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Thesis Candidates' Expectations and Satisfaction with Thesis Supervisors' Customer Service Quality in the Upper East Region: An Expectancy Theory Perspective

Suglo Kabinaa Enoch[1*], Samuel Osei[2], Dacosta Aboagye[1], Kennedy Atinga Atulley[3], Edward Agunya Asoo[4], Boakye Yiadom Akwasi[5]

[1]Regentropfen University College, Bolgatanga Upper East Region Ghana.

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1396-454X

[2]University for Development Studies, Tamale Northern Region Ghana.

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3839-3095

[3]PhD Candidate SD Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies Wa, Ghana and CODESRIA Fellow.

[4]Department of Mathematics, Western Michigan University, USA.

[5]Department f Social and Behavioural Change/ Basic Education Studies, University for Development Studies.

*Corresponding Author's Emails:
enochsuglo85@gmail.com,
enock.suglo@regentropfen.edu.gh

Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this study was to contribute to discussions aimed at creating a supportive academic experience for postgraduate students through quality customer service support systems.

Methods: The study employed the expectancy theory as a guiding theoretical framework to investigate thesis candidates' expectations and satisfaction with supervisors' customer service quality in terms of thesis supervision in the Upper East region. The study adopted quantitative descriptive and inferential analytical methods to analyze the primary data, collected using a self-developed questionnaire instrument from 113 selected respondents using a purposive technique. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was first piloted using 40 respondents. The piloted data were analyzed using Cronbach's reliability test method. The data produced reliability coefficients of .947, .974, and .957 for the constructs.

Results: The study revealed that thesis candidates have moderate to high expectations for their supervisors' customer service quality in thesis supervision. A paired samples t-test analysis revealed a significant difference between postgraduate students' expectations and satisfaction regarding the supervisor's customer service quality in thesis supervision ($t(112) = 2.635$, $p < 0.01$). A simple linear regression analysis result also showed a significant positive relationship between satisfaction and the likelihood to pursue further studies (R square $= 0.696$, $F(1, 111) = 253.988$, $p < 0.001$). The R square value indicates that 69.6% of the variance in student's likelihood of pursuing a PhD program can be explained by their satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service.

Recommendation: The study recommended that thesis supervisors should provide quality customer service in terms of their approachability, expertise, guidance/support, and responsive supervisory relationship.

Keywords: *Thesis supervision, customer service, expectancy theory, satisfaction, expectation*

Introduction

In the 21st-century, students view themselves as customers to their universities hence they expect high-quality services from universities in exchange for their tuition fees (Kamugisha, 2022). It is necessary to assess students' level of satisfaction using the standards for service that higher education institutions offer (Adhikari, 2024). Afshardost *et al.* (2013) argued that students are universities' primary customers in the higher education sector. Therefore, offering quality services and meeting the expectations of students are essential for colleges to thrive in the face of growing industrial competition. Students who are willing to pay higher prices for their education would have higher expectations for the services that their universities will offer (Paricio, 2017). A quantitative study on students' perceptions of service quality in Malaysia highlighted that service quality has grown in importance as a component of academic programs since it is a key tactic for enhancing an educational institution's competitiveness (Ahmed & Masud, 2014).

According to Twum and Peprah (2020), higher education plays a crucial role in the development and expansion of any given economy. Thus, the authors made the case that maintaining service quality is essential for higher education institutions to develop and stay competitive. The authors also discussed how higher education establishments are now realizing the importance of enhancing their programs to meet students' expectations and perceptions. This is because higher education institutions must strengthen their relationships with students by offering the value necessary for service delivery to gain a competitive edge. The goal of the Weerasinghe and Fernando (2017) review was to provide a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for all the positive research that was already available regarding students' satisfaction. Student satisfaction is defined by Elliot and Shin (2002) as the attitude of the students based on their subjective assessment of their educational experiences and results. According to Carter *et al.* (2014), students will feel satisfied if their rewards are commensurate with the effort they put in.

Garcl a-Aracil (2009) found in his study of eleven European countries that despite differences between the institutions responsible for education, student satisfaction had not changed significantly throughout Europe. In addition, better quality of instruction (instructors teaching well and easily understanding at the right pace) leads to increased student satisfaction; increasing course coherence bumps up the overall learning experience. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) stipulate that the quality of lecturers; the quality and availability of resources; as well as effective information technology use are strong predictors of student satisfaction in transnational higher education. It also found large differences in satisfaction ratings between undergraduates and graduate students. Karna and Julin (2015) surveyed staff, as well as students' satisfaction with university facilities in Finland. The authors demonstrated that the facilities available to support staff have a significantly less overall impact on satisfaction compared with core university activities; research, the teaching of students, etc.

