

# Service Quality's Impact on Educational Reputation and Students' Happiness at Hohai University: The Mediating Role of Students' Motivation

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## Abstract

Service quality is important for public organisations, especially in higher education, where accredited degrees enhance reputation and competitiveness. A strong university image fosters student motivation and retention, making service quality vital in crowded markets. As a multidimensional concept, quality influences academic standards and overall student satisfaction, happiness and motivation. This research explores how the quality of services influences the reputation of education and the overall happiness of students at Hohai University by focusing on how student motivation acts as a mediator in this relationship. By drawing on theories like Self Determination Theory (SD) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), the study investigates how aspects of service quality, such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, impact students' contentment and views on the university's standing in society. The researcher designed a questionnaire grounded on previous studies. Used a convenience sample from the international students at Hohai University based on their availability, which was then examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and analysis at Smart PLS and SPSS and the sample size was 378 students; this was done to understand the connections, both indirect and between variables. The results show the importance of top-quality services across areas such as support and campus facilities in improving students' contentment and overall happiness and significantly boosting the institution's standing. Significantly, we found the role of motivation to be a factor in this process by strengthening the impact of service quality on both student happiness and institutional prestige and reputation. Students who perceive robust support services tend to exhibit levels of extrinsic motivation, which further enhances their academic involvement and satisfaction levels while fostering a positive bond

with the university. The outcomes point towards the potential benefits institutions can gain by prioritizing service excellence and encouraging student engagement to enhance student success and improve their standing in the educational sector. This study contributes to the understanding of service quality in higher education, offering actionable insights for enhancing student experience and reputation and recommending further cross-cultural and longitudinal studies for a comprehensive view of these dynamics in diverse settings.

## Keywords

Service Quality, Educational Reputation, Student Motivation, Student Happiness, Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, Higher Education, Hohai University

## 1. Introduction

In the dynamic world of higher education, academic excellence and the quality of services provided by educational institutions are closely linked. Nowadays, the manufacturing sector is becoming less important in the economies of many nations, and one of the most significant economic sectors is education. Scholars and researchers are focusing more of their attention on the educational sector (Ahmed et al., 2010; Lam & Le, 2021). Education becomes increasingly important as countries' economies grow (Banahene et al., 2018). Since the education sector generates new knowledge and human capital, higher education institutions are viewed as essential elements of economies (Lam & Le, 2021). Many universities across the globe are currently concentrating their research efforts on student reputation and satisfaction (Cabrerizo et al., 2015). Concerns have been raised regarding the course material, teaching methods, curriculum, and lecturers' performance quality (Kandampully et al., 2015). The elements of quality services are as follows: having facilities provided by educational institutions; having the appropriate teaching strategies, materials, and methods for students; having efficient time management; and having access to organisations that encourage or enhance student creativity (Trisela, 2019).

Knowing value from the customer's standpoint can give management information that is helpful when allocating resources and creating programs that aim to increase student gratification and happiness (Hamid & Subandi 2021). Students should feel positive about their institution as a result, and this should spread a positive word of recommendation (Kandampully et al., 2015). It is recognized that high-quality education is essential for sustainable educational development and that it has a big impact on students' reputation and success in general. So, the most significant stakeholders in any educational institution are its students (Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022; Li et al., 2023). The study of service disciplines and service systems forms the basis of this definition of service quality in higher education, which recognizes that value is a co-creation between the provider and the consumer, a term that refers to academic staff and students in higher education system based on the

latter's profit (Hama et al., 2020). When we talk about the quality of services in education settings, we focus on the level of services offered by schools and colleges. This includes aspects like guidance, facilities, assistance from staff members, administration and overall, the educational experience that students have (Sahu, 2014). Taking a student-focused approach is a method that responds to the growing demand for better-quality services in universities. Even though there are obstacles to overcome, it's crucial to assess the importance of evaluating and managing service quality (Pham et al., 2019).

The educational reputation and standing relate to how society views and values an institution due to its accomplishments and faculty standards facilitating student success and overall impact on knowledge advancement. It encompasses the institution's standing in areas such as teaching excellence, research output, graduate employability, and social impact (Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021). A strong educational reputation attracts students, faculty, and funding while enhancing the institution's influence and prestige in both local and global academic communities (Chandra et al., 2018; Wantara, 2015). Customer response to the services received is known as satisfaction and happiness. Student satisfaction is a transient mindset that emerges from assessing a student's learning opportunities. It is a multifaceted process that is affected by numerous variables (Chandra et al., 2018; Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2021; Gong & Yi, 2018; Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022). So, Student happiness is the overall well-being and satisfaction students experience in their academic and social life, influenced by supportive environments, meaningful interactions, and personal achievement (Al Matalka & Al Dwakat, 2022; Voss et al., 2007). **Students' motivation** is the internal drive that influences how students engage with their studies, mediating the impact of service quality on educational reputation and student happiness (Altbach & Knight, 2007; McClelland et al., 2008).

The primary aim of this paper is to bridge the research gap regarding the significant role that these dimensions (service quality with mediating role of students' motivations for achieving student reputation and happiness) at educational institutions, which was represented in the students of Hohai University in the city of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province in China. As a result, participant numerical data regarding the effects of service quality were gathered. This study concluded that a thorough investigation should be carried out, taking into account the aims and objectives of the literature review. The questionnaires were created for a particular international student group.

