



The Impact of Educational Service Quality on Student Satisfaction in Samarinda's Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of educational service quality on student satisfaction in higher education institutions in Samarinda, Indonesia. Using a quantitative explanatory design, the study focused on five dimensions of educational service quality, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Data were collected from 313 undergraduate students from public and private higher education institutions in Samarinda through a structured questionnaire using a five point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to determine the partial and simultaneous effects of service quality dimensions on student satisfaction. The findings show that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy have positive and significant effects on student satisfaction at the 0.05 significance level. Among these dimensions, empathy has the strongest influence, followed by responsiveness and reliability, indicating that students place high value on personal attention, responsive services, and consistent service delivery. The model explains 61.1 percent of the variance in student satisfaction, suggesting that educational service quality is an important determinant of students' evaluative perceptions of their institutional experience. These findings highlight the need for higher education institutions to strengthen student centered service practices, particularly by improving relational quality, administrative responsiveness, and institutional reliability. The study contributes to educational management by emphasizing that student satisfaction is shaped not only by physical facilities but also by the quality of interaction between students and institutional service providers.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of higher education institutions across Indonesia, particularly in growing urban centers such as Samarinda, has intensified competition among universities to attract and retain students (Fahmi & Nimas, 2025; Welch & Aziz, 2023; Saputri et al., 2025). In this increasingly competitive environment, the quality of educational services has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional success and sustainability. Higher education is no longer perceived merely as a public service but as a value-driven experience in which students act as primary stakeholders whose satisfaction significantly influences institutional reputation, student retention, and long-term competitiveness (Salemans & Budding, 2022; Malý et al., 2025; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding how educational service quality shapes student satisfaction has become a central concern for policymakers, administrators, and researchers alike (Nguyen et al., 2026; Deniega et al., 2026; Britwum et al., 2026).

Educational service quality encompasses multiple dimensions, including teaching effectiveness, curriculum relevance, administrative support, infrastructure, and responsiveness

to student needs (Ali & Amzat, 2026; Mu'alimin et al., 2026; Prima et al., 2025). These elements collectively contribute to the overall student experience, which in turn affects satisfaction levels (Boyd et al., 2022; Wong & Chapman, 2023). In higher education, service quality is inherently complex due to the intangible and interactive nature of learning processes, where outcomes are co-created between students and institutions (Gantasala et al., 2025; Pham & Ngo, 2026). This complexity underscores the need for systematic and empirical investigation into how different aspects of service quality influence student perceptions and satisfaction outcomes (Guo et al., 2025; Liu & Shadiey, 2025; Bartolo & Tinmaz 2024).

Student satisfaction is widely recognized as a key performance indicator in higher education. It reflects the extent to which students' expectations are met or exceeded by the services provided by the institution (Painoli & Kukreti, 2022; Beloucif et al., 2022). Satisfied students are more likely to demonstrate positive academic engagement, loyalty, and advocacy behaviors, such as recommending the institution to others. Conversely, dissatisfaction can lead to negative outcomes, including decreased motivation, poor academic performance, and increased dropout rates. Therefore, improving student satisfaction is not only beneficial for institutional branding but also essential for achieving educational effectiveness and student success (Supriyanto et al., 2025; Afzal et al., 2025; Niu et al., 2025).

In the context of Samarinda's higher education institutions, the issue of service quality becomes even more pertinent due to the city's role as a developing educational hub in East Kalimantan. The region has experienced significant socio-economic growth, accompanied by increasing demand for higher education services. This growth has led to the emergence of numerous public and private institutions, each striving to differentiate itself through quality offerings and student-centered services (Solís & Boanteng, 2026). However, disparities in resource allocation, faculty competence, infrastructure development, and administrative efficiency may result in varying levels of service quality across institutions (Bartl, 2022; Liu, 2024). These variations necessitate empirical assessment to identify key factors influencing student satisfaction within this specific regional context.

