



Role Of Competitive Advantage In Mediating The Determinants Of Private High School Students' Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine and analyze the influence of: (1) service quality on competitive advantage; (2) educational costs on competitive advantage; (3) convenience on competitive advantage; (4) service quality on satisfaction; (5) educational costs on satisfaction; (6) convenience on satisfaction; (7) competitive advantage on satisfaction; (8) the indirect effect of service quality on satisfaction through competitive advantage; (9) the indirect effect of educational costs on satisfaction through competitive advantage; (10) the indirect effect of convenience on satisfaction through competitive advantage of private high schools in the Kudus district. This research method utilizes a quantitative approach, with the population being all high school teachers in the Kudus district. The sample consists of 130 teachers. Data analysis was conducted using smart PLS software.

The results of the study are as follows: (1) there is a significant influence of service quality on competitive advantage ($0.015 < 0.05$) with 15.4%; (2) there is no significant influence of educational costs on competitive advantage ($0.497 > 0.05$); (3) there is a significant influence of convenience on competitive advantage ($0.000 < 0.05$) at 82.2%; (4) there is a significant influence of service quality on student satisfaction ($0.000 < 0.05$) with an effect of -41%; (5) there is a significant influence of educational costs on student satisfaction ($0.000 < 0.05$) with an effect of 54.2%; (6) there is no significant influence of convenience on satisfaction ($0.798 > 0.05$); (7) there is a significant influence of competitive advantage on satisfaction ($0.000 < 0.05$) at 81%; (8) service quality indirectly affects student satisfaction through competitive advantage in private high schools in the Kendal district at 0.154 or 15.4%; (9) educational costs do not indirectly affect student satisfaction through competitive advantage in private high schools in the Kendal district; (10) Convenience does not indirectly affect teacher satisfaction through service quality in private junior high schools in the Kendal district.

In conclusion, this study suggests that (1) service quality and convenience significantly influence increasing student or school competitiveness; (2) service quality, educational costs, and competitive advantage significantly affect student satisfaction; (3) competitive advantage serves as a relevant mediator in enhancing service quality towards student satisfaction. This study recommends that private high schools in the Kendal district improve satisfaction determinants to enhance customer satisfaction. Further research is recommended to involve the influence of other indicators of student satisfaction variables.

Keywords: satisfaction, competitive advantage, convenience, service quality, costs.

INTRODUCTION

Service quality is a unique phenomenon because its dimensions and indicators can vary among individuals involved in the service delivery. Service quality serves as an indicator of the success level of implementation within an organization's management. Service quality becomes the most crucial factor in providing customer satisfaction. This applies to all organizations offering services or productions. Educational institutions demand a high level of service quality and customer satisfaction. In the educational world, school customers include students, parents, the community, and graduates' users.

Satisfaction can be defined as an effort to fulfill something or make something adequate (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016: 195). Kotler (2003: 61) states that satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure or disappointment experienced by someone after comparing the performance or results of a product with their expectations. Suhaji (2012:7) identifies three factors influencing customer satisfaction: service quality, costs, and convenience. In this study, the researcher takes these three satisfaction factors as research variables. Schools can be equated with companies, organizations, or institutions, while students are equated with customers or consumers. These satisfaction factors, when applied within a school environment, are as follows: (a) service quality has an impact on customer satisfaction. This means that if the quality of school services improves, student satisfaction will also increase; (b) costs affect satisfaction. This means that if educational costs are affordable and meet students' expectations, they will feel satisfied; (c) Convenience influences student satisfaction. This means that if the school provides administrative service convenience and easy access to technology for learning, customer satisfaction will increase.

Tjiptono (2016: 54) mentions that quality is closely related to customer satisfaction. Quality encourages customers to form strong relationships with service institutions. The theory of service quality with customer satisfaction states that (1) customer satisfaction with a particular service will lead to an overall evaluation or attitude towards service quality over time (Bitner et al., Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016: 217); (2) The essence of service quality is an antecedent or model for customer satisfaction. Both concepts of satisfaction and service quality cannot be separated (Bitner et al., Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016: 217).

The concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction are two distinct but closely related concepts or elements in management. This implies that increasing customer satisfaction tends to be followed by a positive perception of service quality, and vice versa (Sureshchandar in Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016: 113). Quality service can be identified through perceived customer satisfaction. Private schools are a type of educational service business. Schools are likened to service management companies that must provide quality service to their customers or clients. School customers include teachers, students, parents, the community, and graduates' users. All students expect to achieve satisfaction while learning at school. Students have the right to good service, ease of access to services, and facilities corresponding to the fees they pay to the school.

Furthermore, the second factor of satisfaction is costs. Students as consumers have an obligation to pay educational costs as determined by the school. According to Supriyadi (2010:3), educational costs include all types of expenditures related to education management in the form of money, goods, or educational resources. According to Ministerial Regulation No. 44 of 2012 concerning levies and contributions to education costs in basic education units, Article 1, paragraph 5 states that education costs are financial resources used for the costs of unit education participants, education implementation, and management of education participants in accordance with the regulations established by the government. In practice, private schools charge educational costs to support education management at the school. The majority of teachers and education personnel at private high schools in Kendal are non-government employees. This means that teacher salaries and other activities are funded by student fees. Students will feel satisfied if the fees paid receive adequate rewards in the form of good and appropriate services.

