Original Article

Service Quality as a Predictor of Students' Choice of Academic Programs: Perceptions of Kenyans of Indian Origin in Kenyan Public and Private Universities

Vidya Chandrasekhar[1], Prof. Jeremiah Mutuku Kalai, PhD[1] & Prof. Ursullah A. Okoth, PhD[1]*

[1] University of Nairobi, P. O. Box 30197-00100, Nairobi, Kenya.
[*] Author for Correspondence ORCID ID; https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2307-9479; Email: cs.vidya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The choice of career paths and academic programs is a critical decision for students entering universities and middle-level institutions. This study examined how perceived service quality influences academic program choices among Kenyan students of Indian origin in Nairobi universities, guided by Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) and Chapman's (1981) college choice models. The target population included students from both public and private universities to ensure a balanced representation of higher education institutions. Public universities were selected for their established history and diverse academic offerings, while private universities were included due to their high rankings and popularity. Out of 150 students contacted, 135 participated, along with one admissions officer and six deans of students who provided additional insights. Using a descriptive survey approach, data were analyzed with SPSS version 25. Findings indicated moderate satisfaction with university services and facilities (mean = 3.2978, SD = 1.1156). Students expressed high satisfaction with knowledgeable lecturers (mean = 4.0074), library facilities (mean = 4.0148), and institutional reputation (mean = 4.0296), while dissatisfaction was noted in internet connectivity (mean = 2.8889) and limited vegetarian food options (mean = 2.4074). Digital media and counselling services played a greater role in program selection than traditional media. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived service quality and academic program choice (r = 0.265**, p < 0.01), indicating that better service quality increases the likelihood of students selecting specific programs. The null hypothesis was rejected, affirming that service quality influences student decisions. The study underscores the need for universities to enhance infrastructure, streamline administrative processes, and modernize service delivery. Aligning academic programs with emerging career trends and industry demands will improve student satisfaction and institutional competitiveness. Regular curriculum reviews, quality assurance mechanisms, and stronger collaboration with industry experts, alumni, and students will ensure academic offerings remain relevant. These initiatives will create a dynamic learning environment that prioritizes service quality and supports student success.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a critical role in fostering national economic growth and societal progress through teaching, research, and skill development (Chankseliani, Qoraboyev, & Gimranova, 2021). Universities in both developed and developing countries contribute to social and economic welfare by providing the expertise needed for societal advancement (Nowak & Dahal, 2016; Grant, 2017). The introduction of digital technologies has further revolutionized access to education, creating new opportunities for skill enhancement, income generation, and personalized learning (Hogan, 2015; Bano & Taylor, 2015).

In Kenya, the diverse academic programs offered by public and private universities significantly influence students' career development (Gacohi, Sindabi, & Chepchieng, 2017). The selection of academic programs is shaped by students' aspirations, market demands, and academic goals. Informed decision-making has been greatly enhanced through online platforms and virtual reality tools, which offer detailed insights into program offerings, faculty expertise, and campus facilities (Eynon & Malmberg, 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Perceived service quality has become a pivotal factor in shaping students' academic decisions (Kara, Tanui, & Kalai, 2016; Omolo, 2021). It includes aspects such as responsive administration, accessible resources, supportive services, and quality infrastructure. For Kenyan students of Indian origin, culturally inclusive environments that support academic and personal growth are especially important. Other factors, such as job prospects, degree recognition, and extracurricular opportunities, also play a significant role in influencing students' decisions (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Kang, 2023).

Studies emphasize the multifaceted nature of these choices. Factors such as parental and teacher recommendations, graduate quality, school fees, location, and university reputation strongly influence students' decisions (Yusuff, 2024). Proximity, affordability, advertising, and funding are additional drivers of university selection, while program choices are often shaped by external influences, including family input and financial constraints (Mahangiru, 2016).

Participation in established academic networks has been shown to offer substantial benefits, though it may occasionally overshadow individual accomplishments (Heffernan, 2020). Academic self-efficacy has also been identified as a stronger predictor of academic performance than career self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of cultivating confidence in students' academic abilities (Yadav, 2020). At the same time, a lack of exposure to career information underscores the need for improved career guidance to support informed decision-making (Theresa, 2015).

