Exploring the nexus Between Customer Service Quality and Student Satisfaction and Loyalty in Ghana's Upper East Region: Insights from Undergraduate Students at Regentropfen University College (RUC)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore undergraduate students' expectations and satisfaction levels with customer service quality. This study employed the Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) and a quantitative cross-sectional design with a sample of 385 undergraduate students selected from a population of 635 using simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire which through pilot-testing produced a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .862 demonstrating that the constructs of the questionnaire were highly internally consistent. Descriptive and inferential analysis tools were used. The descriptive statistics result revealed high satisfaction levels among the students regarding various aspects of customer service (M=3.20-3.68).The results also revealed that the students generally held high expectations for the institution (M=2.66-3.74). Additionally, the inferential results revealed a positive correlation between satisfaction and loyalty r (385) =0.125, p= 014 (Sig. 2-tailed). This suggests that as satisfaction levels increase, loyalty levels also tend to increase, even though the relationship is not strong. Again, a statistically significant difference between satisfaction levels students expectations was found F(385)= 9.228, (p<.001). The study concluded that, RUC successfully fulfills students' core academic and community expectations, with most students indicating that they would choose RUC again and support its mission. The students' willingness to recommend RUC and participate in fundraising efforts suggests a strong foundation of loyalty. The study recommended maintaining high standards in friendliness, accessibility, and effective communication to sustain students' satisfaction. Additionally, feedback channels could help identify specific areas within customer service where students feel underserved, enabling continuous improvement and student-centered growth at RUC..........

Key words: Customer service, students' satisfaction, students' loyalty, educational quality

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INTRODUCTION

The demand for higher education should not just be about quantity but must include provision of quality services which are critical to preserve high level of academic excellence and quality educational experiences among students. In Ghana, the introduction of the free senior high school has led to a rapid and growing demand for higher education by the increasing number of senior high school graduates each academic year (Osei-Kwadwo, 2024) amidst the limited capacity of public universities in the country. With the limited spaces available in these public universities for potentially qualified students to gain admission, equity and access problems in higher education could arise (Acquah et al., 2024).

The existence of private universities in the country therefore serves as a great opportunity to absorb the excess number of senior high school graduates that the traditional or public universities are unable to admit for higher education. As much as we discuss the increasing demand for higher education, it is critical to point out that the demand for higher education is not just about quantitative but also about qualitative, where the educational institutions have to adapt in a way to preserve high levels of academic excellence so that the larger pool of graduates can be adequately supported (Kwegyiriba, 2021). The issue of quality education therefore calls for more attention to the quality of customer services provided to students by higher educational institutions, especially private ones. In light of this, the current study explored the views and findings of several academic writers in the ongoing discourse about the impact of universities customer service quality on students' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. For instance, Matanga (2020) investigated how customer care brings about customer satisfaction at the University of Arusha. The author's specific objectives included finding out whether the University of Arusha is practicing customer care and customer satisfaction. The author's findings revealed that respondents had a view that the University of Arusha is practicing customer care and customer satisfaction. The study concluded that inadequacy of facilities such as computer lab equipment was part of the source of dissatisfaction among students. It was recommended that training the staff on customer care skills is essential to improving customer care at the university.

In the current period of market liberalization in Tanzania, Kwikwega (2018) examined the customer service that students at private and public universities experienced in order to attract students. Although political and demographic shifts may continue to influence university student mobility in Tanzania, the authors pointed out that St. Augustine University, particularly Jordan University College has the potential to draw and keep more students on campus than Mzumbe University. The authors recommended that colleges address the main obstacles to bettering customer service, including staff training requirements and ineffective policies and processes.

Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016) examined the relationship between service quality and student loyalty in order to determine the mediating function of student satisfaction and highlighted that student happiness is significantly impacted by service quality. This means that university administrators must adopt better methods that are in line with students' expectations and satisfaction. This may include the need for a stronger knowledge of the relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty as emphasized by (Annamdevula&Bellamkonda, 2016). A study by Chandra et al. (2019) evaluated the impact of service quality and university image on student satisfaction and loyalty in Indonesia. The authors indicated that service quality had a positive and significant impact on student satisfaction, adding that students' loyalty is positively and significantly impacted by their satisfaction. Additionally, Chandra et al. (2019) highlighted that students' loyalty and happiness are positively and significantly impacted by university image. The authors nevertheless, pointed out that service quality had no appreciable or beneficial impact on student loyalty.