The third satisfaction factor is the convenience obtained by students. Jogiyanto (2010) states that convenience is the extent to which a person believes that using technology will be effortless. Davis in Amijaya (2010) states that ease of use is a level at which someone believes that technology can be easily understood and used. This implies that convenience can increase customer satisfaction. Students will feel satisfied if they have ease in learning, innovating, accessing technology, and ease in creativity. This indicates that students feel independent in receiving, developing their potential, and spending time at school. According to Porter in Putri (2012:14), it can be defined as a company's ability in the industry to face various environmental challenges. Competitiveness is determined by a company's competitive advantage and heavily depends on its relative resource level, or what we commonly refer to as competitive advantage. Service quality, educational costs, and convenience provided by schools are not enough to provide student satisfaction.

With competitiveness, schools will be able to create changes or innovations to provide customer satisfaction. This forms the basis for making competitiveness a mediating variable in improving service quality, costs, and convenience to enhance student satisfaction in private high schools in the Kendal district. This study is motivated by (1) the phenomenon of fluctuating numbers of students in private high schools in Kendal district; (2) the numerous complaints from students indicating dissatisfaction with private high schools in Kendal. During observations, several private high schools in Kendal seemed static from year to year, lacking high

competitiveness. Schools still seem to imitate each other in developing their schools. Students complain about the reality experienced by students with the promotions given by schools during new student admissions (PPDB). In reality, the students enter as students, the promotions given are very different from reality.

The service quality of private high schools in Kendal district is considered less than optimal according to the perceptions of interviewed students. In Kendal city, there are 20 long-standing private high schools with an average age of over 10 years. The decreasing phenomenon of private high school students in Kendal district from year to year is one of the causes because of the dissatisfaction of students and parents of students. Promotions during new student Admission are extraordinary, but after the reality in the learning process at school, it is inversely proportional. Ineffective services, very minimal facilities, and teacher discipline are factors in student dissatisfaction. The phenomenon of students' perceptions of the services received not matching the educational costs they pay to the school. Limited learning facilities, minimal fees for student activities indicate student dissatisfaction. In addition, the phenomenon of the lack of ease in accessing technology, ease of administrative bureaucracy is still felt by students.

Based on the research gap above, there are research results stating differences in their results. Research Gap on service quality variables, Agung (2018) and Nanang (2015) state that the service quality variable affects satisfaction. Meanwhile, according to Fadhilah (2015), the service quality variable does not affect satisfaction. This was also stated by Kuswanto (2009) that not all service quality variables affect satisfaction. Furthermore, regarding convenience research gap, there are two studies with different results, namely Sanaji (2016) stating that the ease perception variable affects satisfaction and contrary to the research results of Chwen Ya Lin (2010) stating that the ease perception variable does not affect satisfaction. According to encourages further research in high schools (SMA) that have complexity in implementing customer satisfaction. Researchers chose the research object in private high schools in Kendal district because they receive a lot of attention from the education department and the community due to the underdevelopment of private high schools in Kendal district. This is also caused by the accreditation results from the national accreditation body for madrasah schools (BAN S/M) mostly receiving a B (good) grade. The values of infrastructure standards and average graduation standards are still unsatisfactory. Researchers also took the competitiveness mediator variable because the researcher assumes that competitiveness is an important factor that can drive quality, financing, and convenience in private school management systems. Competitiveness conceptually can be a remedy or solution to the problems faced by private high schools today.

Theoretical Study Satisfaction

According to Oliver (1997) in (Tjiptono & Diana, 2015: 23), customer satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure or disappointment that someone gets from comparing the performance/results of perceived products with their expectations. Fulfillment of customer expectations by satisfying them. The student satisfaction indicators adopted from Suhaji (2012) are as follows: (1) service quality dimensions include: Level of assessment of school services, Level of assessment of learning in schools, Level of pride in alma mater; (2) cost dimensions include the level of assessment of education fee collections, the level of assessment of financing services, the level of assessment of financial accountability reports; (3) convenience dimensions include indicators of the level of assessment of information services, knowledge, and technology provided by schools, the level of assessment of ease in managing administration, the level of ease in using school facilities.

Service Quality

Lewis and Booms in Tjiptono (2016: 115). Berry et al (1990: 19) states that service quality is the discrepancy between customer or consumer expectations and perceptions. Lovelock (1992: 225) states that measuring service quality can be measured through five standards: tangible; reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The next view of service, put forward by Moenir (2002: 27), is that "Service is essentially a series of activities or processes. As a service process proceeds routinely and continuously, it encompasses people's lives in society." The service here is more oriented towards general services provided by government bureaucracies. Barata (2003: 27) states that excellent service is caring for customers by providing the best service to facilitate ease of meeting needs and realizing satisfaction, so that they always remain loyal to the organization. The concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction are two concepts or elements that have differences but have a close bond in management. Sureshchandrar in Tjiptono & Candra (2016: 113), increasing customer satisfaction tends to be followed by an increase in positive perceptions of service quality and vice versa. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in this theory identify five main dimensions of service quality that are the focus of customer evaluation: (1) Responsiveness. The willingness and readiness of staff to assist customers and provide fast and efficient service; (2) Reliability. The service provider's ability to provide consistent and reliable service, without significant errors or delays; (3) Assurance. Customers' trust and confidence in the staff's ability to provide competent and quality service, as well as providing a sense of security and trust to customers; (4) Empathy: The staff's ability to understand and respond to customer needs, desires, and feelings with sincere empathy and attention; (5) Tangibles: The physical appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel, and materials used in providing services, which can provide a visual impression of service quality. The ServQual theory provides a basis for service providers to measure and improve their service quality by measuring customer perceptions of these five dimensions. Through a better understanding of customer needs

and expectations in each dimension, service providers can improve customer satisfaction and achieve competitive advantage.

