

Measuring student satisfaction with internship program using Servqual Method

Istiadi^{1,*}, Ari Pramono², Karin Amelia Safitri¹

¹ Universitas Indonesia, Depok 16424, Indonesia

² Monash University, City of Monash 3170, Australia

* **Corresponding author:** Istiadi, Istiadi_soenarto@vokasi.ui.ac.id

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Abstract: Quality evaluation is an essential part of maintaining and sustaining the performance of each organization. In educational institutions, every student who takes a vocational education program is required to be able to carry out and complete internship activities. On the other hand, in implementing quality evaluation, something significant needs to be solved holistically. The problem is that no gradual and comprehensive measurement can provide information about the conditions of each scientific group. This study uses the SERVQUAL approach, which focuses on the performance that has been produced by combining the stages in the internship. Data was collected by distributing online questionnaires to 261 students who had internships in three scientific groups, namely 1) Management & Business Administration, 2) Health and 3) Media & Communication. The final results show that each scientific group has a different evaluation focus base that needs to be considered and optimized to maintain the quality of education.

Keywords: evaluation; internship; service quality; vocational education

1. Introduction

The quality of Vocational Education Institutions is, among other things, determined by how well their internship program are conducted. Effective internship program are one of the critical elements in achieving the main goal of vocational education programs, especially in ensuring the market acceptance and employability of their graduates. In the literature, there are at least three proven links that connect the students' participation in internship program and their employability, i.e., in helping them find jobs, stepping-stones into a full-time job and also in creating the satisfying experience that motivates students to enter their chosen path (Davis et al., 1987; Shoenfelt et al., 2013).

Service quality is a collection of various perceptions held by the public (or consumers) regarding a form of service (Heide and John, 1992) or the totality of features and characteristics of the service that bear upon its ability to satisfy the stated or implied needs (Rowley, 1996). The idea that using the gap between the customers' overall experience and their expectations to assess the quality of service has long been formalized in the literature, mainly in consumer behavior and marketing studies, most notably the seminal study from Parasuraman et al. (Parasuraman et al., 1988) which introduced the SERVQUAL framework as the quantitative practical approach in measuring the service quality, the framework was further refined in their subsequent papers (1991) and (2002). The method provides a model which breaks down service quality into measurable dimensions which can then be measured quantitatively as a gap between what the customers' perceived experience and their expectations of what the

experience should be. To apply the framework, Parasuraman, et.al propose a multi-item scale measurement for each dimension. They put forward five generic dimensions that can be used as the basis for measurement of a firm's service quality, i.e., (Parasuraman et al., 2002).

- Tangibles, the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.
- Reliability, the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness, the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance, the ability to convey trust and confidence.
- Empathy, the caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

However, while these links quantify the critical role of such a program in a higher education program, some studies argue that the realization of such perceived benefits will be much dependent on the student's individual factors such as engagement level (Coates, 2005; O'Connor and Bodicoat, 2017), preparedness, positive attitudes and self-initiative (Ismaela, 2021). Furthermore, organizational factors such as how the students feel about the challenging job, effective supervision, clarity of tasks and compensation may also influence the student's perception on the effectiveness of the internship program in increasing their employability (Ismaela, 2021). In other words, the assessment of whether such programs can live up to their promises, especially in relation to developing the student's confidence about their employability, will be much dependent on how the students "value" their experience while participating on the program. As pointed out by Rowley (1996), measuring how the students' perceive the fitness of the purpose of their educational process, including the internship aspect of it, is very much aligned with the concept of measuring the customer's satisfaction of the service quality. More specifically, in how the customers' judge the excellence and superiority of their overall experience (e.g., Homer, 2008; Zeithaml, 1987).

SERVQUAL model is not only relevant but can also be a useful tool to improve the experience of all parties involved (Buttle, 1996). By measuring and understanding the quality of service provided, both students and employers can contribute to the development of more effective and satisfying internship programs. Companies can measure and improve the quality of service provided to interns using the SERVQUAL model (Udo et al., 2011). This approach is not only beneficial for the intern but can also improve the company's reputation and attract quality talent in the future.