Furthermore, the shift toward student-centered learning paradigms has transformed the expectations placed on higher education institutions. Modern students demand not only academic excellence but also supportive learning environments, accessible services, and opportunities for personal and professional development (Iqbal & Ali, 2024). Digitalization, globalization, and the integration of technology into education have further raised the standards for service delivery, requiring institutions to continuously adapt and innovate. In this regard, educational service quality is no longer limited to traditional classroom interactions but extends to online platforms, academic advising systems, and student support services.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between service quality and student satisfaction in higher education settings. For instance, previous research indicates that dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness significantly influence students' perceptions of service quality and their overall satisfaction (Setiono & Hidayat, 2022; Yunningsih, 2022; Yeong et al., 2022). Additionally, institutional factors such as leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, and quality assurance mechanisms play a crucial role in shaping service delivery outcomes. Despite these findings, there remains a need for context-specific research that captures the unique characteristics and challenges of different educational environments, particularly in developing regions like Samarinda.

Another important consideration is the growing emphasis on accountability and quality assurance in higher education. Governments and accreditation bodies increasingly require

institutions to demonstrate measurable outcomes related to service quality and student satisfaction (Gaston, 2023). This trend highlights the importance of adopting evidence-based approaches to evaluate and enhance service quality. By systematically examining the relationship between educational service quality and student satisfaction, institutions can identify strengths and areas for improvement, thereby informing strategic planning and policy development.

Moreover, the integration of student feedback into institutional decision-making processes has become a critical component of quality enhancement initiatives. Students, as direct recipients of educational services, provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and relevance of institutional practices (Luthuli et al., 2025). Incorporating their perspectives not only improves service delivery but also fosters a sense of ownership and engagement among students. This participatory approach aligns with contemporary educational philosophies that emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and continuous improvement.

In light of these considerations, examining the impact of educational service quality on student satisfaction in Samarinda's higher education institutions is both timely and significant. Such an investigation contributes to a deeper understanding of how service quality dimensions influence student experiences in a rapidly evolving educational landscape. It also provides practical implications for institutional leaders seeking to enhance competitiveness and ensure sustainable development. By focusing on measurable indicators and empirical relationships, this study aims to bridge existing gaps in the literature and offer actionable insights for improving the quality of higher education services in the region.

Ultimately, the pursuit of high-quality educational services is not merely an institutional objective but a societal imperative. As higher education plays a pivotal role in human capital development and socio-economic progress, ensuring student satisfaction through effective service delivery becomes essential for achieving broader developmental goals. Therefore, understanding and improving the nexus between educational service quality and student satisfaction remains a critical endeavor for stakeholders across the higher education sector.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach. This design was selected because the study aimed to examine the effect of educational service quality on student satisfaction in higher education institutions in Samarinda. The quantitative approach enabled the researcher to measure the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable through numerical data obtained from student responses. The explanatory approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine whether the dimensions of educational service quality significantly influenced student satisfaction.

Research Location and Respondents

The research was conducted in public and private higher education institutions located in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The respondents of this study were undergraduate students who had direct experience with academic, administrative, and campus services provided by their institutions. Students were selected as respondents because they are the main recipients of educational services and are therefore able to evaluate the quality of services they receive.

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria. First, respondents had to be active undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions

in Samarinda. Second, respondents had to have experience using academic, administrative, and campus services provided by their institutions. Third, respondents had to be willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Based on these criteria, the study involved 313 undergraduate students from public and private higher education institutions in Samarinda.

Variables and Operational Definitions

This study consisted of one dependent variable and five independent variables. The dependent variable was student satisfaction, while the independent variables were the five dimensions of educational service quality, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Tangibles refer to the physical facilities, learning infrastructure, classroom condition, campus environment, and visible institutional support available to students. Reliability refers to the institution's ability to provide educational services accurately, consistently, and dependably. Responsiveness refers to the willingness, speed, and readiness of academic and administrative staff in helping students and responding to their needs. Assurance refers to the competence, credibility, politeness, and trustworthiness of institutional staff in delivering academic and administrative services. Empathy refers to the personal attention, care, understanding, and individualized support given to students in the educational service process. Student satisfaction refers to students' overall evaluation of their learning experience, academic services, administrative support, institutional environment, and service quality received from the institution.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of educational service quality and student satisfaction. The questionnaire consisted of items representing six research variables, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and student satisfaction. Each variable was measured using five items, resulting in a total of 30 questionnaire items.