Education Costs

According to Supriyadi (2010:4) in theory and practice, education costs, whether at the macro or micro level, are classified as follows:

a. Direct Costs

Direct costs are expenses used to support the provision of education that are incurred directly. Indirect costs are expenses incurred to support education indirectly.

b. Personal Costs

Personal costs are expenditures originating from the student's family for the provision of education, while social costs are costs originating from the community for the provision of education, usually through schools or taxes collected by the government to finance education.

c. Routine Costs

Costs incurred continuously over time, for example, teacher salaries, operational costs, school building maintenance, and school furniture such as water, electricity, etc.

Sources of education costs in According to (PP) No. 48 of 2008 concerning Education Funding, Article 51 paragraph (1) states that education funding comes from the government, local government, and the community. According to Suhardan et al. (2012:21), sources of education costs include: (1) Government, for example, the national and regional budgets; (2) Schools (student fees); (3) Community/donations; (4) Business world/companies; (5) Donations.

Indicators of Education Costs in high schools can be broken down into the following indicators: (1) routine cost aspects include Satisfaction in paying school tuition fees, Level of ability to pay non-tuition fees; (2) School development costs include indicators of Satisfaction in paying school development fees; (3) indirect cost aspects include: Level of satisfaction in paying school development fees.

The Nature of Convenience

Jogiyanto (2010) states that convenience is the extent to which a person believes that using a technology will be effortless. Ease of use means easy to learn, easy to understand, simple, and easy to operate. Meanwhile, Davis in Amijaya (2010) defines ease of use as a level where someone believes that technology can be easily understood and used. Goodwin and Silver in Sakti et al. (2013) state that convenience is the intensity of use and interaction between the user and the system, which also indicates ease of use. Meanwhile, Mathieson in Harlan (2014) states that convenience can be interpreted as an individual's belief that if they use a particular technology, it will be effortless.

Based on several definitions, it can be concluded that convenience is a person's belief that using a technology will be effortless or will not require much effort from the user to understand and use it. Iqbaria in Amijaya (2010) states that this convenience will impact behavior, meaning the higher a person's perception of ease of use of technology, the higher the level of utilization of information technology.

Nature of Competitiveness

Porter (2007) defines competitiveness as the ability or advantage utilized to compete in a specific market. Competitiveness is created through continuous development across all lines within the organization, primarily in the production sector. When an organization engages in continuous development, it can enhance its performance. According to Cravens (1996), "Competitiveness is the ability of a company to compete with its competitors. Therefore, every company must have competitive strategies and competitive advantages focused on dynamic processes." According to Noor, F.H (2004), "Competitiveness is the ability or resilience to compete for the attention and loyalty of consumers." Martin (1998) states, "Competitiveness is the sustainable ability to gain profits and retain market share." From the various definitions above, it can be concluded that competitiveness is the ability of a company to compete or excel over its competitors in capturing the attention and loyalty of consumers, achieving sustainable profits, and retaining market share. Factors influencing competitiveness according to Tambunan (2008) state that a company's competitiveness can be determined by many factors, seven of which are very important, namely: (1) skills or education level of workers; (2) entrepreneur skills; (3) availability of capital; (4) good organizational and management systems (according to business needs); (5) availability of technology; (6) availability of information; (7) availability of other inputs such as energy and goods or services. Competitiveness indicators can be translated as follows: (1) output aspects include increased number of students, employment of graduates, student satisfaction, institutional profits; (2) resource aspects include indicators of sufficient human resources in schools, sufficient financial resources, sufficient technological support, innovation; (3) management processes and capabilities include indicators of a Total Quality Management-based school management system, visionary leadership, clear and futuristic programs.

2.4. Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this study are:

- 1) Ha-1: There is a direct influence of service quality on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 2) Ha-2: There is a direct influence of education costs on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 3) Ha-3: There is a direct influence of convenience on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 4) Ha-4: There is a direct influence of service quality on the satisfaction of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 5) Ha-5: There is a direct influence of education costs on the satisfaction of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 6) Ha-6: There is a direct influence of convenience on the satisfaction of private high school students in Kendal district;
- 7) Ha-7: There is a direct influence of the competitiveness of private high school students on their satisfaction in Kendal district;
- 8) Ha-8: There is an indirect influence of service quality on the satisfaction of private high school students through the mediation of competitiveness in Kendal district;
- 9) Ha-9: There is an indirect influence of education costs on the satisfaction of private high school students through the mediation of competitiveness in Kendal district;
- 10) Ha-10: There is an indirect influence of convenience on the satisfaction of private high school students through the mediation of competitiveness in Kendal district

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a quantitative approach of ex post facto research type. The population of this study consists of students in Kendal regency, Central Java. The data collection technique used in this research is a questionnaire or instrument with an ordinal data scale, while the data analysis technique utilizes the smartPLS application. In this study, the researcher does not have direct control over the independent variables because the events or conditions observed have occurred before the research began.