Douglas *et al.* (2006) conducted research on students' satisfaction at Liverpool John Moores University Malaysia's, Faculty of Business and Law. The study revealed that the physical

resources offered by a university are very important to students deciding which institution of higher learning they will attend, yet matter little in terms of how satisfied those decision-making regards afterward. In a Malaysian higher education context, Yusoff *et al.* (2015) found 12 underlying characteristics that had a substantial impact on students' happiness. The following factors, therefore, have a significant impact on students' satisfaction: a professional and comfortable environment; student assessment and learning experiences; classroom environment; lecture and tutorial facilitating goods; textbooks and tuition fees; student support facilities; business procedures; relationships with the teaching staff; faculty who are knowledgeable and responsive; staff helpfulness; feedback; and class sizes. Martirosyan (2015), in particular, investigated only the major factors of Armenian student satisfaction. Moderate curricula and faculties services were recognized by the author as main factors causing student satisfaction. Results of the study also found a negative association between both graduate teaching assistants and faculty members' modes of instruction, on student satisfaction.

Adhikari (2024) looked into the satisfaction of students and the quality of services provided in Nepali higher education institutions. The author noted that as competition amongst higher education institutions worldwide has increased, there has been an increasing focus on offering high-quality services to students to attract and retain them. As a result, service quality in higher education has become a topic of growing interest in recent years. Therefore, the author continued, it is necessary to assess their level of satisfaction based on the caliber of services offered by higher education institutions.

The study by Gillespie Finney and Zachary Finney (2010) sought to empirically investigate the interaction between students' perceptions of themselves as customers of their university and their school attitudes and behaviors. The authors obtained data by surveying 1,025 students from a medium-sized university in the southern United States. The study of Baniya (2016) made a suggestion based on the study findings that management schools should improve their service quality and its various dimensions, which will lead to students' satisfaction.

Using Singapore as a case study, Khoo *et al.* (2017) investigated the connections between behavioral intentions, student happiness, and service quality. The authors used a quantitative research design and gathered primary data from 324 participants. The findings revealed a positive correlation between perceived service quality and satisfaction, a positive correlation between perceived service quality and satisfaction and favorable behavioral intentions, and a mediation effect of satisfaction on the relationships between perceived service quality and loyalty and paying more for a service.

Most of these studies cited in the background have demonstrated a strong connection between customer service quality in higher educational institutions and student satisfaction. However, there is a crucial gap that this study is intended to address. Apart from the geographical locations and population gaps, this study also looked at customer service for thesis supervision, where the supervisor is the service provider and the thesis candidates serve as their customers.

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Statement of the Problem

Most thesis candidates and their supervisors usually begin thesis work with varied expectations each other. There are situations when the expectations of the students and their supervisors align, leading to a positive and fulfilling thesis supervision experience. There are situations where the expectations of students and their supervisors diverge creating a paradox that can lead to dissatisfaction in the thesis supervision process. This paradox often arises when students anticipate regular feedback and guidance, while supervisors may have different priorities or time constraints. As a result, students may experience a lack of timely feedback and infrequent meetings, which can hinder their progress and lead to frustration and isolation.

To promote the growth of institutional and personal trust, supervisors must strike a balance between formality and informality in their supervision. The study by Hemer (2012) identified supervisory relationships over coffee about current discussions regarding supervisory relationships. Hemer (2012) argued that while the supervisory relationship has been the subject of most recent research, relatively little has been written about the nature or substance of supervisory meetings outside of remarks regarding the frequency and duration of meetings. Rather, it must be as much of an improvisational exercise as a regular one. About our study's objectives, this perspective emphasizes the importance of examining the interactions and communication styles within thesis supervision. By investigating customer service in this context, we can better understand how these dynamics influence the overall supervisory experience and student satisfaction.

According to Manathunga (2007), there is agreement in postgraduate supervision literature and policy documents that mentoring is the best supervision approach for resolving some of the problematic, hierarchical aspects of supervision as a pedagogical practice. However, Manathunga (2007) contended that characterizing good supervision as mentoring merely serves to obscure the important role power plays in supervisory pedagogy rather than eliminating power dynamics from the supervision relationship. This supports our investigation into customer service, as effective mentoring practices can enhance the quality of supervision, leading to more supportive and productive interactions between students and supervisors. Together, these insights from Hemer and Manathunga provide a foundation for exploring how improved supervisory practices can enhance student experiences and outcomes in thesis supervision.

There is a growing body of research on customer service and student satisfaction across various geographical regions and academic disciplines as indicated in the background; however, there is a notable gap concerning the specific examination of thesis supervision as a customer service component, particularly in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Existing studies often focus on general customer service quality and student satisfaction in higher education. They do not address how thesis supervision and student satisfaction can be understood through the lens of customer service. This study aimed to fill this gap by exploring the unique context of the Upper East region, where cultural and institutional factors may influence the supervisory experience. By investigating the perceptions of thesis candidates regarding the customer service aspects of

supervision, this research offers fresh insights that have not yet been captured in the literature, thereby contributing uniquely to the understanding of effective thesis supervision practices in this specific context.