The internship process is carried out in six stages, namely 1) preparation, 2) administrative process, 3) counselling support from the school, 4) advisory support during the program, 5) examination, and 6) placement location. The entire process will be evaluated by the participants regarding the performance obtained during the internship process. This is an exciting view for getting corrections in building a comprehensive evaluation.

2. Materials and methods

(See **Table 1**) The study is conducting by surveying 261 students of a major VEI in Jakarta Indonesia. The students are coming from three clusters of studies, i.e., Management and Administration cluster, Allied Health cluster and Media and Communication cluster. The basic criteria for taking the sample using the convenience

sampling technique and the time for data collection starts from January to July 2024. All respondents are already completing their mandatory internship program placements in various commercial and public institutions outside campus. The survey was conducted through online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire in the study uses a Likert scale to answer the questions posed. Scale 1 indicates strongly disagree, 3 is neutral, while number 5 indicates strongly agree. The questionnaire is distributed to respondents online. The Likert scale is designed to assess how strongly subjects agree or disagree with statements on a five-point scale with the following anchors (Sekaran and Bougie, 2003):

Table 1. Likert scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Source: (Sekaran and Bougie, 2003).

The questions categorized in 6 phases: 1) preparation, 2) administrative process, 3) counselling supports from school, 4) advisory support during program, 5) examination, 6) placement location. The questionnaire is designed to measure the students' expectation and assessment of their actual experience of each aspect of the internship program from enrolment until the final examination stage. The questions are developed based on the five-dimensions of SERVQUAL methods, and the responses are scaled with 5 points Likert agreement scale (1-disagree, 2-somewhat disagree, 3-neutral, 4-somewhat agree and 5-agree). In total there are 35 items representing and following the SERVQUAL methodology (Parasuraman et al., 2002, 1991, 1988), the items are defined by calculating the gap between expectation and experience for each aspect of the internship program as listed in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Servqual indicator research.

No	Indicator
Tangible	
1	The academic administration process in the Vocational Program is very easy
2	The process of getting information about academics in the Vocational Program is very easy
3	The Vocational Program provides good internship preparation workshops or briefings
4	The Vocational Program should have adequate facilities and resources to hold internship preparation briefing workshops
5	The Vocational Program should provide a complete internship guidebook
6	The Vocational Program should be able to facilitate students to contact the internship company if needed
7	The Vocational Program should be able to assign appropriate supervisors
8	The Vocational Program should provide effective communication facilities between supervisors and students during the internship process
9	The Vocational Program should have interactive media for registration of the trial
10	The Vocational Program should have adequate trial rooms and facilities
11	The Vocational Program should be able to provide credible internal and external examiners who are in accordance with their fields

Table 2. (Continued).

No	Indicator
Responsiveness	
12	The administrative process in the Vocational Program must be fast
13	The Vocational Program should be able to organize an internship preparation workshop promptly and quickly
14	The administrative process for internship registration must be fast
15	Supervisors must be quick to help and direct students during the internship process
16	The trial registration process should be fast
17	The results of the trial evaluation should be known quickly
Assurance	
18	Administrative staff must be very responsive and not long-winded
19	Vocational programs should provide convenience in conveying internship preparations clearly
20	Internship locations must be in accordance with students' desires and interests
21	Lecturers and students must be able to make agreements on guidance times easily
22	Stages in the registration process, implementation, and evaluation of the trial should be clear and easy to understand
Realibility	
23	The administrative staff in the Vocational Program is very credible
24	Lecturers should be able to explain information about internship preparation clearly
25	The Vocational Program should have a list of internship companies that are up to date and can be easily accessed by students
26	Supervisors should always be easy to contact during the internship process
27	Requirements for registering for the trial must be clear and consistent
28	The trial room and facilities should be ready for use on time
29	The examining team should have read and understood the Final Project material at the time of the trial
Empathy	
30	Administrative staff must be friendly
31	One of the tasks of the Vocational Program is to provide encouragement and motivation to students in carrying out the Internship Program
32	One of the tasks of the Vocational Program is to eliminate anxiety and worries of prospective interns
33	Supervisors should be able to provide a sense of security and comfort to students
34	The Vocational Program should provide counseling to overcome anxiety during the trial process
35	The Vocational Program should be able to provide counseling to increase motivation and recovery after the trial