Here are the general steps in the ex post facto quantitative research method:

- (1) Identification of Variables, which involves identifying independent variables (which cannot be manipulated by the researcher) and dependent variables (which are expected to be influenced by the independent variables);
- (2) Data Collection from existing sources such as archives, records, or previous survey results;
- (3) Data Analysis to evaluate the relationship between independent and dependent variables. This may involve statistical techniques such as regression analysis, t-tests, or correlation;
- (4) Interpretation of Results: The analysis results are used to draw conclusions about the relationship between the variables under study. This includes identifying patterns or trends in the data and interpreting them according to the research questions.

The ex post facto quantitative research method is often used in social and behavioral sciences, especially when there are ethical or practical barriers to conducting experimental research.

RESULTS

Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis of the influence of school principal leadership, teacher salary, service quality on teacher commitment through satisfaction.

a) Factor Loading

Factor loading is the initial stage in testing the validity of a model. The requirement for factor loading is that it must be >0.6 for the variable indicators to be considered valid. If not valid, the indicators must be removed from the model (Husein, 2015).

a) Average Variance Extracted

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is a value used in testing convergent validity because it is obtained from the output of convergent validity. In this study, the expected AVE value is >0.05 when viewed from the constructs of Latin variables. The SmartPLS analysis results are as follows:

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted

Konstruk	AVE
X1_Service Quality	0.678
X2_Education Cost	0.847
X3_Convenience	0.565
Y_Competitiveness	0.674
Z_Student Satisfaction	0.730

Source: Research results smartPLS 2023

According to the table provided, it can be inferred that there are no issues with convergent validity, thus

allowing the analysis to advance to the discriminant validity stage..

b) Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity can be tested by looking at the cross-loading table, this output is used to test the discriminant validity at the level of indicators with the requirement that the correlation between indicators and their latent variables > the correlation between indicators and other latent variables (outside the block). The results are as follow

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	X1_Service	2_Education Cost	X3_Convenience	Y_Competitiveness	Z_Satisfaction
<i>X1_Service Quality</i>	0,828				
<i>X2_Education Cost</i>	0,635	0,920			
<i>X3_Convenience</i>	0,592	0,612	0,752		
<i>Y_Competitiveness</i>	0,697	0,656	0,954	0,821	
<i>Z_Student Satisfaction</i>	0,445	0,758	0,772	0,794	0,855

Source: Research results 2023

a) Composite Reliability

To ensure that there are no problems related to measurement, the step taken is to evaluate the outer model (testing unidimensionality) of the model. This test is carried out using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha by considering the cut-off value of both indicators as 0.7.

Table 4. Composite Reliability

Construct	Composite Reliability
X1_Service Quality	0,912
X2_Education Cost	0,917
X3_Convenience	0,866
Y_Competitiveness	0,891
Z_Student Satisfaction	0,890

Source: Research results smartPLS 2023

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that all constructs have composite reliability values above 0.7, so no unidimensionality problems were found in all variables.

d) Inner Model Testing

Next, the Goodness of Fit is determined, which can be known by the Q2 value. The Q2 value has the meaning of the coefficient of determination (R-square) in regression analysis.

Table 3. Square Model

Construct	R square	R square Adjusted
Y_Competitiveness	0,937	0,936
Z_Student Satisfaction	0,802	0,798

Source: Research results smartPLS 2023

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the model can explain the competitiveness variable (Y) by 93.7% and the satisfaction variable by 80.2%.

Hypothesis Testing

Subsequently, hypothesis testing is conducted based on the results of smart PLS analysis. The results are described in the table below.

Table 4. Hasil Pengujian Hipotesis

No	Hypothesis	P value	Conclusion
1	Ha-1: There is a direct influence of service quality on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district in central java;	0,015<0,05	Ha1: accepted H01: rejected
2	Ha-2: There is a direct influence of education cost on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district in central java;	0,497>0,05	Ha2: ditolak H02: diterima
3	Ha.3: There is a direct influence of convenience on the competitiveness of private high school students in Kendal district in central java;	0,000<0,05	Ha3: accepted H03: rejected
4	Ha-4 There is a direct influence of service quality on the satisfaction of private high school	0,000< 0,05	Ha4: accepted H04: rejected

No	Hypothesis	P value	Conclusion
	students in Kendal district in central java;		
5	Ha-5: There is a direct influence of education cost on the satisfaction of private high school students in Kendal district in central java;	0,000 < 0,05	Ha5: accepted H05: rejected
6	Ha-6: There is a direct influence of convenience on the satisfaction of private high school students in Kendal district in central java;	0,059 > 0,05	Ha6: accepted H06: rejected
7	Ha-7: There is a direct influence of student competitiveness on student satisfaction in private high schools in Kendal district in central java;	0,0499 < 0,05	Ha7: accepted H0: rejected
8	There is an indirect influence of service quality on student satisfaction through the mediation of competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district in Central Java	0.037 < 0.05	Ha8: accepted : rejected
9	There is an indirect influence of tuition fees on student satisfaction through the mediation of competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district in central java;	0.563 > 0.05	Ha9: rejected H09: accepted
10	There is an indirect influence of convenience on student satisfaction through the mediation of competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district in central java;	0.085 > 0.05	Ha10: rejected H010: accepted

