



## EXCELLENT SERVICE IN INCREASING STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC SERVICES

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### Article Info

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### ABSTRACT

This study seeks to ascertain the impact of superior service on student satisfaction with academic services, evaluated through five dimensions: physical appearance, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, and assurance. Data collection involved interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentation, followed by analysis through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion formulation. The research findings suggest that academic services at FITK UIN SU are typically effective and of excellent quality across all dimensions. Nonetheless, the physical appearance elements remain inadequate, including diminutive projectors, sluggish internet connectivity, inadequate air conditioning, compromised seating, and classroom capacity that fails to accommodate the student population. Nonetheless, the amenities for the postgraduate courses are more sufficient. These findings underscore the necessity for enhancements in buildings and infrastructure to bolster academic services. This research offers both theoretical and practical insights into educational policy, namely in primary services aimed at improving student happiness.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Service activities are integral to human existence, as individuals depend on the services of others to meet their needs. Service, defined as the fulfillment of needs through the direct actions of others, is a term that retains significance across many institutional contexts. Service extends beyond business enterprises and has increasingly permeated government entities. Hardiyansyah defines "service" as an action aimed at assisting, preparing, and managing the transfer of products or services from one party to another (Hardiyansyah, 2011).

According to Tjiptono and Diana, higher education institutions, as service providers characterized by significant interaction between providers and users, are assessed based on five criteria that determine service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Tjiptono & Anastasia, 2000).

Sallis thinks that the caliber of academic services is paramount in educational institutions. Academic services are deemed high quality if they fulfill the requirements of their clientele. According to Lupiyoadi, the quality of academic services is defined as the value assigned by customers based on the degree to which the delivered academic services fulfill their expectations. Students will deem academic services to be of good quality

if they fulfill their demands (Lupiyoadi & Hamdan, 2008). Effectiveness denotes the degree to which a service fulfills its anticipated objectives, specifically delivering client happiness via superior service quality.

Zeithaml identified the essential dimensions influencing the quality of Prima's academic services through the SERVQUAL framework, which includes: (1) Responsiveness (the institution's promptness and willingness to address students' needs); (2) Assurance (the staff's knowledge, demeanor, politeness, courtesy, friendliness, and reliability in delivering academic services); (3) Reliability (the consistency and dependability in providing services accurately and on time); (4) Empathy (the consideration of individual student values, exemplified by remembering their names); (5) Tangibles (the physical manifestations of service quality, including facilities, equipment, and communication tools for students) (Susanto, 2014).

Delivering exceptional service is crucial for enhancing student satisfaction and fostering a positive relationship between the university and its students. This corresponds with the primary objective of exceptional service, which is student satisfaction, evidenced by the lack of complaints from students on the services provided. Should the university fail to deliver optimal service, public sentiment will deteriorate, resulting in increased missed chances. The efficacy of educational services is contingent upon their quality; hence, as student satisfaction is the primary objective of higher education institutions, these institutions must prioritize it.

Consequently, exceptional service that meets the requirements and circumstances of students is essential to assist and motivate them (Ayuni, 2011). As students are both clients and consumers of higher education institutions, universities must possess the capability to guarantee the quality of education and academic services. Exceptional services facilitate the attainment of educational objectives through learning activities tailored to student requirements (Ratnasari, 2016). Higher education institutions must perpetually evolve to deliver exceptional service to their students. These measures are crucial for enhancing services progressively, as an elevation in educational quality will perpetuate an improvement in student happiness.

Student satisfaction with university services will positively influence the institution. The capacity of higher education institutions to fulfill students' demands through optimal service provision will dictate the success of university education, since student satisfaction serves as an indicator of the institution's effectiveness in catering to its clientele (Ariyani, 2010). If students perceive the service as inadequate, it will impact student happiness and the university's overall reputation. If students are content with the service offered, their trust will augment, thus resulting in a higher enrollment of students.