Kara et al. (2016) looked into the connection between student satisfaction in public institutions in Kenya and the quality of educational services provided. The study specifically looked at the aspects of university educational service quality. The study also ascertained the connection between university students' satisfaction and aspects of educational service quality. The research design used in the study was cross-sectional. We used stratified random sampling to sample eight universities. Using proportionate stratified random sampling, 1062 undergraduate students in their third and fourth years participated in the study. The results revealed that students' satisfaction was significantly and directly correlated with the quality of teaching facilities, the availability of textbooks in university libraries, the quality of administrative services, the reliability of university exams, perceived learning gains, and the quality of student welfare services. The author highlighted that students' satisfaction was directly but marginally correlated with the quality of the lecturer, the library service environment, and the instructional methods.

Chuah et al. (2011) used field research of 100 undergraduate students at one of Malaysia's institutions to investigate the connection between service quality and student happiness. The study's conclusions showed that a key element influencing students' degree of satisfaction is service quality. In particular, the study's findings indicate that students are more satisfied when the university offers higher-quality services. The results of this study have significantly

advanced our understanding of how to manage student happiness in Malaysian higher education institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to understand these processes in the context of Ghana, particularly in the upper east region, which is the core aim of this current study.

Student satisfaction has emerged as a critical indicator of institutional success in higher education, shaping not only students' academic experiences but also their loyalty and advocacy for their institutions (Elliott & Healy, 2001). Regentropfen University College (RUC), like many higher education institutions, seeks to understand and improve the quality of its services to meet students' evolving expectations. Research highlights that students' satisfaction with university services is multidimensional, including aspects such as academic support, administrative responsiveness, and overall campus environment (Gruber et al., 2010). Institutions that prioritize understanding and enhancing students' satisfaction levels are better positioned to cultivate a loyal student body (Brown &Mazzarol, 2009). Consequently, assessing and addressing students' satisfaction and loyalty have become strategic objectives for universities striving to retain and attract future cohorts.

The expectations and preconceptions that students bring to a university influence their satisfaction and overall academic experience (Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008). Many students, prior to enrolling at a university, have various expectations based on marketing materials, word-of-mouth, or social media information. However, when these expectations are misaligned with actual experiences, a satisfaction gap may arise, leading to decreased loyalty and retention rates (Oliver, 1980). Therefore, it is essential to investigate not only the level of student satisfaction but also the expectations they hold before joining the institution and how these expectations influence their satisfaction and sense of loyalty.

Based on the findings of a case study of private universities in Bangladesh on service quality and student satisfaction, Mohammad et al. (2013) highlighted which students are drawn to institutions that will offer them a distinctive educational experience that they will cherish for the rest of their lives. The authors emphasized that students in the twenty-first century are consumers looking for educational programs that will equip them for lucrative jobs and a successful career. Accordingly, Mohammad et al. (2013) made an effort to investigate the connection between students' satisfaction and the aspects of service quality (tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy). A series of questionnaires was used by the authors to survey 550 business students from private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. According to the results, all of the dimensions and student satisfaction are significantly correlated. The importance of service quality in determining students' satisfaction in higher education institutions was highlighted by this study by Mohammad et al. (2013).

This study focuses on four key areas: first, it aims to measure undergraduate students' level of satisfaction with customer service quality at RUC using a scale of 1-4. Second, it seeks to understand the expectations and preconceptions students held before joining RUC. Third, it aims to ascertain if there is a significant difference between students' initial expectations and their actual satisfaction. Finally, the study examines the relationship between students' satisfaction levels and their loyalty to RUC. Exploring these aspects will provide valuable insights for RUC, helping the institution to align its service offerings with student expectations, thereby fostering a positive and supportive educational environment that enhances student retention and satisfaction. By investigating these areas, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on higher education service quality and student satisfaction. Findings from this study may assist RUC and similar institutions in refining their service delivery models to better meet students' needs and expectations, ultimately contributing to increased student satisfaction and loyalty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years, the quality of customer service in higher education institutions has emerged as a critical factor influencing student satisfaction and loyalty. Despite the growing body of literature on this topic, there remains a notable gap in research, particularly within the context of Ghana's Upper East Region. Numerous studies (e.g Kara et al. 2016; Chuah et al. 2011; Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016) have explored the relationship between customer service quality and student outcomes in larger urban areas, however,there are yet unique challenges and dynamics faced by institutions in less urbanized areas, such as the Upper East Region which need to be studied. Regentropfen University College (RUC), located in the upper east region, serves a diverse student body that reflects the socio-economic and cultural intricacies of the area. However, the extent to which customer service quality impacts student satisfaction and loyalty at RUC has not been examined. As such, this research seeks to address this geographical gap by investigating how the quality of customer service provided at RUC influences the overall satisfaction levels and loyalty of its undergraduate students. Understanding this nexus is essential not only for enhancing the educational experience at RUC but also for informing policy decisions aimed at improving service delivery in higher education across the region. By focusing on the specific

context of RUC and its students, this study aims to contribute valuable insights that can help bridge the existing knowledge gap and promote the development of effective strategies for improving customer service quality in Ghana's upper educational landscape.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to:

1. assess the expectation and preconceptions that undergraduate students had before joining Regentropfen University College
2. measure undergraduate students' level of satisfaction with customer service quality at Regentropfen University College using a scale of 1-4.
3. ascertain whether there is a significant difference between students' expectations and their actual satisfaction of customer service quality at Regentropfen University College.
4. find out whether there is a significant relationship between students' satisfaction level and their sense of loyalty at Regentropfen University College.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference between students' expectations and their actual satisfaction

H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between students' expectations and their actual satisfaction

H_0: there is no significant relationship between students' satisfaction level and their sense of loyalty at Regentropfen University College

H_1: There is a statistically significant relationship between students' satisfaction level and sense of loyalty at Regentropfen University College.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study is the Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT). This theoretical model was originally proposed by Oliver (1977) and further developed in subsequent studies (Albtoosh&Ngah, 2024; Chen, 2021; Oliver, 1980). The theory has become a fundamental paradigm in consumer behaviour research and service quality assessment. The ECT posits that satisfaction is determined by the interplay between prior expectations and perceived performance after actual product or service consumption. In the context of higher education, students form pre-enrolment expectations about their university experience, including academic services, administrative support, and overall institutional quality. These expectations serve as reference points against which actual experiences are compared, leading to either confirmation (when experiences match expectations) or disconfirmation (when experiences deviate from expectations).
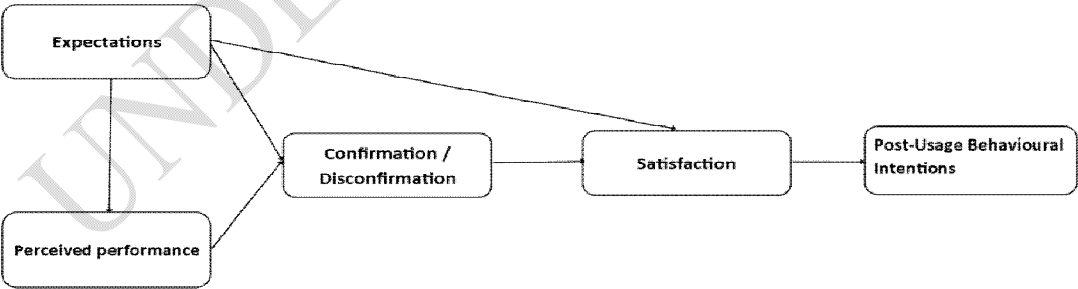

Figure 1: Framework illustrating the Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT)

The theory operates through five primary constructs: **1)** expectations: the initial expectations refer to the pre-consumption beliefs about a service that serve as reference points for future evaluations (Oliver, 1980). In the higher

education context, these expectations are particularly complex and multifaceted. Students form expectations about academic quality and teaching standards; administrative efficiency and support services; campus facilities and learning resources; social environment and student life and career development opportunities. These initial expectations are shaped by various factors, including marketing materials, peer recommendations, family influences, and previous educational experiences (Stankevich, 2017). **2)**Perceived Performance: This involves the student's perception of actual service delivery. This perception is formed through direct experience with the institution's services and represents the student's evaluation of how well the university has performed relative to their expectations (Ayyoub et al., 2023; Henry, 2018; Ye et al., 2022). Key aspects of perceived performance in higher education include quality of teaching and learning experiences; effectiveness of administrative processes; availability and quality of support services; physical and digital infrastructure; and student-staff interactions. Research indicates that perceived performance is not merely objective but is influenced by individual student characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and previous experiences (Sultan & Wong, 2019).**3)**Confirmation/Disconfirmation: The comparison process between initial expectations and perceived performance. This comparison can result in three outcomes (Chatterjee&Suy, 2019) positive disconfirmation takes place when performance exceeds expectations, simple confirmation happens when performance matches expectations, and negative disconfirmation occurs as a result of performance falling below expectations. In the higher education context, this comparison process is ongoing and dynamic, occurring across multiple service encounters throughout the academic year (López et al., 2023).**4)**Satisfaction: The outcome resulting from the confirmation/disconfirmation process. ETC suggests that satisfaction is influenced by both the initial expectations and the degree of confirmation/disconfirmation. **5)**Post-Usage Behavioural Intentions: The final component focuses on the behavioural consequences of satisfaction, particularly the development of loyalty intentions. In higher education, these intentions manifest in continued enrolment decisions, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, alumni engagement and support, future educational choices and institution advocacy. These behavioural intentions are particularly significant for universities as they contribute to long-term sustainability and reputation (Tawafak et al., 2023).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Student Expectations and Perceptionsof customer Service in higher education