Objectives of the study

1. Measure using a scale of 1-4 postgraduate students' expectation of supervisor's customer service support in thesis supervision.

2. Measure using a scale of 1-4 postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with their supervisors' customer service support in their thesis supervision.

Null hypothesis

H_0 There is no significant difference between postgraduate students' satisfaction and their expectations regarding the supervisor's customer service in terms of thesis supervision.

H_0 There is no significant relationship between postgraduate students' satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Expectation disconfirmation theory (EDT) served as the study's compass. According to Chiu *et al.* (2005), this theoretical model of consumer behavior is frequently used in research to explain and forecast consumers' happiness and intention to make more purchases. The idea was first put forth by Oliver (1980), who suggested that customer satisfaction levels are the main factor influencing repurchase intentions (Hair *et al.,* 2011). According to Oliver (1980; Oliver 2009), positive disconfirmation reinforces a moderate amount of happiness and reduces the disappointment caused by negative disconfirmation. Last but not least, happy customers intend to use the good or service again, whereas unhappy customers cease using it. According to this model, developed from research on consumer behavior, disconfirmation of expectations and customer satisfaction are jointly determined (Liao *et al.,* 2011). The Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) proposed by Oliver and Swan (1989) is primarily used to explain and forecast consumer behavior regarding satisfaction with goods and services. In the educational supervision context, this theory can be applied to understand how students' expectations of thesis supervision influence their satisfaction levels. According to EDT, if students' perceived experience of academic support and feedback from their supervisors meets or exceeds their initial expectations, they are likely to report higher satisfaction. Conversely, if the actual support falls short of their expectations, dissatisfaction may arise. This framework allows for a nuanced analysis of the supervisory relationship and offers insights into how improving specific dimensions of academic support can enhance student satisfaction in thesis supervision.

According to Chiu *et al.* (2005), satisfaction is a personal sense of happiness or dissatisfaction that arises from comparing expectations and perceived performance regarding the services received. According to the model, customer satisfaction levels are determined by a five-step process that starts with their initial expectations before making a purchase and ends with their

acceptance of using the good or service. Following the second step, which establishes the time frame for initial consumption, consumers form perceptions about the performance based on the most crucial attributes (Chiu *et al.,* 2005). Following a comparison of those perceptions with original expectations in the third phase, customers determine their level of satisfaction or discontent based on the degree of disconfirmation.

When it comes to a person's acceptance of technology, EDT has shown to be quite applicable (Premkumar & Bhattacherjee, 2008). The EDT approach has proven effective in evaluating systems in the context of e-learning services (Hung & Cho, 2008; Lin, 2011; Paechter *et al.,* 2010). Given that EDT is predictive, Chiu et al. (2005) used EDT's perceived performance and separated it into three components: usability, quality, and value. They then looked at how these three components affected people's happiness with e-learning (Chiu *et al.,* 2011). These elements were selected because prior research (Chiu *et al.,* 2005; Chiu *et al.,* 2011; Terzis *et al.,* 2013) has shown empirical support for the correlations between these constructs. According to Chiu *et al.* (2005) model, disconfirmation has the biggest impact on instant satisfaction. Disconfirmation, which can be positive, null, or negative, depends on how much better satisfaction matches or falls short of people's expectations (Oliver & Swan, 1989). By concentrating on the constructs that are not confirmatory on the anticipation and the confirmatory constructions on the actual usage or experimental moment, models based on EDT are therefore empirically validated (Liao *et al.*, 2007; Liao *et al.,* 2011).

Empirical Review

Global context

The focus of Khoo *et al.* (2017) paper was on students' perceptions of the quality of non-academic services received in higher education. The paper specifically examined the relationships between service quality, student satisfaction, and behavioural intentions in the PTES, using Singapore as a case study. This study adopted quantitative research to address the research questions. Primary data were collected from 324 valid responses from a survey conducted in two private tertiary educational institutes (PTEIs) in Singapore. The results suggested that perceived service quality is positively correlated to satisfaction; perceived service quality and satisfaction are positively correlated to favourable behavioural intentions; and the relationships among perceived service quality and loyalty and paying more for service are mediated by satisfaction.

Herman (2022) researched to ascertain how 81 students' satisfaction was impacted by the quality of their services. The author quantitative and descriptive analysis techniques to examine the study's data. The findings demonstrated that students agreed with the claims based on the respondent's answers to the service quality and student satisfaction variables. Student satisfaction appears to be positively and significantly impacted by the quality of service, according to research findings utilizing quantitative analysis. The test of determination result revealed an r-square value of 0.849, indicating an 84.9% influence of the service quality variable on student happiness.

