

The Relationship Between Academic Service Quality and Employee Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Cambodian Public Universities

Sopheha Menh¹, Sokean Kouy², Visalbot Pok³, Sarom Mok⁴

^{1,2,3}College of Education, The University of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

⁴The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Research exploring the perceptions of public university employees in Cambodia regarding job satisfaction and academic service quality revealed significant insights. Using a quantitative design with a sample of 336 staff from three Phnom Penh universities, the study found that employees reported a high perception of both their job satisfaction and the academic services they provide. On average, staff felt more satisfied with their jobs than they rated the quality of academic services, although both were perceived positively. This suggests that job satisfaction is a slightly stronger factor. A key finding was the confirmed positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that the perception of academic service quality increases as job satisfaction increases. This correlation highlights the crucial link between employee well-being and the quality of education services. The research, driven by the need to enhance the education sector, provides valuable insights into employee morale and the current state of academic services within the Cambodian public university system, underscoring the importance of focusing on staff satisfaction as a strategy for improving educational offerings.

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Corresponding Author:

Sopheha Menh

Faculty of Education, The University of Cambodia

Email: sopheamenh@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is vital for societal progress, with academic institutions playing a critical role in disseminating knowledge. As the education industry has grown, so has the focus on assessing and improving the quality of its services. This emphasis stems from the need for educational institutions to remain competitive and accountable in a challenging market. Service quality has become a central theme in service-marketing literature, highlighting its importance for an institution's success [1], [2], [3]. In this regard, the

quality of services universities provide is an indicator of institutional performance and a determinant of their sustainability in the global higher education landscape.

A key determinant of high-quality academic services is the job satisfaction of staff [1], [2], [4]. The link between job satisfaction and service quality is a subject of growing interest, as satisfied employees are more likely to deliver excellent service [2], [5]. Effective academic leadership must prioritise employee well-being and needs, as frameworks like the two-factor theory [6] and the hierarchy of needs [7] underscore that meeting these needs boosts productivity and long-term institutional success. This study used the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), a widely recognised and reliable tool [8] based on Herzberg's two-factor theory [9], to measure job satisfaction. Therefore, exploring the connection between staff satisfaction and service outcomes provides valuable insights into how universities can enhance their organisational effectiveness.

In Cambodia, the demand for higher education is increasing due to population growth and technological advancements [1], [2], [10], [11], [12]. However, while the relationship between job satisfaction and service quality has been studied globally [1], [13], [14], there is a significant gap in comprehensive research specifically within the Cambodian context. This study addresses this lack of empirical data by focusing on the perceptions of public university staff in the country. Understanding this context is particularly important, as Cambodian universities are under growing pressure to align with international standards and improve their service quality to remain competitive regionally.

This study, driven by a need to address a research gap in the Cambodian context, has two main objectives: to evaluate the self-perceptions of job satisfaction and academic service quality among public university staff, and to determine the relationship between these two variables. To achieve this, the study uses the SERVQUAL questionnaire to measure service quality across five key dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability. The central hypothesis is that a positive relationship exists between job satisfaction and academic service quality among public university staff in Cambodia. By clarifying this relationship, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to guide policymakers and administrators in enhancing staff well-being and educational outcomes.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study utilised a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the perceptions of job satisfaction and academic service quality among public university staff in Cambodia. This approach was selected because it is ideal for collecting and analysing numerical data from a large sample at a single point in time, allowing for statistical analysis and identifying relationships between variables [15], [16]. The methodology followed a structured process, from data collection to analysis, ensuring the findings are reliable and generalizable to the wider population. Such a design is particularly suitable for exploring relational hypotheses, as it enables the researcher to capture current perceptions and compare them across a representative sample.

Population and Sample

The target population for this research was all staff members at public universities in Phnom Penh. A sample of 336 university employees, including teaching and administrative staff, was selected from three public universities in the city during the 2023-2024 academic year. The study employed a stratified probability sampling method to ensure the sample represented different subgroups within the academic workforce. As described by Creswell [16], this technique randomly selects individuals from a large group to ensure a proportionate and representative sample. This strategy minimises sampling bias and enhances the credibility of the results, making the findings more applicable to Cambodia's broader higher education context.

Instruments

A multi-section survey questionnaire was the primary data collection tool. The second section measured the faculty staff's perception of transformational leadership style using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) [17] in both Khmer and English. The third section assessed job satisfaction with the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) [8], which assesses intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction components. The fourth section evaluated the faculty staff's perceptions of academic service quality using the Performance-only Service Quality Questionnaire (SERVPERF) [18], focusing on five key dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability. Combining these instruments, the study captured multiple aspects of the academic work environment, ensuring a more holistic understanding of the relationship under investigation.

Reliability & Validity

A rigorous process was followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The questionnaires underwent a back-translation process, guided by practical instructions from Brislin et al. [19], and were reviewed by four specialists. A pilot study was also conducted to test the questionnaire and make necessary revisions based on feedback from a small group of respondents, as Creswell [15] and Brislin et al. [18] recommended. The internal consistency reliability for each construct was measured using Cronbach's alpha (α). A Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.70 is considered acceptable, indicating a high level of reliability for the scales used in this study. These steps ensured the instruments aligned with international standards and were culturally appropriate and comprehensible for Cambodian respondents.

