

EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION SERVICES AT THE FACULTY OF VOCATIONAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract

Academic administration services are a crucial component in supporting the smooth running of higher education, particularly within the Faculty of Vocational Studies, which emphasizes speed, accuracy, and efficiency. This study aims to evaluate the quality of academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra, based on student perceptions, identify barriers in the service process, and explore user expectations and input on service quality improvements. The approach used was descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation of 10 purposively selected respondents. The results showed that service quality was considered quite good in terms of reliability and tangibles, but weaknesses remained in the dimensions of responsiveness, empathy, and assurance. Obstacles found included: lack of clarity in procedural information, unresponsiveness from staff, the absence of an online document tracking system, and minimal empathy in service communications. Service users expect improvements in interpersonal communication, procedural consistency, and accelerated service through the digitization of the administrative system. Therefore, improving the quality of academic administration services needs to focus on strengthening staff competencies, developing technology-based service systems, and establishing a humanistic and responsive service culture.

Keywords: *Academic administration services, service quality, students, vocational, qualitative approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a strategic role in developing high-quality and competitive human resources. Not only the teaching and learning process, but also supporting service systems such as academic administration also play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth running of students' studies (Lutvianingsih, 2025). These services include completing the Student Study Plan (KRS), processing certificates, document legalization, and other academic information (Abubakar, 2022). Good administrative services will support an orderly academic climate and increase student satisfaction (Turrahma, 2022). Conversely, suboptimal services can lead to academic delays, procedural confusion, and dissatisfaction with the institution. In vocational education, which emphasizes accuracy and speed, efficient service is essential (Rahayu, 2024). However, based on initial observations, administrative services at the USU Faculty of Vocational Studies still face challenges, such as document delays, a lack of clear procedures, and suboptimal staff response. Furthermore, digital systems like SIAKAD have not been fully implemented, resulting in manual processes and challenges for students with off-campus activities. Another issue raised concerns the lack of friendliness and clarity of communication from staff, highlighting the importance of comprehensive service quality improvements, not just procedural, but also attitudes and empathy. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation is necessary to ensure services are more professional, responsive, and up-to-date. It can also serve as a benchmark for other faculties in improving the quality of academic administration services.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Quality of Service

Service quality is a strategic factor determining the success of organizations, including in the education sector. Quality service not only meets basic needs but also exceeds user expectations (Surti & Anggraeni, 2020).

According to Tjiptono (2009), service quality encompasses accuracy of needs and delivery methods. This emphasizes the importance of procedural aspects as well as interpersonal interactions. In the context of public services, including higher education, service quality impacts student satisfaction and trust in the institution. Efforts to improve quality need to focus on human resource competency, system efficiency, and the availability of supporting facilities.

Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) SERVQUAL model identifies five main dimensions of service quality:

1. **Tangibles**– includes physical facilities and supporting service facilities such as cleanliness of the TU room, work equipment, and information media.
2. **Reliability**– the ability of officers to provide services accurately and on time, such as processing academic documents according to procedures.
3. **Responsiveness**– the responsiveness of officers in responding to student needs, questions or complaints quickly and in a friendly manner.
4. **Assurance**– professionalism, knowledge and courtesy of staff in providing service, which fosters a sense of security and trust.
5. **Empathy**– personal attention and concern for the condition of individual students through warm communication and humanistic service.

These five dimensions serve as important references in evaluating and improving academic administration services at the USU Faculty of Vocational Studies, so that they can meet student expectations and support the smooth running of the academic process.

2.2 Academic Administration Services

Academic administration services are a series of activities that support the smooth running of academic functions at universities, such as student data management, KRS approval, active student letter submission, and transcript and graduation administration. According to Sellang (2016), these services must meet the basic principles of public service, namely: punctuality, accuracy of information, transparency of procedures, and the attitude and competence of staff. Responsive and transparent services are crucial to ensure students do not experience obstacles in their academic activities. At the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra, academic administration services are a central point of interaction between students and the institution. Prompt and professional service not only streamlines the academic process but also enhances student trust and satisfaction with the institution. Conversely, slow, uninformative, or unfriendly service can create negative perceptions of faculty management. Therefore, regular evaluation of the quality of administrative services is necessary to identify weaknesses and develop strategies for future improvement.

