# SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMAGE IN THE PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY

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## ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are 1) to study the significance level of service quality perception, satisfaction, organizational image, and success of Thai higher education institutions, and 2) to examine satisfaction and organizational image as mediating variables in the perception of service quality leading to the success of Thai higher education institutions. The sample group consists of 300 students from Thai higher education institutions. The instrument used is a questionnaire. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and structural equation modeling analysis. The results of the study found that respondents have a high level of agreement in terms of service quality perception, perceived value from teaching and learning, satisfaction with the private higher education institution they are currently attending, and willingness to provide information to others about the private higher education institution they are currently attending, across all aspects. The structural equation model analysis revealed that perceived value from teaching and learning and perceived service quality have a direct positive influence on satisfaction. Furthermore, satisfaction has a direct positive influence on the willingness to provide information to others. Additionally, perceived service quality and perceived value from teaching and learning indirectly positively influence the willingness to provide information to others through satisfaction.
**Keywords:** Satisfaction, Organizational Image, Perception of Service Quality, Success of Thai Higher Education Institutions

## INTRODUCTION

In an era where knowledge and wisdom are fundamental to prosperity, educational institutions play a crucial role in developing the nation's workforce to build strong economic and social capabilities and competitive advantage. Consequently, public and private educational institutions strive to improve human resources and the necessary infrastructure to enhance educational quality. They continuously revise curricula and teaching methods and develop new programs that address the challenges and changes in the economic and social landscape and technological advancements. These efforts aim to become internationally renowned higher education institutions and achieve global university rankings. In alignment with the Higher Education Plan for the production and development of the national workforce for 2021-2027, which aligns with the critical context and circumstances from 2023-2027, and connects with the policy framework and strategies for higher education, science, research, and innovation for 2023-2027, the emphasis remains on the role of higher education as a foundation for the leapfrogging and sustainable development of human resources and knowledge. According to Strategy 1: Developing Human Potential, the focus is on lifelong learning, providing opportunities for people to access education, and enhancing the quality of higher education and workforce competencies to meet the country's developmental directions. Additionally, it aims to cultivate high-quality higher education personnel (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, 2023). The initiative also promotes the 'Reinventing University' project to elevate Thai universities to international standards, leading to a reform of the higher education system. This includes improving the quality of teaching and learning, developing faculty skills to meet 21st-century learning needs, and enabling higher education institutions to utilize their knowledge, capabilities, and potential effectively according to their strategic specializations. This will foster competition among universities, thereby enhancing the reputation of the institutions and the country (Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation Development and Promotion Division, 2022).

In addition to developing the quality of education to be comparable internationally and to remain competitive in changing environments, Thai educational institutions must also manage under relevant laws. According to the Educational Institutions Act of 2019, Thai educational institutions have responsibilities that include education management, research and innovation, academic services to society, arts and cultural preservation, and other duties specified by law. These responsibilities cannot be achieved effectively without the cooperation of educational institution staff, who must possess knowledge, skills, expertise, and specialized qualities in each field according to the curriculum offered. This includes the quality of teaching management and the institution's various administrative and support services. Therefore, it is a significant challenge for educational institution managers to effectively fulfill all these responsibilities while gaining recognition from multiple countries.

Based on the situation that will impact Thai higher education according to the 2nd Long-Term Higher Education Plan (B.E. 2551-2565), Thailand's overall population will gradually increase. Still, the number of children and adolescents will decrease. This will affect entry into various levels of education, as shown by statistics collected regarding the number of adolescents in upper secondary education who are the population entering higher education institutions.

The number of students entering higher education institutions decreased from 2017 to 2021, but there was a slight increase in the academic year 2022-2023. Thailand currently has a large number of higher education institutions, including public universities, private universities, and government-affiliated institutions under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, offering graduate-level education.

Therefore, there is intense competition in the market to attract the number of students as planned by the institutions. Notably, the current trend is toward autonomous management of higher education institutions separate from the government, leading these institutions to seek

additional income while still pursuing their established objectives. Additionally, they are increasingly able to meet the demands of students. The ability to offer courses that meet market demands has increased, enabling competition with private higher education institutions to its fullest extent. Therefore, it can be considered an "educational business." Competition has steadily intensified, with strategies implemented to attract students to enroll in their institutions. Consequently, there has been a widespread offering of graduate-level education throughout the country, expanding educational opportunities for the public. As a result, competition in academic institutions has emerged, with various strategies employed to enroll students according to their goals and admission plans. Simultaneously, more opportunities and alternatives have been made available to students.