The gap between student expectations and perceptions of service quality has received considerable attention in recent literature. Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) developed and validated the Higher Education Service Quality (HESQUAL) scale, studying 600 students across multiple institutions. Their findings revealed significant disparities between pre-enrolment expectations and actual service experiences, particularly in administrative services (mean difference = 1.2 on a 5-point scale).A longitudinal study by El-Hilali and Al-Rashidi (2020) in Kuwait tracked 285 first-year students' expectations and perceptions throughout their initial year. The research found that students' pre-enrolment expectations were significantly higher than their actual experiences ($p < 0.05$), particularly regarding administrative services and support facilities. The study emphasized the importance of managing student expectations during the recruitment and orientation processes. Le Roux and Van Rensburg (2014) carried out a study to assess students' loyalty, intentions to advocate, and their perceptions of customer experience during interactions with the administrative personnel at North-West University. The authors utilized a quantitative descriptive research approach, distributing questionnaires to 1,295 students. The results from Le Roux and Van Rensburg (2014) indicated that students at the Potchefstroom campus demonstrated significantly higher levels of loyalty and advocacy intentions compared to those at the Vaal and Mafikeng campuses. Overall, the results suggest that students have a very favorable view of the professional appearance of staff members and believe that their personal information is managed securely. The research conducted by Gibbs (2004) examined the expectations and perceptions of consumers in undergraduate higher education. The researcher distributed a survey aimed at assessing the gap between students' expectations and their perceptions of the quality of service provided. The findings revealed specific areas where the university is not meeting student expectations, offering a framework for managers to reallocate resources

effectively. Furthermore, the author emphasized that tracking customer perceptions of service quality can be utilized over time to evaluate the effects of quality enhancement initiatives initiated through an organization's strategic planning efforts. A study carried out by Asim and Kumar (2018) aimed to explore students' expectations and perceptions regarding the quality of services at specific higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Maldives. Quantitative data was gathered using the SERVQUAL instrument designed for assessing service quality. The authors utilized a cross-sectional survey method and selected a sample of 72 students. The data were evaluated using the statistical software SPSS version 23, along with Pearson correlation tests and methods of multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that there was a positive yet weak correlation between expectations and perceptions across all five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument.

Customer Service Quality and Student Satisfaction

Recent empirical research consistently demonstrates the critical relationship between service quality and student satisfaction in higher education. A comprehensive study by Shahsavar and Sudzina (2017) of 350 students in Denmark found that service quality explained 63% of the variance in student satisfaction, with administrative support and faculty interaction being the strongest predictors ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$). The study particularly emphasized the importance of prompt and accurate service delivery in academic administration. Ali et al. (2021) conducted research across Malaysian universities, examining the relationship between service quality dimensions and international student satisfaction. Their findings revealed that reliability ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$) and responsiveness ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.01$) were the most significant predictors of satisfaction. The study highlighted how efficient handling of student queries and consistent service delivery significantly influenced overall satisfaction levels. In the African context, Oluwunmi et al. (2020) investigated service quality in Nigerian private universities, surveying 419 students. Their research identified significant correlations between administrative efficiency ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and student satisfaction, particularly emphasizing the role of digital service delivery systems in enhancing student experiences.

Customer Service Quality and Student Loyalty

Recent research has established strong links between service quality and student loyalty in higher education. Latif et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive study of 600 students in Pakistan, finding that service quality significantly influenced student loyalty both directly ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and indirectly through satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Their structural equation modelling revealed that satisfaction played a crucial mediating role in the service quality-loyalty relationship. Hameed et al. (2021) examined the impact of service quality on student loyalty in UAE universities, surveying 427 students. Their findings showed that administrative service quality was a significant predictor of student loyalty ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$), with trust and satisfaction acting as mediating variables. The study particularly highlighted the importance of digital service delivery in building long-term student relationships. Supporting these findings, Qayyum et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between service quality and student loyalty in Malaysian universities, studying 389 international students. Their research revealed that service quality dimensions explained 71% of the variance in student loyalty, with reliability and assurance being the strongest predictors.

METHODOLOGY

Using a quantitative cross-sectional research design, the study used a simple random sampling technique to sample 385 undergraduates from an accessible population of 635. We conducted our research at one time-point during the 2024/25 academic year. This is consistent with Schmidt and Brown (2019)'s view that researchers conducting cross-sectional research design attempt to "collect data from a group of subjects at one time. This research has employed a questionnaire as the only tool for collecting data. It is noted in literature that surveys or questionnaires often serve as instruments for data collection in cross-sectional research (Schmidt & Brown, 2019). A 4-point Likert rating scale was used to self-develop the data collection questionnaire instrument. Individual items were rated 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-agree and 4-strongly agree. The instrument to be self-developed required reliability and validity testing. The questionnaire was examined by multiple scholars and academic writers in order to make sure that the statements in it were measuring the research objectives closely. In terms of reliability, initial data was collected through piloting of the instrument. Data

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resulting from the piloting was analyzed by means of Cronbach's alpha reliability test. The analysis revealed a total reliability coefficient of .862 which demonstrated that the construct of the questionnaire was highly internally consistent in measuring the research objectives as intended. The study also provided a critical view of ethical considerations such as confidentiality and anonymity. To begin with, no student was forced to take part in the study. All students had been informed about the purpose of this study and all showed interest in participating in the data collection. The study did not make use of any identifiers of students which could be traced back to participants (ID numbers, names etc.) so as to guarantee anonymity consequently; this act by the research team was much intended to increase student confidence in providing the team with accurate and reliable data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One

How satisfied are undergraduate students with the quality of customer service at RUC?