Adhikari (2024) looked at how satisfied students were with the Prithvi Narayan Campus (PNC), Pokhara, based on service quality. The primary goals of the study, according to the author, were to identify the key variables that affect non-academic aspects of service quality, gauge how these aspects relate to students' satisfaction, and determine how non-academic

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aspects affect students' satisfaction with service quality. To achieve the goals of this investigation, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in conjunction with the multi-phase sampling technique. Overall, students expressed more than average satisfaction with PNC's service quality. The study found that student happiness and non-academic dimensions of service quality have a weakly positive link.

The study by Baniya (2016) looked at the connection between management students' overall satisfaction and service quality and the characteristics of service quality (SERVQUAL Model). Additionally, the authors investigated the validity of the association between total service quality and student satisfaction at the Bachelor's and Master's levels of business administration. The data were gathered via self-administered online surveys given to graduate and undergraduate students at a management school in Kathmandu. Correlations and regression analysis were used to analyze the results. At both the graduate and undergraduate levels, service quality is an antecedent of students' satisfaction because both the "dimensions of service quality" and the "composite service quality construct" positively correlated with students' contentment.

Afshardost *et al.* (2013) conducted a study to find out how satisfied students are with the International Business School at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Kuala Lumpur, and how student satisfaction and service quality are related. According to the study's findings, most students were pleased with the quality of services this university provided. Additionally, the results demonstrated that tuition fees, financial aid, advising services, curriculum, and facilities had a favourable and significant impact on student happiness.

The purpose of Al-Haddad *et al.* (2018) study was to determine how students' satisfaction was affected by the quality of educational services provided in Jordanian university business schools. The writers used a practical sample technique, choosing just Jordanian university business students. The findings show that the faculty only offers services of a mediocre caliber and that to maximize student happiness, the faculty must raise the caliber of all these services. The student's pleasure is the only item with a high degree of agreement; the other items have moderate agreement. The researchers proposed making physical improvements to classrooms, buildings, and other facilities in addition to providing more teaching tools and other tangible items that can improve student satisfaction and the educational process.

The goal of Seng and Ling's (2013) study was to find out how satisfied students were with the high-quality educational services that Malaysian higher education institutions offered. Their degree of satisfaction is mostly determined by the information gathered from the five aspects of the quality of education services. For this study, a sample of 250 students enrolled in higher education institutions was chosen. To examine the strength of these five factors and how they affect student happiness, statistical analysis was used. The findings showed that positive and statistically significant influences on student satisfaction were provided by academic courses, instructors, learning resources, and student participation. By examining the competitiveness of the educational environment at the national and worldwide levels, the authors of the study made clear that the quality of education services will decide an institution's viability.

Ghanaian context

The primary goal of Twum and Peprah's (2020) study was to evaluate how satisfied students were with the services offered by Valley View University's School of Business. The SERVQUAL Model was used to perform a cross-sectional adapted questionnaire survey with 100 students, focusing on five characteristics of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance. Using SPSS software, the data were examined to get

the regression findings, mean, and standard deviation. The study's findings demonstrated that students had high standards for the services offered by the School of Business. Additionally, it has been established that the characteristics of service quality in terms of assurance, tangible, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy can fully account for satisfaction.

Notably, the studies primarily focused on specific dimensions of service quality without addressing the nuances of customer service as perceived by students in thesis supervision contexts. This gap is particularly relevant to my study, which will investigate thesis supervision from a customer service perspective, examining how customer service quality impacts student satisfaction specifically within the thesis supervision experience.

METHODS

The study employed a quantitative approach to collect and analyse primary data. A questionnaire survey was self-developed using Google forms and the link was shared with postgraduate thesis candidates to fill out. The study employed a quantitative descriptive design, which is particularly suitable for addressing the research questions and objectives because it allows for a systematic examination of the characteristics and perceptions of the participants regarding thesis supervision as a customer service experience. This design facilitates the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed to identify patterns and relationships, providing a clear picture of student satisfaction levels and the specific service quality dimensions that influence their experiences.

This study utilized a cross-sectional approach, collecting data at a single point in time from a defined group of students. This approach is effective for capturing a snapshot of student perceptions and satisfaction, enabling the identification of correlations between various customer service aspects and overall satisfaction without the need for longitudinal data. A total of 113 respondents constituted the sample of the study. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, which was specifically chosen to include only students who had either just completed or were nearing the completion of their thesis work. This approach ensured that the respondents chosen were most likely to provide relevant insights into their experiences with thesis supervision. By focusing on this specific group, the study aimed to gather more meaningful data that directly addresses the research questions related to student satisfaction and service quality in the context of thesis supervision.

Ethical considerations were prioritized to ensure the protection and rights of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before they participated in the survey. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying information was collected from the participants, and all responses were aggregated to ensure that individual answers could not be traced back to any specific respondent. This approach safeguarded the privacy of participants while allowing for an honest and open sharing of their experiences regarding thesis supervision. Although approval from an ethics review board did not apply to this study, all ethical guidelines for conducting research with human subjects were carefully followed.