The decision to choose which higher education institution to attend depends on various factors, including the reputation and image of the institution, the curriculum, faculty members, learning materials and equipment, the atmosphere and environment, welfare and services, public relations, preferences, skills, knowledge, and abilities of the students, and scholarships (Chaiyaphon Jupoldi, 2021). At the same time, international students prioritize university rankings as a critical factor in their decision-making process (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2020). These factors are crucial considerations that institutions must prioritize and enhance to ensure quality education. There is a significant emphasis on the importance of service quality in higher education institutions, as universities need to meet the needs of students, recognizing that education is a customer market, not just a university market. Service quality is, therefore, essential for organizations to use as a tool to maintain competitiveness. Several research studies have confirmed that improving quality can sustainably enhance business competitiveness (Abbas, 2020; Camilleri, 2021; Herman, 2022; Diana, & Zaini, 2023).

Therefore, Thai higher education institutions need help with the quality of their services due to unforeseen circumstances, such as disease outbreaks, rapid technological changes in education, and changing behaviors or perspectives of students, which may impact teaching or education-related services. Suppose adjustments or problem-solving cannot be made. In that case, students may become dissatisfied, leading to negative consequences for the institution's reputation, reduced competitiveness, and ultimately affecting the number of students deciding to enroll. This has unavoidable implications for the country's overall quality of education. Therefore, there needs to be a study on understanding perceptions of service quality and organizational image to perceive factors related to service quality perception, satisfaction, organizational image, and the success of higher education institutions. This will provide insights into which factors students prioritize regarding service quality that will affect the institution's success. Managers can then use these factors to create differentiation and competitive advantage in education, leading to decisions in selecting educational institutions and guiding educational management, curriculum development, staff development strategies, and academic counseling adjustments to achieve the institution's vision and mission.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS
### Concepts and theories regarding service quality perception
Businesses must adapt to stay competitive in intensely competitive scenarios. Some may opt to cut operational costs, including reducing staff numbers. However, managers cannot overlook service quality (Azzari et al., 2020). It's widely believed that businesses can achieve greater success than their competitors by providing superior quality services to customers (Ekaabi et al., 2020; Satti et al., 2020). This is crucial for long-term business success (Khoo, 2020).

Service quality is critical in creating customer satisfaction and is particularly important for service businesses (Fang et al., 2020). Service quality can be described as the gap between perceived and expected service quality by customers (Azzari et al., 2020), or in other words, the disparity between the service customers expect and the service they receive (Bichler et al.,

2020; Satti et al., 2020). If customers feel positively about the service they receive, it fosters customer loyalty towards the business (Khoo, 2020; Zia, 2020), which helps maintain and expand the organization's customer base (Fang et al., 2020).

During the 1980s to 1990s, scholars showed great interest in service quality, leading to significant research utilizing the SERVQUAL instrument (Shurair and Pokharel, 2019; Azzari et al., 2020). This instrument was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988 (Parasuraman et al., 1988) to measure customers' expectations regarding service quality. It aimed to confirm whether customers' expectations matched their actual service experiences. The SERVQUAL introduced ten dimensions for measuring service quality. Comprising of reliability, responsiveness, competence, accessibility, courtesy, communication, trustworthiness, security, understanding, and tangibles (Haron et al., 2020; Mattah et al., 2018), in 1991, Parasuraman and colleagues revised the instrument above to include five dimensions for measuring service quality. These dimensions consist of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1991; Mattah et al., 2018; Shurair and Pokharel, 2019; Bichler et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2020; Zia, 2020). However, despite the widespread use of the SERVQUAL tool for measuring service quality, it has yet to be criticized, particularly regarding reliability and validity. Variability in scoring and the stability of the factors used for measurement have been questioned (Njau, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to refine the SERVQUAL instrument. By adding items or modifying the wording of items to align or be contextually appropriate for the study (Haron et al., 2020), the exact dimensions are sometimes used for measurement, and occasionally, different sizes are used to measure service quality (Endeshaw, 2019). Despite criticisms of the SERVQUAL tool for measuring service quality, it remains a fundamental instrument for measuring service quality overall (Mattah et al., 2018). The widely used 5-dimensional service quality measures (Bichler et al., 2020) are employed across various industries and contexts (Azzari et al., 2020). For example, in the banking industry, healthcare industry, airline industry, hotel industry, and tour company industry (Fang et al., 2020), from the research above studies, it can be seen that the SERVQUAL service quality measurement tool has been developed, tested, and widely used in numerous research studies in the service industry. This is done to assess customer perceptions and identify the relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Shafiq et al., 2019). Many researchers have utilized the service quality measurement tool in their studies, leading to success in various industries (Fang et al., 2020).

Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, and Best (2007) define the perception of service quality in educational institutions as follows: Perception is a process that begins with customers' discovery and interest in marketing offerings and ends with the interpretation of meaning by customers. Factors influencing customer perception include exposure, attention, interpretation, and perception, which influence customer memory and consumer decision-making. Poor perception may lead customers to encounter services randomly, with little interest and relevance to their needs, resulting in short-term memory of the service. Without urgent problem-solving, customers may delay their purchase decisions. On the contrary, on the right side, there is a positive direction, where customers use thorough details to explore their desired services. This results in high interest and relevance to their needs at a high level. Consequently, customers can remember valuable experiences and positive feelings about the service. Therefore, customers can decide to use that service. Danjuma and Rasli (2013) studied the perceptual measurement of service quality dimensions in technology-based universities. The objective was to examine service quality dimensions within the context of technology-based universities in Nigeria. The sample group consisted of students studying at five state universities. The research instrument used was a questionnaire. The research findings revealed that students' expectations were consistently higher than perceptions across all dimensions. Gaps were identified between students' expectations and perceptions regarding the university's

service quality, with the largest gap found in the dimension of assurance, indicating that administrators should pay the highest attention to service quality in terms of assurance. Following assurance, trustworthiness, tangibility, understanding, and empathy were ranked in descending order of importance. Calvo-Porral et al. (2013) A study on perceived quality in higher education revealed that tangibility understanding and empathy significantly influenced the perceived quality variables the most in educational institutions. In addition, researchers also found significant differences in the relationship between public and private higher education institutions. Shekarchizadeh et al. (2011) studied the perception of international students studying at Malaysian higher education institutions regarding service quality using the SERVQUAL model. They analyzed the gaps in the modified SERVQUAL model and applied it to a sample group of 522 master's and doctoral students. The sample group was selected from the top 5 universities in Malaysia. The results showed that the newly discovered five dimensions differed in some aspects from the original SERVQUAL model: professionalism and contractual responsibility. As for the gap analysis, it was found that all perception items were negative compared to expectations. The researchers suggested that this research would be beneficial for administrators in identifying gaps and areas with significant disparities. This could lead to improvements and developments to enhance competitiveness. It would benefit the design of quality systems for educational institutions and be advantageous for students. Angell et al. (2008) used the Convergence interview method to study service quality in graduate and postgraduate education. Through exploratory factor analysis, they found that services could be categorized into four components: academic, entertainment, networking between academic institutions and external businesses, and student expenses. Academic and networking between academic institutions and external businesses were identified as the most important factors influencing the service quality of educational institutions. Khanchitpol Yousapronpaiboon (2014) examined the service quality measurement in Thai educational institutions using the SERVQUAL model. This research involved a sample group of 350 undergraduate students from private universities. The research findings revealed that higher education in Thailand fails to meet the expectations of undergraduate students, particularly in terms of physical facilities, resulting in a significant perception-expectation gap. Chantima Pannin (2010) investigated expectations and perceptions of service quality at the graduate school of Kasetsart University, using a questionnaire as the data collection tool from a sample group of 368 individuals. The research found that the average perception scores of service recipients were lower than the average expectation scores across all dimensions. The dimension with the highest average perception of service quality is trustworthiness, followed by confidence in the service provider, service tangibility, responsiveness, and understanding of the service recipient. The perception-expectation gap is most prominent in the dimension of understanding of the service recipient. Grek Geakiat (2008) conducted a study on the service quality of the Faculty of Economics, Burapha University, Chanthaburi Education Center, from the perspective of students, using a self-developed questionnaire based on the service quality concepts of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. The sample consisted of 109 students from the Master of Public Administration program, cohorts 8 and 9, General Management specialization, Faculty of Economics, Burapha University, Chanthaburi Education Center. The research findings indicate that responsiveness has the highest service quality level, followed by assurance, empathy, reliability, and tangibles being the dimension with the lowest service quality level.

Studying the service quality of higher education institutions is a crucial strategy to provide universities with tools to create student satisfaction. Many researchers have utilized the SERVQUAL Model, designed as a comprehensive tool for measuring service quality in various service organizations. Applying the SERVQUAL Model requires tailoring it to specific needs (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Several researchers have found this model beneficial for assessing service quality in higher education institutions (Soutar & McNeil, 1996). Therefore,

researchers have adapted the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991) for research and theoretical studies (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988; 1991; Sunanto et al., 2007; Zeithaml et al., 1990; Zeithaml et al., 2003). Research on the perception of service quality in higher education institutions (Angell et al., 2008; Calvo-Porral et al., 2013; Danjuma & Rasli, 2013; Khanchitpol Yousapronpaiboon, 2014; Shekarchizadeh et al., 2011) includes the following components: Thai higher education institutions' service quality perception consists of five dimensions: Tangibility, Responsiveness, Reliability, Empathy, and Assurance.