The purpose of this research question is to evaluate undergraduate students' satisfaction levels with the customer service quality at RUC. Using a 1-4 scale, the study seeks to capture students' perspectives on various dimensions of customer service, including responsiveness, approachability, and issue resolution, to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement. This research aims to provide insights that can guide RUC in enhancing its customer service experience for students.

Table 1: Assessing Undergraduate Student Satisfaction with Customer Service Quality at RUC.

STATEMENT	VD (%)	SD (%)	SS (%)	VS (%)	$\bar{x}$ (std)
I am satisfied with the university's strong reputation for academic excellence.	18 (4.7)	42 (10.9)	64 (16.6)	261 (67.8)	3.48 (0.88)
I am satisfied with the response time to my queries by RUC's customer service.	18 (4.7)	48 (12.5)	76 (19.8)	243 (63.0)	3.41 (0.81)
I am satisfied with the strong sense of community and campus life.	8 (2.1)	46 (11.9)	96 (24.9)	235 (61.0)	3.45 (0.78)
I feel am satisfied with how the staff valued me as a customer staff.	15 (3.9)	60 (15.6)	142 (36.9)	168 (43.6)	3.20 (0.84)
I am satisfied with the customer service at RUC because it is easily accessible and convenient.	15 (3.9)	44 (11.4)	87 (22.6)	239 (62.1)	3.49 (0.67)
I am satisfied with the resolution of my issues by RUC's customer service.	7 (1.8)	19 (4.9)	162 (42.1)	197 (51.2)	3.43 (0.67)
I am satisfied with how clear and effective communication has been done by Staff at RUC.	12 (3.1)	27 (7.0)	50 (13.0)	296 (76.9)	3.64 (0.74)
I am satisfied with how staffs at RUC are friendly and approachable.	7 (1.8)	29 (7.5)	46 (11.9)	303 (78.7)	3.68 (0.69)
Overall, I am satisfied with the customer service quality and the strong sense of community and campus life at RUC.	9 (2.3)	30 (7.8)	46 (11.9)	300 (77.9)	3.65 (0.72)

Source: Field Data (2024)

Key: Very Dissatisfied =VD; Somewhat Dissatisfied =SD; Somewhat Satisfied =SS; Very Satisfied=VS; Mean=$\bar{x}$; Standard Deviation= std.

The result suggests that RUC is successful in delivering a high-quality customer service experience, particularly in terms of approachability, communication, and fostering a sense of community, which aligns with existing research on student satisfaction in higher education. Studies indicate that effective communication, approachability, and a strong campus community contribute significantly to student satisfaction, as they help create a supportive and engaging environment (Gibson & Cornell, 2012). The high satisfaction scores in friendliness and communication by staff (78.7% and 76.9%, respectively) underscore the importance of these elements, suggesting that students value interpersonal interactions and clear, accessible communication channels at their institution. This finding echoes the work of Nguyen and Le (2014), who noted that students are more likely to feel satisfied in environments where staff are approachable and communicate effectively.

The institution's academic reputation, with a satisfaction mean of 3.48, also appears to be an important factor for students. This supports research emphasizing the role of academic prestige in enhancing student loyalty and satisfaction

(Al-Khatib & Dawood, 2016). A strong academic reputation likely provides students with a sense of pride and confidence in their education, contributing positively to their overall satisfaction.

However, the data also shows a relatively moderate satisfaction score in feeling valued by staff (mean = 3.20), suggesting a potential gap in personalized attention where students' needs may not be fully met. Literature emphasized that students feeling recognized and valued by staff can significantly influence their loyalty and satisfaction (Martins & Santos, 2015). Implementing strategies to address this aspect such as personalized support services, recognition programs, or additional staff training could help bridge this gap and strengthen students' sense of belonging and connection to the institution.

Research Question Two
What expectations and preconceptions did undergraduate students have before joining RUC?

