

Linking Quality Perceptions to Student Decisions: A Study of Private Universities in Bandung, Indonesia

Efi Fitriani*

Management Program, Ekuitas University, Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how students' perceptions of quality at private universities in Bandung influence their college preferences and enrolment intentions to continue their master's studies. With the increasing number of private universities in Indonesia, particularly in Bandung, competition for students has grown. Perceived quality, including academic reputation, facilities, and service, plays a key role in students' decision-making. Previous studies highlight the impact of institutional image, service quality, and promotional efforts on student enrolment intentions. However, there is limited research focusing specifically on how perceived quality influences college preference and enrolment intention in private universities in Bandung. This study fills this gap by examining the direct and indirect effects of perceived quality on student intention, mediated by college preference. The research questions address the influence of perceived quality on preferences, the impact of preferences on intention, and the mediating role of preferences between perceived quality and intention. Data were collected via questionnaires from 400 prospective and current students across 14 private universities in Bandung. Using Structural Equation Modelling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), the study tested relationships between perceived quality, college preference, and student intention. Findings reveal that perceived quality significantly influences college preference but has no direct significant effect on student intention. College preference significantly affects student intention and mediates the relationship between perceived quality and intention. The study suggests that universities should enhance perceived quality to shape student preferences and implement targeted strategies to convert them into actual enrolment decisions.

Keywords: college preference; higher education; intention; perceived quality; student

*) Corresponding Author Email: efi_rani@yahoo.co.id

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh persepsi kualitas perguruan tinggi swasta di Bandung terhadap preferensi perguruan tinggi dan niat mahasiswa untuk melanjutkan studi ke jenjang magister. Seiring dengan meningkatnya jumlah perguruan tinggi swasta di Indonesia, khususnya di Kota Bandung, persaingan dalam menarik mahasiswa menjadi semakin ketat. Dalam konteks tersebut, persepsi kualitas yang mencakup reputasi akademik, fasilitas, dan layanan menjadi faktor penting yang memengaruhi pengambilan keputusan mahasiswa. Penelitian terdahulu menunjukkan bahwa citra institusi, kualitas layanan, dan aktivitas promosi memiliki pengaruh terhadap niat mahasiswa untuk mendaftar. Namun, penelitian yang secara khusus mengkaji bagaimana persepsi kualitas memengaruhi preferensi perguruan tinggi dan niat melanjutkan studi pada perguruan tinggi swasta di Bandung masih terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini berupaya mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung persepsi kualitas terhadap niat mahasiswa melalui preferensi perguruan tinggi sebagai variabel mediasi. Pertanyaan penelitian yang diajukan meliputi pengaruh persepsi kualitas terhadap preferensi perguruan tinggi, pengaruh preferensi perguruan tinggi terhadap niat mahasiswa, serta peran mediasi preferensi perguruan tinggi dalam hubungan antara persepsi kualitas dan niat mahasiswa. Data penelitian dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner kepada 400 calon mahasiswa dan mahasiswa aktif dari 14 perguruan tinggi swasta di Bandung. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan metode Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) untuk menguji hubungan antara persepsi kualitas, preferensi perguruan tinggi, dan niat mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi kualitas berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi perguruan tinggi, tetapi tidak berpengaruh secara langsung terhadap niat mahasiswa untuk melanjutkan studi. Sebaliknya, preferensi perguruan tinggi terbukti berpengaruh signifikan terhadap niat mahasiswa serta berperan sebagai variabel mediasi dalam hubungan antara persepsi kualitas dan niat mahasiswa. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa peningkatan persepsi kualitas perlu diikuti dengan strategi yang mampu membentuk preferensi mahasiswa, sehingga preferensi tersebut dapat dikonversi menjadi keputusan nyata untuk melanjutkan studi di perguruan tinggi yang dipilih.

Kata Kunci: preferensi kampus, perguruan tinggi, minat, kualitas yang dirasakan, mahasiswa

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays an important role in creating superior and competitive human resources. In the current era of globalization, the demand for highly educated graduates is increasing, encouraging many individuals to pursue master's degrees (S2). Bandung, as one of the centers of higher education in Indonesia, has a high concentration of private and public universities, and it offers

various diverse master's degree programs. This makes the city of Bandung one of the main destinations for prospective graduate students.

Between 2018 and 2022, the number of private universities in Indonesia decreased by 5.96%, dropping from 3,171 to 2,982, with the highest concentration found in West Java, especially in Bandung. By 2024, Indonesia recorded 4,495,453 undergraduates, with 663,307 located in West Java and 216,106 in Bandung. Undergraduate enrolment (S1) in Bandung showed some fluctuation, declining by 3.69% between 2019 and 2020, then increasing by 4.98% from 2021 to 2022. In contrast, enrolment in master's programs (S2) steadily rose by 15.6% from 2019 to 2021 and by 11.8% from 2021 to 2022, reaching 9,403 students in 2022. Despite the rise in total S2 students, the share of S1 graduates transitioning to S2 programs slightly declined, from 4.5% in 2020 to 4.35% in 2022. The decrease suggests a modest drop in interest in pursuing postgraduate education. While the number of S2 students continues to grow, the decreasing percentage of S1 graduates who advance raises important questions about the factors influencing students' decisions to pursue further studies, especially amid intensifying competition among universities.

