

Self-Perceived Job Performance as a Mediator of the Effects of Academic Satisfaction and Quality on Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Globally, there is increased customer mobility and competition within the higher education sector. As such, university management and administration practices should consider academic satisfaction, quality and loyalty as important factors to influence graduate job performance. The study was conducted to see if self-perceived job performance had a role in mediating the effect of academic satisfaction and perceived academic quality on academic loyalty. Data was collected from 714 respondents using a cross-sectional survey. The covariance-based structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses. According to the study results, self-perceived job performance partially mediates the effect of both academic satisfaction and academic quality on academic loyalty. The study findings emphasise the importance of graduate quality and satisfaction in influencing loyalty. Thus, the higher education sector should take cognisance of self-perceived job performance as this also influences academic loyalty.

JEL classification: M10, M30, M31

Keywords: academic loyalty, academic quality, academic satisfaction, self-perceived job performance, Zimbabwe

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic loyalty has become a primary focus for university management and administration practices as a result of increased customer mobility and global competition within the higher education sector (Mulyono et al., 2020; Uddin et al., 2018). Academic loyalty is determined by repeat patronage and recommendations by the institution's graduates and employers of its graduates (Ali et al., 2016). Additionally, university graduates become loyal to their training institutions after they have acquired the expected skills (Boileau et al., 2021; Navani, 2020). Also, the consistency of academic quality determines the performance of the training institution (Mayombe, 2017; Trinidad, 2020). Academic satisfaction is also considered as one of the

major factors influencing academic loyalty (Belwal et al., 2017; Taskoh, 2020). It involves a psychological state that results from the confirmation, or not, of the expectations regarding the institution's academic reality (Helfenstein et al., 2020). Feedback from graduates plays an important role in the management of a university. One critical aspect of the feedback from a university's graduates is self-perceived job performance (Mwiya et al., 2017; Tilak, 2020). Self-perceived job performance feedback enables higher education institutions to prioritise activities that are crucial in imparting to students those skills that are relevant in the workplace.

Much scholarly attention has been accorded to loyalty, quality, satisfaction and job performance constructs in higher education (Ali et al., 2016; Abas & Imam, 2016; Gallagher & Stephens, 2020; Manik & Sidharta, 2017; Plantilla, 2017; Shea & Parayitam, 2019; Zaini et al., 2020). However, few researchers have looked at the role of self-perceived job performance in mediating the effect of academic satisfaction and perceived academic quality on academic loyalty. Thus, by examining the mediating effect of self-perceived job performance on the effect of academic satisfaction and self-perceived academic quality on academic loyalty, the current study contributes to the literature in the services marketing industry, particularly the industry and higher education within emerging markets. Therefore, the research questions (RQ) to be addressed by this study are:

RQ1: Does self-perceived job performance mediate the effect of academic satisfaction on academic loyalty?

RQ2: Does self-perceived job performance mediate the effect of perceived academic quality on academic loyalty?

In this study, a short literature review on academic loyalty, academic satisfaction, perceived academic quality and self-perceived job performance is presented. Also, the study looked at the development of research hypotheses, materials and methods, presentation of results, discussion on theoretical and practical implications and future research implications.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH MODEL

2.1. Academic loyalty

“Academic loyalty is defined as a graduate's psychological attachment to their university, which is based on feelings of belonging and identity that manifest in behaviour and attitudes” (Guilbault, 2016; Shea & Parayitam, 2019). Academic loyalty is understood in this study as graduates' psychological connection to their universities based on their identification and association feelings that are expressed as behavioural and attitudinal allegiance to the institution.

Muslim (2016) asserts that academic loyalty is a source of competitive advantage. Through academic loyalty, universities can increase their customer base through repeat transactions and patronising by satisfied graduates (Gurukkal, 2020; Thevaranjan & Ragel, 2016). Also, academic loyalty results from academic quality and academic satisfaction (Belwal et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). As a result, if an institution's academic quality is strong, students, graduates, and employers become loyal to it and continue to do business with it (Ali et al., 2016; Gbadamosi, 2018).