The research was analyzed using a regression analysis approach to see the role of each part of the internship process in influencing the level of satisfaction. Liang and Zeger (1993) explained that regression can be used to see a variable's role with other variables. Qiu-li (2011) explained that regression can be used as a tool to evaluate related to important factors that play a role in satisfaction in an educational institution. The model created is arranged as follows:

$$y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + b_5x_5 + b_6x_6 + e$$

Description:

y = Satisfaction; x_3 = Counselling support from the school

a = constant; x_4 = Advisory support during the program

$b_1 - b_6$ = Coefisient variable; x_5 = Examination

x_1 = Preparation; x_6 = Placement location.

x_2 = Administrative process

3. Results

The respondents are the second and final (third) year students from University of Indonesia's Vocational Education program who have completed their internship program. University of Indonesia is the largest provider of post-secondary vocational program in the country. From the total of 261 respondents, 57% (150) are Management and Business Administration students, while 23% (61) are from Allied health program and 19% (50) are Media and Communication major. The majority (74%) of the respondents are female and all within the 19–25 years old age cohort.

The factor analysis of the respondents' responses reveals six principal factors that optimally represent the quality dimension of internship. The factors are extracted using Principal Component Analysis method with varimax rotation ($\chi^2: 785.59; dof: 400$ and $p - value: 2.94e^{-27}$).

The estimated dimensions are in confirmation with the previous studies regarding the antecedents of the success of an internship program. A qualitative study from Rothman (2007) found that, among others, factors such as on-going feedback, respectful treatment, and task challenges are found to be the drivers of student satisfactions with their internship experience. These factors are closely related to advisory support, counselling and placement location dimensions in our model. Also align with our findings, an exploratory study conducted in a Portuguese university by Narayanan (2010) reveals that the student satisfaction with the internship program is a result of three main factors, i.e., the helpfulness of the school during the program in providing good pre-internship preparation, advisory support and on-going feedback and counselling throughout the program.

One distinctive aspect of our model is the examination dimension which is not typically found in the previous studies. This is because in the context of our study, post internship students are mandated to prepare a report and present it in an oral examination in front of panel of examiners. The results confirm the suitability of SERVQUAL framework as the service quality measurement for internship program.

The last step of factor analysis is to estimate the score of each identified factor. The scores will be used as the 'new' variables for further analysis. There are several methods available in the literatures for measuring the factor score. In an exploratory factor analysis with m common factors, the expected factor scores of individual i on item j with common factor θ is modelled as a linear combination of the factor loadings λ , i.e., (DiStefano et al., 2019; Ferrando and Lorenzo-Seva, 2018).

$$E(X_{ij}|\theta) = \lambda_{i1}\theta_1 + \lambda_{i2}\theta_2 + \dots + \lambda_{im}\theta_m \quad (1)$$

where all X_{ij} and the loading factors λ_{i2} are distributed as standardized normal distribution. Applying Equation (1) on our data using the loading factors in appendix 1, the factor scores for each dimension distributed across the three study clusters of our respondents are described in **Figure 1**.

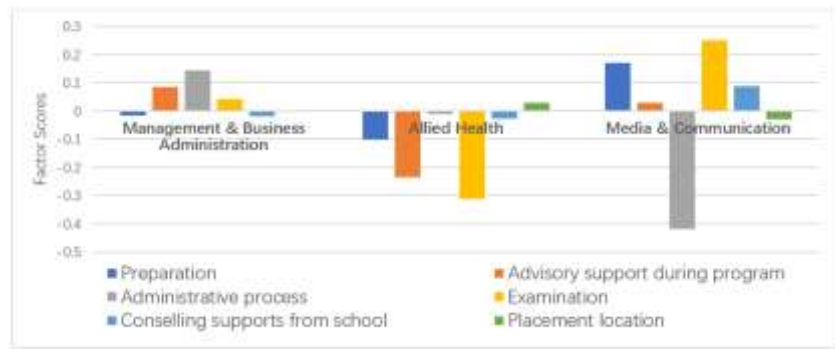


Figure 1. Factor scores comparison for all dimensions across all study clusters.