Although the number of master's program students in Bandung has increased year by year, the proportion of bachelor's degree (S1) graduates continuing to the S2 level has experienced a slight decline. This phenomenon indicates that there are certain factors influencing the decision of bachelor's degree graduates to continue their studies, whether from the individual, educational institution, or socio-economic environment. In the context of increasingly fierce competition among universities, understanding the factors that shape interest in pursuing a master's degree becomes crucial, both for higher education institutions in formulating promotional strategies and for the government in designing policies to improve the quality of human resources.

Supe et al. (2018) state that the competitiveness of higher education institutions is influenced by internal factors, such as academic quality, curriculum innovation, human resource management, and organizational culture, as well as external factors such as government policies, economic conditions, inter-institutional competition, and demographic changes. Both of these factors can present opportunities as well as challenges for the sustainability and growth of the institution.

Furthermore, Khashab et al. (2020) explain that universities and educational institutions need to design marketing strategies that encompass the planning, identification, prioritization, and active engagement of stakeholders through continuous interaction. With this approach, institutions not only reach their audience but also build sustainable trust and loyalty. Therefore, as emphasized by Stukalina (2015), higher education institution managers today must be able to adjust their strategic positions. This is done by comprehensively considering various internal and external factors.

Students' plans to pursue postgraduate studies are vital to both universities and the nation. This is because higher education has been recognized as the most important component in the socio-

economic development of every country, playing a greater role in training skilled labor, producing, and disseminating the knowledge needed for a knowledge-based economy (Bailey et al., 2013; Nyangau, 2014). Thus, increasing students' interest and intention to pursue postgraduate education becomes one of the crucial steps in supporting the sustainable development of the nation.

Various studies have revealed that brand perception plays an important role in influencing individual interest and behavior towards an institution. Fitriani et al. (2025) state that perceived quality has a positive and significant impact on college preference at private universities. This research aligns with Wang (2013), who found that perceived quality directly affects brand preference. This conclusion is further supported by Liu et al. (2014), who explained that perceived brand quality was found to be a mediator between corporate social responsibility and brand preference in terms of environment, society, and stakeholders (Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan, 2020). In other words, perceived quality directly influences brand preference.

Shahijan et al. (2018) examined the intention to continue further studies influenced by brand image, student expectations, past student experiences, information sources, and service quality mediated by student satisfaction and student performance perception. Meanwhile, Shiel & Peruta (2019) examined the decision-making process in choosing a university using social media as an independent variable. On the other hand, Solesvik et al. (2012) examined how students' intentions are influenced by perceived desirability and feasibility. In another study, Dao & Thorpe (2015) identified that the factors influencing student choice in selecting a university include facilities and services, programs, prices, offline information, opinions, online information, ways of communicating, program additions, and advertising. Furthermore, Teo et al. (2019) assert that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and attitude towards use influence students' behavioral intentions. Meanwhile, Kamal Basha et al. (2020) found that student preferences are influenced by how educational programs are designed, which indicates that the quality and relevance of the curriculum play an important role in attracting prospective students. The findings from various studies indicate that students' decisions in choosing higher education institutions are influenced by various complex factors, both internal and external, which interact with each other in shaping the intention to continue their studies.

Building on these prior findings, this study focuses on how students' perceptions of quality at private universities in Bandung shape their college preferences and enrolment intentions to pursue master's degrees. Therefore, investigating the interest in continuing to graduate-level education, particularly in the Bandung area, becomes relevant to identify the preferences of prospective students. This study is expected to contribute to the development of strategies aimed at increasing participation in advanced higher education in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of service quality is strongly rooted in the confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm, which refers to individual satisfaction in relation to the difference between expectations and perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This paradigm addresses how customer expectations are met and forms the foundation for high-quality service businesses and has dominated service literature since the early 1980s. In line with this, perceived quality is an assessment made by consumers about the quality of a product based on personal views (Das, 2014). Moreover, Su & Tong (2015) state that perceived quality also helps consumers by encouraging them to make purchases and highlighting the differences between brands and their competitors.

Extending the discussion of quality into the context of education, Watty (2006) explains that quality in higher education encompasses various dimensions, including efficiency, high standards, excellence, value for money, fitness for purpose, and customer focus. At a more fundamental level, quality may also be understood as transformation or the added value gained through education. Complementing this view, McKimm (2003) defines quality in higher education as the policies, processes, and actions implemented to maintain and enhance educational standards. Building upon these conceptualizations, Fitriani (2024) emphasizes the importance of students' perspectives, defining perceived quality as students' subjective evaluations of the services they receive throughout their on-campus academic experience.

To learn more about how perceived quality is conceptualized in the context of higher education, various scholars have proposed different dimensions that capture students' evaluation of academic and non-academic services. These dimensions reflect the complexity of perceived quality and emphasize its relevance in shaping the overall educational experience. The following studies illustrate the diversity and depth of these dimensions as identified by multiple researchers.

According to Peng & Samah (2006), the dimensions of perceived quality include the course content, service given by the lecturers and the faculty, course assessment, instruction medium, social activities, concern for students, and facilities. Building on this, Kao (2007) mentions that the dimensions of perceived quality in higher education institutions include interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality. These perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of perceived quality, which not only focuses on academic content but also on environmental and interpersonal aspects.