This research question explores the expectations and preconceptions that undergraduate students held before enrolling at RUC. Understanding these initial impressions is essential, as they often shape students' overall satisfaction, engagement, and academic motivation throughout their university experience. By examining the expectations students brought with them, this study aims to provide insights into the factors that influence students' choices and identify areas where the university might enhance its communication and orientation efforts. Addressing gaps between expectations and reality can help RUC align its offerings more closely with student needs, fostering a more positive and supportive educational environment from the outset.

Table 2: Undergraduate Students' Expectations and Preconceptions Prior to Joining RUC.

STATEMENT	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	x̄ (std)
Before joining RUC, I expected the university to have a strong reputation for academic excellence.	11 (2.9)	27 (7.0)	52 (13.5)	295 (76.6)	3.64 (0.73)
I assumed that RUC would have state-of-the-art facilities and resources.	5 (1.3)	22 (5.7)	42 (10.9)	316 (82.1)	3.74 (0.62)
I expected RUC to have a diverse and vibrant student community.	9 (2.3)	34 (8.8)	63 (16.4)	279 (72.5)	3.59 (0.74)
I thought RUC would have a rigorous academic program with high standards.	10 (2.6)	24 (6.2)	57 (14.8)	294 (76.4)	3.65 (0.71)
I expected RUC to have a strong sense of community and campus life.	10 (2.6)	31 (8.1)	54 (14.0)	290 (75.3)	3.62 (0.74)
I assumed that RUC would have a wide range of extracurricular activities and clubs.	12 (3.1)	26 (6.8)	60 (15.6)	287 (74.5)	3.62 (0.74)
I expected RUC to have a clear and effective communication system.	28 (7.3)	71 (18.4)	74 (19.2)	211 (54.8)	3.22 (0.99)
I thought RUC would have a supportive and approachable faculty.	42 (10.9)	96 (24.9)	80 (20.8)	167 (43.2)	2.97 (1.06)
I am likely to recommend RUC to friends and family.	27 (7.0)	87 (22.6)	81 (21.0)	189 (49.1)	3.13 (0.99)
I feel a strong sense of belonging to the RUC community.	35 (9.1)	83 (21.6)	77 (20.0)	189 (49.1)	3.10 (1.03)
I am proud to be a student at RUC	73 (19.0)	101 (26.2)	87 (22.6)	124 (32.2)	2.66 (1.11)
I would choose RUC again if I had to make the decision over.	6 (1.6)	27 (7.0)	37 (9.6)	315 (81.8)	3.72 (0.66)
I feel that RUC has met my academic and personal expectations.	7 (1.8)	28 (7.3)	37 (9.6)	313 (81.3)	3.70 (0.68)
I am committed to supporting RUC's mission and values.	12 (3.1)	22 (5.7)	68 (17.7)	283 (73.3)	3.62 (0.74)
I would be willing to donate to RUC or support fundraising efforts.	6 (1.6)	27 (7.0)	37 (9.6)	315 (81.8)	3.72 (0.73)
I feel proud to associate myself with RUC wherever I go including my social media platforms.	93 (24.2)	68 (17.7)	83 (21.6)	141 (36.6)	2.71 (1.19)

Source: Field study (2024).

Comment [H10]: Std is not always the most appropriate tool for measure ordinal data because it assumes equal intervals between categories, which may not true for ordinal scales. Please be sure once again.

Key: Strongly Disagree =SD; Disagree =D; Agree= A; Strongly Agree =SA; Mean= $\overline{x}$; Standard Deviation=std.

The data reveals significant insights into undergraduate students' expectations and experiences at RUC, showing that, before joining, most students held high expectations for the university's academic reputation, facilities, and sense of community. For instance, 76.6% of students were "Strongly Agree" that they expected RUC to have a strong reputation for academic excellence (mean = 3.64, std = 0.73), and 82.1% assumed the university would have state-of-the-art facilities (mean = 3.74, std = 0.62). These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of institutional reputation and resources in shaping student perceptions (Alves&Raposo, 2007). Furthermore, students anticipated a diverse, vibrant community (72.5% "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"), reflecting the impact of social environment on their academic choices and satisfaction (Thomas, 2012).

However, perceptions around communication systems and faculty support were notably lower, with mean scores of 3.22 and 2.97, respectively. Only 54.8% expressed satisfaction with RUC's communication, while perceptions of faculty support were similarly mixed, reflecting broader findings in student engagement research that stress the need for clear institutional communication and accessible faculty support to build student trust and engagement (Kuh, 2009). Notably, although students were likely to recommend RUC toothers (mean = 3.13) andexpressed a sense of belonging (mean = 3.10), their pride in being part of RUC and willingness to endorse the university on social media were lower, with means of 2.66 and 2.71, respectively. This suggests a gap between students' initial expectations and their subsequent experiences.