The charts in **Figure 1** clearly shows the differences of the respondents’ assessment of their internship experience based on the six dimensions of quality. The lowest assessment is given by students from Media and Communication study cluster toward the administrative process of their internship program. Allied Health students are showing the clearest dissatisfaction the overall program, indicated by the consistent negative assessment for almost all dimensions of the internship program, while Management and Business Administration students are the most satisfied. These figures reflect the gap between expectation and experience for each quality dimension among students from different study clusters, the actual heterogeneity of the quality determinants can be best assessed by investigation how important are these dimensions in driving the satisfaction of the entire internship program, or in other words whether there are causal relationships between these quality dimensions with the students’ satisfaction of the internship program and whether there is some heterogeneity across students from different study clusters. The results of the data calculations are presented in a regression **Table 3** as follows:

Table 3. Regression analysis.

	Management & Bus. Adm		Allied Health		Media and Communication	
	Coefficient	Std deviation	Coefficient	Std deviation	Coefficient	Std deviation
Intercept	4.03	0.05	3.97	0.09	4.12	0.13
Student Preparation	0.05	0.06	0.27	0.09	0.17	0.11
Advisory Support	0.12	0.05	0.19	0.09	0.22	0.12
Administrative Process	0.20	0.06	0.10	0.08	0.19	0.13
Examination	0.17	0.05	0.13	0.09	0.11	0.12
Student Counselling	0.23	0.05	0.21	0.09	0.26	0.11
Placement Location	0.05	0.05	0.18	0.09	0.02	0.12
R square (model fit)	24.6%		48.1%		26.7%	
nbr of sample	150		61		50	

4. Discussion

The results in **Table 3** show that while students from all clusters consistently put ‘student counselling’ as an important aspect that will drive their satisfaction, they are not in agreement for the other dimension. This finding highlights the complexity and diversity of factors influencing student satisfaction with internship program. It suggests that while some elements are universally valued, others may vary significantly based on individual or group characteristics. Student counselling emerged as a universally important aspect across all student clusters. This indicates that regardless of background, academic focus, or internship experience, students recognize the critical role of counselling services in enhancing their satisfaction with internship program. Effective student counselling provides guidance, support, and resources that help students navigate their internship experiences. It addresses their concerns, assists with professional development, and offers emotional support, all contributing significantly to a positive internship experience.

Management and Business Administration students feel that ‘Administrative Process’ is another important dimension, while none of the other clusters feel the same. This likely reflects their expectations for streamlined, efficient, and transparent administrative procedures within their internship program. These students may view efficient administrative processes as critical to their future roles, where administrative competence is often an essential aspect of business operations. They might expect internships to provide exposure to effective administrative practices essential for their professional development. Internship program for Management and Business Administration students should ensure clear communication, efficient handling of paperwork, and organized administrative support. A well-structured administrative framework can enhance their satisfaction and provide valuable learning experiences.

The most critical dimension for allied health students is the ‘reparation ‘process. In contrast, the satisfaction of media and communication students is only driven by counselling as their quality determinant. Allied Health students prioritize the ‘Preparation’ process’, indicating they value comprehensive preparatory training before commencing their internships. This preparation might include practical skills training, theoretical knowledge refreshers, and orientation sessions specific to their roles in healthcare settings. Given healthcare environments’ demanding and high-stakes nature, thorough preparation is crucial for Allied Health students. They need to feel confident and adequately equipped to handle their internship responsibilities. Institutions should focus on providing extensive preparatory sessions covering theoretical and practical aspects of the student’s future students roles. Simulations, workshops, and pre-internship training modules can help ensure that Allied Health students are well-prepared and thus more satisfied with their internship experiences.

