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The Mediating Effect of Service Quality on the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Student Satisfaction (Study at Jambi University)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of transformational leadership on student satisfaction, mediated by service quality at the University of Jambi. Transformational leadership is considered capable of inspiring and motivating improvements in service quality, ultimately contributing to student satisfaction. This research employs a quantitative approach using a survey method, involving 380 students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. The results indicate that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on both service quality and student satisfaction. Furthermore, service quality is found to significantly mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and student satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of transformational leadership in enhancing academic and administrative service quality in alignment with student expectations, thereby reinforcing their satisfaction with the higher education institution. This study is also expected to serve as a reference for further research in the field of higher education management.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, Partial Least Square (PLS).

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INTRODUCTION

Public universities play a strategic role in shaping high-quality human resources capable of competing in the global era. This role encompasses not only the advancement of knowledge and research but also public service, including high-quality academic services for students (Humiati & Budiarti, 2020). However, universities in Indonesia face complex challenges ranging from bureaucratic processes, high education costs, to suboptimal service quality (Suryani et al., 2013). Therefore, universities are required to focus not only on academic aspects but also on improving the quality of services provided to students as the primary users of educational services.

One crucial approach to improving service quality is through transformational leadership. This leadership style can drive positive change and build internal motivation among all academic members through four main pillars: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Jufrizen et al., 2020).

Universitas Jambi, as one of the public universities in Jambi Province, has more than 37,273 students and offers various academic and non-academic facilities to support education services. Although the 2024 public satisfaction survey showed good service ratings—where all service elements scored above 3 on a scale of 4—8.06% of students expressed dissatisfaction with academic services. This reflects a gap between student expectations and the reality of academic and administrative services (LP3M, 2024).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of transformational leadership in higher education. (Al-Husseini et al., 2021) emphasized that transformational leadership fosters positive interactions between lecturers and students, which impacts service quality. (Rahmawati et al., 2024) also confirmed that visionary leaders can create a supportive learning environment, contributing to student satisfaction.

Further studies by (Tanuwijaya, J., Aseanty, D. and Gunawan, 2021) reinforced that a humanistic and communicative transformational leadership approach improves student satisfaction and academic achievement. Moreover, research by (Zaporozhchenko, 2021) & (Thao ; Tran and Truc Dinh Le, 2022) in Vietnamese universities, as well as Iskandar Ali Alam (2021), indicated that transformational leadership enhances service quality by fostering an innovative and responsive service culture.

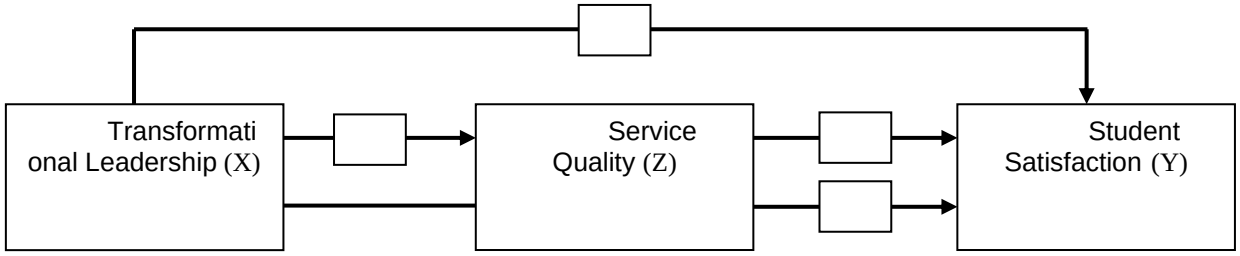
However, studies by (Alias & Malokani, 2024) and (Al-Husseini et al., 2021) also found that the influence of transformational leadership on student satisfaction is not always direct but can be mediated by factors such as expectations and internal motivation. Overall, these findings suggest that implementing transformational

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leadership in universities can positively affect service quality and student satisfaction, both directly and indirectly. Therefore, it is essential to further investigate The Mediating Effect of Service Quality on the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Student Satisfaction at Universitas Jambi.

Objectives

The conceptual framework used in this study includes the following variables:



Figur 1. Framework of Thought

This article aims to:

1. Describe transformational leadership, student satisfaction, and service quality;
2. Analyze the effect of transformational leadership on student satisfaction at the University of Jambi.
3. Analyze the effect of transformational leadership on service quality at the University of Jambi;
4. Analyze the effect of service quality on student satisfaction at the University of Jambi;
5. Analyze the effect of transformational leadership on student satisfaction mediated by service quality at the University of Jambi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study adopts a quantitative approach using transformational leadership (X), service quality as a mediating variable (Z), and student satisfaction (Y) at the University of Jambi. The population consists of all active students in 2024, totaling 37,273, with a sample of 380 students.