The decision to focus on international students at Hohai University arises from their unique perspectives on service quality in a cross-cultural context. Facing challenges in adapting to new environments, their expectations and perceptions of service quality differ from those of domestic students. This research aims to understand how the university meets the needs of this diverse group, which is key to enhancing its international reputation and student satisfaction. Additionally, focusing on international students offers a more consistent sample, as domestic students' expectations are influenced by familiarity with local norms. Consequently, a thorough review of prior research findings was done to make sure that

the sample selected for this study would enable the findings to be broadly applied. Some researchers were able to articulate exactly what high-quality education entailed, and the majority of researchers looked at service quality as a whole as a means of achieving customer satisfaction. Many researchers point out that more research is required in the identified area of deficiency—empirical research regarding the relationship between satisfaction and service quality—to improve quality operations. Hohai University, known for its commitment to academic excellence and student development, explores the interplay between service quality and student motivation. This study highlights how motivation mediates the relationship, amplifying the impact of quality services on institutional reputation and student happiness. The findings will enhance our understanding of these dynamics, providing insights for improving student experiences and academic success while suggesting future research directions. Further, this research paper is divided into the following sections: significance of the study, literature review, conceptual framework and hypotheses, methods, findings and discussion, conclusions, and suggestions.

## 2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is dual, encompassing both academic and practical dimensions. On an academic level, the study explores the complexities of delivering quality service and evaluating student-perceived quality within the context of study programs. Specifically, the focus extends to the study courses and their content, examining how these courses are presented and their overall attractiveness. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of valuable information by students during these courses (Purgailis & Zaksa, 2012). Furthermore, the broader academic community stands to benefit from this research, as it addresses the essential for the higher education sector to acknowledge the important role of service enhancements in establishing a competitive advantage. Recognizing the importance of service quality with the mediating role of student motivation for students' reputation and happiness (McClelland et al., 2008; Kandampully et al., 2015). This research aims to provide observations and an academic comprehension of the relationship among these variables. Practically speaking, Hohai University stands out as an example that sheds light on the workings of higher education in China. The results could offer insights for shaping plans and policies not only locally but also globally. By examining the hurdles and advantages faced by an institution in the Chinese higher education arena, this study gives useful advice to those aiming to enhance service standards, boost academic achievements and build strong bonds with students. The research goes beyond the realm and holds significance for how institutions operate and the policies they follow on local and global levels.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Background

This research investigates the influence of service quality on the reputation of education and the satisfaction of students by examining how student motivation

mediates this relationship using Self Determination Theory (SDS) and Expectancy Value Theory (EVT) as guiding frameworks for understanding motivational processes proposed by Ryan & Deci, (2000) that suggest motivation thrives when students feel autonomous and competent while fostering a sense of relatedness (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Quality services that meet these needs promote students' drive in a college environment and result in increased contentment and involvement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory of expectancy-value (EVT), in conjunction with the self-determination theory (SDT), suggests that students' drive to succeed academically is influenced by how much they believe in their ability to succeed and the importance they attach to their tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

When educational institutions provide high-quality services such as administration and faculty support along with available resources for students' use, this helps boost students' confidence in their abilities and the perceived value of their endeavours. Consequently, this inspires them to participate in their learning journey and fosters a perception of the institution to which they belong (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In the realm of education, service quality encompasses various elements, such as the physical presentation of facilities and staff (appearance) and the reliability and consistency of services provided (dependability). These factors contribute to the overall experience and satisfaction of students (Grönroos, 1984), which have been proven to enhance student loyalty, contentment and allegiance (Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022). This favourable encounter also bolsters the standing of the establishment as students tend to perceive the university in a light and advocate for it amongst their peers (Chandra et al., 2018). Having a reputation in education can draw in students and faculty members who can help boost the institution's image within the community and worldwide (Dill, 2007). It is also important to note that student happiness and well-being are greatly influenced by quality services and supportive interactions (Voss et al., 2007). By providing top-quality services and fostering motivation among students through these efforts' institutions can enhance student satisfaction levels which in turn boosts their reputation positively. This structure serves as a roadmap for the investigation. Provides valuable perspectives on enhancing student engagement and the overall achievements of educational institutions.

## 3.2. Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

### 3.2.1. Service Quality

Delivering quality service involves managing the standards of services offered to customers based on their needs (Cahyono et al., 2020). Service quality involves planning and executing tasks to maintain the desired level of excellence (Arrivabene et al., 2019). These include developing a quality policy, carrying out quality assurance and planning, and carrying out continuous quality control and improvement in a methodical, systematic manner throughout the company and its value chain (Zaid et al., 2020). An organization creates a support system for its whole operation by controlling the quality of its services (Hamid & Subandi 2021). A key differentiator in the marketplace is the prompt demonstration to clients and

potential customers of your company's real commitment to satisfying their demands through high-quality service management in the form of service quality (Zaid et al., 2020).

Kanwar & Sanjeeva (2022) stated the value of systematic service quality evaluations, particularly using frameworks like SERVQUAL, which assess tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness in educational environments. Countries can enhance overall service quality by addressing several aspects, which will help customers and students and improve sustainable development (Latif & Bunce, 2021; Sunaengsih et al., 2021). Although some researchers suggest that a scarcity of high-quality services could cause students to become complacent, the concept is false (Ooi et al., 2011). Improved efficiency, effectiveness, and user pleasure are the goals of high-quality services; the influence on motivation depends on personal attitudes, workplace culture, and expectations (Quinn et al., 2009). In the provision of services, particularly in education, an overemphasis on convenience and low effort might, however, run the danger of lowering student motivation and engagement (Dora, 2017). Finding the right balance is essential to delivering the best possible service quality that supports academic output and learning without eliminating challenges (Williams, 2016). As a result of service quality assessment, which is mediated by student happiness and trust, service quality evaluation focuses on customer perceptions, reflecting their opinions on particular service dimensions and the accuracy of delivery in meeting expectations (Sultan & Wong 2014). According to several experts, quality is defined as meeting or exceeding expectations, and the way that quality and service are related affects how customers view both (Sahu, 2014). The concept of service quality is presented as an endeavour to satisfy customer requirements and preferences while maintaining delivery precision (Sultan & Wong, 2014). In the context of education, schools, acting as service providers, must effectively manage their operations to offer high-quality instruction and a welcoming atmosphere for students, with a focus on exceeding client expectations to win their loyalty and satisfaction (Trisela, 2019).