Regional and socioeconomic factors further impact students' academic program choices. Geographic disparities often determine access to high-status institutions, disadvantaging high-achieving students in less accessible areas (Mangan et al., 2010).

Additionally, socio-economic influences, examination performance, and external recommendations frequently drive program selections, while personal interest is sometimes less significant in decision-making processes (Mpolokoso & Miyoba, 2024).

This study explores the influence of perceived service quality on the academic program choices of students of Indian origin in Kenyan universities. By examining how different service quality dimensions affect students' preferences, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature and provides practical recommendations for improving service delivery. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about inclusivity and diversity in Kenyan higher education, offering valuable insights to attract and retain students from diverse backgrounds.

Satisfaction with various service qualities at the university level plays an integral role in students' academic decisions. Key factors include infrastructure, teaching quality, and support services. For instance, while the university's physical infrastructure met students' expectations with a mean score of 3.4 (SD = 1.25), satisfaction with internet connectivity was lower, at a mean of 2.9 (SD = 1.29). Faculty and staff support, as well as knowledgeable lecturers, received higher ratings, with mean scores of 4.0 (SD = 0.83) and 3.6 (SD = 1.08), respectively. The university library contributed positively to the learning environment, with a mean score of 4.0 (SD = 0.97), while satisfaction with the computer lab was slightly lower at 3.2 (SD = 1.20). Other elements, such as hostel accommodation, had less impact on program choice, with a low mean score of 1.7 (SD = 1.04). The overall perceived service quality scored a mean of 3.3 (SD = 1.12), indicating a moderate level of satisfaction with university services and facilities.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing these gaps in service quality could enable universities to better align their offerings with student expectations. Universities can achieve this by fostering culturally inclusive environments, enhancing career guidance programs, expanding financial aid options, and strengthening academic networks. Additionally, effective marketing strategies and improved facilities can attract a diverse student population, including students of Indian origin in Kenya. This study provides critical insights into how perceived service quality influences academic program choices, offering practical recommendations to enhance the higher education experience.

Statement of the Problem

Efforts to promote inclusivity in higher education are critical to achieving equal opportunities and representation for diverse student groups. However, persistent gaps in service quality across various dimensions continue to undermine these goals, negatively impacting student satisfaction and academic outcomes. The selection of academic programs plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic and career trajectories, yet the influence of perceived service quality on this decision, particularly among minority groups such as Indian-origin students in Kenya, remains underexplored (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Omolo, 2021).

Key areas of concern include the preparation and ICT literacy of lecturers, which are vital for delivering technology-integrated education. Research highlights the importance of ICT-proficient educators in enhancing learning experiences, yet disparities in teaching effectiveness persist, emphasizing the need for robust faculty development programs (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Rudhumbu et al., 2017). This issue is compounded by inadequate ICT infrastructure, with studies underscoring the role of reliable internet access in academic success. However, many institutions fail to meet these standards, limiting students' ability to engage with digital resources (Akingbohungbe, Akinluyi, & Babalola, 2014). Tenya, Maina, & Awuor (2023) further highlight that despite the availability of digital resource platforms in Kenyan public universities, users face difficulties in accessing and utilizing information due to challenges in navigation, mismatches between user expectations and platform designs, which may negatively impact teaching and research outcomes.

Infrastructural inadequacies extend to physical campus facilities, including overcrowded lecture halls, insufficient residential spaces, and inadequate

recreational amenities, which detract from the overall student experience. Poorly maintained facilities further exacerbate these challenges, negatively affecting students' comfort and focus (Fosu & Poku, 2014; Kara, Tanui, & Kalai, 2016; Díaz-Iso, Eizaguirre, & García-Olalla, 2019).