Further expanding the framework, Teeroovengadum et al. (2016) identify additional dimensions of perceived quality such as administrative quality, physical environment quality, core educational quality, support facilities quality, and transformative quality. This view emphasizes not only the academic and physical environment but also the institutional capacity to foster meaningful change in students. In a similar vein, Kwek et al. (2010) propose a more granular categorization, outlining

dimensions such as contact personnel, quality of librarians, access to facilities, curriculum, physical facilities, staff responsiveness from the Division of Examinations and Awards, reputation of the tertiary institution and academic program, amount of recreational activities, and cost of courses. This detailed classification underscores the importance of both academic and non-academic components in shaping perceived quality.

Consistently, Sumaedi et al. (2012) mention that the dimensions of perceived quality in higher education institutions include curriculum, facilities, personal contact, social activities, education counselors, assessment, and instruction medium. These elements reflect the holistic nature of student experience, integrating academic services with social and personal support. Furthermore, Narang (2012) mentions that the dimensions of perceived quality in higher education institutions include physical facilities, academics, learning outcomes, responsiveness, and personality development. This reinforces the notion that perceived quality is closely tied to the overall development and satisfaction of students during their academic journey. Lastly, Fitriani et al. (2025) mention that the dimensions of perceived quality include physical facilities, academic achievement, scholarship, and responsiveness.

College preference is another concept that can influence a student's intention to pursue a master's degree. To understand how preferences are formed, consumer attitude models such as the Fishbein model (1965), which is based on the expectation-value framework, are commonly utilized. According to this model, consumer preference for a brand is a function of their cognitive beliefs about the brand's attributes (Bass & Talarzyk, 1972; Bass & Wilkie, 1973). This theoretical foundation has significantly contributed to preference studies and continues to be widely applied (Allen et al., 2005; Muthithcharoen et al., 2011). In particular, Bass & Talarzyk (1972) emphasized that brand preference is influenced by both cognitive beliefs and brand attitude.

Several scholars have further refined the concept of brand preference. Hellier et al. (2003), for instance, define it as the extent to which customers favor the service provided by their current company compared to other alternatives. In a similar vein, Chomvilailuk (2010) describes brand preference as the relative tendency to choose and use a particular brand. Moreover, Ebrahim et al. (2016) view brand preference as a behavioral inclination that reflects a consumer's attitude toward the brand. Expanding on this, Kronrod & Huber (2019) suggest that brand preference is shaped through a combination of brand memory and brand attitude. Building upon these marketing-based perspectives, Fitriani et al. (2025) extend the concept of brand preference into the context of higher education, stating that college brand preference is the feeling that arises in liking one campus over another.

Maguire & Lay (1981) mention that the dimensions of college preference consist of financial aid (scholarships), parental preference, special academic programs, school size, campus location,

sports facilities, and social activities. Expanding on this early framework, Obermeit (2012) proposes that college choice can be measured through various factors such as reputation, financial considerations, location, curriculum, and input from others, as well as information gathered from the internet, publications, social networks, campus visits, and rankings.

In a broader perspective, Agrey & Lampadan (2014) explain that students' decisions in selecting a university are influenced by support systems (both physical and non-physical), the learning environment and job prospects, sporting facilities, student life and activities, and a safe and friendly atmosphere. Similarly, Kayombo et al. (2020) identify teaching quality, tuition fees, course availability, campus facilities, and post-graduation employability as key determinants of student preference.

Complementing these views, Dao & Thorpe (2015) highlight factors such as facilities and services, academic programs, pricing, both online and offline information, peer opinions, communication channels, program enhancements, and promotional efforts as influencing student decisions. In the Indonesian context, Fitriani et al. (2025) elaborate that indicators of college preference include the designation of a college as a priority, the student's preferred institution, first choice, and the perceived likelihood of choosing a particular university.

These various factors shaping college preference ultimately converge into a student's intention to enroll, which aligns with the broader theoretical perspectives on decision-making and behavioral intention. Ajzen (1985) stated that actions are controlled by intentions, but not all intentions are acted upon; some are abandoned altogether, while others are revised to fit changing circumstances. Howard developed the consumer decision model in 1963 (Du Plessis, Rousseau et al., 1991). Hung et al. (2011) define purchase intention as the likelihood of future purchasing actions resulting from consumer interest in goods or services and their assessment of buying them. Kotler & Keller (2012) define purchase intention as a process used to evaluate consumer purchase decisions. The intention of students, specifically their desire to pursue higher education, drives their actions.

Perceived brand quality is said to be the main factor influencing brand preference (Liu & Smeesters, 2010). This finding is consistent with the study by Cobb-Walgren et al. (1993), which found that brand equity has a significant and substantial impact on brand preference. Similarly, Chen & Chang (2008) found that brand equity has a positive and significant effect on brand preference. Meanwhile, Chang & Liu (2009) emphasized that perceived quality has a positive and significant impact on brand preference in service industries. In a different context, Wang (2013) found that perceived quality has a direct effect on brand preference in food products. Furthermore, Liu et al. (2014) stated that perceived brand quality serves as a mediator between corporate social responsibility and brand preference concerning the environment, society, and stakeholders (Hansopaheluwakan &

Setiawan, 2020). In the field of education, Fitriani et al. (2025) found that perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on college preference.