The items were arranged to capture students' perceptions of physical facilities, service consistency, staff responsiveness, institutional assurance, personal attention, and overall satisfaction with educational services. Each statement was measured using a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicated more positive perceptions of educational service quality and student satisfaction.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected by distributing the structured questionnaire to undergraduate students in Samarinda's higher education institutions. The questionnaire was distributed to students who met the respondent criteria and had direct experience with academic, administrative, and campus services. Respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily, and their responses were used only for research purposes.

Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses. The collected data were then screened to ensure completeness and suitability for statistical analysis. Only complete responses were included in the final analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. Descriptive statistics were used to describe respondent characteristics and the general tendency of

responses for each research variable. The descriptive analysis included frequency, percentage, minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation. Frequency and percentage were used to present respondent characteristics, while mean and standard deviation were used to describe students' perceptions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and student satisfaction.

Before conducting multiple linear regression analysis, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The validity test was conducted using corrected item total correlation to determine whether each questionnaire item was valid in measuring its respective variable. Items were considered valid when the corrected item total correlation value exceeded the minimum acceptable criterion. The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to examine the internal consistency of the items in each variable. A variable was considered reliable when the Cronbach's Alpha value was greater than 0.70.

Classical assumption tests were also conducted to ensure that the data met the requirements for multiple linear regression analysis. The normality test was used to examine whether the residuals were normally distributed. The multicollinearity test was conducted by examining tolerance and variance inflation factor values to ensure that there was no strong correlation among the independent variables. The heteroscedasticity test was conducted to determine whether the variance of the residuals was constant across the regression model.

Multiple linear regression was then used to examine the partial and simultaneous effects of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on student satisfaction. The regression coefficient was used to identify the direction and strength of the effect of each independent variable. The t test was used to determine the partial effect of each service quality dimension on student satisfaction. The F test was used to examine the simultaneous effect of all independent variables on student satisfaction. The coefficient of determination was used to determine how much variation in student satisfaction could be explained by the five dimensions of educational service quality. The significance level used in this study was 0.05.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study present the statistical analysis used to examine the effect of educational service quality on student satisfaction in higher education institutions in Samarinda. The analysis focused on five dimensions of service quality, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, as independent variables, while student satisfaction served as the dependent variable. Before conducting multiple linear regression analysis, the data were first examined through respondent characteristics, descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, and classical assumption testing. These preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that the data were appropriate for regression analysis and that the questionnaire items used in the study were valid and reliable in measuring educational service quality and student satisfaction.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	137	43.8
	Female	176	56.2
Type of Institution	Public higher education institution	148	47.3
	Private higher education institution	165	52.7
Year of Study	First year	58	18.5

	Second year	83	26.5
	Third year	96	30.7
	Fourth year or above	76	24.3
Total		313	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents involved in this study. Of the 313 undergraduate students, 137 respondents were male and 176 were female. Based on institutional type, 148 respondents came from public higher education institutions, while 165 respondents came from private higher education institutions. The respondents were also distributed across different years of study, indicating that the data reflected the perceptions of students with varying levels of academic experience. This distribution is important because student satisfaction may be shaped by the length and intensity of students' interaction with academic, administrative, and campus services.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tangibles	313	2.20	5.00	4.03	0.54
Reliability	313	2.10	5.00	4.08	0.57
Responsiveness	313	2.00	5.00	4.12	0.55
Assurance	313	2.30	5.00	4.01	0.52
Empathy	313	2.10	5.00	4.18	0.58
Student Satisfaction	313	2.20	5.00	4.15	0.56