The availability of academic resources, administrative support, and robust student services is particularly critical for minority groups (Popov, 2019; Proboyo & Soedarsono, 2015; Munisamy et al., 2014). Indian-origin students, for instance, prioritize these factors when selecting higher education institutions. However, Kenyan universities face significant challenges in meeting these needs, including poorly equipped libraries, limited material resources, and inadequate career support services, which undermine efforts to provide quality education (Kara, Tanui, & Kalai, 2016). Additionally, high student enrollment in public universities has exacerbated resource constraints, leading to overcrowded classrooms, outdated textbooks, limited access to computers, and shared skills laboratories, particularly in medicine and nursing programs (Njeru, Kang'ethe, Kwena, & Otieno, 2020). These issues, compounded by financial constraints, highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve the quality of education and support services in Kenyan universities.

Advancements in digital technology have expanded access to university information, raising expectations for superior service quality and infrastructure. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these advancements influence program choices, particularly among minority students in Kenyan public and private universities (Gai, Xu, & Pelton, 2016; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Addressing these service quality gaps is crucial for fostering inclusivity and aligning higher education offerings with the diverse needs of students.

This study investigates the relationship between perceived service quality and the selection of academic programs among Kenyan students of Indian origin. Specifically, it examines how elements such as infrastructure, lecturer competency, and career support services influence their choices. Previous research highlights the critical role of service quality in shaping students' academic decisions and satisfaction (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Kara, Tanui, & Kalai, 2016). Additionally, studies emphasize the need for equitable access to quality education to foster diversity and inclusivity in higher education (Popov, 2019; Munisamy et al., 2014). The findings of this study aim to provide actionable insights for improving service delivery and promoting equity and diversity within Kenya's universities.

Research Objective

The objective was to assess if significant differences exist in students' perception of service quality and the choice of academic programs by students of Indian origin at public and private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As global economies become increasingly industrialized and interconnected, the demand for higher education has surged, prompting institutions worldwide to actively promote their academic programs to attract students (Grant, 2017). Students' choices of academic programs are influenced by factors such as academic offerings, facilities, career prospects, and program recognition (Proboyo & Soedarsono, 2015). Among these, perceived service quality stands out as a critical determinant, encompassing academic advising, student support, teaching quality, campus resources, and the overall learning environment. Wanti et al. (2022) further highlight the significance of equitable access to higher education, emphasizing the role of government policies, financial aid, and social support from peers, family, and educators. These findings underline the need for institutions to foster social connections, provide institutional support, and establish academic skill programs to promote equity and inclusivity in higher education.

Research highlights that high-quality teaching, personalized academic advising, and experiential learning opportunities significantly enhance student satisfaction and influence program choices (Jain, 2014; Crisp et al., 2017). For instance, a study by Bosu, Asare, and Agormedah, (2018), found that students provided negative feedback on services

offered by their university, particularly in areas such as tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance, indicating a gap between expected and actual service quality

Service quality perceptions in higher education extend beyond the classroom to encompass critical infrastructure such as libraries, laboratories, accommodation, and recreational facilities, which collectively contribute to a supportive campus environment (Chepkener, 2018; Kitsawad, 2013). In Kenya, despite the expansion of public and private universities, resource limitations often hinder student satisfaction, particularly in areas such as teaching facilities, technological resources, and library infrastructure. Kara, Tanui, and Kalai (2016) observed that inadequate facilities negatively affect students' comfort and academic focus, while Fosu and Poku (2014) highlighted that universities with insufficient and poorly maintained infrastructure are perceived less favourably by students. Aligning with these findings, Gikunju, Odero, and Kwanya (2023) emphasize the evolving needs of university library users, necessitating the adaptation of library spaces to accommodate advancements in information technology and shifting user expectations. Their mixed-methods study of Kenyan universities identified commonly used library spaces and stressed the importance of continuous assessment to meet user needs effectively.

Similarly, Nduta, Itegi, and Muchanje (2024) explored the impact of physical facility management on education quality in private universities in Kenya. Their study revealed that inadequate physical facilities significantly hinder education quality, noting a positive correlation between effective facility management and higher education standards, and recommended increased funding for construction and maintenance. Complementing this, Oluwunmi, Durodola, and Ajayi (2016) underscored the importance of prioritizing student feedback on facilities and services in private universities to remain competitive. Their study revealed that while students rated general library services as above average, specific facilities like parking and escape routes were poorly rated, prompting calls for increased budgetary allocation and quality improvements in university infrastructure.