4.2 Discussion of the Research

The Influence of Service Quality on School Competitiveness

The results of this research prove that there is a significant influence of service quality on satisfaction. Schools will be considered to be of high quality if they are able to provide the necessary services and meet the expectations of students (Permana, 2018). Fulfilling the needs and expectations of students is intended to provide satisfaction with the education provided and to avoid disappointment due to received discrepancies. In order to increase student satisfaction, schools can analyze the factors influencing student satisfaction. After identifying these influencing factors, schools can take appropriate actions to satisfy their students. One of the factors influencing satisfaction is service quality (Ratnasari and Akxa, 2011: 117). Service quality is one of the factors influencing student satisfaction (Ratnasari and Akxa, 2011: 117). Service quality indicators consist of (1) Reliability; (2) Responsiveness; (3) Assurance; (4) Empathy; and (5) Tangibles (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in Tjiptono, 2008). Student satisfaction is an attitude/response or feeling of consumers (students) after receiving products/services from the school, which is done by comparing perceived performance with expectations (Oliver, 1980, 2010). Referring to the field of education, students are consumers who need and use educational services. Dahlan (2016: 28) states that student satisfaction is the positive and negative attitudes shown by students towards the fulfillment of their expectations from the school, after undergoing the education and learning process. The indicators of student satisfaction used in the study are (1) overall satisfaction; (2) expectation confirmation; (3) ideal comparison (Fornell, 1992). This result is consistent with the theory of Ratnasari and Akxa (2011), which explains that service quality is one of the factors influencing satisfaction. Service quality that meets expectations will make students feel satisfied and leave an impression based on their experience while receiving services from the school. Supporting the research conducted by Sofiati (2016), it also shows a partial influence between service quality and student satisfaction. Service quality with tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy indicators shows good results. These results are supported by the completeness of infrastructure, timely teaching and learning processes according to the curriculum, and the role of teachers and administrative staff who provide maximum performance.

Good service significantly influences student satisfaction. The research recommends that principals, teachers, and staff need to provide excellent service to students (Yusuf, 2017). The way to do this is by understanding the needs and desires of students, including understanding the types of students and utilizing information to develop a strategic framework in service. Students who respond satisfactorily to these services can provide recommendations (word of mouth) to the public in their environment.

The Influence of Education Costs on Student Competitiveness

Irna S.S. (2014) stated that the education costs and satisfaction of students at the Bandung Tourism College were in the high category. Theoretically, education costs can determine the competitiveness of students or schools. However, empirically, it is not proven in private high schools in Kendal regency. Statistically, in terms of dimensions and indicators, education costs were considered quite good by respondents, with an average of 2.78. Indicators such as school tuition fee payments, registration fees, satisfaction levels in paying exam fees, re-registration fees, extracurricular activity fees, and social activity fees reached a sufficient level, thus it could cause the competitiveness of schools and students to not be achieved maximally. Here are some reasons why

education costs in private high schools do not always directly affect the competitiveness of schools or students: (1) Public Education Quality. Based on empirical data, public high schools have better quality and facility equipment compared to private schools. This includes in the Kendal regency area; (2) Financial Capability of Students. Education costs in private high schools are too high for most families, even if the education quality there is considered better. Therefore, students with financial limitations may not have access to private schools, even though the schools offer better education; (3) Curriculum and Teaching Methods. Education quality is not only determined by costs but also by curriculum, teaching methods, and teacher quality. Private high schools that have a curriculum relevant to the needs of the job market and innovative teaching methods can attract more students without having to charge very high education costs; (4) School Reputation. School reputation in terms of academic achievements, student achievements, and alumni success also plays a crucial role. A positive reputation can attract prospective students regardless of education costs; (5) Students are individuals with various needs. Those needs continue to grow and develop according to their nature and characteristics as human beings. The National Association of Secondary Schools Iskandar (2009: 115-116), according to Abraham Maslow as the pioneer of humanistic psychology. Maslow posited that humans possess an inherent drive to comprehend and embrace themselves to the fullest extent possible. His renowned theory, known as the hierarchy of needs, suggests that humans are compelled to satisfy various life needs, encompassing physiological requirements, safety and security, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Numerous studies support the notion that a sense of security is paramount for students and significantly impacts their conduct. For instance, Rutter et al. (1979) as cited in Desmita (2016) observed that favorable behavioral and academic outcomes are associated with clean and well-decorated school environments. Additionally, Murphy et al. (1985) asserted that the effectiveness of schools hinges on providing a safe and structured learning atmosphere. Consequently, students tend to gravitate towards a comfortable setting within a clean, aesthetically pleasing, and conducive school environment. They are disinclined to strive for academic achievement unless the environmental conditions facilitate such endeavors.