In relation to the aforementioned difficulties, it is imperative to investigate exemplary service in enhancing student contentment with academic services at FITK UIN SU, as well as to comprehend student satisfaction with the academic services offered. The researcher intends to perform a study entitled: "Excellent Service in Enhancing Student Satisfaction with Academic Services at FITK UIN SU," based on these issues and phenomena.

This research intends to explain exemplary service in improving student satisfaction with academic services, specifically with tangibility at FITK UIN SU. Secondly, elucidate the role of exemplary service in augmenting student satisfaction with academic services, particularly via the lens of responsiveness at FITK UIN SU. Third, investigate the role of exceptional service in improving student satisfaction with academic services, focusing on reliability at FITK UIN SU. Fourth, examine the role of exemplary service in improving student happiness with academic services via the lens of empathy at FITK UIN SU, and fifth, investigate the impact of outstanding service on student satisfaction with academic services from the perspective of assurance at FITK UIN SU.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research approach. Creswell defines qualitative research as an inquiry process aimed at understanding social phenomena and human problems through methodological study (Creswell, 2017). In this approach, the researcher creates a complex picture, examines words, reports detailed opinions from respondents, and conducts research in a natural setting. Qualitative research emphasizes real-world findings. According to Murdiyanto, qualitative research focuses on processes and meaning (Murdiyanto, 2020). Based on the nature of the research problem, this study adopts a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data collection from subjects and informants, as well as analysis, is carried out holistically and comprehensively through qualitative research using a phenomenological approach, which involves interpretative and naturalistic analysis of observed phenomena. The qualitative approach is the central focus of this study.

The use of qualitative research with a phenomenological approach is reflected in the selection of research subjects and informants, as well as in the data collection and analysis techniques applied. The following reasons justify why this study mainly adopts a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach: First, the research problem is addressed through understanding (*verstehen*) and meaning-making, which are key reasons for using a qualitative method.

Second, this research aims to explore and understand Excellent Service in Enhancing Student Satisfaction with Academic Services at FITK UIN SU.

The scope of this study, as aligned with the research title, includes:

1. Excellent service in enhancing student satisfaction with academic services viewed from the responsiveness aspect.
2. Excellent service viewed from the assurance aspect.
3. Excellent service viewed from the reliability aspect.
4. Excellent service viewed from the empathy aspect.
5. Excellent service viewed from the tangible aspect at FITK UIN SU.

This study employed many strategies for data collecting, including observation, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). All of these strategies were utilized to collect data on the impact of Excellent Service on Student Satisfaction with Academic Services at FITK UIN SU. This study's data analysis adheres to the Miles and Huberman framework, comprising three phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation. Miles and Huberman present a data analysis framework comprising data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2014).

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This research seeks to ascertain the degree to which exemplary service has been executed in enhancing student satisfaction with academic services at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FITK) UIN North Sumatra. The assessment was performed according to the five principal aspects of service in the SERVQUAL model: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Data were gathered via interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), field observations, and documentation, thereafter processed by data reduction methods, data presentation, and thematic conclusion formulation.

Regarding tangibles, it was determined that the majority of students expressed dissatisfaction with the condition of the physical facilities for academic support. Certain classrooms possess a capacity that is incongruent with the student population, numerous air conditioning units are inoperative, and the projectors employed are inadequately sized, hindering visibility of lecture materials from all areas of the room. The existing internet network is regarded as slow and unpredictable, prompting students and professors to frequently utilize personal hotspots. Moreover, there are damaged and inoperable chairs. This state signifies that the facilities and infrastructure are not yet adequately equipped to facilitate a comfortable and successful learning experience. Nonetheless, the classrooms for the Master's and Doctoral programs are regarded as excellent and adequately fulfill the students' requirements. This gap must be rectified by the faculty management to provide consistent standards for physical services.

The reliability dimension indicates that most academic services at FITK UIN SU have been consistently and dependably executed. Instructors deliver courses aligned with their specialization and employ diverse interactive and pertinent pedagogical techniques. The completion of the KRS, guidance services, grading, and other administrative responsibilities is executed punctually in accordance with established norms. Lecturers and academic personnel are evaluated for their dedication to executing academic responsibilities with professionalism, while students experience assurance throughout the entire process, from the commencement of lectures to the thesis preparation phase.