2.3 Service Evaluation

Service evaluation is a systematic process of measuring and assessing the quality of services provided to the public or service users. This evaluation aims to determine the level of satisfaction, effectiveness, efficiency, and gaps between expectations and reality (Yulianti & Wahdah, 2018). (Patton, 2008) explains that service evaluation using a qualitative approach aims to explore the subjective experiences, meanings, and perceptions that service users have of the services they receive. This evaluation focuses not only on numbers, but also on narratives, descriptions, and the context of individual experiences. In the context of academic administration, evaluations are conducted to identify areas for improvement, identify factors causing dissatisfaction, and formulate practical and applicable solutions. One method that can be used is in-depth interviews with students as service recipients.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study uses the service quality theory of Parasuraman et al. (1988) as an evaluation framework to explore students' experiences with academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra. The five dimensions of SERVQUAL (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy) are used as tools to gather in-depth information through interviews and observations. This framework believes that good service quality will increase user satisfaction and build a positive image of the institution. The conceptual framework model is as follows:

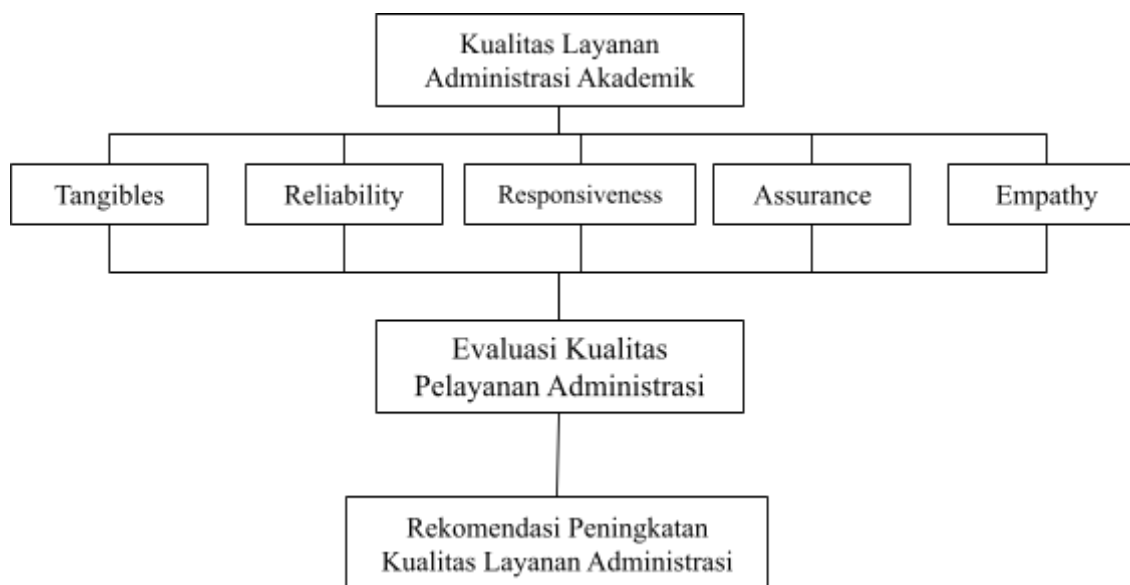


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Types of research

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to evaluate the quality of academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra. This method aims to understand the phenomenon based on the direct experiences of the research subjects through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The researcher acts as the primary instrument and analyzes the data inductively to explore the perceptions, obstacles, and expectations of students, lecturers, and staff regarding the administrative services provided.

3.2 Research Location and Sample

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra, Medan, for three months, from March to May 2025, covering the preparation stage through to report preparation. The study population was students of the Faculty of Vocational Studies, with the sample selected using a purposive sampling method, which intentionally selected respondents deemed relevant and experienced in academic administrative services. A total of 10 respondents were selected to provide in-depth data in accordance with the focus and objectives of the study.

3.3 Data Analysis Methods and Techniques

The methods used in this research included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner to directly observe the academic administration service process at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, USU. Interviews were conducted directly with students using structured and semi-structured questions to explore their experiences and perceptions of the service. Documentation was used to collect secondary data, such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), archives, and internal reports relevant to the service system. The data analysis method used follows a qualitative descriptive approach with an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The collected data is filtered and categorized, then presented in narrative or visual form to identify patterns and relationships. Next, Verification is used to ensure the accuracy of information before drawing tentative conclusions that can be strengthened by further findings. This approach aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the quality of academic administrative services and a basis for recommendations for future improvements.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Description of Research Location