The Influence of Convenience on Student Competitiveness

Competitiveness aims to achieve the best performance for oneself and for the school. According to Jogiyanto (2019:934), perceived ease of use is a measure to ensure that technology can be used clearly without much effort, making it easy to operate. According to Davis et al (2019:30), there are 6 dimensions as follows: (1) easy to learn, (2) controllable, (3) clear and understandable, (4) flexible, (5) easy to become skillful, (6) easy to use. This can be translated into the convenience in various areas at school that are received by students. Convenience in accessing learning facilities, ease in obtaining administrative services, ease in accessing the internet, ease in using learning media, and other service conveniences. Convenience is a dimension of student satisfaction. Maulana et al. (2021) stated that students' perceptions of convenience can increase motivation, learning independence, and self-actualization. The convenience received by students encourages independent and sustainable development. Generally, students do not want to struggle in doing something. They want it to be fast, easy, and achieve satisfaction.

The Influence of Service Quality on Student Satisfaction

Based on statistical results, there is an influence of service quality variables on student satisfaction in private high schools in Kendal regency. Manaf, Ahmad, and Ahmed (2013) grouped factors influencing student satisfaction into seven factors: administrative services, physical evidence, academic programs, academic staff, teaching methods, assurance, and empathy of administrative staff. The research results show that administrative services, physical evidence, teaching methods, and assurance have a positive and significant influence on student satisfaction.

Suhaji (2012) identified three factors that positively influence customer satisfaction: service quality, cost, and convenience. In the context of educational institutions, this translates as follows: (a) Service quality has an impact on customer satisfaction. This means that if school services are improved, customer satisfaction will also increase; (b) Cost, this means that if schools set teacher salaries in line with the workload, teachers will feel satisfied; (c) Convenience, it affects student satisfaction. This means that if the school provides convenience in administrative services, easy access to technology for learning, then customer satisfaction with the school will increase. Hamzah & Uno (2011:261) stated that students' needs should be met with good and beneficial educational services. Service quality becomes a factor in meeting students' needs. The need to be valued is essential for students according to Maslow's hierarchy.

The Influence of Education Costs on Student Satisfaction

Based on statistics, there is an influence of education costs on student satisfaction in private high schools in Kendal regency. The influence of education costs paid by students on student satisfaction can be explained through several factors influencing students' educational experiences. Fulfilling students' needs as human beings requires sufficient funds. Both physical and psychological human needs indirectly and directly require financial support.

In the learning process at school, students need good and satisfying services. Schools must synergize in meeting the needs of students so that their needs are fulfilled. Students require comprehensive facilities, excellent and quality services. Desmita (2016) stated that needs are fundamental requirements that must be met to achieve

organismic balance. Needs arise when someone feels lacking, imperfections that can disrupt their well-being. This strengthens the importance of the costs paid by students in meeting their learning needs at school.

Fulfilling student satisfaction will enable the fulfillment of student needs, both psychological and physical. Higher education costs may reflect students' access to better facilities such as comprehensive libraries, scientific laboratories, computer centers, and sports facilities. Students who have access to adequate facilities tend to feel more satisfied with their learning environment. Schools with higher education costs may have a smaller student-teacher ratio, allowing teachers to provide more individual attention to students. In a smaller learning environment, teachers can provide more intensive guidance and understand students' needs more deeply, which can enhance student satisfaction.

However, it is important to note that student satisfaction can also be influenced by many other factors, such as social relationships in school, family support, as well as academic success and students' personal achievements. Therefore, education costs are just one of the many factors influencing student satisfaction, although they can have a significant impact on creating an adequate and satisfying educational environment.

The Influence of Convenience on Student Satisfaction

Convenience is among the necessities required by students in obtaining education at school. Students who have easy access to a comprehensive library with reading materials can enhance their reading interest and knowledge. Easy access to scientific laboratories, computers, and other supportive equipment provides students with the opportunity to experiment and learn through hands-on experiences. Students who can use sports facilities such as basketball courts, football fields, or fitness rooms can develop their sports skills, improve physical health, and build leadership and teamwork skills. Easy access to tutors or guidance teachers can assist students who need additional help in certain subjects, enhance their understanding, and boost their confidence. Career Guidance Program: Career guidance services help students understand their career options, provide information about colleges or jobs, and plan their future better. Students who have easy access to the internet and computers at school can develop digital skills, access online learning resources, and improve their research abilities. Easy access to online learning platforms allows students to learn independently, access course materials, and take additional courses according to their interests. Availability of counseling services in schools helps students overcome emotional, social, or academic issues. This creates an environment supportive of students' emotional development and enhances their satisfaction. Students who have easy access to various extracurricular activities such as literary clubs, arts, music, or social activities can develop their interests beyond the academic curriculum. This creates a more diverse and satisfying learning experience. Students in schools with efficient communication systems with parents, such as applications or online platforms, allow parents to be actively involved in their children's education. This can create a sense of security and support student satisfaction.

The convenience students receive from school not only enriches their educational experience but also significantly contributes to student satisfaction. Adequate facilities, support, and services create a positive and satisfying learning environment, which in turn enhances students' motivation, confidence, and achievements.