H1: College preference is positively impacted by perceived quality

O’Cass & Lim (2001) found that brand preference and brand personality have a positive and significant impact on purchase intention in the context of fashion clothing. Similarly, Chen & Chang (2008) discovered that brand preference significantly influences purchase intention, using international airport users as their unit of analysis. In the service industry, Chang & Liu (2009) confirmed that brand preference has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Supporting these findings, Sambath & Jyh-Fu (2015) researched sports shoes and shampoo, concluding that brand preference influences purchase intention in both product categories. This relationship was further observed by Pool et al. (2018), who studied fashion brands, and DAM (2020), who examined electronic supermarkets—both reporting similar results. Moreover, Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan (2020) found that brand equity influences purchase intention indirectly, with brand preference acting as a mediating variable.

H2: Student intention is positively impacted by college preference

Chi et al. (2019) found that perceived quality influences purchase intention for mobile phones, a finding also supported by Lee et al. (2019). Similarly, Wang & Tsai (2014) conducted a study on mutual fund companies and found that perceived quality positively affects purchase intention. Consistent with these findings, Hansopaheluwakan and Setiawan (2020) examined the bottled drinking water industry and concluded that brand equity—particularly perceived quality—has a significant impact on purchase intention. In the service sector, Chang & Liu (2009) found that perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on both brand preference and purchase intention. Reinforcing this evidence, Wu (2006), as cited in Ho (2007), also identified a strong relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention. Similarly, Chi et al. (2009) confirmed that perceived quality has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention in the mobile phone market. In a different context, Shahijan et al. (2018) examined service quality in higher education and found that it positively affects students' intentions to continue their studies, based on their perceptions of institutional performance.

H3: Student intention is positively impacted by perceived quality

Research examining the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention through brand preference includes the study by Hellier et al. (2003). Their findings indicate that perceived quality influences purchase intention indirectly, with brand preference serving as a mediating variable. In line with this, Chen & Chang (2008) also found that there is an indirect effect of brand equity, particularly perceived quality, on purchase intention, mediated by brand preference. Similarly, the study conducted by Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan (2020), as supported by Silva

& Fernando (2020), demonstrates that brand equity impacts purchase intention through the mediating role of brand preference.

H4: Perceived quality positively affects students' intentions through college preference.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on a population of 70,284 students enrolled in master's programs at 14 private universities in Bandung, Indonesia. To measure various aspects relevant to the research objectives, a total of 17 indicators were employed. Following the guideline suggested by Hair et al. (2010), which recommends a minimum sample size of five to ten times the number of indicators, the minimum required number of respondents was determined to be 170 (17×10). To ensure greater representativeness and robustness of the analysis, data were collected from 400 respondents. The data was analyzed using a technique known as variance-based structural equation modeling (VB-SEM), also called partial least squares (PLS), and this analysis was done with the Smart PLS 4.0 software.

The questionnaire employed the summated rating method using a seven-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 to 7. The scale was defined as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree. Data collection was conducted over five months, from January to May 2024. We visited each university to distribute the questionnaire and provided participants with a Google Form link. While the primary target respondents were students in their seventh and eighth semesters, students from the third, fourth, and fifth semesters were also included to meet the desired sample size.

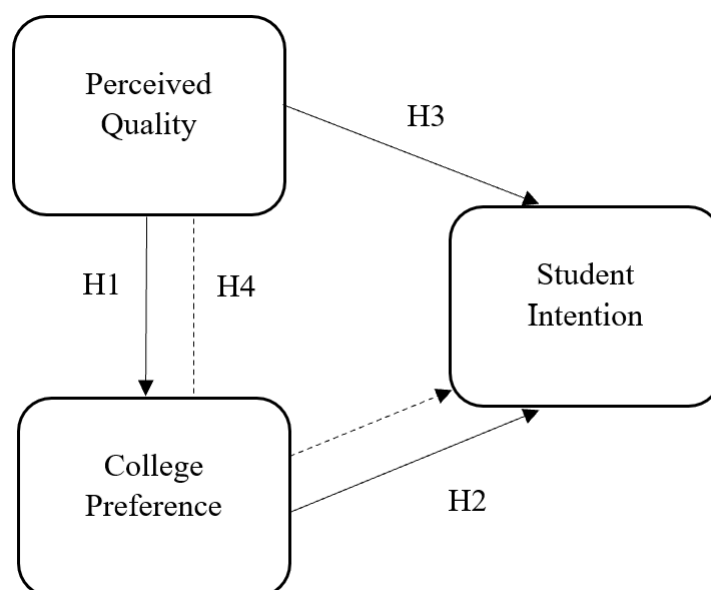


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

A total of 400 respondents participated in this study. In terms of gender, the respondents were relatively balanced, consisting of 204 females (51%) and 196 males (49%). Most respondents were aged 21–25 years (77%), followed by those aged 16–20 years (21%) and 26–30 years (2%). Regarding academic terms, the majority were in terms 7–8 (57%), while 23% were in terms 5–6 and 20% were in terms 3–4. These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly students in their final years of undergraduate study, making them well-positioned to provide insights into college preferences and intentions to pursue master's degree programs.

Furthermore, regarding the study program, the respondents came from 29 different academic disciplines, indicating a diverse representation of students. The largest proportion of respondents were from the management program (26.75%), followed by communication science (9.75%), accounting (7.75%), and legal studies (7.75%). The remaining respondents were distributed across various fields, including engineering, business, design, social sciences, health sciences, and education. Therefore, this diversity suggests that the study captured perspectives from students with different academic backgrounds, providing a broader understanding of the factors influencing college preference and the intention to pursue postgraduate studies.