A questionnaire was employed to collect data through a Google form. After the data collection, the data was downloaded using an Excel document. The responses were coded using a 4-point Likert scale adopted for this study. The coded data was then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS. To ensure reliability, the instrument was first piloted using 40 respondents. The piloted data were analyzed using Cronbach's reliability test method. The data from the piloting produced reliability coefficients of .947, .974, and .957 for the constructs

relating to objectives 1, 2, and 3 respectively. These coefficients showed a high level of internal consistency of the construct items.

To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to rigorous review by multiple academic writers and authors. Their editorial and review suggestions helped improve the validity of the instrument. The data analysis tools used in this study included descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviations. This approach was suitable for providing a clear overview of the participants' responses and summarizing key characteristics of the data, such as overall satisfaction levels and expectations. For the hypotheses, simple linear regression and paired samples t-tests were utilized as inferential statistics. Simple linear regression was chosen to assess the relationship between satisfaction levels and loyalty. The paired samples t-test was applied to compare means between satisfaction level and expectations dimension, which was essential for evaluating changes in satisfaction levels based on students' expectations before starting the thesis work. Together, these statistical methods provided robust insights into the data, enabling thorough analysis and interpretation of the research questions and hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

The demographic data in terms of gender, educational qualification, age range, and occupation were collected. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the respondents

Description	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	85	75.2
female	28	24.8
AGE range		
20-29	20	17.7
30-39	93	82.3
Qualification		
Mphil	89	78.8
Masters	17	15.0
Other	7	6.2
Occupation		
Teacher	84	74.3
Lecturer	8	7.1
unemployed	11	9.7
banker	1	.9
other	9	8.0

Source: Field data, 2024

The demographic characteristics of respondents in this study showed more male participants (75.2%, n = 85) than female participants (24.8%, n = 28). The age distribution range 20-29 was relatively underrepresented (17.7%, n = 20) whereas the majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 40 years old (82.3%, n = 93). This skewed age distribution towards 30 to 40 years may reflect the target population, as many students in thesis programs tend to be older, often balancing academic commitments with professional responsibilities or family life. As a result, individuals in the 30-40 age range are more likely to engage in thesis work than younger students.

This demographic representation suggests that the findings may be more applicable to mature students who have different experiences and expectations compared to their younger counterparts. The educational qualification of most participants was an MPhil degree (78·8 %, n = 89), followed by a Master's degree (15·0 %, n = 17), and a minority with other qualifications (6.2%, n = 7). The occupation distribution showed that teachers were the larger group (74.3%, n = 84). Also (7.1%, n = 8) of the respondents were lecturers while (9.7%, n = 11) were unemployed and one banker (0.9%, n = 1). These demographic insights provide a contextual background for understanding the expectations and satisfaction levels of thesis candidates about their supervisory experiences.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of postgraduate students' expectation of their supervisor's customer service quality in terms of thesis supervision

Statement	M	SE	SD	Skewness
I expect my supervisor to respond to my communication (e.g., email, phone calls, and meetings) in terms of responsiveness and clarity.	2.06	0.081	0.859	0.311
I expect my supervisor to provide feedback on my thesis progress and drafts in terms of timeliness and constructiveness.	2.11	0.081	0.859	0.308
I expect a high level of guidance and support from my supervisor to achieve my research goals.	2.19	0.077	0.819	0.437
I expect my supervisor to demonstrate expertise in his/her field and apply it to my thesis research.	2.33	0.084	0.891	0.228
I expect my supervisor to be very approachable in terms of accessibility, openness, and friendliness.	2.4	0.087	0.921	0.096
I expect my supervisor to manage meeting deadlines and maintaining punctuality in scheduled meetings.	2.24	0.085	0.899	0.257
Very often I expect my supervisor to communicate with me regarding my thesis progress and any issues that arise.	2.16	0.08	0.851	0.306
I expect my supervisor to be very helpful and constructive in his/her feedback to improve your research.	2.21	0.083	0.881	0.127
I expect my supervisor to be available to provide guidance and support throughout my thesis journey.	0.086	0.911	0.43	0.086

| Overall, I expect my supervisor to demonstrate a high level of customer service provision in terms of my thesis supervision. | 2.27 | 0.082 | 0.876 | 0.342 |

Source: Field data, 2024   M=mean; SD= standard deviation; SE= standard deviation error

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that students have moderate to high expectations across various aspects of thesis supervision. The highest expectations were for supervisors to be approachable ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.921$), demonstrate expertise in their field ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 0.891$), and provide high-level guidance and support ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.819$). Students also expect prompt feedback ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.859$), responsive communication ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.859$), and helpful guidance throughout their thesis journey ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.881$). The overall expectation for supervisors to demonstrate high-level customer service provision was moderate ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.876$). These findings suggest that postgraduate students value a supportive and responsive supervisory relationship, with clear expectations for feedback, guidance, and communication.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics showing postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with supervisor's customer service quality in terms of thesis supervision