Social factors also play a role, including campus culture, peer reviews, and the institution's reputation. For example, universities that actively engage with prospective students through social media and prioritize personalized outreach efforts are perceived as more appealing (Spearman et al., 2016; Fosu & Poku, 2014). Additionally, the availability of responsive administrative support, adequate academic resources, and robust student support services are critical determinants of students' preferences and overall satisfaction with higher education institutions (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014).

However, research on how perceived service quality influences academic program choices among minority groups, particularly Kenyan students of Indian origin, remains scarce. This population's program decisions are, likely shaped by unique considerations, including cultural inclusivity, institutional reputation, and access to academic and personal support services.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the role of perceived service quality, specifically academic support, resource availability, and campus experience, in shaping the academic program choices of Kenyan students of Indian origin in Kenyan universities. The findings aim to inform strategies for improving service delivery, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging more Indian-origin students to pursue higher education locally.

In summary, while institutions have made notable strides in promoting inclusivity and equity, persistent deficiencies in service quality threaten to erode these gains. Addressing these challenges is critical to fostering an equitable and enriching educational environment that aligns with the aspirations of students and other stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model and Chapman's (1981) Model of Influences on Students' College Choice. These frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding the factors influencing students' academic program choices. Hossler and Gallagher's model conceptualizes the college choice process as a sequence of three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. During the predisposition stage,

students develop aspirations for higher education, influenced by family background, socioeconomic status, personal goals, and perceptions of the potential return on investment, as suggested by Human Capital Theory. In the search stage, students actively gather information about institutions and programs through online resources, counselling sessions, peer networks, and evaluations of service quality (Eynon & Malmberg, 2019; Gai, Xu, & Pelton, 2016). Frameworks like the SERVQUAL model, which examines dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, are instrumental in this stage. Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory further explains satisfaction based on the alignment between expected and actual experiences, offering insights into how universities can assess and enhance students' perceptions of curriculum quality, career prospects, and campus life.

In the choice stage, students evaluate and select options based on institutional attributes such as reputation, service quality, and resource availability. Concepts like the Theory of Planned Behavior emphasize the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in decision-making, while the Push-Pull Theory provides insights into how dissatisfaction with local options and the attractiveness of specific programs influence final decisions. Additionally, the Service-Dominant Logic perspective highlights the importance of value co-creation, encouraging universities to engage students in shaping their educational experiences. This model underscores the critical role of external information sources, institutional marketing, and positive alumni experiences, with the Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty Framework linking service quality to satisfaction and loyalty, further enhancing institutional reputation and future enrollments.

Chapman's (1981) model complements this by emphasizing the interplay between student characteristics and external factors in shaping college choice. Intrinsic factors, such as personal interests, academic performance, and career aspirations, drive program selection. This perspective aligns with Pane et al. (2017), which highlights how integrating technology into education facilitates personalized learning

experiences, enabling students to tailor their academic pursuits to their interests and learning styles. This technological integration enriches Chapman's framework by demonstrating how advancements in education not only respond to but also shape intrinsic factors, supporting the alignment of students' individual goals with institutional offerings (Means, Toyama, Murphy & Baki, 2013). External factors, including institutional characteristics like academic quality, faculty reputation, and practical teaching, significantly influence students' perceptions of service quality (Popov, 2019). For instance, the quality of libraries, laboratories, and recreational facilities plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional appeal (Kara, Tanui, & Kalai, 2016; Omolo, 2021). Furthermore, financial aid availability and institutional location are critical considerations, particularly for students with limited resources (Abubakar, 2017; Proboyo & Soedarsono, 2015).