Analysis

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (SD), were used to summarise the key features of the data. This approach is consistent with a 5-point Likert-type scale, as referenced by Harrison [20] and Erdem et al. [21]. Inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation were used to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and academic service quality. In addition, correlation

analysis allowed the researcher to test the study's central hypothesis, providing empirical evidence of the strength and direction of the relationship between the two key variables.

Table 1. The 5-level Likert Scale for Attitude Interpretation

Value of Mean Range	Attitude Interpretation
1.00 – 1.79	Very Dissatisfied/Strongly Disagree
1.80 – 2.59	Dissatisfied/Disagree
2.60 – 3.39	Neither
3.40 – 4.19	Satisfied/Agree
4.20 – 5.00	Very Satisfied/Strongly Agree

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was the main statistical tool to test the study's theories. A significance level of 0.01 was selected because the researcher was confident that the relationships found in the sample were a true representation of those in the larger population. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the linear regression model indicates the extent to which the variable (x) accounts for the variation in the response variable (y). R^2 was defined as the ratio of the independent variables (transformational leadership components) to the dependent variables' variance (job satisfaction and academic service quality). By combining correlation and regression analysis, the study could determine the strength and direction of relationships and assess the predictive power of leadership variables on job satisfaction and service quality. This analytical strategy ensures that the findings are statistically rigorous and practically meaningful for higher education management.

Ethical Considerations

All research procedures adhered to ethical standards. Formal approval was obtained from the top administration of each participating university. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and their rights, and their involvement was voluntary. The completion of the survey implied informed consent. To ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality, no personal identifiers were collected, and no financial incentives were offered for participation. The data collection process was designed to be honest and non-coercive.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Job Satisfaction and Service Quality among the University Staff

Self-perceptions of the job satisfaction and service quality instruments were assessed among the staff of public universities in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 335 staff from the three universities were chosen as research samples. They were among the survey questionnaires the researcher modified and used as the primary study tools. The findings, as shown in Table 2, revealed that the averages for idealised influence (attributed), idealised influence (behaviour), intellectual stimulation, motivating others, and personalised attention were 3.94, 3.97, 3.95, 3.75, and 3.48, respectively, with standard deviations of 0.92, 0.88, 0.87, 0.96, and 0.97. The TRL component's mean score of 3.82 and standard deviation of 0.79 revealed how university staff perceived their leaders'

transformational leadership style. These results indicate that leadership behaviours such as idealised influence and intellectual stimulation were rated relatively high, while individualised consideration received lower ratings, pointing to potential gaps in personalised staff support.

Table 2. The Means and Standard Deviations for Each Instrument Dimension

Instrument	No. of Items	Mean	SD.
TRL	20	3.82	0.79
<i>IDI-A</i>	4	3.94	0.92
<i>IDI-B</i>	4	3.97	0.88
<i>INM</i>	4	3.95	0.87
<i>INS</i>	4	3.75	0.96
<i>INC</i>	4	3.48	0.97
JOS	20	3.66	0.72
ASQ	20	3.49	0.78

This study showed that job satisfaction and academic service quality were positively and significantly correlated among public university staff in Phnom Penh. According to research findings that were consistent with the majority of previous studies on the relationship among the three variables under investigation, transformational leadership styles are highly correlated with job satisfaction and academic service quality include idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [22], [23], [24]. This suggests that leadership practices directly and indirectly impact both staff satisfaction and the perceived quality of academic services, reinforcing leadership's role as a key driver of institutional performance.

In order to improve group performance and, ultimately, academic service quality overall, university administrators should pay more attention to the needs and preferences of their employees. This is because staff members at the chosen public universities in Phnom Penh thought that the institutional service quality was moderate. Leaders can use reciprocal connections and communications to increase followers' effectiveness, productivity, and job satisfaction. Thus, targeted interventions that strengthen staff engagement and communication channels may translate into higher service quality and organisational effectiveness.

Relationships of Job Satisfaction and Service Quality among the University Staff

This section aims to determine how the three chosen public university staff in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, perceive the linkages between the five TRL characteristics, JOS, and ASQ. For each subscale tested in the surveys, Table 3 summarises descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, 95%, and the lowest and highest total scores. The results show that the three selected public university staff located in Phnom Penh, as perceived towards TRL, JOB, and ASQ, were at high (M=3.82, M=3.66, M=3.49, and S.D.=0.79, S.D.=0.72, S.D.=0.78, respectively).