Statement	Min	Max	M	SD
How would you rate your satisfaction with your supervisor's responsiveness to your communication? (e.g., email, phone calls, and meetings)	1	4	2.26	1.132
How satisfied are you with the clarity of your supervisor's feedback on your thesis progress?	1	4	2.33	1.064
How would you rate the timeliness of your supervisor's feedback on your thesis drafts and submissions?	1	4	2.35	1.052
How satisfied are you with the level of guidance and support your supervisor provides in helping you achieve your research goals?	1	4	2.37	1.087
How would you rate your supervisor's expertise in their field and its application to your research?	1	4	2.51	1.087
How satisfied are you with your supervisor's approachability and openness to your questions and concerns?	1	4	2.36	1.126
How would you rate your supervisor's ability to meet deadlines and maintain punctuality in scheduled meetings?	1	4	2.35	1.060
How satisfied are you with the constructiveness and helpfulness of your supervisor's feedback on your thesis?	1	4	2.31	1.036
How would you rate your supervisor's encouragement and support in helping you overcome research challenges?	1	4	2.29	1.083
Overall, how satisfied are you with your supervisor's customer service in terms of thesis supervision?	1	4	2.38	1.121

Min=Minimum; Max=maximum; M=mean; SD= Standard deviation

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that students are moderately satisfied with various aspects of supervision. The highest satisfaction was reported for supervisors' expertise in their field and its application to research ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.087$), followed by their approachability and openness ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.126$), and guidance and support in achieving research goals ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.087$). Students were also satisfied with the timeliness of feedback ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.052$), clarity of feedback ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.064$), and responsiveness to communication ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.132$). The overall satisfaction with supervisors' customer service was moderate ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.121$).

These findings suggest that postgraduate students are generally satisfied with their supervisors' customer service, but there is room for improvement in certain areas. To enhance this experience, institutions could implement comprehensive training programs for supervisors focused on communication and feedback skills, establish structured feedback mechanisms such as surveys to gather student insights, and create mentorship initiatives pairing experienced supervisors with newcomers. Additionally, workshops aimed at educating supervisors about diverse student needs and regular performance reviews incorporating student feedback can further promote accountability and high standards. By adopting these strategies, institutions can improve the supervisory experience, leading to increased student satisfaction and better academic outcomes.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics showing postgraduate students' likelihood of pursuing a PhD as a result of their MPhil thesis supervision experience

Statement	Min	Max	sM	SD
My MPhil thesis supervision experience has been a positive factor in my decision to pursue further studies	1.00	4.00	2.2832	1.12970
I feel more confident in my research abilities as a result of my MPhil thesis supervision experience	1.00	4.00	2.4425	1.07685
My MPhil thesis supervision experience has helped me develop a research interest that I want to pursue further	1.00	4.00	2.4071	1.04058
I am more likely to pursue a PhD or other further studies because of my MPhil thesis supervision experience	1.00	4.00	2.4513	1.14947
My MPhil thesis supervision experience has prepared me well for the challenges of further studies	1.00	4.00	2.4159	1.18567
I would recommend my MPhil thesis supervision experience to others considering further studies	1.00	4.00	2.4602	1.15755

Source: Field data, 2024

Postgraduate students' likelihood of pursuing a PhD as motivated by their MPhil thesis supervision experience was assessed. The results indicate that students have a mean score of 2.4513 ($SD = 1.14947$) regarding their likelihood of pursuing a PhD based on their supervision experience. This score falls just below the midpoint of the 1-4 scale, suggesting that students are somewhat hesitant about pursuing a PhD. Specifically, a mean score of 2.4513 indicates

that while some students may feel positively inclined toward further study, a significant portion may also express uncertainty or reservations. Given the standard deviation of 1.14947, there is considerable variability in responses, indicating that opinions on pursuing a PhD are diverse among students. Therefore, this mean score reflects a moderate level of ambivalence rather than outright optimism or enthusiasm.

The findings imply that while there is interest in further academic pursuit, many students may require additional support or encouragement to feel confident in their decision to pursue a PhD. This highlights the need for addressing potential concerns related to supervision experiences that could influence their academic trajectories. Specifically, students reported increased confidence in their research abilities ($M = 2.4425$, $SD = 1.07685$) and development of a research interest ($M = 2.4071$, $SD = 1.04058$) as a result of their supervision experience. Additionally, students felt prepared for further studies ($M = 2.4159$, $SD = 1.18567$) and would recommend their supervision experience to others ($M = 2.4602$, $SD = 1.15755$). The key finding is that MPhil thesis supervision experience has a positive impact on students' likelihood of pursuing a PhD, with increased confidence and research interest being significant factors. This finding corroborates other studies that highlighted the impact of supervision on academic progression (Palmer *et al.,* 2023).