1. According to Suprapto, (2011) student satisfaction is defined as a condition in which an individual feels content after receiving experiences or outcomes that meet expectations. The dimensions of student satisfaction include: (1) service procedures, (2) service requirements, (3) staff competence, (4) fairness in

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receiving services, (5) certainty of service schedules, and (6) service safety and environmental fairness.

2. Hemsworth et al., (2013) in (Safria, 2022) define transformational leadership as a style involving the leader's ability to identify needed change, create a vision, and execute strategies to realize the change. The dimensions include: (1) idealized influence attributes, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, (4) individualized consideration, and (5) idealized influence behaviors.
3. According to Tjiptono & Chandra, (2016) service quality is the extent to which customer expectations align with perceived service performance, measured through five dimensions: (1) reliability, (2) responsiveness, (3) assurance, (4) empathy, and (5) tangibles.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristic

Characteristic	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	143
	Female	237
Age	15–17 years old	7
	18–20 years old	220
	21–23 years old	126
	> 23 years old	27
Faculty	Education and Teacher Training	144
	Law	42
	Economics and Business	53
	Agriculture	50
	Fisheries	15
	Science	38
	Medicine and Postgraduate Programs	34
	Postgraduate Program	4
Semester	2	120
	4	97
	6	119

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	8	42
	10	1
	12	0
	14	1

This study involved 380 respondents. Demographically, the majority were female 237 and aged between 18–20 years 220. Most respondents were from the Faculty of Education Teacher Training 144, followed by Agriculture 50, and Economics & Business 53. In terms of academic standing, most were in semesters 2 (120), semesters 6 (119), and semesters 4 (97), while very few were in semesters 10–14 (2).

Table 2. Outer Loading Values

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Description
Transformational Leadership (X)	KT1	0,752	Valid
	KT2	0,772	Valid
	KT3	0,726	Valid
	KT4	0,818	Valid
	KT5	0,799	Valid
	KT6	0,827	Valid
	KT7	0,833	Valid
	KT8	0,842	Valid
	KT9	0,834	Valid
	KT10	0,859	Valid
	KT11	0,864	Valid
	KT12	0,853	Valid
	KT13	0,816	Valid
	KT14	0,792	Valid
	KT15	0,807	Valid
	KT16	0,822	Valid
	KT17	0,788	Valid
	KT18	0,834	Valid
	KT19	0,820	Valid
Service Quality (M)	KL1	0,873	Valid
	KL2	0,887	Valid

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	KL3	0,876	Valid
	KL4	0,877	Valid
	KL5	0,885	Valid
	KL6	0,896	Valid
	KL7	0,867	Valid
	KL8	0,890	Valid
	KL9	0,857	Valid
	KL10	0,896	Valid
	KL11	0,884	Valid
	KL12	0,909	Valid
	KL13	0,879	Valid
	KL14	0,880	Valid
	KL15	0,884	Valid
	KL16	0,907	Valid
	KL17	0,890	Valid
	KL18	0,854	Valid
	KL19	0,856	Valid
Student Satisfaction (Y)	KM1	0,843	Valid
	KM2	0,887	Valid
	KM3	0,859	Valid
	KM4	0,877	Valid
	KM5	0,872	Valid
	KM6	0,829	Valid
	KM7	0,847	Valid
	KM8	0,857	Valid
	KM9	0,854	Valid
	KM10	0,837	Valid
	KM11	0,871	Valid
	KM12	0,867	Valid
	KM13	0,863	Valid
	KM14	0,845	Valid
	KM15	0,869	Valid
	KM16	0,855	Valid

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	KM17	0,843	Valid
	KM18	0,785	Valid
	KM19	0,870	Valid
	KM20	0,858	Valid
	KM21	0,859	Valid

Based on Table 2, it shows that all outer loading values of each indicator are above 0.70, thus it can be concluded that all indicators are considered valid in measuring their respective constructs.

Tabel 3. Nilai AVE

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Transformational Leadership (X)	0,663
Student Satisfaction (Y)	0,731
Service Quality (M)	0,777

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with a minimum acceptable threshold of ≥ 0.50. As presented in Table 3, all constructs exhibit AVE values that meet the required criteria, namely Transformational Leadership (0.663), Student Satisfaction (0.731), and Service Quality (0.777). These results indicate that each construct is capable of adequately explaining more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Values

	Transformational Leadership (X)	Student Satisfaction (Y)	Service Quality (M)
Transformational Leadership (X)	0,814		
Student Satisfaction (Y)	0,717	0,855	
Service Quality (M)	0,710	0,874	0,882

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

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Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than its correlation with any other construct. As shown in Table 4, Transformational Leadership (0.814) and Service Quality (0.882) meet this criterion. However, Student Satisfaction has a square root of AVE value (0.855) that is slightly lower than its correlation with Service Quality (0.874), indicating a potential overlap between the constructs.