Table 3. The Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum of Each Instrument

Instrument	M	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		SD.	Min	Max
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
TRL	3.82	3.71	3.88	0.79	1.15	4.95
IDI-A	3.94	3.81	4.01	0.92	1	5
IDL-B	3.97	3.86	4.04	0.88	1	5
INM	3.95	3.83	3.82	0.87	1	5
INS	3.75	3.62	3.59	0.96	1	5
INC	3.48	3.38	3.88	0.97	1	5
JOS	3.66	3.57	3.71	0.72	0.70	4.92
ASQ	3.49	3.40	3.56	0.78	0.76	4.91

The results of the normality and homogeneity tests are displayed in Table 4 below using the Shapiro-Wilk and Levene statistics. The Levene statistic was used to analyse the homogeneity of variance. Since its p-value was more than 0.05, the homogeneity conditions were satisfied. According to the statistically significant Shapiro-Wilk p-value, the variables were not normally distributed. However, because even small deviations from normalcy are often statistically significant, parametric tests are thought to be possible when sample sizes are large.

Table 4. The Test Results of Normality and Homogeneity

	Shapiro-Wilk		Levene Statistic	
	Statistic	Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
TRL	0.953	< 0.001	0.289	0.833
IDI-A	0.924	< 0.001	0.690	0.559
IDL-B	0.925	< 0.001	0.504	0.680
INM	0.917	< 0.001	1.261	0.288
INS	0.943	< 0.001	0.971	0.407
INC	0.961	< 0.001	1.484	0.219
JOS	0.979	< 0.001	1.524	0.208
ASQ	0.983	< 0.001	0.796	0.497

Table 5 displays the correlations between the five TRL variables (IDI-A, IDI-B, INM, INS, and INC), JOS, and ASQ. The dimensions of transformational leadership showed stronger positive relationships. At the .01 level, every correlation was statistically significant. The significant correlations between the transformational leadership characteristics varied from $r = 0.566$ to $r = 0.780$. All of the variables had very good associations with one another, with $r = 0.477$ to $r = 0.780$. Idealised impact (behaviour) and inspiring motivation had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.780$). Idealised influence (behaviour) and service quality had the lowest correlation ($r = 0.477$).

Table 5. The Relationships among the Five Dimensions of TRL, JOB, and ASQ

Variables	IDI-A	IDI-B	INM	INS	INC	JOS	ASQ
IDI-A	1						
IDL-B	0.753*	1					
INM	0.699*	0.780*	1				
INS	0.621*	0.691*	0.749*	1			
INC	0.597*	0.574*	0.566*	0.695*	1		
JOS	0.587*	0.564*	0.619*	0.592*	0.609*	1	
ASQ	0.515*	0.477*	0.520*	0.495*	0.513*	0.640*	1

Note: * Significant at $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

The findings indicate a positive correlation between academic service quality and job satisfaction ($r = 0.640$, $p < 0.01$). Because happy staff will deliver higher-quality academic services, public university administrations should make every effort to guarantee that their employees are content in their roles. This outcome was consistent with research by Naser et al. [4] and Dehaghani et al. [25], which discovered a positive and significant relationship between job satisfaction and academic service quality.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study confirm a significant and positive relationship between job satisfaction and academic service quality among public university staff in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The strong correlation ($r = 0.640$, $p < 0.01$) highlights that when university employees feel satisfied with their jobs, they perceive the quality of academic services to be higher. This result aligns with previous research [4], [25], reinforcing that employee well-being is not merely a human resources concern but a direct driver of service excellence in the education sector. Such alignment with earlier studies strengthens the external validity of the present research and situates Cambodia within a broader global discourse on higher education quality.

The descriptive statistics show that staff perceptions of job satisfaction ($M = 3.66$) and academic service quality ($M = 3.49$) are moderately high, with job satisfaction slightly more favorably. This suggests that while both are perceived positively, enhancing academic service quality is room for improvement. Specifically, the gap between the two measures indicates that universities may need to allocate additional resources, training, or structural support to raise service quality to the same level as job satisfaction.

The strong correlations observed between transformational leadership subscales, job satisfaction, and service quality suggest that effective leadership behaviours, such as idealised influence and inspirational motivation, play a crucial role in fostering a positive work environment and, by extension, improving the quality of educational services. This finding emphasises that leadership development should be a strategic priority for universities, as leadership behaviours directly shape the institutional climate and influence staff outcomes.

Therefore, university administrators should prioritise strategies that enhance job satisfaction and leadership practices to improve students' overall academic service quality. By investing in employee well-being and leadership capacity, universities can create a sustainable cycle of satisfaction and service excellence, enhancing student experiences and strengthening institutional reputation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study successfully investigated the self-perceptions of job satisfaction and academic service quality among public university staff in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the relationship between these two variables. The findings show that employees hold a positive view of their job satisfaction and the quality of services they deliver, with job satisfaction slightly higher. Crucially, the research confirmed a strong positive correlation between the two, indicating that the perception of academic service quality increases as job satisfaction

increases. These results underscore the importance of employee well-being as a key factor in improving the education sector. In other words, enhancing staff satisfaction is beneficial for the workforce and instrumental in raising the overall quality of educational services.

This research provides valuable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and academics. By highlighting the direct link between job satisfaction and service quality, the study offers a clear, evidence-based direction for improving higher education in Cambodia. The implications suggest that initiatives focused on staff development, supportive leadership, and organisational well-being should be prioritised to achieve sustainable improvements. Furthermore, future research could expand this study by incorporating longitudinal designs or comparative analyses across different regions to deepen understanding of the dynamics between job satisfaction and service quality..

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