### 3.2.2. Student Motivation

Student motivation refers to the internal processes that drive students to engage in learning, influencing their effort, persistence, and overall academic success. Two main forms of motivation are recognized as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation—where intrinsic drive stems from interest or pleasure in the topic at hand, resulting in increased involvement and better academic performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). On the side, external motivation comes from incentives such as grades or acknowledgement. This can lead to results. It may reduce overall commitment over time (Vallerand et al., 1989).

Ryan & Deci (2000), Self Determination Theory underscores the significance of satisfying three requirements—self-governance, competence and connection—in enhancing motivation. When individuals have these needs fulfilled, they tend to showcase heightened drive, resulting in academic achievement (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). The Expectancy-Value Theory is another framework that proposes that



students' drive is shaped by their belief in achieving success and the importance they attach to tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Students who have confidence in their ability to succeed and appreciate the importance of the study material are more likely to put in effort towards their education. Mastery and performance goals are two categories within the Goal Orientation Theory (Dweck, 1986). Students with an orientation prioritize learning and growth, while those with a performance orientation are motivated by approval and competitiveness. Studies indicate that students with goals tend to exhibit levels of perseverance and adaptability compared to those with performance goals, who may experience anxiety and decreased long-term motivation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The motivation of students is greatly influenced by external factors, like the learning setting and teaching methods used in classes, which have an impact on how motivated students feel to engage in academic tasks effectively (Reeve, 2006). Moreover, the students' own belief in their capabilities, known as self-efficacy, is another influencer in determining their drive to participate actively in their studies (Bandura, 1997).

### 3.2.3. Educational Reputation

The educational reputation is how people view an institution, like students and faculty members and its importance in making decisions for students and attracting support from the community and employers cannot be overstated. Educational institutions held regard tend to draw top-tier individuals in terms of students and faculty and also gain from their graduates improved job prospects due to a reputation they have built over time through factors like academic achievements, especially in research and teaching (Dill, 2007). Faculty recognition and expertise play a role in boosting an institution's standing by generating research (Marginson, 2006). Another crucial aspect influencing reputation is student performance outcomes, such as postgraduate employment rates and accomplishments in their professions. Individuals graduating from institutions typically have an edge in the workforce arena, which further solidifies the institution's prestige (Dembereldorj, 2018). Quality education is important for a university's reputation. So, providing services and ensuring student satisfaction plays a significant role, too! The overall experience for students. From having access to support services and engaging in activities to enjoying facilities. Greatly influences how both current students and alumni view the school. The more positive experiences students have at a university, the better its reputation becomes, suggesting that universities focusing on providing services tend to receive higher ratings from their students (Grönroos, 1984). Top-tier rankings and accreditation also act as markers of reputation for institutions in the eye—a recognition that brings with it prestige and visibility despite the potential limitations of solely quantitative measures in some cases (Hazelkorn, 2015). Having a reputation is advantageous, for institutions in ways as it attracts bright students and faculty members while also ensuring financial support from donations and research grants; moreover, it encourages collaborations with both industry and government entities (Chowdhury et

al., 2010). According to Borishade et al. (2021), the relationship between service quality and educational reputation is well-documented and has extensive impacts on each other. Attending a school can open up career doors for students since companies tend to link prestigious institutions with high academic standards and skilled alumni (Chevalier & Conlon, 2003).

Moreover, students tend to feel a sense of pride and motivation from being associated with a prestigious university (Tinto, 2012). Managing educational reputation, however, comes with challenges. Institutions must adapt to changes in the higher education landscape, such as globalization, technological advancements, and shifting societal demands, to maintain their reputations (Marginson, 2006). Additionally, there is often a tension between preserving an elite reputation and promoting inclusivity. Highly selective institutions, while maintaining their prestige, may face criticism for limiting access to underrepresented groups (Marginson, 2006). In today's digital age, managing online presence and student reviews has become crucial, as institutions are increasingly judged by their digital reputation. Positive online engagement can enhance an institution's standing, while negative feedback can rapidly spread and damage it (Saichaie & Morphey, 2014).

#### 3.2.4. Student Happiness

Student happiness in the academic context is a multifaceted emotional state characterized by contentment and satisfaction, significantly influenced by various interrelated factors. In academia, it's important to have an environment where interactions between students and institutions are positive and where students feel a strong sense of belonging. This helps improve resilience and keeps students engaged (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 2012). Furthermore, "strong social connections offer support by reducing stress and anxiety levels; taking part in extracurricular activities also cultivates bonds and a broader sense of fulfilment outside of academics." The mental well-being of students is another factor influencing their happiness. Challenges such as anxiety and stress can detrimentally affect their wellness. "Schools that place importance on health resources like counselling services and wellness initiatives play a role in boosting student contentment." Moreover, the genuine drive within oneself is crucial; methods that nurture a love for acquiring knowledge and promote independence have the potential to result in levels of satisfaction, contentment and happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The level of care given by schools and colleges plays a role in shaping student satisfaction levels. Studies on service innovation delve into the connection between service provision and student contentment by highlighting the importance of tailoring services to address students' emotional and mental well-being (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). Incorporating a social marketing approach allows institutions to evaluate success not based on achievements but also their impact on students' well-being (Boadi et al., 2019). For students to be happy and successful academically, it is crucial to have a rounded strategy that focuses on creating an atmosphere, building strong social connections, ensuring mental health and providing high-quality services.