Perceived quality refers to the quality of campus services as experienced by students during their time in college. To assess this construct, the dimensions used include physical facilities, academic achievement, scholarships, and responsiveness. Specifically, physical facilities encompass the availability of sports fields, prayer rooms, restrooms, library resources, and computer or practical laboratory facilities. Moreover, academic achievement relates to the ease with which students are able to complete courses and achieve satisfactory grade point averages. In terms of financial support, scholarships refer to the availability of tuition assistance, whether provided internally by the institution or externally by third parties. Meanwhile, responsiveness is reflected in the promptness of academic staff in providing assistance, the efficiency of financial services, the proactiveness of study programs in offering guidance, and the willingness of lecturers to mentor students.

On the other hand, college preference refers to a student's tendency to favor one institution over others. In this study, it is measured using four indicators: priority college, preferred college, first preference, and the likelihood of choosing a specific campus. More specifically, priority college represents the institution that is most prioritized for continued studies. Preferred college refers to the overall attraction or liking toward a particular institution. First preference reflects the student's primary choice. In addition, the likelihood of choosing a campus indicates how probable it is that the student will actually enroll there.

Furthermore, student intention is defined as the student's desire to continue their studies at a higher level within the same institution. This construct is measured through three key indicators:

willingness to continue studies, possibility of continuing studies, and consideration for continuing studies. To elaborate, willingness refers to the student's personal readiness to pursue further education. The possibility of continuing studies indicates the perceived chance or likelihood of doing so. Finally, consideration for continuing studies captures the thought processes, factors, and motivations that influence the student's decision to pursue higher education.

RESULT/FINDING

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted to examine the relationships among perceived quality, college preference, and student intention to pursue postgraduate studies. The findings are derived from responses collected through a structured questionnaire and are supported by statistical testing using relevant analytical tools. Each construct is analyzed based on its indicators, and the relationships between variables are interpreted by the research hypotheses. The results are presented in both tabular and narrative form to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness.

The data in Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of respondents' perceptions regarding various aspects of perceived quality in master's programs at private universities in Bandung. The overall perceived quality score is 5.0, which falls into the category of "Quite Quality." Among all items, the library received the highest score (5.5), indicating that students are highly satisfied with the availability of academic resources. Similarly, campus facilities and laboratories were also rated highly (5.4), suggesting that infrastructure is generally adequate. In terms of academic performance, the Academic Achievement Index (5.2) and the ease of passing courses (4.8) were perceived positively, reflecting a favorable academic environment. However, when it comes to financial support, both on-campus (4.6) and off-campus tuition assistance (4.8) were considered only sufficiently available, indicating that improvements are needed in this area. Furthermore, service responsiveness showed mixed results. While the study program's speed (5.3) and the overall assistance of academic staff (5.0) were considered quite fast, the speed of direct staff assistance received the lowest score (4.3), which highlights a potential weakness. In conclusion, although students generally view the quality of services positively, certain aspects, such as tuition assistance and staff responsiveness, require further enhancement.

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of college preference, highlighting how students prioritize and consider the campus for their master's studies based on several preference indicators. The overall score for college preference is 4.0, which falls under the category of "Less Preference." Among the indicators, the statement "This campus is a priority for continuing master's degrees" received the highest average score of 4.5, indicating that while some students prioritize the campus, it is not considered a strong priority overall. In comparison, the preference for this campus over others scored 4.0, suggesting that students are less fond of it when making comparisons. The campus's first-

choice rating was even lower, at 3.8, showing it is good enough but not the top pick. Lastly, the item “I will likely choose this campus” received the lowest score of 3.7, which reflects a relatively low level of intent to enroll or that the campus is just not enough to choose. Taken together, these findings imply that while the campus holds some appeal, it is not the most preferred option among respondents for pursuing master’s studies.

Table 3 presents respondents’ perceptions of student intention, focusing on their willingness to continue, complete, or consider pursuing a master’s degree at the campus. The overall average score is 3.6, which is categorized as "Quite Not Interested." Among the items, the highest score (3.8) was given to the intention to consider pursuing a master’s degree, indicating that while there is some thought, the level of commitment is low. In contrast, the willingness to continue scored 3.6, categorized as “sufficiently unwilling,” suggesting a lack of strong interest. Meanwhile, the statement about probably finishing a master’s degree at the campus received the lowest score (3.4), reflecting minimal certainty or commitment. These findings suggest that, although students may entertain the idea of studying on campus, their actual intention to enroll remains weak overall.

Table 1. Respondent’s perception of perceived quality

Item	Average Score	Category
The availability of campus facilities, such as the sports field, prayer room, and restroom, is a concern	5,4	Sufficiently Available
The library offers a wide selection of books and journals	5,5	Available
Availability of a computer or practical laboratories	5,4	Quite Complete
Ease of passing courses	4,8	Pretty Easy
Academic Achievement Index	5,2	Quite Achieved
The availability of campus tuition assistance	4,6	Sufficiently Available
The availability of off-campus tuition assistance	4,8	Sufficiently Available
The speed at which academic staff assist and serve is impressive	5	Quite Fast
The speed of academic staff in assisting and serving	4,3	Not Fast Enough
The level of speed of the study program in serving and directing	5,3	Quite Fast
Category of Perceived Quality	5	Quite Quality