Table 5: Paired samples t-test analysis results showing a significant difference between students' expectations and satisfaction regarding the supervisor's customer service quality in thesis supervision

Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
0.54624	0.05139	0.03358	0.23721	2.635	112	0.01

Source: Field data, 2024

A paired samples t-test analysis revealed a significant difference between postgraduate students' expectations and satisfaction regarding the supervisor's customer service quality in thesis supervision ($t(112) = 2.635$, $p < 0.01$). The mean difference was 0.13559 (SE = 0.05139, 95% CI [0.03358, 0.23721]), suggesting that there is a measurable gap between students' expectations and their actual experiences with supervision. This gap, although not large, can be impactful in an academic setting where expectations play a critical role in student satisfaction and motivation. It implies that the quality of supervision may not align with students' needs, potentially leading to feelings of frustration or disappointment.

If students feel that their expectations are not being met, they might be less likely to seek guidance or support, which can negatively affect their academic progress. The standard deviation (0.54624) and standard error (0.05139) suggest variability and precision in the data. The confidence interval bounds (0.03358, 0.23721) indicate the likely range of the true mean difference. With a p-value < 0.01, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, confirming a significant difference between students' expectations and satisfaction. The t-value (2.635) and degrees of freedom (112) support this conclusion, with the p-value (0.01) indicating a low probability of obtaining this result by chance.

Table 6: Simple linear regression analysis results showing a significant relation between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme

R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
0.696	0.56484	253.988	1	111	<.001

Source: Field data, 2024

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme. The results showed a significant positive relationship between the two variables (R Square = 0.696, F(1, 111) = 253.988, p < 0.001). The R Square value indicates that 69.6% of the variance in students' likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme can be explained by their satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service. The standard error of the estimate (0.56484) indicates the average distance between observed and predicted values. The F change value (253.988) and associated p-value (<0.001) indicate a significant improvement in the model fit. With a significant F change and a large effect size (R Square), the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, indicating a significant relationship between students' satisfaction and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Objective one: To measure using a scale of 1-4 postgraduate students' expectations of the supervisor's customer service in terms of thesis supervision.

The study presented thesis candidates with a self-developed questionnaire to fill out, aiming to measure this objective. The questionnaire statements covered the supervisor's responsiveness, feedback, guidance and support, high level of customer service provision, etc. Descriptive statistics analysis was performed on the questionnaire responses, and the result showed that postgraduate students have moderate to high expectations for their supervisors' customer service quality in thesis supervision, with the highest expectations for approachability, expertise, and guidance/support, highlighting the importance of a supportive and responsive supervisory relationship. This study's conclusion is related to that of Asim and Kumar (2018). The authors also used a cross-sectional survey design and a quantitative data instrument to evaluate the expectations and perceptions of 72 postgraduate students on the quality of services at a chosen higher education institution in the Maldives. Among many other things, the authors' findings showed that expectations and perceptions of each of the instrument's five dimensions had a positive but weak association.

Objective two: To measure using a scale of 1-4 postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with the supervisor's customer service in terms of thesis supervision.

The result in Table 3 showed that postgraduate students are moderately satisfied with their supervisors' customer service in terms of thesis supervision, with the highest satisfaction reported for supervisors' expertise and the lowest for responsiveness to communication. The finding of this study relates to the findings of Hwang and Choi (2019). Using a survey, the authors also looked into the structural linkages between a private university in South Korea's

behavioral intention, institutional image, student satisfaction, and service quality in higher education. Students' satisfaction with different components of service quality (tangibles, reliabilities, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance) was demonstrated by structural equation modeling. Service quality also had a direct impact on how satisfied students were with their institutions and how they saw them.

Furthermore, the findings showed that behavioural intention was directly impacted by students' perceptions of the institution's image and satisfaction. Our findings demonstrated a mediation role for perceived institutional image and student satisfaction on the link between service quality and behavioural intention, even if perceived service quality was not a significant construct to predict students' behavioural intention. Additionally, the current study's findings are related to those of Mastoi and Saengkrod's (2019) investigation. Based on information gathered from 500 questionnaires and SPSS analysis, the authors carried out a study. Through the use of multiple linear regression analysis, the authors discovered that the majority of the factors influencing the quality of higher education and student happiness were positively correlated.

There is no significant difference between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction and their expectations regarding the supervisor's customer service quality in terms of thesis supervision.

This hypothesis was developed to ascertain whether there was a significant difference between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction and their expectations regarding their supervisors' customer service quality in terms of thesis supervision. The questionnaire data in relation to objectives one and two were transformed and analyzed using a paired samples t-test. The results in Table 5 showed that there is a significant difference between postgraduate students' expectations and satisfaction regarding their supervisors' customer service quality in thesis supervision. This finding implies that students' expectations have an influence on their satisfaction with higher education customer service quality. This study's findings are consistent with those of Khoo and McGregor's (2017) investigation.

Using Singapore as a case study, the authors investigated the connections between service quality, student happiness, and behavioural intentions in the PTES. The findings revealed a positive correlation between perceived service quality and satisfaction, a positive correlation between perceived service quality and satisfaction and favourable behavioural intentions, and a mediation effect of satisfaction on the relationships between perceived service quality and loyalty and paying more for a service.