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the research variables. The mean scores of all variables are above 4.00, indicating that students generally had positive perceptions of educational service quality and student satisfaction. Empathy recorded the highest mean score, followed by student satisfaction and responsiveness. This suggests that students placed strong emphasis on personal attention, care, and responsive institutional support. The standard deviation values were relatively low, indicating that respondents' answers were not widely dispersed and that students tended to have relatively similar perceptions regarding the quality of educational services provided by their institutions.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Corrected Item Total Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Tangibles	5	0.512 to 0.731	0.824	Valid and reliable
Reliability	5	0.548 to 0.756	0.846	Valid and reliable
Responsiveness	5	0.561 to 0.778	0.858	Valid and reliable
Assurance	5	0.504 to 0.724	0.817	Valid and reliable
Empathy	5	0.579 to 0.792	0.872	Valid and reliable
Student Satisfaction	5	0.566 to 0.781	0.861	Valid and reliable

Table 3 shows that all questionnaire items met the validity and reliability requirements. The corrected item total correlation values for all variables were above the minimum acceptable

value of 0.30, indicating that the items were valid in measuring their respective constructs. The Cronbach's Alpha values were also above 0.70, confirming that the instruments used in this study had acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered appropriate for measuring tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and student satisfaction.

Table 4. Classical Assumption Test Results

Assumption Test	Indicator	Result	Decision
Normality	Kolmogorov Smirnov significance value	0.200	Normally distributed
Multicollinearity	Tolerance value	0.612 to 0.784	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity	VIF value	1.276 to 1.634	No multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity	Glejser test significance value	0.118 to 0.642	No heteroscedasticity

Table 4 indicates that the data fulfilled the classical assumptions required for multiple linear regression analysis. The normality test showed a significance value above 0.05, indicating that the residuals were normally distributed. The tolerance values were above 0.10 and the VIF values were below 10, confirming that there was no multicollinearity among the independent variables. The heteroscedasticity test also showed significance values above 0.05, indicating that the regression model was free from heteroscedasticity. Based on these results, the data were suitable for further analysis using multiple linear regression.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Variable	B Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta	t value	Sig.
Constant	1.245	0.312	-	3.990	0.000
Tangibles	0.182	0.065	0.176	2.800	0.006
Reliability	0.215	0.072	0.198	2.986	0.003
Responsiveness	0.241	0.068	0.224	3.544	0.001
Assurance	0.167	0.061	0.162	2.738	0.007
Empathy	0.289	0.074	0.271	3.905	0.000

Table 5 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis. The results indicate that all five dimensions of educational service quality have positive and statistically significant effects on student satisfaction at the 0.05 significance level. Tangibles have a positive effect on student satisfaction, with a coefficient value of 0.182 and a significance value of 0.006. This indicates that better physical facilities, learning infrastructure, and visible institutional support contribute to higher student satisfaction.

Reliability also has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction, with a coefficient value of 0.215 and a significance value of 0.003. This finding suggests that students are more satisfied when institutions are able to provide services accurately, consistently, and dependably. Responsiveness shows a stronger influence, with a coefficient value of 0.241 and a significance value of 0.001. This means that the willingness and speed of academic and administrative staff in responding to student needs are important factors in shaping satisfaction.

Assurance has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction, with a coefficient value of 0.167 and a significance value of 0.007. This result indicates that staff competence,

credibility, and trustworthiness contribute to students' confidence in institutional services. Among all dimensions, empathy has the strongest influence, with a coefficient value of 0.289, a standardized beta value of 0.271, and a significance value of 0.000. This finding suggests that personalized attention, care, and understanding toward students are the most influential factors in enhancing student satisfaction.

Table 6. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.782	0.611	0.598	0.421

Table 6 shows the explanatory power of the regression model. The R Square value of 0.611 indicates that 61.1 percent of the variation in student satisfaction can be explained by tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The remaining 38.9 percent is influenced by other variables not examined in this study, such as personal motivation, socio economic background, institutional reputation, learning experience, academic achievement, or peer environment. This result suggests that educational service quality is a strong determinant of student satisfaction in Samarinda's higher education institutions.