Table 2. Respondent’s perceptions of college preference

Item	Average Score	Category
This campus is a priority for continuing master's degrees	4,5	Moderate
I prefer this campus over other campuses to continue my master's studies	4	Moderate
This campus is my first choice for continuing my master's degree	3,8	Moderate
I will likely choose this campus to continue my master's degree	3,7	Moderate
Category of college preference	4	Moderate

Table 3. Respondent's perceptions of student intention

No	Item	Average Score	Category
1	I am willing to continue my master's studies at this campus	3,6	Low
2	This campus is where I'm probably going to finish my master's degree.	3,4	Low
3	On this campus, I'll think about pursuing my master's degree.	3,8	Moderate
Category of Student Intention		3,6	Low

Table 4 Convergent Validity: First Order

Variable	Dimensions	Items	Outer loading	AVE
Perceived Quality	Physical Facilities	X1	0.850	0.756
		X2	0.884	
		X3	0.875	
	Academic Achievement	X4	0.905	0.840
		X5	0.928	
	Scholarship	X6	0.910	0.809
		X7	0.889	
		X8	0.885	
	Responsiveness	X9	0.911	0.795
		X10	0.880	
College Preference		Y1	0.875	0.868
		Y2	0.946	
		Y3	0.958	
		Y4	0.946	
Student Intention		Z1	0.926	0,824
		Z2	0.942	
		Z3	0.853	

The following section presents the results of the verification analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This method was chosen due to its suitability for analyzing complex models with multiple constructs and indicators, especially when the research focuses on prediction and theory development. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 software, which allows for the assessment of both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model).

The convergent validity test results are displayed in Table 4. Every indicator accurately reflects what it is intended to measure because its outside loads are greater than 0.7. Every dimension's AVE value is higher than the 0.5 cutoff point.

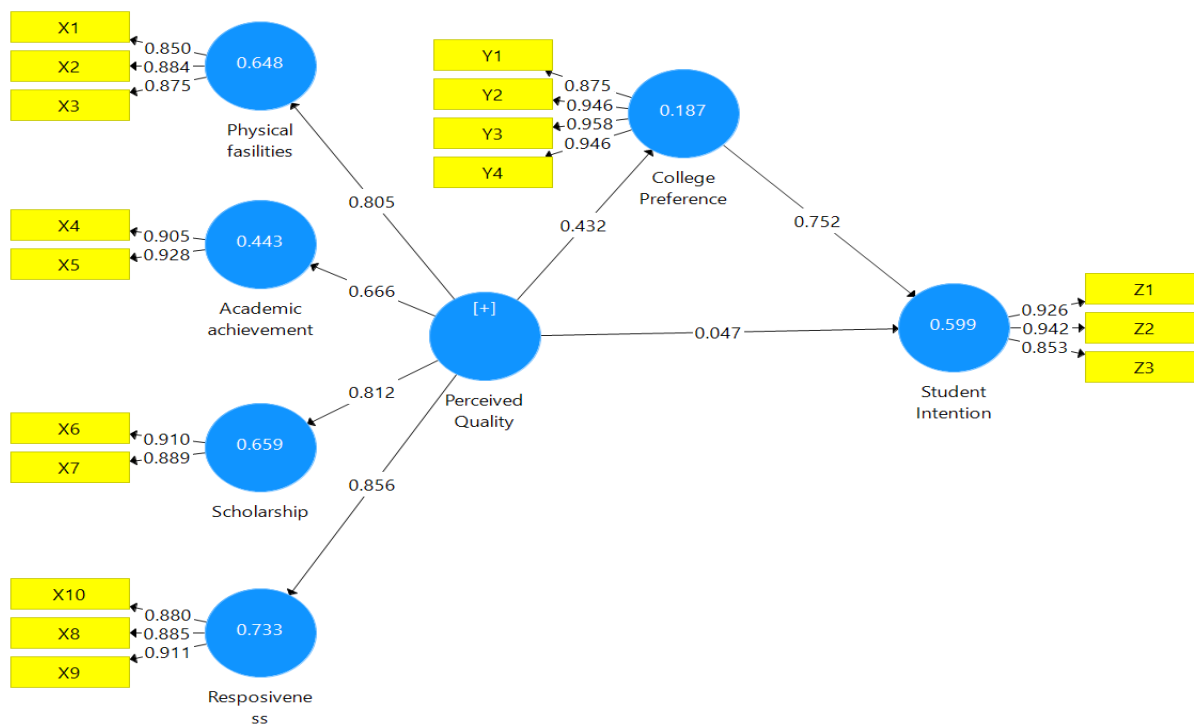


Figure 2. Model Structural First-Order (Data processing using PLS 4.0)

Table 5. Convergent Validity: Second Order

Variable	Dimensions/Indicators	Outer loading	AVE
Perceived Quality	Physical Facilities	0,744	0,569
	Academic Achievement	0,768	
	Scholarship	0,765	
	Responsiveness	0,739	
College Preference	Priority college	0,875	0,868
	Preferred college	0,946	
	First preference	0,958	
	The possibility of choosing a college	0,946	
Student Intention	Willingness to continue studies	0,926	0,824
	Possibility of continuing studies	0,942	
	Consideration for continuing studies	0,853	

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 5 demonstrates that the indicators for each construct consistently measure their respective latent variables, as evidenced by Cronbach’s alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability values exceeding 0.7. Additionally, all AVE values exceed the threshold of 0.5, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. These results provide clear evidence of convergent validity.

The second-order structural model, which gauges student intention, perceived quality, and college preference, is shown in Figure 2. Every indicator has a loading factor greater than 0.7, indicating a good measurement of the latent variable represented.