For Media and Communication students, ‘Counselling’ is the sole determinant of their satisfaction. This suggests that these students value personalized guidance, mentorship, and emotional support throughout their internship experiences. The creative and dynamic nature of the media and communication field may necessitate strong mentorship to navigate industry challenges, develop professional skills, and build networks. Personalized counselling can provide the support and direction needed to thrive in this field. Internship program for Media and Communication students

should prioritize vital counselling and mentorship components. Assigning dedicated mentors, offering regular one-on-one guidance sessions, and providing career counselling can significantly enhance the satisfaction and success of these students.

The distinct preferences among different student clusters highlight the need for tailored internship program. Institutions should design and implement internship experiences that address each academic cluster's specific needs and priorities to maximize student satisfaction. Conducting comprehensive needs assessments for different student groups can help identify each cluster's most essential quality dimensions. Regular feedback mechanisms like surveys and focus groups can provide valuable insights into student expectations and experiences. Developing flexible and adaptive internship program that can be customized based on student feedback and evolving industry standards is essential. This approach ensures that programs remain relevant and effective in meeting diverse student needs. While addressing the unique priorities of different student clusters is essential, institutions should also maintain a baseline quality standard across all dimensions. Ensuring all internship program have vital administrative processes, thorough preparation, and robust counselling can create a solid foundation for student satisfaction.

Comparing the regression results in **Table 3** with the average factor scores in **Figure 1**, it can be observed that for Management & Business Administration and Allied Health clusters, the factor scores (which are based on SERVQUAL's quality gaps assessment) are primarily consistent with the drivers estimated from in the regression, which indicated that the assessment gap is a good prediction the quality determinant. However, in the case of the Media and Communication cluster, the picture is entirely different. It can be observed that from the SERVQUAL analysis, the most significant quality gap is found to be the 'Administrative process'; the causal analysis through regression found that the most critical driver of student satisfaction is 'Student Counselling'; in fact, 'Administrative Process' is found to be insignificant. This finding confirms previous critics of the SERVQUAL method that gap analysis is not always appropriate in measuring service quality and that the model's applicability is sector/industry specific (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Cronin et al., 1992).

5. Conclusion

The study put forward significant insights regarding the use of SERVQUAL method for assessing the students' satisfaction with internship program within a post-secondary vocational study program. It is found that SERVQUAL's five dimensions of quality can be used as the conceptual framework when deriving quality dimension of an internship program. However, our analysis indicates some cautionary warning in directly using the descriptive gap analysis from SERVQUAL framework. The study shows that a direct interpretation of SERVQUAL's gap analysis show some significant sectoral bias and may not providing good indications of the real driving factor(s) of students' satisfaction with the internship program. Results of the study indicate that Management & Bus. Adm can focus on several elements, namely 1) Guidance Support, 2) Administrative Process, 3) Examinations and 4) Student Counseling. Allied Health focuses on 1) student preparation and 2) advisory support. Media and Communication focus on student counselling.

The study confirms that SERVQUAL's five dimensions—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—are applicable and useful as a conceptual framework for assessing the quality of internship program. These dimensions provide a structured approach to evaluate various aspects of the internship experience comprehensively. A significant finding of the study is the presence of sectoral bias in SERVQUAL's gap analysis. The bias arises because different sectors may have varying standards and expectations for internships. Internships in technical fields might emphasize different aspects of service quality compared to those in creative industries. This sectoral variation can skew the gap analysis, making it difficult to accurately identify the real driving factors of student satisfaction.

Future research should explore the development of modified SERVQUAL models that account for sector-specific variables and contextual nuances. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of internship program improvements on career success and satisfaction can provide valuable insights.

On the other hand, in the SERVQUAL theory, several industry-specific variables can be added and tested, such as the practical application of internship tasks and the quality of tutor support. This is considered useful for improving the concept of satisfaction. The SERVQUAL framework's descriptive gap analysis might not fully capture the nuanced and multifaceted nature of student satisfaction. Factors such as the quality of mentorship, the relevance of tasks to career goals, and the overall learning environment may not be adequately reflected in the five dimensions alone. This limitation suggests that additional qualitative measures should complement the SERVQUAL analysis.

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