The Faculty of Vocational Studies at the University of North Sumatra (USU) is a new faculty established in 2022 in response to the demands of industry and the workplace for highly skilled and ready-to-use graduates. The faculty offers 14 Diploma III programs and 7 Applied Bachelor programs covering the natural sciences, social and political sciences, computer science, and culture. Supported by two professors, 68 lecturers, and 49 administrative staff, the faculty has adequate human resources to support academic activities and administrative services. The role of administrative staff is crucial, particularly in the efficient and high-quality implementation of academic administration services, which is also the focus of this research. As a vocational education institution, the faculty envisions becoming a leading center for vocational education, producing superior and globally competitive human resources. Its mission includes providing vocational education oriented toward character development and professionalism in line with industry needs, as well as producing graduates of international standards to support national industrial growth. The USU Faculty of Vocational Studies upholds the values of excellence, spirituality, and respect, and is committed to producing graduates who are creative, adaptive, and possess high integrity. This commitment underpins every aspect of education delivery, including building an administrative service system that supports the smooth running of students' academic processes.

4.2 Respondent Description

This study involved 10 students from the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra, with a balanced composition of respondents based on gender, namely 5 males and 5 females (50% each). Respondents came from 10 different study programs, each represented by one person (10%), such as Tax Administration, Japanese Language, Informatics Engineering, and others. This diversity aims to ensure that the collected data evenly reflects the views of various academic backgrounds. Judging by semester, most respondents were in the middle to final semester, with 4 students (40%) in semester 5, while 2 students (20%) each in semesters 2, 3, and 6. This indicates that most respondents had sufficient experience using academic administration services, thus the information obtained in this study is considered relevant and in-depth for evaluating the quality of service at the Faculty of Vocational Studies at USU.

4.3 Research result

4.3.1 Tangibles Dimensions (Physical Evidence)

Tangible dimensions of academic administrative services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra, include the condition of physical facilities, room cleanliness, environmental comfort, and staff appearance. Interview results showed that most respondents felt the Administration room was clean, tidy, and comfortable, supported by adequate lighting and air conditioning. The arrangement of tables and chairs, and a professional work environment also contributed to a positive impression of service quality. However, several respondents reported shortcomings in terms of physical comfort, particularly regarding the limited space and lack of adequate waiting areas. During peak hours, students often had to stand for extended periods due to insufficient seating. This indicates limited space capacity, which can impact the user experience, even if the visuals and cleanliness of the space meet expectations.

The appearance of the administrative staff was considered quite professional, with their work attire neatly and in accordance with institutional standards. This demonstrates the faculty's efforts to cultivate an image of serious and disciplined service. However, some students felt that despite their neat appearance, their facial expressions and demeanor often appeared unfriendly or unenthusiastic. This created a gap between their physical appearance and the quality of interactions students perceived. These findings indicate that tangible aspects extend beyond physical appearance and must also be complemented by warm and empathetic interpersonal service. Several studies confirm that a professional appearance must be accompanied by a communicative attitude to ensure a truly high-quality service experience for users. Therefore, communication training and soft skills development for administrative staff are crucial to supporting a more comprehensive and satisfying service experience for students.

4.3.2 Reliability Dimension

The Reliability dimension in SERVQUAL emphasizes the importance of consistent, procedurally correct service and service delivery as promised. The study results show that most students assess that the academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies at USU are carried out according to established procedures. Processes such as document submission, form completion, and collection of administrative results generally follow established procedures. However, complaints persist regarding the lack of procedural socialization and unclear communication of changes in information, which can lead to confusion among students. Most students felt the service they received met their expectations, particularly regarding the accuracy and completeness of

documents. Some even reported that the service exceeded expectations, being fast and efficient. However, some respondents felt that communication from staff was minimal, with responses lacking in friendliness and information. This indicates that service reliability is not yet fully fledged, as there are still challenges in communication and clarity of administrative information. Timely completion of administrative services is one of the strengths of the USU Faculty of Vocational Studies. Many respondents reported that documents were retrieved within the promised timeframe, sometimes even earlier. However, some also reported experiencing delays without clear explanation, so that suggestions arose that a document status tracking system or digital notification could be implemented to reduce student uncertainty in the administrative process. In general, the USU Faculty of Vocational Studies has demonstrated good performance in terms of service reliability, but there is still room for improvement, particularly in terms of procedural transparency and service communication. Efforts are needed to strengthen information systems, improve procedural socialization, and develop a service system that allows students to access real-time information to ensure more consistent and reliable service.