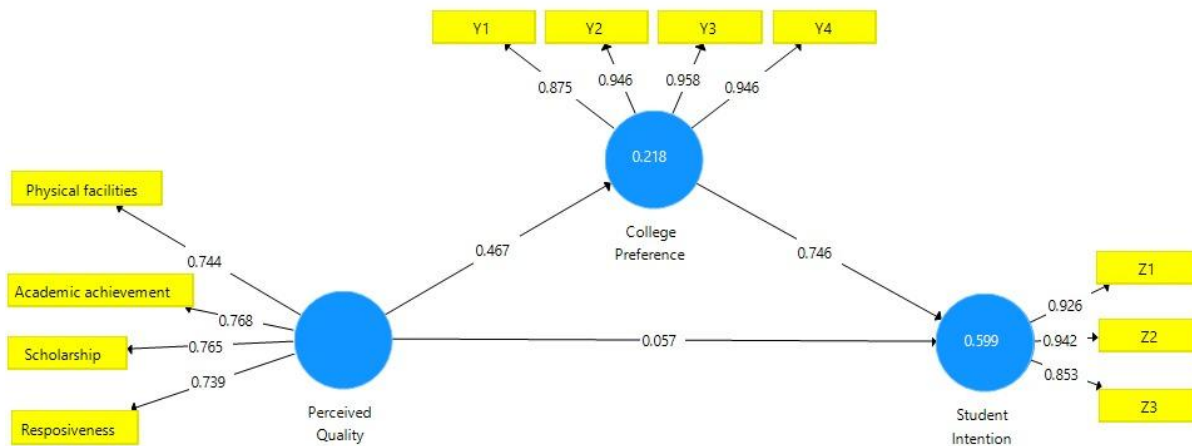


Figure 2. Model Structural Second-Order (Data processing using PLS 4.0)

Table 6 confirms that all constructs meet the criteria for reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability values all exceed 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. Additionally, AVE values are above 0.5 for all constructs, showing that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Thus, the measurement model demonstrates adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Table 7 demonstrates that the square roots of AVE (diagonal values) are greater than the correlations between constructs (off-diagonal values), fulfilling the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This indicates that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs, thus confirming discriminant validity.

Table 6. Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
College Preference	0.949	0.953	0.963	0.868
Perceived Quality	0.753	0.769	0.841	0.569
Student Intention	0.894	0.916	0.934	0.824

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 7. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	College Preference	Perceived Quality	Student Intention
College Preference	0.932		
Perceived Quality	0.467	0.754	
Student Intention	0.773	0.405	0.908

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 8. Cross-Loading

Constructs	Perceived Quality	College Preference	Student Intention
Academic achievement	0.768	0.447	0.380
Physical facilities	0.744	0.286	0.252
Resposiveness	0.739	0.289	0.224
Scholarship	0.765	0.339	0.323
Y1	0.445	0.875	0.627
Y2	0.428	0.946	0.728
Y3	0.423	0.958	0.743
Y4	0.445	0.946	0.773
Z1	0.421	0.786	0.926
Z2	0.366	0.717	0.942
Z3	0.304	0.576	0.853

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 8 shows that each indicator loads highest on its intended construct compared to other constructs, indicating good indicator discriminant validity. For instance, all indicators for Perceived Quality, College Preference, and Student Intention display the strongest loadings on their respective constructs. This confirms that the items are distinct and appropriately associated with the constructs they are intended to measure.

Table 9 presents the results of path coefficients and hypothesis testing using PLS-SEM. The path from perceived quality to college preference shows a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.467$, $t = 11.093$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students' perceptions of quality strongly influence their preference for a particular college. Thus, H1 is accepted. Similarly, the path from college preference to student intention is also significant ($\beta = 0.746$, $t = 20.753$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that college preference is key to determining intention to enrol. Therefore, H2 is accepted. However, the direct path from perceived quality to student intention is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.057$, $t = 1.112$, $p = 0.266$), leading to rejection of H3. This implies that perceived quality alone does not directly influence students' intention to continue their studies, but rather, its effect is channelled through college preference as a mediating variable. These findings highlight the importance of college preference in the decision-making process and support the notion that student intention is more strongly influenced by their evaluation of institutional fit and desirability than by perceived quality alone.

Table 9. Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effect	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Conclusion
Perceived Quality -> College Preference	0.467	0.042	11.093	0.000	H1 Accepted
College Preference -> Student Intention	0.746	0.036	20.753	0.000	H2 Accepted
Perceived Quality -> Student Intention	0.057	0.051	1.112	0.266	H3 Reject

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 10. Specific Indirect Effect

Specific Indirect Effect	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Conclusion
Perceived Quality -> College Preference -> Student Intention	0.348	0.037	9.467	0.000	H4 Accepted

Source: Data processing using PLS 4.0

Table 10 reveals a significant indirect effect of perceived quality on student intention through college preference. The path coefficient for this mediation is 0.348, with a t-value of 9.467 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance at the 0.01 level. As a result, H4 is accepted, confirming that college preference mediates the relationship between perceived quality and student intention. This finding aligns with the earlier result where the direct effect of perceived quality on student intention was not significant (Table 9), suggesting a full mediation. In other words, students' perception of quality does not directly influence their intention to enroll but does so indirectly by shaping their preference for a particular college. This conclusion emphasizes the critical role of college preference as a mediating variable in the decision-making process for further studies.