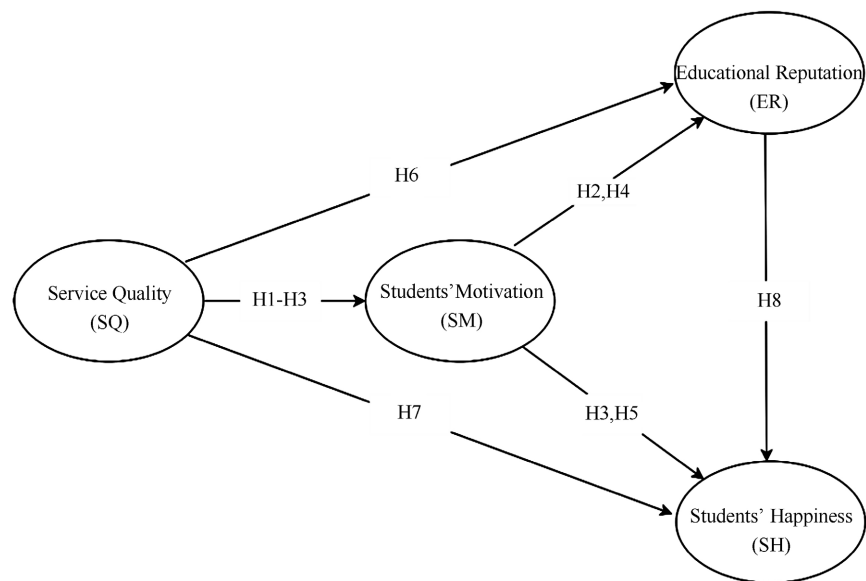
### 3.2.5. Hohai University

Hohai University (HHU), founded in 1915 in Nanjing, China, is an academic institution known for its exceptional expertise in engineering fields like water resources and hydraulic engineering. Paying homage to the essence of “rivers and seas” in culture through its name “Hohai”, the university plays a role in propelling China’s progress in water management and hydropower initiatives. Throughout its history spanning over a century Hohai University (HHU) has diversified its offerings to encompass diverse disciplines such as business studies, law and environmental sciences, making it an inclusive hub for holistic education and growth (Tian et al., 2020; Zhuang & Liu, 2022). HHU has three campuses, Xikang Road Campus and Jiangning Campus, in Nanjing and Jintan Campus in Changzhou, covering a building area of 1,641,333 meters. The campuses are equipped with facilities such as a library system housing millions of books along with research resources. Additionally, the university consists of 31 colleges and departments that provide a range of programs, including 72 undergraduate programs, 205 masters’ programs, 66 doctoral programs, and 16 post-doctoral research stations. The diverse approach of HH University encourages creativity in fields such as conservation and water resource management (Statistica, 2024). Known for its research achievements in projects like the Three Gorges Dam and the South to North Water Diversion Project, HHU University demonstrates expertise in hydrology and sustainable water practices. Its partnerships with efforts such as the National Natural Science Foundation underscore its role in tackling worldwide environmental issues. The university has been recognized with honors for its endeavours, including prestigious state-level honors and patents showcasing its dedication to academic and technological advancement (Statistica, 2024; Tian et al., 2020; Zhuang & Liu, 2022). Hohai University is actively engaging in collaboration by partnering with more than 100 universities, research institutes and global organizations. These partnerships involve exchanges, joint degree programs, joint colleges and research projects. These collaborations include academic exchanges, joint degree programs, joint colleges, and research initiatives. As one of the first Chinese universities to host and confer degrees to international students, HHU has educated thousands from over 100 countries and regions. The university also supports the Belt and Road Initiative by developing customized talent cultivation programs to train locally adapted professionals for participating countries (Statistica, 2024). HHU also emphasizes student satisfaction and the quality of educational services. Recent initiatives have improved academic support, campus infrastructure, and financial aid programs, enhancing the student experience. The university’s service quality—defined by faculty expertise, administrative efficiency, and support services—plays a critical role in its reputation, as the university has more than 3600 faculty members. It attracts a diverse student body of over 55,000, including more than 1200 international students from worldwide. As part of the BRICS Universities League, HHU prioritizes global engagement, with extensive exchange programs and partnerships with nearly 50 universities worldwide (Statistica, 2024). Challenges remain, such as increasing competition for research funding and

adapting to the needs of a growing international student population. Nonetheless, HHU continues to thrive as a leader in engineering and environmental sciences. Its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates fields like information technology and environmental studies, underpins its innovative contributions to sustainable practices (Zhuang & Liu, 2022).