The Influence of Competitiveness on Student Satisfaction

Student competitiveness can significantly influence student satisfaction in several ways. Students with high competitiveness tend to achieve better academic performance. This achievement can increase student satisfaction as they feel successful and recognized for their efforts. Competing students can tackle academic challenges with more confidence. The ability to handle difficult subjects or complex tasks can increase their satisfaction with their academic achievements. Students who actively compete in academic or non-academic competitions often feel motivated and enthusiastic. Student satisfaction can increase when they receive awards or achievements in these competitions. Maslow states that humans need self-actualization to achieve success. Self-actualization demonstrated by students is through academic and non-academic achievements. Competitiveness can also be reflected in artistic, sports, or special skills achievements. Students who excel in these areas feel proud and satisfied with the skills they develop. Competing students also tend to have good collaboration skills. They may become leaders in work groups or joint projects, increasing satisfaction as they feel valued by peers and teachers. Competing students can develop their leadership skills. Student satisfaction increases when they feel they have an important role in school or community activities. Students who compete well in education often have better opportunities for college acceptance or obtaining desired jobs in the future. This preparation creates satisfaction as students feel ready to face future challenges. Competing students who achieve success often receive support from parents and teachers. This support creates confidence and satisfaction as students feel supported in their educational journey. Anastasia, Puan (2019) states that competitiveness has a significant influence on satisfaction. Fandy, Tjiptono (2010: 168) states that several important elements in customer-defined quality are as follows: (a) customers must be the organization's top priority; (b) reliable customers are the most important; (c) customer satisfaction is guaranteed by producing high-quality products and continuous improvement. Thus, student competitiveness can be a crucial factor in improving their satisfaction with the educational experience. Students who feel successful, recognized, supported, and prepared for future challenges tend to be more satisfied with their education and are inspired to achieve higher accomplishments.

The Indirect Influence of Service Quality on Student Satisfaction Through Competitiveness

Service quality indirectly influences student satisfaction through competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district, with a coefficient of 0.154 or 15.4%. In the context of the study, a mediator is a variable that helps explain or describe the relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. The competitiveness variable carries additional information explaining why or how the independent variable influences the dependent variable. Here are detailed reasons why competitiveness is considered a mediator between service quality and student satisfaction: (1)Improvement in Competitiveness. Good service quality, such as quality teaching, adequate facilities, and effective academic support, can enhance student competitiveness. Students who receive quality services tend to have higher satisfaction because they feel supported and valued. Improved service quality can enhance student satisfaction as they experience better educational experiences. In-depth teaching, innovative teaching methods, and efficient support can create satisfaction among students; (2)Good service quality can create a motivating learning experience for students to compete. This experience includes appropriate academic challenges, teacher support, and opportunities to develop social and learning skills. Students' perceptions of their school's competitiveness can influence their satisfaction. If students feel that the school supports competitiveness and personal achievement, they may be more satisfied with their educational experience; (3)Students who feel competitively capable tend to have higher self-confidence. This confidence can create a sense of satisfaction because students feel capable of facing academic challenges and achieving success. Good service quality creates a positive learning environment. In this environment, students feel supported, empowered, and recognized by teachers and peers. This supportive school culture can enhance students' competitiveness and, in turn, their satisfaction. Schools that support competitiveness may provide opportunities for students to participate in competitive activities. Active involvement in these activities can increase student satisfaction as they feel empowered and appreciated for their achievements. Thus, the competitiveness variable serves as a mediator between service quality and student satisfaction because it helps explain the mechanism by which the acceptance of quality services affects students' competitiveness and ultimately, their satisfaction with their educational experience.

The Indirect Influence of Education Costs on Student Satisfaction Through Competitiveness

Education costs do not indirectly influence student satisfaction through competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district. A mediator is a variable that helps explain the relationship between the independent variable (education costs paid by students) and the dependent variable (student satisfaction). For the competitiveness variable to be an effective mediator, it must be influenced by the education costs variable. This means that changes in education costs must affect students' competitiveness. If there is no relationship between education costs and competitiveness, the competitiveness variable cannot act as a mediator. The competitiveness variable must impact student satisfaction. If competitiveness does not affect student satisfaction, then there is no reason to consider competitiveness as a mediator in the relationship between education costs and student satisfaction. As a mediator, the competitiveness variable should dampen or reduce the relationship between education costs and student satisfaction. If competitiveness instead strengthens this relationship or has no significant effect, the variable cannot be considered a mediator. In some cases, other factors such as teaching quality, school facilities, or psychological support may act as stronger mediators in the relationship between education costs and student satisfaction. If the competitiveness variable does not meet the above mediator criteria, then it cannot be considered a mediator in the relationship between education costs paid by students and student satisfaction. In this case, further research and careful analysis may be needed to understand the factors influencing the relationship between education costs, competitiveness, and student satisfaction better.