By integrating Hossler and Gallagher's sequential approach with Chapman's focus on internal and external factors, this theoretical framework offers a comprehensive perspective on the role of perceived service quality in shaping academic program choices. For Kenyan students of Indian origin in Kenyan universities, key service quality dimensions—such as responsive administration, accessible academic resources, and alignment of programs with career goals—emerge as critical influencers. The SERVQUAL model underscores the importance of assessing the gap between student expectations and perceptions of services, particularly in dimensions like reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. These dimensions provide a useful lens for evaluating university services, such as teaching quality, infrastructure, and student support, which directly impact students' satisfaction and decisions regarding academic programs (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

By understanding these service quality gaps, universities can enhance student satisfaction and retention. Studies like Gikunju, Odero, and Kwanya (2023) and Nduta, Itegi, and Muchanje (2024) emphasize the importance of adapting to evolving student needs, ensuring that infrastructure and

facilities meet the demands of a competitive academic environment. Institutions can achieve this by improving physical infrastructure, strengthening reputations, leveraging digital platforms for effective communication, and fostering a supportive educational environment (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Eynon & Malmberg, 2019; Nachatar, Schapper & Jack, 2014; Hemsley & Oplatka, 2015; Stukalina, 2014). These theoretical insights not only illuminate the determinants of program selection but also provide actionable strategies for addressing the evolving needs of a diverse student population.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study emphasizes the role of perceived service quality in influencing the academic program choices of Indian-origin students in Kenyan universities. Service quality is examined through multiple dimensions, including facilities, staff quality, and institutional infrastructure, all of which contribute to shaping students' academic and personal experiences.

Key dimensions such as external appearance, teaching quality, staff responsiveness, and infrastructure elements like libraries, laboratories, internet connectivity, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, hostel accommodation, transport, location, and availability of vegetarian food significantly impact students' satisfaction and perceptions of institutional quality. These factors collectively influence the decision-making process for selecting academic programs, as they align with students' career aspirations, academic needs, and personal preferences.

The following table presents the conceptual framework, categorizing the dimensions of perceived service quality and their potential impacts on academic program choices.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework on Perceived Service Quality and Academic Program Choice

Independent Variable (Perceived Service Quality)	Dimensions	Impact on Program Choice
External Appearance	- Campus aesthetics, cleanliness	Enhances first impressions, builds trust, and signals institutional commitment to quality.
Teaching Quality	- Expertise, teaching methods, and faculty engagement	Fosters academic excellence, improves learning outcomes and establishes institutional credibility.
Staff Responsiveness	- Timely and effective communication with students	Builds trust, supports student needs, and creates a welcoming environment.
Libraries and Laboratories	- Availability and quality of academic resources	Provides essential tools for academic success, fostering engagement and knowledge acquisition.
Internet Connectivity	- Speed and accessibility	Facilitates online learning, research, and communication, particularly critical in a digitalized education system.
Indoor and Outdoor Recreational Facilities	- Sports, gym, and entertainment amenities	Promotes work-life balance and enhances students' overall campus experience.
Hostel Accommodation	- Quality, availability, and proximity	Ensures comfort and security, positively impacting students' focus on academics.
Transport	- Access to reliable and affordable transportation services	Enhances accessibility to the campus, making it a practical option for prospective students.
Location	- Proximity to urban centres and safety	Influences convenience, safety, and access to external opportunities like internships and jobs.
Vegetarian Food	- Availability and quality of vegetarian meals	Addresses dietary preferences and cultural needs, contributing to student satisfaction and comfort.

This table outlines the critical dimensions of perceived service quality and their direct and indirect impacts on students' program selection decisions. By focusing on these dimensions, universities can tailor their services to better meet students' needs and aspirations, thus enhancing satisfaction and improving enrollment outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate the factors influencing academic program choices among Indian-origin students in Kenyan universities, with a focus on perceived service quality. This design provides a structured framework encompassing methods and procedures for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Shikokoti, Okoth, & Abung'ana, 2024). Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires distributed to 135 students, which captured their perceptions and preferences regarding academic programs. To complement this, an additional set of interview guides was administered to six deans and one admission officer, who were selected based on recommendations from the Deputy Vice-Chancellors. They were identified as key individuals with direct knowledge of student enrollment trends, academic program structures, and institutional policies. Their roles provided extensive student interaction and insights into the factors influencing program choices, ensuring that the study captured both student perspectives and institutional viewpoints for a more comprehensive understanding of academic decision-making. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, offering meaningful insights into the trends and preferences of the respondents. This comprehensive approach facilitated the systematic examination of both individual and institutional dimensions, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between perceived service quality and academic program selection.