### 3.2.6. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The research framework explores how Service Quality (SQ), Students' Motivation (SM), Educational Reputation (ER) and Students' Happiness (SH) are connected based on Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Expectancy Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). It suggests that SQ affects ER and SH directly and indirectly through SM, which plays a role in mediating these connections. Top-notch services allow students to take charge of their learning journey and develop their skills and sense of belonging within education. This approach boosts both drive and external rewards for students while also increasing their contentment and dedication to the institution they're part of. This model highlights the importance of establishments focusing on delivering service to enhance student motivation and overall satisfaction levels to build a positive reputation and foster growth in the higher education framework (Borishade et al., 2021; Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022). In Figure 1, the research conceptual framework and its relations with variables as follows:



**Figure 1.** Proposed framework.

### 3.2.7. Hypothesis Development

The study's hypothesis development examines the relationships between **Service Quality (SQ)**, **Students' Motivation (SM)**, **Educational Reputation (ER)**, and **Students' Happiness (SH)**. It proposes that SQ directly impacts ER and SH while SM mediates these relationships. Motivated students amplify the effects of quality

services on reputation and happiness. The hypotheses highlight SQ as a driver of student satisfaction and institutional success, with motivation serving as a key pathway for enhancing outcomes. Based on the research framework, the summary of the Hypothesis is as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>—There is a statistically significant correlation between the Service quality and the motivation of students.

H<sub>2</sub>—Educational Reputation can be significantly affected by service quality, with student motivation engaging a mediating role.

H<sub>3</sub>—There is a significant connection between students' happiness and service quality, with student motivation engaging in a mediating role.

H<sub>4</sub>—Student motivation significantly influences Educational Reputation.

H<sub>5</sub>—Student motivation can significantly affect students' happiness.

H<sub>6</sub>—Service Quality significantly affects Educational Reputation.

H<sub>7</sub>—Service Quality has a significant relationship with students' happiness.

H<sub>8</sub>—Educational Reputation has a significant effect on students' happiness.

#### 4. Research Methods

A research method is a systematic approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to address a research question or test a hypothesis, chosen based on the study's objectives, data needs, and context (Kumar, 2011). It operates as a thorough framework for mixed, qualitative, and quantitative approaches and offers thorough instructions on all study-related procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023). It is essential to remember that the research questions, not the researcher's preferences, should drive the choice of research method. A clear research method offers a comprehensive plan for gathering and evaluating data (Hair et al., 2013). A quantitative survey research design was employed to assess the proposed relationships (Zikmund et al., 2013). We developed a questionnaire based on a review of previous literature and studies. Employing a quantitative approach, this study utilized survey research to examine underlying relationships between related variables. This method allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data to explore both direct and mediated relationships among the variables, providing empirical insights into their interconnections. A convenience sample, consisting of international students at Hohai University, was used due to its accessibility and ease of recruitment. All items on the scale used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Disagree" (1) to "Agree" (5). The population consists of international students registered in the 2024 academic year, with the sample size (n) determined by the formula  $n = N/(1 + Ne^2)$ , where N represents the population size, e is the margin of error, which 4% tolerance for uncertainty is applied, resulting in a sample size of 410 from a population from 1,200 international students in HHU.

For data analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in SPSS were the chosen tools. SEM, amalgamating factor analysis and multiple regression analysis serve as the primary tool, with Partial Least Squares (PLS) in SPSS selected for its suitability in an ex-

ploratory study (Ghodang et al., 2018). SEM will be combined with descriptive statistical analysis to test the model. This analysis is especially pertinent when examining variables that provide an inadequate representation of latent constructs (Byrne, 2016). Research objectives and findings will be connected through the use of data layout and hypothesis testing. Variables from the survey are presented using SEM for model testing and descriptive statistical analysis.

Data collection involves a questionnaire, edited and analyzed using Smart PLS and SPSS. SEM will identify factors influencing academic service quality, student satisfaction, and loyalty, aligning with recommended practices (Ghodang et al., 2018).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Respondents' Profile

From 410 questionnaires, excluding 32 incomplete surveys, a total of 378 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Among the 378 participants, 73.28% (277) were male, while 26.72% (101) were female (refer to **Table 1**). The majority of respondents fell within the 26 - 33 age range, comprising 190 individuals or 50.26% of the sample. Additionally, 22.49% (85) were between 34 and 41 years old, 18.25% (69) were aged 18 - 25, and 9% (35) were 42 years or older. Regarding marital status, 71.16% (269) of the participants were single, and 28.84% (109) were married. In terms of educational background, the largest proportion of respondents (58.47%, or 221 individuals) were master's students, followed by 23.8% (90) pursuing doctoral studies and 17.73% (67) at the bachelor's level. Concerning work experience, 29.89% (113) had five or fewer years of experience, 27.78% (105) had 11 to 15 years, 25.93% (98) had 6 to 10 years, and 16.4% (62) had over 16 years of experience. Geographically, 64.29% (243) of the respondents were from Asia, 28.3% (107) from Africa, 4.5% (17) from the Americas, and 2.91% (11) from Europe.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of respondents.

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	277	73.28
Female	101	26.72
Age		
18 - 25	69	18.25
26 - 33	190	50.26
34 - 41	85	22.49
42 or above	35	9
Marital Status		
Single	269	71.16
Married	109	28.84

**Continued**

Educational Level		
Bachelor	67	17.73
Master	221	58.47
PhD	90	23.8
Experience		
5 Years or Less	113	29.89
6 - 10 Years	98	25.93
11 - 15 Years	105	27.78
16 Years and Above	62	16.4
Continent		
Asia	243	64.29
Africa	107	28.3
America	17	4.5
Europe	11	2.91

Source: Authors. Note:  $n = 378$ .