4.3.3 Responsiveness Dimension

In the Responsiveness dimension, students had varying experiences regarding the speed and responsiveness of administrative staff in responding to questions, complaints, and service requests. Some respondents appreciated the speed of response through digital channels such as official communication groups or instant messaging, where responses were provided promptly and accompanied by clear solutions. However, others felt less attentive during in-person interactions, particularly when staff members' expressions seemed flat or unfriendly. The disparity between fast online service and less empathetic in-person interactions was a key concern. Regarding the speed of in-person assistance, most students felt the service was fast enough when procedures and documents were complete and the room was not overly crowded. However, some complaints also arose about long wait times, particularly during peak hours or when the number of staff members was disproportionate to the number of students present. Some students also noted that staff members were more focused on chatting with others than providing assistance, indicating a lack of responsiveness in high-workload situations.

Staff availability was also a concern. Staff were generally present during office hours, but not always ready to provide immediate service. Some students had to wait long periods even during operating hours. This complaint points to the need to improve time efficiency and adjust the number of active staff during peak hours. Conversely, some students felt the staff continued to provide excellent service, even near closing time, indicating responsive practices worth maintaining and emulating by all staff. Thus, the Responsiveness dimension demonstrates strengths in terms of fast digital services and some responsive staff, but also reflects serious challenges in consistent in-person service. To improve responsiveness, interpersonal communication training, additional staffing during peak hours, and the implementation of an efficient queuing system are needed to ensure fast, responsive, and empathetic academic administrative services.

4.3.4 Assurance Dimension

The Assurance dimension in the context of administrative services reflects the extent to which students perceive staff competence, clarity of information, and a sense of security regarding the services provided. The majority of students assessed that the administrative staff of the Faculty of USU's vocational staff demonstrated strong technical competence in explaining procedures and handling documents without error. However, some respondents reported that when faced with situations outside of routine, staff appeared unprepared, and interpersonal communication was often stiff or lacking in commitment, creating an overall impression of unprofessionalism. Regarding information clarity, some students felt that administrative information was clear enough when delivered through group media like WhatsApp, especially from the committee or study program coordinator. However, direct information delivery by staff tended to be inconsistent. Some students reported receiving incomplete, confusing, or too brief explanations.

This led to dependence on peers and increased the risk of errors in administrative management. These findings emphasize the importance of standardizing information and communication training to ensure all students have the same understanding. In terms of trust, most students feel secure and trust the administrative staff, and don't even feel the need to double-check their submitted documents. This level of trust stems from the experience of documents being processed on time and as expected. However, some students expressed lingering doubts due to a lack of transparency and timeliness in the document processing process. Several cases of delays have raised concerns about the importance of a tracking system or service status notification. Thus, the Assurance dimension of academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies (FVS) at USU demonstrates strengths in staff technical competence and student trust. However, to improve overall quality, attention must be paid to interpersonal

communication, consistency in information delivery, and transparency in the service system. Staff soft skills training and the implementation of an integrated digital information system are crucial steps to strengthen service assurance for students.

4.3.5 Dimension of Empathy

The Empathy dimension in the context of administrative services reflects the staff's ability to understand and respond to student needs in a personal and humane manner. Based on interviews, most students assessed that staff empathy was situational and not yet part of a comprehensive service culture. Many students felt that staff approaches were more procedural than personal, resulting in their special needs or urgent situations often not receiving adequate attention. However, some students acknowledged the prompt and attentive response when they openly explained their situation, particularly for urgent needs such as scholarships. Regarding understanding students' academic challenges, experiences were also quite varied. Several respondents reported that staff were flexible and able to provide solutions when students encountered challenges, such as internships or administrative difficulties. However, this service still relied heavily on students' initiative to explain first, as some staff tended to operate mechanically without demonstrating proactive concern. This indicates that empathy has not yet become a part of the student experience. work standards, but only appear in certain situations or in certain individual staff.

Staff communication, including politeness, friendliness, and respect for students, also showed inconsistencies. While staff were generally considered polite, some students felt that communication was too brief, flat, or rushed. Interpersonal interactions often focused solely on conveying administrative information, without demonstrating a deeper interest in understanding students' circumstances. On the other hand, some students felt they were treated with kindness and respect, but this experience was not uniform across all staff. Overall, the empathy dimension in administrative services at the USU Faculty of Vocational Studies shows that a humane and caring approach is still not consistently applied. Service tends to be transactional, rather than relational. Therefore, it is crucial for the institution to improve empathetic communication training, strengthen a service culture based on individualized attention, and encourage staff to be more proactive in understanding students' circumstances to create a more positive, warm service experience and build long-term trust.