The findings revealed that 45% of the students considered the external appearance of the institution as an influential factor in their decision-making, although 25% disagreed, indicating diverse opinions regarding its importance. The adequacy of physical infrastructure, including classrooms and buildings, met the expectations of 55% of the respondents, while 25% expressed dissatisfaction. Teaching quality emerged as a critical determinant, with 60% of the participants affirming its significance in their application process. Faculty knowledge and supportiveness received particularly high ratings, with 85% of the students expressing satisfaction and only 5% dissenting. Similarly, 65% of the students agreed that the responsiveness of faculty and staff positively impacted their decisions, while 10% disagreed.

The reputation of the university stood out as a prominent factor, with 80% of the respondents indicating it influenced their choices, while 10% disagreed. Library facilities were also highly regarded, with 85% acknowledging their role in creating a conducive learning environment and just 5% expressing dissatisfaction. However, internet connectivity elicited mixed feedback, as 40% of the participants found it satisfactory, while 35% were dissatisfied. Outdoor sports facilities were positively reviewed by 55%, whereas 15% disagreed on their adequacy. Indoor sports facilities garnered agreement from 45%, although 20% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Hostel accommodation and vegetarian food options were less influential, with only 30% of the students finding them adequate, while 45% disagreed. The location of the university, however, was deemed significant by 60% of the participants, with 15% expressing disagreement.

These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' academic program choices. Key determinants such as teaching quality, institutional reputation, faculty responsiveness, and library facilities were highly valued, while areas requiring improvement, including internet connectivity and food options, were identified. Addressing these issues can help Kenyan universities better meet the needs of a diverse student population and enhance overall student satisfaction.

The research methodology outlined above is visually represented in the accompanying graphic to provide a clear and concise overview of the key findings and respondent feedback.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the distribution of student responses regarding various institutional factors influencing their academic program choices. It highlights the significance of teaching quality, institutional reputation, library facilities, and infrastructure, as perceived by the respondents, while also identifying areas requiring improvement, such as internet connectivity and vegetarian food options. The graphical representation provides a clear overview of students' levels of satisfaction and the extent to which these factors impacted their decision-making process.