Considering these varying outcomes, a high proportion of students (81.8%) would still choose RUC if given a second chance (mean = 3.72), indicating that, overall, RUC has met many core academic and personal expectations (mean = 3.70). Additionally, the commitment to supporting RUC's mission (mean = 3.62) and willingness to contribute to fundraising (mean = 3.72) suggest a strong foundational loyalty, a finding that aligns with literature on student loyalty, which often emphasizes the importance of mission alignment and institutional support for sustained commitment (Helgesen&Nesset, 2007). In summary, while RUC meets academic expectations effectively, there is an opportunity to improve areas related to faculty support, communication, and fostering a sense of pride and socialconnection within the RUC community.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference between students' expectations and their actual satisfaction

Table 3: Difference between satisfaction levels and expectations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.057	13	.697	9.228	.000
Within Groups	28.011	371	.076		
Total	37.068	384			

The ANOVA table investigates whether there is a significant difference between satisfaction levels and expectations. The analysis shows that the Sum of Squares Between Groups is 9.057, while the Sum of Squares Within Groups is 28.011, resulting in a total sum of squares of 37.068. The degrees of freedom (df) for Between Groups is 13, indicating 13 groups or categories, while the Within Groups df is 371, representing the number of observations minus the number of groups. The Mean Square Between Groups is 0.697, calculated by dividing the sum of squares by the degrees of freedom, while the Mean Square Within Groups is 0.076. The F-value, which compares the variation between groups to the variation within groups, is 9.228, and the p-value (Sig.) is 0.000. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it indicates a statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels based on expectations.

The significance of the findings suggests that satisfaction levels vary depending on the expectations of the individuals. The observed differences are unlikely due to random variation. This implies that expectations play a crucial role in shaping satisfaction. For example, individuals with higher or met expectations may experience greater satisfaction, while unmet expectations may result in dissatisfaction. The F-value of 9.228 confirms that the differences between groups are meaningful.

The relationship between expectations and satisfaction has been extensively discussed in literature. According to Oliver's Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) (1980), satisfaction results from the confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations. When expectations are met or exceeded, satisfaction tends to increase, and when expectations are not met, satisfaction decreases. This study's significant findings align with ECT by showing that varying expectations lead to different satisfaction levels. Similarly, the Discrepancy Model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) posits that satisfaction is determined by the gap between expected and perceived outcomes. The significant results here suggest that different expectations likely lead to varying perceptions of satisfaction. In practical contexts, Anderson et al. (1994) highlight that

managing expectations is crucial to improving satisfaction. For example, in education, Tinto (1993) found that students' satisfaction is heavily influenced by how their expectations align with their learning experiences.

In conclusion, the ANOVA results indicate a significant difference in satisfaction levels based on expectations ($p<0.05$ $p < 0.05$ $p<0.05$). These findings underscore the importance of managing and aligning expectations to enhance satisfaction. The results align with established theories such as Expectation-Confirmation Theory and the Discrepancy Model, both of which highlight the influence of expectations on satisfaction. However, further research and targeted strategies are necessary to explore and address group-specific differences.

H_0: there is no significant relationship between students' satisfaction level and their sense of loyalty at Regentropfen University College

Table 4: Relationship between satisfaction and loyalty

		Satisfaction Level	Loyalty Level
Satisfaction Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.125[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	385	385
Loyalty Level	Pearson Correlation	.125[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	385	385
***. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**			

The correlation table examines the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty using Pearson correlation analysis. The results indicate a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.125, suggesting a weak positive correlation between the two variables. This means that as satisfaction levels increase, loyalty levels also tend to increase, but the relationship is not strong. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.014, which is less than the significance threshold of 0.05. This confirms that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance. The sample size (N) for both variables is 385, providing adequate data to support the findings. The asterisk (*) next to the correlation coefficient emphasizes the significance of the relationship at the 0.05 level.

Although the relationship is statistically significant, the weak correlation suggests that satisfaction alone may not be a strong predictor of loyalty. While higher satisfaction levels are associated with increased loyalty, the small magnitude of the correlation coefficient implies that other factors, such as trust, perceived value, or emotional connection, might also influence loyalty. This highlights the need to consider satisfaction as one of many variables that contribute to fostering loyalty.

The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty has been explored extensively in literature. Oliver (1999) argues that satisfaction often serves as a precursor to loyalty by fostering trust and positive experiences. However, the strength of this relationship can vary depending on individual circumstances or context. Similarly, Reichheld (2003) points out that satisfaction, while necessary, is not sufficient to guarantee loyalty. For example, even satisfied customers may switch to competitors if they perceive better value elsewhere. In organizational and educational settings, Hallowell (1996) found that loyalty is often influenced by a combination of factors, such as emotional connection, perceived fairness, and satisfaction. These insights align with the weak correlation observed in this study.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that efforts to enhance loyalty should not focus solely on improving satisfaction levels. While satisfaction is important, strategies must also address other aspects of loyalty, such as trust-building, providing consistent value, and fostering emotional connections. Organizations should adopt a holistic approach to loyalty improvement by addressing multiple factors simultaneously. Additionally, further research is needed to identify other variables that influence loyalty. Conducting a multiple regression analysis could provide deeper insights into how satisfaction and other factors interact to affect loyalty.