4.5 Managerial Implications

Based on research findings on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy, several managerial implications have been identified that can serve as a strategic basis for improving the quality of academic administration services at the Faculty of Vocational Studies, University of North Sumatra. These implications are detailed as follows:

1. Optimization of Physical Service Facilities (Tangibles)

Although the Administration room has been assessed as clean and well-organized, the limited waiting area remains an issue impacting student comfort. Therefore, management is advised to increase the number of waiting chairs, expand the service area, or rearrange the room layout to make it more ergonomic. The appearance of staff, already deemed professional, also needs to be improved through interpersonal communication training, so that this professional impression aligns with friendliness, responsiveness, and enthusiasm in serving students.

2. Simplification and Socialization of Administrative Procedures (Reliability)

There are still gaps between established formal procedures and their implementation in the field, particularly regarding information consistency. Therefore, management needs to develop concise and easy-to-understand Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), either in digital form or through infographics. These SOPs should be disseminated regularly through various communication channels, such as student WhatsApp groups, bulletin boards, and the official faculty website, to ensure all students receive consistent and accurate information.

3. Increased Responsiveness and Workload Management

Staff responsiveness in responding to student inquiries or service requests remains uneven. Some students experience delays or a lack of friendliness during face-to-face interactions. Therefore, training in service ethics, strengthening soft skills, and time management is essential. Furthermore, it is necessary to adjusting the number of staff or dividing tasks proportionally during peak hours so that services are not disrupted by high workloads.

4. Competency Improvement and Service System Development (Assurance)

To improve service quality assurance, administrative staff need ongoing training, not only in technical aspects but also in communication, decision-making, and professionalism. Furthermore, the development of a digital document tracking system is highly recommended, allowing students to independently monitor their administrative status without having to visit the service desk repeatedly.

5. Building an Empathetic Culture and Proactive Service (Empathy)

Students still find services inflexible and lacking understanding of their personal situations or challenges. Therefore, institutions need to develop empathy-based service standards that emphasize individualized attention to students. Emotional intelligence training programs and increased awareness of the importance of humanistic service should be implemented to create warmer, more solution-oriented, and more humane interactions with students as service users.

5. CLOSING

5.1 Conclusion

- a. The quality of academic administrative services, based on student perceptions, was generally considered quite good, particularly in terms of procedural accuracy (reliability) and cleanliness and staff appearance (tangibles). Students assessed that the service process followed a clear flow, staff appeared professional, and the service area was clean and comfortable. However, there were shortcomings in the responsiveness and empathy dimensions, where staff interpersonal interactions were perceived as less warm and sometimes unresponsive, and not all staff proactively understood students' conditions. The assurance dimension also indicated that although staff appeared competent, training was still needed to make the information conveyed more easily understood and reliable. Overall, the service was assessed as running well but not optimal in all aspects of SERVQUAL.
- b. Identified challenges include: Lack of consistency in information: students complained about procedural changes not being communicated early and explanations being too technical. Lack of responsiveness from some staff: students felt they needed to ask questions repeatedly to get answers or that processing took too long. The absence of a document tracking system, forcing students to visit in person to check the status of their requests. Lack of empathy and warm communication from staff, resulting in a formal service that did not address students' personal circumstances.
- c. Service users expect improved interpersonal communication through staff training to make service more friendly, empathetic, and solution-oriented. Simplification of procedures and digitization of service systems, including document submission, status tracking, and pickup notification. Responsive and fast service, without the need for back and forth or long waits. Consistency in procedures and information provided so as not to cause confusion and increase student confidence in the service.

5.2 Suggestion

1. Suggestions for Theory Development and Further Research:
This research can serve as a reference for SERVQUAL-based evaluations of academic administrative services. Future researchers are advised to expand the scope of respondents (e.g., lecturers or alumni) and combine qualitative and quantitative methods for more comprehensive results.
2. For USU's Faculty of Vocational Studies:
There is a need for improvements in the dimensions of responsiveness and empathy through improving the service system and strengthening interpersonal communication in service interactions.
3. For Administrative Staff:
It is recommended to be more proactive, empathetic, and communicative in providing service. Clarity of information and a friendly attitude are key to increasing student satisfaction.
4. For Students:
Students are expected to actively provide constructive feedback to create more participatory, adaptive, and appropriate services.

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