Figure 1.1*: **Students Perceptions of Institutional Factors Influencing Academic Program Choices in Kenyan Universities.**
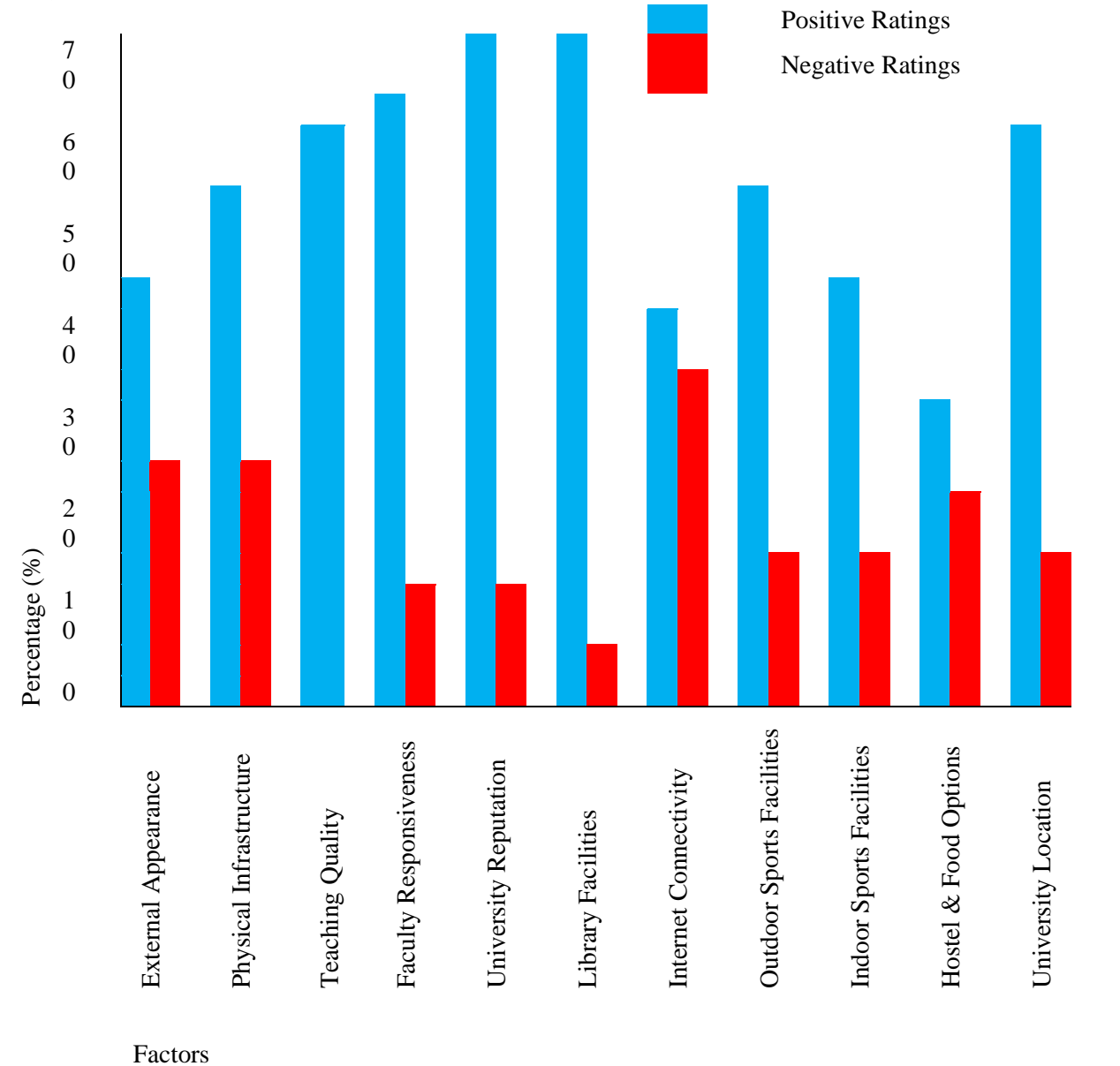
The percentages represent levels of agreement or satisfaction with various factors such as teaching quality, institutional reputation, library facilities, and infrastructure, as well as areas identified for improvement, including internet connectivity and food options.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perspective of Service Quality

The analysis of perceived service quality at the university offers a detailed view of both student and dean perspectives, underscoring areas of convergence and divergence. Students rated the

quality of teaching highly, with a mean score of 4.01, reflecting their appreciation for the supportive and knowledgeable faculty. This finding aligns with Rudhumbu et al. (2017), who highlighted the critical role of faculty support in fostering student success. In contrast, students expressed dissatisfaction with internet connectivity, which recorded a mean score of 2.89. This finding mirrors the observations of Akingbohungbe, Akinluyi, and Babalola (2014), who stressed the importance of robust internet infrastructure for contemporary educational practices.

University reputation emerged as a key factor influencing student choices, achieving a mean score of 4.03, consistent with Hieu et al. (2020). Facilities and amenities received a moderate rating of 3.37, aligning with findings by Pittaway et al. (2015) and Díaz-Iso et al. (2019). Notably, the university library was highly rated, with a mean score of 4.01, underscoring its pivotal role in enhancing the learning environment, as supported by Kara et al. (2016). However, canteen services offering vegetarian food received a low mean score of 2.41, underscoring an area of campus life that requires attention to enhance overall student satisfaction, particularly in meeting diverse dietary preferences. Hostel accommodation was rated even lower, with a mean score of 1.73, indicating that students prioritize academic and service quality over housing.