The Indirect Influence of Convenience on Student Satisfaction Through Competitiveness

Convenience does not indirectly influence student satisfaction through competitiveness. The competitiveness variable cannot act as a mediator between the convenience variables received by students from the school and student satisfaction for several reasons: (1)In the context of the relationship between the convenience received by students and student satisfaction, competitiveness may not be a relevant or important mediating variable. Mediation variables must have theoretical and empirical significance in the relationship. If competitiveness is not a factor that directly affects student satisfaction in this context, the variable will not be an effective mediator; (2)There is a possibility that there are other more relevant variables as mediators in the relationship between the convenience received by students and student satisfaction. Factors such as teaching quality, social support, or participation in extracurricular activities may have a greater influence on student satisfaction and may act as more effective mediators. Student satisfaction can be influenced by various other factors outside the convenience received by students and competitiveness, such as personal life factors or other aspects of the school environment. If these confounding variables are not taken into account or controlled, mediation analysis results may be inaccurate or improperly interpreted.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions that can be drawn based on the discussion of the research findings are as follows (1)Quality of service significantly influences competitiveness, with a total effect of 0.154 or 15.4% ($p\text{-value} = 0.015 < 0.05$);

(2) Education costs do not significantly influence competitiveness (p -value = $0.497 > 0.05$); (3) Convenience significantly influences competitiveness, with a total effect of 0.822 or 82.2% (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$); (4) Quality of service significantly influences student satisfaction, with a total effect of -0.410 or -41% (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$); (5) Education costs significantly influence student satisfaction, with a total effect of 0.542 or 54.2% (p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$); (6) Convenience does not significantly influence satisfaction (p -value = $0.798 > 0.05$); (7) Competitiveness significantly influences student satisfaction, with a total effect of 0.810 or 81% (p -value = $0.005 < 0.05$); (8) Service quality indirectly influences student satisfaction through competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district, with a 15.4% effect, making competitiveness a relevant mediator; (9) Education costs do not indirectly influence student satisfaction through competitiveness in private high schools in Kendal district, rendering competitiveness irrelevant as a mediator for education costs; (10) Convenience does not indirectly influence teacher commitment through service quality in private junior high schools in Kendal district, making competitiveness irrelevant as a mediator for convenience in student satisfaction.

RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research have implications on the following aspects:

Influence of service quality and convenience provided by private high schools in Kendal regency on student competitiveness or school has various significant implications. Here are some implications of the influence of service quality and convenience on student competitiveness or private high school:

Competitiveness of Students:

- a. Provision of Quality Education. Quality of educational services, including teaching methods, facilities, and relevant curriculum, provides students with a deep understanding and skills needed to compete in the modern world.
- b. Development of Special Skills. Easy access to sports, arts, and science facilities allows students to develop their special skills, whether in sports, arts, or sciences. This can enhance students' competitiveness in specific fields.

Competitiveness of Schools:

- a. Good Reputation.
The quality of service and convenience provided by the school creates a good reputation in the eyes of parents and the community. This good reputation can enhance the school's attractiveness, attract more students, and strengthen the school's position in competition with other schools.
 - b. Increased Customer Satisfaction.
Good service and convenience provided to students and parents make them feel satisfied with the educational experience. This customer satisfaction can create loyalty, bring students back for subsequent years, and provide positive referrals to others.
 - c. Preparedness for the Future.
Preparation for Higher Education: Students who receive quality education and various conveniences in private high schools are more likely to be prepared to continue their studies to colleges or universities. This preparation involves in-depth learning, social skills, and practical experiences that can enhance their future opportunities.
 - d. Ease in Finding Employment.
Students who have thrived in private high schools, both academically and socially, are likely to have an easier time finding employment. The skills and knowledge they acquire during high school can serve as a strong foundation for success in the job market.
 - e. Welfare of Students and Employees.
Psychological Well-being of Students: Well-being facilities such as counseling and social support can improve the psychological well-being of students. Students who feel emotionally supported tend to be more motivated and enthusiastic in learning, which in turn affects their competitiveness.
 - f. Employee Satisfaction.
Employees working in supportive environments with adequate facilities tend to be more satisfied with their jobs. Employee satisfaction can influence the quality of teaching and educational services provided to students.
- By paying attention to and improving service quality and convenience, both students and private high schools can achieve better educational outcomes, enhance their reputation, and create a positive learning environment. All of these contribute to improving the competitiveness of students and schools in a competitive educational environment

ORIGINALITY/VALUE

- 1) Contribution to Knowledge.
This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between determinants of student satisfaction in private high schools and the mediating role of competitiveness. Previous research may have explored factors influencing student satisfaction, but highlighting the mediating role of competitiveness provides new insights into how these factors are interconnected and mutually influential.

2) Focus on the Private Education Sector.

This study specifically focuses on the context of private education, which may have dynamics and unique characteristics compared to public education. Thus, investigating the relationship between determinants of student satisfaction and the mediating role of competitiveness in the context of private schools fills a gap in knowledge in academic literature.

3) Research Methods.

This research may employ different research approaches or methodologies to investigate the relationship between the involved variables. These approaches may include surveys, interviews, or secondary data analysis. By using specific research methods, this study can contribute to the diversity of research approaches in the field.

4) Practical Implications.

The findings of this research may have significant practical implications for education stakeholders such as schools, teachers, parents, and education policymakers. By understanding how competitiveness acts as a mediator between determinants of student satisfaction, education stakeholders can take appropriate actions to improve educational quality and enhance the student learning experience.

5) Contribution to Theory.

This research can contribute to the development of theory regarding student satisfaction and the mediating role of competitiveness in the educational context. By expanding understanding of how certain factors affect student satisfaction through the mediator of competitiveness, this study can enrich existing theories in the field.

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