DISCUSSION

The research results show that perceived quality has a positive and significant impact on college preference. These findings are consistent with those of Fitriani et al. (2025), who found that perceived quality significantly influences college preference at private universities in Bandung. In a different context, Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan (2020) found a significant effect of perceived quality on brand preference for bottled drinking water. Similarly, Liu et al. (2014) demonstrated that perceived brand quality mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand preference, indicating its strong influence on brand preference in the hotel industry. In the food industry, Wang (2013) also found that perceived quality has a direct effect on brand preference. Moreover, in the

context of service industries, Chang & Liu (2009) revealed that perceived quality positively and significantly impacts both brand preference and purchase intention. Finally, supporting this overall pattern, Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) confirmed that perceived quality has a substantial influence on both brand preference and purchase intention.

On the other hand, college preference has a positive and significant impact on student intention. The results of this study are in line with previous research, which consistently shows that brand preference positively influences purchase intention across various industries. To begin with, Chen & Chang (2008) found that brand preference has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention among international air passengers. In the service sector, Chang & Liu (2009) also confirmed this positive relationship. Furthermore, Sambath & Jyh-Fu (2015) demonstrated similar findings in the context of sports shoes and shampoo. In addition, Pool et al. (2018) reported that brand preference significantly impacts purchase intention in the fashion industry. Most recently, DAM (2020) identified the same effect in electronic supermarkets, further strengthening the generalizability of this relationship across different product and service categories.

In contrast, the results of this study indicate that perceived quality does not significantly affect student intention. This finding is consistent with the research by Cortes et al. (2023), which found that perceived program quality had an insignificant effect on students' intention to enroll in a Bachelor of Science program in Thailand. This suggests that perceived program quality may be less effective in encouraging students to pursue higher education. On the other hand, the results of this study contradict the findings of Shahijan et al. (2018), who revealed that service quality positively influences the intention to continue further studies through student-perceived performance in Malaysia. Likewise, Solesvik et al. (2012) demonstrated that both perceived desirability and perceived feasibility significantly influence student intention in Ukraine. In a different context, Chi et al. (2009) found that perceived quality affects purchase intention for mobile phones. Similarly, Wang & Tsai (2014) reported that perceived quality influences purchase intention in the context of fund companies. Furthermore, Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan (2020) found that perceived quality, as a component of brand equity, positively and significantly affects purchase intention for bottled drinking water. Finally, Chang & Liu (2009) also confirmed that in the service industry, perceived quality has a significant impact on purchase intention. Taken together, while several studies across various industries show a strong link between perceived quality and intention—particularly purchase intention—the findings of this study highlight that such a relationship may not always apply in the context of student enrolment decisions.

Finally, this study also reveals that perceived quality has a positive and significant impact on student intention when mediated by college preference. The results of this finding are in line with the study by Hansopaheluwakan & Setiawan (2020), who found that perceived quality has a

positive and significant effect on purchase intention through brand preference in the context of bottled drinking water. Similarly, Silva & Fernando (2020) discovered that perceived quality positively and significantly influences purchase intention through brand preference among automobile brand marketers. In addition, Hellier et al. (2003) showed that in the superannuation industry, perceived quality also impacts purchase intention through brand preference. Likewise, Chen & Chang (2008) confirmed a similar relationship in the airline industry, where perceived quality significantly affects purchase intention through brand preference.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicate that students perceive the quality of campus services to be generally adequate. Facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and the responsiveness of academic staff are viewed positively, indicating that the campus has met a reasonable standard of service delivery. However, this positive perception of quality does not appear to translate into a strong college preference. The campus is not regarded as a top choice for continuing master's studies, suggesting that while services are satisfactory, they may not be distinctive or competitive enough to influence student preference. Furthermore, students' intention to pursue a master's degree at the campus remains relatively low. The data indicate a lack of strong motivation or commitment to continue their education at the institution, pointing to possible concerns beyond service quality, such as brand reputation, academic prestige, or career prospects.

The findings suggest that perceived quality, which includes physical facilities, academic achievement, scholarships, and responsiveness, can enhance college preference to continue their studies. College preference, which includes priority college, preferred college, first preference, and the likelihood of choosing a specific campus, can further strengthen student intention for higher education. However, perceived quality cannot directly affect students' intention to continue their studies. Perceived quality also influences college preference, which can indirectly raise student intention. College preference fully mediates the relationship between perceived quality and student intention. College preference contributes to increasing student intention to pursue a master's degree at private universities in Bandung, Indonesia.

In contrast to earlier studies that looked at variables with diverse objects, this study focuses on higher education institutions as the research object. Consequently, by providing fresh insights into the variables affecting college preferences, this study contributes to our understanding of consumer behavior in higher education marketing.

These findings highlight a gap between perceived service quality and student decision-making. While quality may be sufficient, it alone is not enough to drive preference or intention. Institutions

may need to enhance their strategic positioning by strengthening their academic image, offering clearer value propositions, or improving student engagement to increase enrolment interest.

Notwithstanding its drawbacks, the results highlight how crucial it is to raise perceived quality to sustain high educational standards and increase university attraction. In order to develop a more thorough knowledge of students' decision-making in higher education, future research is recommended to increase the scope by incorporating alumni, extending the geographic area, and incorporating other pertinent characteristics like perceived value, brand personality, and college image.

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