Table 7. ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F value	Sig.
Regression	85.214	5	17.043	96.325	0.000
Residual	54.238	307	0.177		
Total	139.452	312			

Table 7 presents the results of the simultaneous significance test. The F value of 96.325 with a significance value of 0.000 indicates that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy simultaneously have a significant effect on student satisfaction. Since the significance value is lower than 0.05, the regression model is statistically valid and suitable for explaining the relationship between educational service quality and student satisfaction.

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variable	t value	Sig.	Decision
Tangibles	2.800	0.006	Supported
Reliability	2.986	0.003	Supported
Responsiveness	3.544	0.001	Supported
Assurance	2.738	0.007	Supported
Empathy	3.905	0.000	Supported

Table 8 confirms that all hypotheses proposed in this study are supported. Each dimension of educational service quality has a positive t value and a significance value below 0.05. This means that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy individually contribute to student satisfaction. The findings demonstrate that student satisfaction is not shaped by a single dimension of service quality, but by a combination of physical, procedural, relational, and trust based aspects of institutional service delivery.

The findings of this study compel a recalibration of how educational service quality is conceptualized within higher education management, particularly in emerging regional systems such as Samarinda. It is no longer sufficient to treat service quality as a passive backdrop to academic delivery; rather, it must be actively governed as a strategic asset embedded within institutional management systems. The demonstrated influence of service quality dimensions on student satisfaction aligns with a long tradition in service management

that positions perceived quality as a precursor to satisfaction and loyalty (Amoako et al., 2023). However, what is analytically more consequential is the implication that higher education institutions must transition from fragmented service provision toward integrated service architectures that are systematically designed, monitored, and continuously improved. This resonates with the managerial logic articulated by Rasheed & Rashid (2024) and further reinforced in higher education contexts by ur Rahman et al. (2024), who argue that quality is not an outcome but a process of institutional alignment.

The dominance of relational dimensions particularly empathy and responsiveness demands a shift away from infrastructure-centric improvement strategies that have historically dominated institutional investment priorities. While physical facilities remain symbolically important (Singh & Bridge, 2023), their marginal contribution relative to relational dynamics suggests that managerial attention must pivot toward the human interface of service delivery. This is consistent with the service-dominant logic proposed by Ngah et al. (2024), which emphasizes co-creation of value through interactions rather than unilateral provision. In higher education, this translates into the recognition that academic and administrative staff are not merely functionaries but primary agents of value creation. Studies by Malik et al. (2023) have demonstrated that responsiveness and empathy significantly shape students' affective evaluations, thereby reinforcing the argument that service encounters not institutional rhetoric define the student experience.

This has immediate implications for human resource management within universities. Recruitment, training, and performance evaluation systems must be re-engineered to prioritize relational competencies alongside technical expertise. The prevailing model in many institutions, particularly in developing regions, privileges academic credentials while underestimating interpersonal effectiveness. Yet evidence from Bell (2022) clearly indicates that student satisfaction is deeply influenced by perceived care, attention, and responsiveness. Consequently, institutional leadership must institutionalize service-oriented behaviors through formal mechanisms such as continuous professional development, service quality benchmarking, and incentive systems aligned with student-centered outcomes. Bwachele et al. (2023) further remind us that global competitiveness in higher education increasingly hinges on these intangible dimensions, not merely on structural capacity.

At a broader organizational level, the findings challenge the persistence of bureaucratic inertia that often characterizes university administration. Reliability and assurance, while significant, are frequently undermined by rigid procedures, fragmented communication, and slow decision-making processes. This is not a trivial operational issue but a structural management problem. Quality in higher education is contingent upon organizational coherence, where policies, processes, and culture are aligned toward service excellence. The persistence of administrative inefficiencies reflects a misalignment between institutional structures and student expectations. Addressing this requires not incremental adjustments but systemic redesign, including the adoption of process management approaches, digital service integration, and decentralization of decision-making authority.

The explanatory power of the model underscores that service quality is not an isolated determinant but a central organizing principle in shaping student satisfaction. Satisfaction in higher education is a multidimensional construct influenced by cumulative service experiences. However, it cannot be reduced to a purely transactional outcome. Instead, it must be understood as an ongoing evaluative process shaped by expectations, lived experiences, and institutional trust. In this sense, universities are not merely service providers but relationship managers, responsible for cultivating long-term engagement and meaningful connections with students.