Despite the statistical significance of the results, the weak correlation coefficient indicates that satisfaction accounts for only a small portion of the variation in loyalty. This underscores the need to explore additional factors, such as trust, emotional satisfaction, or perceived value, which may play a more substantial role in shaping loyalty. Furthermore, the analysis does not establish causation, meaning it is unclear whether satisfaction directly leads to loyalty or whether the relationship is mediated by other factors.

In conclusion, the correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant but weak positive relationship ($r=0.125, p=0.014$ $r = 0.125, p = 0.014$ $r=0.125, p=0.014$) between satisfaction and loyalty. While satisfaction contributes to loyalty, its influence is limited, suggesting that other factors are also important. These findings align with existing theories, such as Oliver's and Reichheld's work, which highlight that satisfaction alone is insufficient to ensure loyalty.

To foster stronger loyalty, organizations must focus on a combination of factors, including trust, emotional connection, and perceived value. Further research is needed to explore these factors and their interactions with satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS

The data reveals high satisfaction levels among RUC undergraduate students regarding various aspects of customer service and campus experience. The highest satisfaction was reported in the friendliness and approachability of staff, with 78.7% of students expressing strong satisfaction (mean = 3.68, std = 0.69). Similarly, effective communication by staff also received high ratings, with 76.9% of students satisfied (mean = 3.64, std = 0.74). The university's reputation for academic excellence, accessibility of customer service, and response time to student queries also reflect positively, with mean scores of 3.48, 3.49, and 3.41, respectively. However, the perception of being valued as a customer shows relatively lower satisfaction, with a mean score of 3.20, indicating an area that may need improvement. The overall satisfaction with customer service and campus community is also strong, with a mean score of 3.65, highlighting the university's effective approach to meeting students' needs.

The data reveals that undergraduate students at RUC generally held high expectations for the institution, particularly in terms of academic reputation and facilities, with mean satisfaction scores of 3.64 and 3.74, respectively. Students also expected a vibrant student community and a strong sense of campus life, aligning with Thomas's (2012) findings on the importance of social integration in higher education. However, lower scores in areas related to faculty support (mean = 2.97) and communication (mean = 3.22) indicate some disconnect between initial expectations and actual experiences. This suggests that while RUC meets students' academic and community expectations, improvements in staff accessibility and communication could enhance overall satisfaction, as highlighted by Kuh (2009) in his research on student engagement.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that RUC has successfully established a high standard of customer service and campus life, aligning with literature that emphasizes the importance of effective communication, approachability, and issue resolution in educational institutions. The positive ratings for friendliness, accessibility, and community engagement support the notion that students are more satisfied in environments where they feel connected and supported. However, the relatively lower score on feeling valued by staff suggests a possible gap in perceived personal attention, which, as studies suggest, is key to deepening student satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, RUC's efforts have fostered a supportive environment, contributing positively to student satisfaction.

Overall, RUC successfully fulfills students' core academic and community expectations, with most students indicating that they would choose RUC again and support its mission. The students' willingness to recommend RUC and participate in fundraising efforts suggests a strong foundation of loyalty, even if some aspects, such as communication and faculty approachability, fall short of expectations. The findings show that students' satisfaction and loyalty are fostered when an institution meets its academic promises but can be further reinforced through stronger personal support structures. The data implies that addressing the areas of faculty support and communication could strengthen the student experience and enhance RUC's reputation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance satisfaction further, RUC should focus on strengthening students' perception of being valued, as research highlights that students' feeling of recognition significantly influences overall satisfaction. Implementing staff training that emphasizes personalized student interactions and acknowledgment can improve students' sense of being valued. Maintaining high standards in friendliness, accessibility, and effective communication should also remain a priority to sustain satisfaction. Additionally, feedback channels could help identify specific areas within customer service where students feel underserved, enabling continuous improvement and student-centered growth at RUC.

To enhance overall student satisfaction, it is recommended that RUC prioritize improvements in faculty support and communication systems. Initiatives such as staff training on student engagement and more transparent communication channels could bridge the gap between expectations and actual experiences. Additionally, RUC should leverage its positive reputation and high-quality facilities to build a more connected community promoting initiatives that foster student interaction and a sense of belonging. These efforts would likely deepen students' loyalty and commitment.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data which were collected from students and analyzed to produce the findings of this study are available in a Microsoft Excel document with the Author. Therefore the data will only be made available from the Author upon request.
Competing interest: The author declares that there are known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the outcome of this study.

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