## 5.2. Common Method Bias

A variance inflation factor with A VIF value higher than 3.3 generally suggests potential multicollinearity, which could lead to bias in estimating relationships between variables (Kock, 2015). To determine whether the model is free from CMB, a complete collinearity test was conducted, using the inner model's VIF values as a diagnostic tool. In the study, VIF values were calculated to assess the degree of collinearity in the model. In **Table 2**, the VIF results for the relationships between variables were 11.546, 6.390, 9.837, 6.390, 8.516, and 1.000, respectively. Among these values, 11.546 ( $ER \rightarrow SH$ ), 9.837 ( $SM \rightarrow SH$ ), and 8.516 ( $SQ \rightarrow SH$ ) exceed the common threshold of 3.3, indicating higher levels of multicollinearity.

**Table 2.** VIF inner model.

Variables	VIF Values
$ER \rightarrow SH$	11.546
$SM \rightarrow ER$	6.390
$SM \rightarrow SH$	9.837
$SQ \rightarrow ER$	6.390
$SQ \rightarrow SH$	8.516
$SQ \rightarrow SM$	1.000

Note:  $ER$  = Education Reputation;  $SH$  = Student Happiness;  $SM$  = Student Motivation; and  $SQ$  = Service Quality.

However, these values remain within acceptable limits for Structural Equation Modeling (*SEM*) and do not significantly undermine the validity of the model. The observed multicollinearity likely arises from the interconnected nature of the constructs being studied, as they share overlapping influences in the context of service quality, motivation, reputation, and happiness. This analysis helps evaluate the robustness of the model in addressing multicollinearity concerns.

### 5.3. Measurement Model

All items in this study demonstrated factor loadings significantly higher than the recommended minimum value of 0.50, as per the guidelines of Hair Jr. et al. (2011). Cronbach's alpha (*CA*) and composite reliability (*CR*) were calculated for each variable, and the results indicated that both *CA* and *CR* values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.60 (refer to Table 3). Specifically, the *CR (Rho\_A)* values

**Table 3.** Measurement model.

Reflective Constructs	Items	<i>FL</i>	$\alpha$	<i>CR (Rho_A)</i>	<i>CR (Rho_C)</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>ER</i>	ER1	0.894	0.898	0.902	0.922	0.665
	ER2	0.775				
	ER3	0.893				
	ER4	0.759				
	ER5	0.758				
	ER6	0.802				
<i>SH</i>	SH1	0.754	0.881	0.884	0.913	0.678
	SH2	0.863				
	SH3	0.834				
	SH4	0.810				
	SH5	0.853				
<i>SM</i>	SM1	0.868	0.914	0.917	0.933	0.700
	SM2	0.807				
	SM3	0.851				
	SM4	0.855				
	SM5	0.853				
	SM6	0.784				
<i>SQ</i>	SQ1	0.780	0.872	0.876	0.907	0.663
	SQ2	0.769				
	SQ3	0.838				
	SQ4	0.810				
	SQ5	0.870				

Note: *FL* = Factor Loading;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; *CR* = Composite Reliability; and *AVE* = Average Variance Extracted.



for Educational Reputation (*ER*), Students' Happiness (*SH*), Students' Motivation (*SM*), and Service Quality (*SQ*) were 0.902, 0.884, 0.917, and 0.876, respectively. Corresponding *CA (Rho\_C)* values were 0.922 for *ER*, 0.913 for *SH*, 0.933 for *SM*, and 0.907 for *SQ*. These results confirm the reliability of the variables, consistent with the recommendations of Bagozzi & Yi (1988).

To assess convergent validity, the average variance extracted (*AVE*) was also computed for each construct. In all cases, *AVE* values exceeded the 0.50 threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), with *ER*, *SH*, *SM*, and *SQ* yielding *AVE* values of 0.665, 0.678, 0.700, and 0.663, respectively. Thus, the constructs demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs, as the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (*AVE*) for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. Specifically, refer to (Table 4) Educational Reputation (*ER*) has an *AVE* of 0.941, Students' Happiness (*SH*) of 0.940, Students' Motivation (*SM*) of 0.918, and Service Quality (*SQ*) of 0.837. For instance, the correlation between *ER* and *SH* is 0.928, and between *SM* and *SQ* is 0.814, with all inter-construct correlations remaining below their respective *AVE* values. The higher *AVE* values (in bold) confirm discriminant validity, supporting the distinctions among the constructs and their roles in exploring relationships between service quality, educational reputation, students' motivation, and students' happiness (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	<i>ER</i>	<i>SH</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>SQ</i>
<i>ER</i>	<b>0.941</b>			
<i>SH</i>	0.928	<b>0.940</b>		
<i>SM</i>	0.931	0.924	<b>0.918</b>	
<i>SQ</i>	0.816	0.824	0.814	<b>0.837</b>

#### 5.4. Structural Model

Refer to (Table 5) There was a substantial and positive correlation between service quality (*SQ*) and students' motivation (*SM*) ( $\beta = 0.918$ ,  $M = 0.918$ ,  $SD = 0.12$ ,  $t = 75.276$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ), as shown in (Table 5). This confirms that H1 is fully supported. In addition, *SM* had a strong and significant effect on educational reputation (*ER*) ( $\beta = 0.546$ ,  $M = 0.547$ ,  $SD = 0.047$ ,  $t = 11.618$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ), confirming H4. There was also a substantial and positive correlation between *SM* and students' happiness (*SH*) ( $\beta = 0.261$ ,  $M = 0.262$ ,  $SD = 0.054$ ,  $t = 4.822$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ), confirming H5. Moreover, H6 was verified, showing a significant positive correlation between *SQ* and *ER* ( $\beta = 0.429$ ,  $M = 0.428$ ,  $SD = 0.048$ ,  $t = 8.902$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ). The effect of *SQ* on *SH* was both significant and positive, with ( $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $M = 0.487$ ,  $SD = 0.049$ ,  $t = 9.871$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ), fully supporting H7. Finally, *ER* had a positive and significant influence on *SH* ( $\beta = 0.228$ ,  $M = 0.228$ ,  $SD = 0.063$ ,  $t = 3.628$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ), providing full support for H8.