The lecturers and faculty leaders exhibit a proactive and attentive approach to addressing students' academic demands. Students feel supported as professors are readily accessible via multiple communication channels, including WhatsApp, email, or in-person meetings. The responses provided are prompt and focused on solutions, encompassing academic concerns such as KRS consultations, thesis revisions, and challenges encountered during both online and offline sessions. Certain instructors proactively remind students to submit

their tasks punctually and offer encouragement to maintain their academic concentration. This demonstrates a strong dedication to delivering responsive and adaptive services to the evolving requirements of students.

In the assurance dimension, the service is delivered by maintaining the principles of courtesy, amiability, and professionalism. Students convey that they have comfort and confidence in their interactions with lecturers and academic staff due to their courteous demeanor, lack of intimidation, and willingness to engage in discourse. The instructor elucidates the evaluation procedure with clarity and motivates students to engage actively in their learning. This service-oriented mentality fosters a constructive academic environment and cultivates students' confidence in the prevailing system.

The dimension of empathy is distinctly evident in the interactions among professors, staff, and students. Student grievances, whether pertaining to academics or non-academics, are handled with diligence and consideration. Lecturers serve not only as educators but also as mentors and empathetic listeners who comprehend students' challenges, including psychological stress, familial issues, or financial limitations. Some lecturers offer individualized advice outside class hours as a demonstration of support. This indicates that the element of empathy has been embedded in the academic service culture at FITK UIN SU.

The research findings demonstrate that exceptional service has been effectively implemented, significantly enhancing student happiness. The qualities of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were positively assessed by students, however the tangibles factor necessitated significant attention and enhancement. These findings suggest that while the service content is already ideal, the physical quality and infrastructure require immediate enhancement to avoid hindering uniform service satisfaction. This research offers significant insights for the formulation of academic service policies, especially in devising methods to improve services according to the actual needs of students and the quality benchmarks of higher education services.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The physical facilities at FITK UIN SU are not yet sufficiently adequate. Facilities such air conditioning, projectors, internet connectivity, and classroom seating remain insufficient for effective learning. Nonetheless, the amenities for the Master's and Doctoral programs are already commendable.

The amicable demeanor and systematic service provided by the management and professors ensure student satisfaction. Secondly, the dimension of reliability is seen in the professional demeanor of the leadership, faculty, and staff in delivering prompt, precise, and accountable academic services. Instructors impart knowledge based on their areas of specialization and engage with students, particularly in supervising capstone projects. The dimension of responsiveness indicates high service quality. Instructors and administrators promptly address students' requirements, both personally and via digital platforms. Supervising instructors consistently prompt students to submit their final assignments punctually. The dimension of empathy is manifested in the attentiveness of leaders and lecturers to the grievances and personal circumstances of the pupils. They attentively listen, uphold confidentiality, and offer answers with a compassionate and empathetic demeanor. The assurance component is manifested by amicable, courteous demeanor and efficient communication among lecturers, administration, and students. Cordial care that addresses student demands also elevates satisfaction with academic services.

Overall, the service at FITK UIN SU has been well executed; nonetheless, enhancements in supporting facilities and infrastructure are necessary to attain optimal student satisfaction.

##### Suggestion

According to the data from this research, there are several points that the researcher proposes as follows:

1. The Dean of the Faculty and the Head of the Study Program at FITK UIN SU must consistently enhance their academic services to align with student needs. The academic services offered must exemplify quality by exceptional performance in tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance.
2. It is essential for the lecturers of FITK UIN SU to deliver optimal service to students, whether in the capacity of course instructors, academic advisers, or thesis supervisors. This can be accomplished through academic services that emphasize effective communication, exhibit empathy in student interactions, ensure promptness and responsiveness, and demonstrate professional competence. Furthermore, throughout academic services, lecturers must consistently exhibit polite attitudes, respectful language, and a cheerful, hospitable approach. All manifestations of exemplary service exhibited by lecturers in academic services would augment student satisfaction with such services.

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