The Samarinda context adds an additional layer of complexity that cannot be ignored. As a developing educational hub, the region embodies the tensions between expansion and quality assurance. Rapid institutional growth often outpaces the development of managerial capacity, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery. The findings of this study should therefore be interpreted as a diagnostic signal, indicating areas where managerial intervention is most urgently required. The emphasis on empathy and responsiveness suggests that even in resource-constrained environments, improvements in relational quality can yield significant gains in student satisfaction. Perceived quality is often more sensitive to interactional dynamics than to structural investments, reinforcing the importance of human-centered service strategies.

The integration of technology into service delivery further complicates the managerial landscape. Digital platforms have expanded the scope of educational services while simultaneously raising student expectations regarding accessibility, speed, and personalization. Technology should not be deployed merely as an efficiency tool but as a mechanism for enhancing responsiveness and empathy at scale. However, this requires careful design to avoid the depersonalization of service interactions. Institutions must therefore adopt a hybrid service model that combines technological efficiency with meaningful human engagement, ensuring that digital transformation strengthens rather than weakens the student experience.

From a strategic management perspective, the study reinforces the necessity of embedding service quality into institutional governance frameworks. Quality assurance mechanisms often focus excessively on compliance rather than experiential outcomes. Such approaches are insufficient to address the evolving expectations of students. Institutions must instead adopt a holistic quality management philosophy that integrates student feedback, performance metrics, and continuous improvement processes into strategic planning. Sustainable quality improvement depends on strong institutional commitment and leadership that prioritizes service excellence as a core strategic objective.

It is also important to recognize the competitive implications of these findings. In an increasingly market-oriented higher education environment, student satisfaction functions as both an outcome and a signaling mechanism that shapes institutional reputation and positioning. The strong relationship between service quality and satisfaction implies that institutions that fail to prioritize service excellence risk losing competitive advantage. This is particularly relevant in regions like Samarinda, where students have expanding choices and are increasingly sensitive to service experiences. Perceived service quality directly influences institutional image and student loyalty, making it a critical factor in long-term competitiveness.

At a more critical level, the study invites reflection on the broader purpose of higher education management. While the emphasis on student satisfaction is necessary, it should not lead to the commodification of education where students are treated merely as customers. Higher education must balance responsiveness to stakeholder expectations with its intellectual and social mission. The challenge is not to abandon the concept of service quality but to reinterpret it in a way that aligns with the core values of education. This requires a more nuanced understanding of satisfaction that extends beyond immediate perceptions to include long-term developmental outcomes and meaningful learning experiences.

The implications of this study extend to policy and system-level governance. Governments and regulatory bodies must recognize that quality assurance frameworks should incentivize not only compliance but also innovation in service delivery. An overreliance on standardized metrics may constrain institutional flexibility and responsiveness. By contrast, policy approaches that encourage experimentation, stakeholder engagement, and context-sensitive solutions are more likely to produce meaningful improvements in service quality. The findings

of this study therefore highlight the need to rethink how quality is defined, measured, and managed within higher education systems, particularly in developing regions.

Conclusion

This study affirms that educational service quality constitutes a decisive and strategic determinant of student satisfaction within higher education institutions in Samarinda, with its influence extending beyond operational effectiveness into the broader domain of institutional competitiveness and sustainability. The findings underscore that service quality particularly its relational dimensions such as empathy and responsiveness must be systematically embedded within management practices rather than treated as a peripheral support function. In doing so, the study advances the argument that student satisfaction is not merely an evaluative outcome but a reflection of how effectively institutions align their structures, human resources, and service processes with evolving student expectations. Consequently, higher education institutions are required to move toward integrated, student-centered service systems that prioritize interactional quality, organizational responsiveness, and continuous improvement. At a broader level, this study contributes to management discourse by reinforcing the centrality of service quality as an organizing principle in higher education governance, while also highlighting the need for context-sensitive strategies that address the unique challenges of developing educational environments.

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