**Table 5.** Direct relationships.

<i>Hypothesis</i>	$\beta$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P Values</i>	<i>Decision</i>
$ER \rightarrow SH$	0.228	0.228	0.063	3.628	***	Supported
$SM \rightarrow ER$	0.546	0.547	0.047	11.618	***	Supported
$SM \rightarrow SH$	0.261	0.262	0.054	4.822	***	Supported
$SQ \rightarrow ER$	0.429	0.428	0.048	8.902	***	Supported
$SQ \rightarrow SH$	0.487	0.487	0.049	9.871	***	Supported
$SQ \rightarrow SM$	0.918	0.918	0.012	75.276	***	Supported

Note:  $\beta$  = Beta coefficient; *M* = Sample Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *T* = t-Statistics, \*\*\*Relationships are significant at  $P < 0.001$ .

In **Table 6**, the results further demonstrated that students' motivation (*SM*) significantly mediated the relationship between service quality (*SQ*) and educational reputation (*ER*). The mediation effect was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.502$ ,  $M = 0.503$ ,  $SD = 0.045$ ,  $t = 11.272$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), thereby providing strong support for hypothesis H2. Additionally, the total effect of *SQ* on students' happiness (*SH*), as mediated by *SM*, was substantial and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $M = 0.240$ ,  $SD = 0.051$ ,  $t = 4.744$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), offering complementary support for hypothesis H3. This indicates that the mediating role of students' motivation enhances the influence of service quality on both educational reputation and students' happiness.

**Table 6.** Indirect analysis.

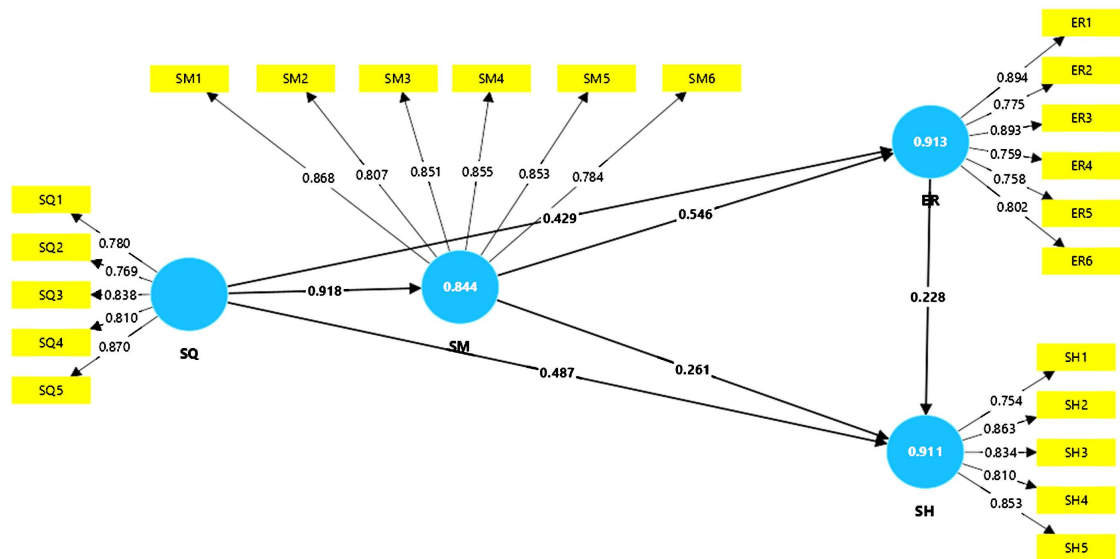
Hypothesis	$\beta$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P Values</i>	Decision
$SQ \rightarrow SM \rightarrow ER$	0.502	0.503	0.045	11.272	***	Supported
$SQ \rightarrow SM \rightarrow SH$	0.240	0.240	0.051	4.744	***	Supported

Note:  $\beta$  = Beta coefficient; *M* = Sample Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *T* = t-Statistics; and \*\*\*Relationships are Significant at  $P < 0.001$ .

In **Figure 2**, "Structural Model Assessment" illustrates the relationships between key variables of our study, such as service quality, educational reputation, student motivation, and happiness. It shows the strength and direction of these relationships, using path coefficients to indicate significant effects. This figure provides an understanding of how these elements interact with each other and gives ideas for enhancing the educational standards at Hohai University.

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to understand how service quality impacts educational reputation and students' happiness at Hohai University, specifically focusing on the mediating role of student motivation. The findings of this study both align with and expand upon previous research in similar contexts, reinforcing the critical role of service quality in shaping the academic experience and enhancing institutional



**Figure 2.** Structural model assessment.

reputation, while also emphasizing the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as drivers of student satisfaction and loyalty. Consistent with earlier studies, such as those by Kanwar & Sanjeeva (2022) and Borishade et al. (2021), this research found that service quality significantly impacts educational reputation and student happiness. These prior studies highlighted the importance of service dimensions like tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness in shaping student satisfaction and loyalty, which are corroborated by the results at Hohai University. However, this study uniquely emphasizes the mediating role of student motivation, extending frameworks like Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Unlike some previous studies that treat service quality and student outcomes as directly related, this research demonstrates that motivation significantly strengthens these relationships. For example, students with higher motivation reported amplified effects of service quality on both happiness and institutional reputation. In addition, the study's context—focusing exclusively on international students in a Chinese university—provides insights into cross-cultural dynamics that are less frequently addressed in the literature. While many studies explore service quality in higher education broadly, this research highlights how culturally diverse student populations experience and respond to service quality, filling a gap in the existing body of knowledge.