**Conceptual Framework**
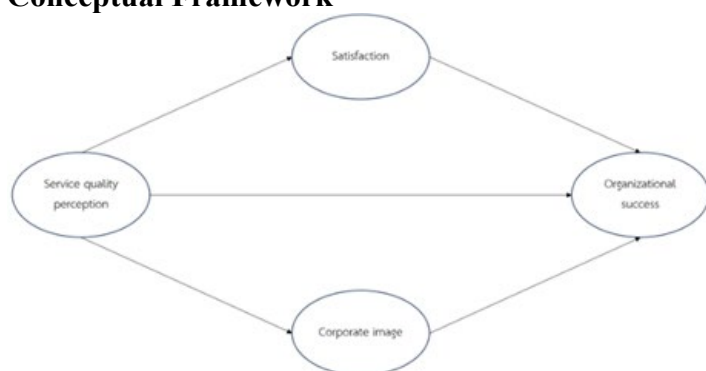


**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population for this study consists of students from Thai higher education institutions in Bangkok listed in the Asia University Rankings 2024. The selection is based on criteria of excellence, including Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, and International Outlook. The study focuses on five institutions that have improved their rankings: Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok, and Thammasat University. These institutions have a total student population of $139,234$, according to data submitted to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) for the second semester of the 2023 academic year (MHESI, 2024). The sample group for this study consists of students from Thai higher education institutions in Bangkok listed in the Asia University Rankings 2024. Specifically, the study focuses on institutions that have improved their rankings, totaling 300 students classified as "Good" according to the criteria established by Comrey and Lee (1992). The sample size is determined for research using structural equation modeling, modeling, and developing statistical formulas. It was found that the sample size for structural equation modeling varies significantly based on statistical criteria. In this study, the researchers considered sample group determination based on the approach proposed by Comrey and Lee (1992), ensuring the sample size meets appropriate criteria, as outlined below. Data collection involved field surveys using questionnaires distributed to communities, targeting students from Thai higher education institutions in Bangkok listed in the Asia University Rankings 2024. The sampling process was conducted based on real-world data and the required sample size, followed by statistical analysis. 2) Secondary data collection involved studying information from the research area, including gathering academic documents, articles, theses, research reports, books, journals, publications, online searches for information, and other documents relevant to the study. The collected concepts, theories, and related research supported this research.

The statistics used are percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics involves using statistical methods to test hypotheses, find causal relationships, and determine the influential factors on direct and indirect variables. This includes analyzing structural equation models (SEM) using the ADANCO 2.2.1 program (Hair et al., 2018)

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

From the research above, the researchers have connected the analytical findings with relevant theories and related research, which can be elaborated as follows: According to Hypothesis 1 testing results, the study concluded that the perception of service quality directly influences satisfaction with the institution being studied. These findings are consistent with the research hypothesis and align with the theoretical framework of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. (Parasuraman et al., 1988) service quality determines whether consumers are satisfied or dissatisfied, with factors including perceived trustworthiness in service provision, perceived responsiveness to service needs, perceived assurance, guarantees, perceived empathy towards service recipients, and perceived tangibility of the service. Similarly, Belas et al. (2014), Park et al. (2013), and Zeitham and Btner (1996) explained that when customers receive quality service that impresses them, it leads to satisfaction with the service received. This is consistent with the research of Han and Hyun (2015), Hapsari et al. (2016), Kasiri, et al. (2017), Khan (2017), Kondasani and Panda (2015), Lien et al. (2017), and Orel and Kara (2014). The study found that excellent service quality perception has a direct positive influence on customer satisfaction based on hypothesis testing. The results concluded that perceiving value from teaching directly impacts satisfaction with the institution one is studying. These findings align with the research hypothesis proposed, consistent with the theoretical frameworks of Kashyap and Bojanic (2000), and Petrick (2004), explaining that perceptions between what the customer pays for and the benefits received, such as graduation time, tuition fees, and expected benefits, play a crucial role. Anderson et al. (2004), Chiu et al. (2014), Gagne et al. (1992), Johnson (1992), and Swanson et al. (2007) explained that when customers perceive value between what they pay (price) and the benefits they receive from the service, they feel satisfied with the service they received. This is in line with the research of Atashfaraz and Abadi (2016), Hamza et al. (2014), Han et al. (2017), Lai and Chen (2011), and Lombart and Louis (2014), which found that perceiving good value has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.

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