted by DOAN (2021) examined how service quality contributes to student loyalty and how student satisfaction and university sustainability practices function as mediators in this relationship. 278

students from public universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, provided responses. The findings demonstrated that student satisfaction, loyalty, and institution sustainability practices are all significantly impacted by service quality. Additionally, the relationship between service quality and student loyalty is mediated by student satisfaction and institution sustainability practices. The authors stress that in order to increase student satisfaction and loyalty, important decision-makers in higher education must integrate sustainable practices and service quality into their approach.

Kakada *et al.*, (2019) looked into how student happiness was affected by academic support and other important aspects of customer service. A cross-sectional survey with 240 respondents was used by the authors. According to their findings, student happiness at both public and private colleges is favorably and significantly correlated with academic support and other important aspects of customer service.

### Key Findings

The bar chart provides information on student's ratings on major specific dimensions of service, these are: Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability, (M=3.64), Tangibles, Accessible (M=3.22), Communications, Academic and Administrative support and Assurance. Responsiveness received the highest agreement with a frequency of 316 (M=3.74), which suggests that students feel the University is generally responsive to their needs in a timely and proactive manner, which is a critical aspect in helping to create a caring and nurturing environment. Empathy scores (M=3.65) suggest room for improvement with regard to authentic interactions, while Reliability scores indicate that students' perceptions regarding services reliability is, at best, moderate, which also suggests that services may not meet expectations. On the positive side of things, Assurance scores (M=3.59), suggest that students believe that staff have the skills and abilities to help them, which is a positive; however, this could be strengthened through staff professional development.

The correlation table examines the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty using Pearson correlation analysis. The results indicate a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.125, suggesting a weak positive correlation between the two variables. This means that as satisfaction levels increase, loyalty levels also tend to increase, but the relationship is not strong. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.014, which is less than the significance threshold of 0.05. This confirms that the relationship between satisfaction with customer service delivery and loyalty is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance.

### CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the university has successfully established a high standard of customer service and campus life, aligning with literature that

emphasizes the importance of effective communication, approachability, and issue resolution in educational institutions. The positive ratings for friendliness, accessibility, and community engagement support the notion that students are more satisfied in environments where they feel connected and supported. However, the relatively lower score on feeling valued by staff suggests a possible gap in perceived personal attention, which, as studies suggest, is key to deepening student satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, the university's efforts have fostered a supportive environment, contributing positively to student satisfaction. The students' willingness to recommend the university and participate in fundraising efforts suggests a strong foundation of loyalty, even if some aspects, such as communication and faculty approachability, fall short of expectations. The findings show that students' satisfaction and loyalty are fostered when an institution meets its academic promises but can be further reinforced through stronger personal support structures. The data implies that addressing the areas of faculty support and communication could strengthen the student experience and enhance the university's reputation.

### Recommendations

To enhance satisfaction further, the university should focus on strengthening students' perception of being valued, as research highlights that students' feeling of recognition significantly influences overall satisfaction. Implementing staff training that emphasizes personalized student interactions and acknowledgment can improve students' sense of being valued. Maintaining high standards in friendliness, accessibility, and effective communication should also remain a priority to sustain satisfaction. Additionally, feedback channels could help identify specific areas within customer service where students feel underserved, enabling continuous improvement and student-centered growth.

To enhance overall student satisfaction, it is recommended that it prioritize improvements in faculty support and communication systems. Initiatives such as staff training on student engagement and more transparent communication channels could bridge the gap between expectations and actual experiences. Additionally, the university should leverage its positive reputation and high-quality facilities to build a more connected community promoting initiatives that foster student interaction and a sense of belonging. These efforts would likely deepen students' loyalty and commitment.

### Data Availability Statement

The raw data which were collected from students and analyzed to produce the findings of this study are available in a Microsoft Excel document with the Author. Therefore the data will only be made available from the Author upon request.



**Competing Interest:** The author declares that there are known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the outcome of this study.

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