The relationship between service quality and educational reputation has been well-documented in prior research, underscoring its role in building a prestigious and well-regarded academic institution. As noted by Borishade et al. (2021), in the Nigerian higher education context, service quality remains a primary driver of student satisfaction and loyalty, directly impacting the institution's reputation. Similarly, Kanwar & Sanjeeva (2022) highlighted the value of systematic service quality evaluations, particularly using frameworks like SERVQUAL, which assess tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness in educational environments. These di-

mensions are critical at Hohai University, where the quality of services—ranging from infrastructure to administrative support—contributes significantly to the university’s reputation. The current study’s findings support the idea that high service quality is instrumental in attracting talented students and faculty, thus enhancing the institution’s educational standing and reputation in both domestic and international circles. Service quality also directly impacts students’ happiness by influencing their academic and social experiences on campus. Drawing from the model proposed by Bakrie et al. (2019), student satisfaction and happiness stem from service dimensions that meet or exceed student expectations. At Hohai University, students’ happiness appears closely linked to the availability of resources, faculty support, and a supportive learning environment. These findings resonate with global literature indicating that students who perceive high-quality services from their institution report a greater sense of well-being and are more likely to engage positively with their academic work (Borishade et al., 2021). Furthermore, as Kanwar & Sanjeeva (2022) indicated, enhancing satisfaction through reliable, responsive, and empathetic service fosters a sense of well-being among students, supporting the positive link between service quality and happiness. Student motivation emerged as a crucial mediating factor in this study, enhancing the effects of service quality on educational reputation and happiness. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as explained by (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which suggests that students’ intrinsic motivation—derived from autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is foundational for sustained academic engagement and satisfaction. When educational services at Hohai University are tailored to support these needs, students exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, leading to greater academic performance, satisfaction, and ultimately, an improved institutional reputation. Additionally, the Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) supports the notion that students’ expectations of success, coupled with the perceived value of their academic pursuits, drive their engagement and motivation. In this study, the university’s attention to student-centred services amplifies motivation, resulting in improved academic outcomes and a heightened sense of pride among students, which positively impacts Hohai University’s reputation and the happiness of its students.

## 7. Conclusion

This research has shown how important service quality is for the reputation of education and the happiness of students at Hohai University by emphasizing the influence of student motivation as a mediating role between them. In today’s world of education, institutions, such as Hohai University, need to uphold top-quality service standards covering aspects like academic resources, quality faculty assistance, administrative effectiveness and the general campus atmosphere. The results found that prioritizing service excellence not only enriches students’ learning journeys but also builds an image essential for attracting bright students and faculty members and maintaining sustained growth for the institution in the long

run. The service quality has direct impacts: High-quality services, including reliable support, responsive administration, and well-equipped facilities, directly enhance both the university's reputation and students' happiness. Findings from the study also show how student motivation plays a role in enhancing the impact of service quality in shaping results. High levels of motivation stem from both internal and external sources. Internal motivation may arise from personal goals, values, and intrinsic interest, while external motivation is influenced by factors such as rewards, recognition, and social expectations. The role of student motivation: Motivation significantly mediates the relationships between service quality, educational reputation, and happiness. Motivated students amplify the positive effects of service quality, demonstrating greater academic engagement and satisfaction. Also, serves to reinforce the link between service quality and students' well-being. When students are driven by motivation, it increases their likelihood of participating in their studies, fostering a sense of fulfillment and feeling proud to be part of the school or college community. This increased drive enhances the prestige of the university by strengthening a commitment to brilliance and focusing on the student learning experience. Educational reputation and happiness: A strong educational reputation positively influences students' happiness, further reinforcing the need for institutions to prioritize service quality and foster motivation. The research underscores the importance of designing services that respond to students' academic and personal needs. By fostering a supportive and engaging environment, Hohai University can cultivate a motivated student body that values and benefits from high-quality services. The positive effects of these efforts extend beyond individual student satisfaction to elevate the institution's standing in the broader educational community. The current findings offer a robust framework for understanding how service quality, mediated by student motivation, can drive positive educational outcomes, ensuring that institutions like Hohai University continue to thrive in a dynamic academic environment. Which can have Cross-Cultural Insights: By focusing on international students, the study offers unique insights into how culturally diverse populations perceive service quality, emphasizing the importance of tailored services to address their specific needs.

## 8. Practical Implications for Hohai University

The findings of this study offer guidance for decision-making and future strategies at Hohai University. It is essential to uphold excellence in service quality in areas that directly impact student education and welfare to bolster the university's standing and promote student satisfaction. Furthermore, acknowledging the role of student drive implies the importance of creating a nurturing atmosphere that nurtures both external motivations, among students. Efforts, like tailored educational assistance programs and immersive involvement in research projects alongside improved feedback systems, have the potential to boost enthusiasm among students and ultimately enhance their satisfaction levels and happiness towards the institution's reputation.

## 9. Limitations and Future Research

The research offers insights into how service quality impacts but has some limitations, too. The findings may not apply broadly to situations given the focus on international students at Hohai University. Suggestions for studies include examining a range of students across various institutions to gain a deeper understanding of these interactions in diverse cultural and educational environments. Longitudinal studies could also shed light on how these relationships change over time in reaction to changes and enhancements in service quality.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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