Perceived Service Quality from Deans' Perspective

Deans shared similar concerns regarding internet connectivity, with 42.9% identifying it as a critical area for improvement. They also emphasized the need to expand learning spaces to address the growing student population, reflecting students' concerns about physical infrastructure, which scored a mean of 3.40. Additionally, deans advocated for enhancing lifelong learning opportunities and incorporating more practical lessons to align academic programs with industry demands, a perspective supported by Popov (2019) and Kakada et al. (2019).

The overall aggregate score for perceived service quality was 3.30, indicating moderate satisfaction. Strengths were evident in teaching support and library resources, while weaknesses in areas like internet connectivity, food services, and hostel accommodation highlighted significant gaps in service delivery. These findings emphasize the need for universities to continually adapt and enhance their offerings to meet evolving student expectations, as suggested by Stukalina (2014). Addressing immediate concerns such as canteen services and recreational facilities, alongside broader strategic improvements identified by deans, will contribute to creating a holistic and supportive educational environment.

Correlation Analysis Between Perceived Service Quality and Students' Choice of Academic Programs

Table 2 displays the correlation between the choice of academic programs in Kenyan universities and perceived service quality. The Pearson correlation coefficient and significance level are provided, indicating the strength and significance of the relationship between these two variables.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis Between Perceived Service Quality and Choice of Academic Programs

Correlations		Choice of Academic Programs in Kenyan Universities	Perceived Service Quality
Choice of Academic Programs in Kenyan Universities	Pearson Correlation	1	.265**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.002
	N	135	135
Perceived Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	.265**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	
	N	135	135

The correlation analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between perceived service quality and students' choice of academic programs (r = 0.265, p < 0.01). This suggests that as students' perceptions of service quality improve, they are more likely to choose specific academic programs. While the relationship is statistically significant, the correlation strength is weak to moderate, implying that other factors also influence student choices.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between perceived service quality and students' choice of academic programs, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample was limited to students of Indian origin in Kenyan universities, restricting the generalizability of findings to other student populations. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to response bias. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods such as focus groups or in-depth interviews to gain richer insights into student experiences and motivations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature on service quality in higher education by demonstrating its influence on students' choice of academic programs. While no previous research has specifically examined Kenyan students of Indian origin, these findings align with broader studies on the impact of service quality on student decision-making. The results support the application of the SERVQUAL model in assessing service quality in higher education.

Practically, the findings highlight the need for universities to invest in service quality improvements, particularly in internet connectivity, hostel accommodation, and food services. Universities should leverage these insights to refine their academic offerings, streamline administrative processes, and enhance faculty support. Addressing these issues will contribute to higher student satisfaction and increased enrollment in academic programs.

The significant positive correlation between perceived service quality and students' choice of academic programs underscores the importance of quality services in higher education. While factors such as academic program availability and financial considerations remain crucial, service quality also plays a pivotal role in attracting students. Universities should focus on enhancing infrastructure, improving faculty responsiveness, and refining administrative processes to create a more conducive learning environment. These strategic improvements will not only enhance student satisfaction but also bolster institutional reputation, ultimately leading to increased student enrollment and retention.

CONCLUSIONS

Perceived service quality plays a pivotal role in influencing students' choices of academic programs. Key factors such as knowledgeable and supportive teaching staff, coupled with the university's reputation, were found to significantly impact students' decisions. However, areas of concern, including inadequate internet connectivity and subpar campus facilities, highlight the need for targeted improvements. To enhance student satisfaction and positively influence enrollment decisions, universities must prioritize investments in infrastructure, modern technology, and efficient administrative processes.

Recommendations

To address these issues, several recommendations are proposed. Universities should focus on enhancing service delivery by implementing comprehensive staff training programs aimed at improving responsiveness and overall service quality. Resolving internet connectivity issues should be a priority, as reliable and fast internet access is essential for modern learning. Expanding learning spaces to accommodate growing student populations is also critical, alongside integrating more practical, hands-on experiences into academic programs to align with industry demands. By adopting these strategies, universities can improve their service quality, foster a more supportive learning environment, and bolster their appeal to prospective students. Ultimately, such efforts will strengthen their competitive position within the

higher education landscape and ensure long-term success.

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