Composite Reliability

In addition to validity testing, the measurement model was also evaluated to assess construct reliability, ensuring the consistency and accuracy of the instruments. According to Hair et al. (2018), reliability can be measured using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with CR being preferred as it tends to produce more accurate estimates. Based on Ghozali et al. (2019), a construct is considered reliable if both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceed 0.7 (> 0.7).

Table 5. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Values

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Transformational Leadership (X)	0,972	0,974
Student Satisfaction (Y)	0,982	0,983
Service Quality (M)	0,984	0,985

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Based on Table 5, all variables in this study—Transformational Leadership, Student Satisfaction, and Service Quality—have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.7. This indicates that all constructs meet the criteria for good reliability.

R – Square **(R^2)**

The change in R^2 value indicates the extent to which the exogenous latent variables influence the endogenous latent variables. According to Hair et al. (2011), R^2 values are classified as substantial (0.75), moderate (0.50), and weak (0.25).

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Table 6. R Square Values

	R Square	*R Square Adjusted*
Student Satisfaction (Y)	0,782	0,781
Service Quality (M)	0,504	0,503

Sumber: Olah Data, 2025

Based on Table 6, the R^2 value for the Student Satisfaction variable is 0.782, which is classified as high. This indicates that the exogenous variables explain 78.2% of the variance in Student Satisfaction. Meanwhile, the R^2 value for the Service Quality variable is 0.504, categorized as moderate, indicating that 50.4% of the variance in Service Quality is explained by its influencing exogenous variables.

Hypothesis Testing

According to Ghozali and Latan (2020), hypothesis testing is conducted by comparing the T-statistic value with the critical T-table value of 1.96 at a 5% significance level (p-value < 0.05). If the T-statistic value is greater than 1.96 or the p-value is less than 0.05, the effect between variables is considered significant. Hair et al. (2017) stated that this testing is performed through a bootstrapping procedure, which produces T-statistic and p-value values to determine the significance of relationships between constructs. This study employs a 5% significance level.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
X -> Y	0,194	0,194	0,059	3,317	0,001
X -> Z	0,710	0,710	0,038	18,792	0,000
Z -> Y	0,736	0,736	0,038	19,378	0,000

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Based on Table 7 above, the explanation regarding the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses is as follows:

a. Hypothesis 1 states that there is a positive and significant effect of transformational leadership on student satisfaction. The test results show an

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original sample value of 0.194, a t-statistic value of 3.317, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.001, which is less than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

b. Hypothesis 2 states that there is a positive and significant effect of transformational leadership on service quality. The analysis results indicate an original sample value of 0.710, a t-statistic value of 18.792 > 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on service quality.

c. Hypothesis 3 states that there is a positive and significant effect of service quality on student satisfaction. The test results show an original sample value of 0.736, a t-statistic value of 19.378 > 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Both values meet the testing criteria. Accordingly, it can be concluded that service quality has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction.

Table 8. Mediation Effect Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
X -> Z-> Y	0,523	0,523	0,032	16,143	0,000

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Based on Table 8, the explanation regarding the hypothesis testing with mediation effect is as follows:

d. Hypothesis 4 states that there is a positive and significant effect of transformational leadership on student satisfaction through service quality. The test results show a t-statistic value of 16.143, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction through service quality. Hypothesis 4 is supported.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of this study, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Overall, the three main variables show high average scores, namely transformational leadership (4.01), service quality (3.91), and student satisfaction (3.88), indicating a generally positive perception of the institution among students..
2. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction, with an original sample value of 0.194, a t-statistic of 3.317, and a p-value of 0.001. This indicates that the better the leadership implemented, the higher the level of student satisfaction.
3. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on service quality, with an original sample value of 0.710, a t-statistic of 18.792, and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that inspirational leadership contributes to improving the institution's service quality.
4. Service quality has a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction, with an original sample value of 0.736, a t-statistic of 19.378, and a p-value of 0.000. High-quality service plays a crucial role in enhancing student satisfaction.
5. Service quality mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and student satisfaction positively and significantly, with an original sample value of 0.523, a t-statistic of 16.143, and a p-value of 0.000. This demonstrates that the influence of leadership on satisfaction is not only direct but also occurs through the mediation of service quality.

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