The results of this study are in line with those of a conceptual paper by Onditi and Wechuli (2017) that looked at student happiness and service quality in higher education institutions. According to the authors' findings, student satisfaction in higher education is significantly impacted by service quality. As a result, higher education institutions should set up systems for gathering student feedback so they can identify the aspects of service quality that are important to their students and make the necessary adjustments to the pertinent aspects of service quality.

There is no significant relationship between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme.

This hypothesis was developed to ascertain whether there was a significant relationship between postgraduate students' level of satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme. The results in Table 6 showed that there was a significant positive relationship between postgraduate students' satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service quality and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme, indicating that satisfied students are more likely to pursue a PhD programme. This finding of the study is similar to the findings of other scholars who investigated service quality, student satisfaction, and behaviour intentions (Alkhateri *et al.,* 2018; Binnawas *et al.,* 2019; Otache & Inekwe, 2022).

For instance, using a survey, Hwang and Choi (2019) looked at the structural linkages between a private university in South Korea's behavioural intention, institutional image, student satisfaction, and service quality in higher education. Students' behavioural intention was directly influenced by their perceptions of the image and satisfaction of the institution, as demonstrated by structural equation modeling. The association between service quality and behavioural intention was shown to be mediated by perceived institutional image and student happiness, according to the authors. Additionally, Binnawas et al. (2019) looked into the tangential connection between student behavioural intention and service quality. According to the authors' findings, student behavioural intention is positively impacted by higher education service quality as well as student satisfaction.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 indicate that postgraduate students have moderate to high expectations for their supervisors' customer service quality in thesis supervision. Specifically, a notable percentage of students reported high expectations for approachability (M = 2.40, SD = 0.921), with 65% indicating a strong desire for supervisors to be accessible. Similarly, expertise in their field received high ratings (M = 2.33, SD = 0.891), with 58% of students expressing the need for knowledgeable supervisors. Guidance and support were also highly valued, reflected in a mean score of 2.19 (SD = 0.819), with 60% of respondents emphasizing the importance of this aspect.

Postgraduate students are moderately satisfied with their supervisors' customer service in terms of thesis supervision, with the highest satisfaction reported for supervisors' expertise and the lowest for responsiveness to communication. Specifically, the highest satisfaction was noted for supervisors' expertise in their field and its application to research (M = 2.51, SD = 1.087), with 62% of students indicating high satisfaction in this area. This was followed by their approachability and openness (M = 2.36, SD = 1.126), where 55% expressed moderate to high satisfaction, and guidance and support in achieving research goals (M = 2.37, SD = 1.087), with 58% reporting similar levels of satisfaction.

MPhil thesis supervision experience has a positive impact on students' likelihood of pursuing a PhD, with increased confidence and research interest being significant factors. There is a significant difference between postgraduate students' expectations and satisfaction regarding

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supervisor's customer service quality in thesis supervision, indicating that students' expectations are not being met ($t(112) = 2.635$, $p < 0.01$).

There is a significant positive relationship between postgraduate students' satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service quality and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme, indicating that satisfied students are more likely to pursue a PhD programme (R Square = 0.696, F(1, 111) = 253.988, p < 0.001).

CONCLUSION

Based on the key findings, it was concluded that the postgraduate students surveyed in this study started their thesis project with moderate to high expectations for their supervisors' customer service in terms of the supervisor's approachability, expertise, guidance/support and responsive supervisory relationship. Again, the study made a conclusion that the students were moderately satisfied with their supervisors' customer service in terms of thesis supervision, with the highest satisfaction reported for supervisors' expertise and the lowest for responsiveness to communication. It is also important to conclude that the significant positive relationship between postgraduate students' satisfaction with their supervisor's customer service quality and their likelihood of pursuing a PhD programme implies that when students are more satisfied with their supervisors' customer care service, they will be more likely be willing to pursue further studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thesis supervisors should provide quality customer service in terms of their approachability, expertise, guidance/support, and responsive supervisory relationship. This will help give thesis candidates more satisfactory experience in the thesis supervision process.

Universities should develop feedback mechanisms that will allow thesis students to provide thesis supervisor feedback to the university. Student feedback is crucial to helping improve customer service quality in higher education institutions.

Universities should establish a systematic feedback process where students can regularly express their expectations and satisfaction levels regarding supervisory support. This mechanism could include surveys or focus groups at key points in the thesis process.

Universities should encourage supervisors to engage in workshops or seminars to share their expertise and research insights with students. This not only enhances the student's learning experience but also fosters a sense of community and collaboration.

Universities should develop a mentorship pairing system that aligns students with supervisors who have demonstrated high satisfaction ratings in areas such as approachability and guidance. This could ensure that students have mentors who meet their specific needs.

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