2.2. Academic satisfaction

“Academic satisfaction is a measure of how happy a graduate feels regarding success in educational training” (Belwal et al., 2017; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018). Mwiya et al. (2017) expound academic satisfaction as the match between the experience of the provided academic service with that expected. This study understands academic satisfaction as a measure of how

successful a graduate becomes regarding skills and knowledge acquired during university education.

Academic satisfaction influences academic loyalty in a favourable way (LeMahieu et al., 2017; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). As a result, institutions should focus on enhancing educational quality because it affects academic satisfaction and loyalty (Rajic et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2020). Academic satisfaction helps to minimise the university's rate of dropout (Plantilla, 2017; Santini et al., 2017). Customer satisfaction is also linked to people's perceptions of how well they are performing their jobs (Solimun & Fernandes, 2018; Zaini et al., 2020). As a result, graduates who perform well at work are content with the abilities and information they gained from their university education (Moran, 2019; Zepke, 2018).

2.3. Perceived academic quality

Academic quality is described as the university's provision of learning opportunities, support, as well as appropriate and effective training to students (Espinoza et al., 2019; Moran, 2019). Similarly, academic quality involves taking careful steps to improve the performance of the student learning experience (Newman et al., 2019; Nugrahaa & Jabeenb, 2020). Academic quality influences customer loyalty especially when actual service performance is above customer expectations (Iskhakova, 2020). Besides influencing customer loyalty, academic quality impacts positively on job performance (Fullwood et al., 2019; Manik & Sidharta, 2017). Thus, graduates become loyal to universities that exhibit superior academic loyalty (Chikazhe et al., 2020; Khairiah & Sirajuddin, 2019; Pekkaya et al., 2019). In this study, perceived academic quality is understood as the graduates' perceptions of the superiority of academic services offered by universities from which they obtained their qualifications.

2.4. Self-perceived job performance

Job performance is described as the measurement of how assigned tasks are accomplished by an employee at the workplace (Belwal et al., 2017; Jalagat, 2016). Job performance also refers to the efficiency with which an individual's activities contribute to the attainment of an organisation's objectives (Kovari, 2018; Plantilla, 2017). Self-perceived job performance is defined in this study as an employee's assessment of his or her performance on given activities that lead to the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

Equipping graduates with the necessary skills provides a competitive advantage and higher efficiency to organisations (Lobo, 2017; Jalagat, 2016; Wohlfart & Hovemann, 2019). Thus, university graduates should possess relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities to fulfil task-related responsibilities (Sabah & Du, 2018; Guilbault, 2016). Moreover, equipping university students with relevant skills increases graduates' loyalty to their training institutions (Crawford et al., 2020; Heringer, 2020). Academic quality is positively related to high performing graduates who are loyal to universities from which they obtained their qualifications (Lakshminarayanan et al., 2021; Thevaranjan & Ragel, 2016).

2.5. Development of research hypotheses and research model

Earlier studies have tested and confirmed positive relationships among customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, service quality and perceived job performance (Ali et al., 2016; Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Onditi & Wechuli, 2017; Mulyono et al., 2020; Plantilla, 2017; Zaini et al., 2020). Ali et al. (2016) studied the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty and concluded that customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty. Also, studies by Amin (2016) and Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017) concur that there is a positive relationship between

customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, the current study was carried out in a different setting which is the higher education sector and it also focused on academic satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, it can be hypothesised that:

H₁: Academic satisfaction has a positive effect on academic loyalty

In a related study, Yee (2018) investigated the relationship between job performance and satisfaction. The study results indicate a positive relationship between job satisfaction and performance. Likewise, studies by Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017) and Nazeer et al. (2014) settled for almost similar results. Hence it can be proposed that:

H₂: Academic satisfaction positively influences self-perceived job performance

Budur and Poturak (2021) investigated the relationship between overall employee performance and customer satisfaction and loyalty. The study findings established direct relationships among employee performance, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that:

H₃: Self-perceived job performance has a positive effect on academic loyalty

Prior studies confirm a positive relationship that exists between service quality and customer loyalty (Kuo & Ye, 2009; Mulyono, et al., 2020; Muslim, 2016; Rostami et al., 2019; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). However, the current study looked at the relationship between academic quality and academic loyalty. Hence, it can be hypothesised that:

H₄: Perceived academic quality positively influences academic loyalty

Earlier studies have investigated how the quality of training influences trainee's job performance (Mayombe, 2017; Mulyono et al., 2020; Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Plantilla, 2017; Sutoro, 2021). Equally, Odigwe et al. (2018) studied how long vocational training programmes affect university graduates' employment performance in, respectively, the baking and computing industries. The findings show that, in the case of graduates from universities working in the computer and baking industries, respectively, the length of vocational training has an impact on job performance. Thus, it can be proposed that:

H₅: Perceived academic quality has a positive influence on self-perceived job performance

Customer satisfaction and loyalty have a positive association, according to research (Ali et al., 2016; Muslim, 2016; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018; Zaini et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction has a beneficial impact on customer loyalty, according to a study by De Matos Pedro et al. (2018). Similarly, Rostami et al. (2019) discovered a link between customer pleasure and loyalty.

Customer satisfaction, according to Saba (2011), has a positive impact on job performance. There is a correlation between customer satisfaction and job performance, according to the findings of a study by Lim et al. (2013). Similarly, Yee (2018) found a correlation between customer satisfaction and job performance in a related study. Yuen et al. (2018) investigated the impact of job performance on academic loyalty and discovered that job performance has an impact on loyalty. Similarly, Erdogmuş and Ergun (2016) found that employment performance affects academic loyalty in a beneficial way. However, there is a scarcity of research on the role of perceived work performance in mediating the impact of customer satisfaction on loyalty.

As a result, it is logical to assume that self-perceived job success plays a role in the academic satisfaction-loyalty link. It is therefore hypothesised that:

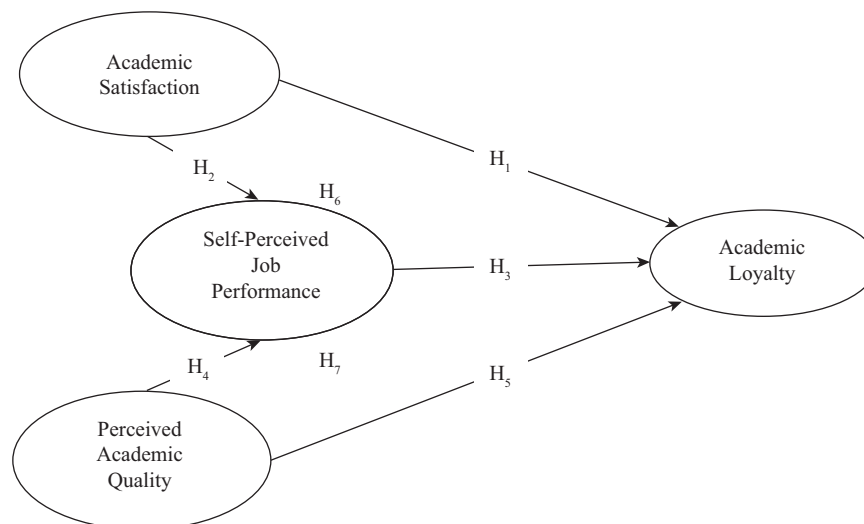
H_6 : *Self-perceived job performance mediates the effect of academic satisfaction on academic loyalty*

Customer loyalty is influenced by perceived service quality, according to previous research (Chikazhe et al., 2020; De Matos Pedro et al., 2018; Jan et al., 2020; Muljono & Setiyawati, 2019; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). The influence of service quality on job performance was researched by Nazeer et al. (2014). The findings suggest that job performance is positively influenced by perceived service quality. Similarly, Singh (2016) looked at how perceived service quality affects job performance. According to the findings, there is an association between perceived service quality and job performance. Likewise, Okabe (2017) conducted research to see if good job performance is linked to customer loyalty. It was discovered that job performance and customer loyalty had a positive link. According to previous studies, there is a paucity of empirical evidence on perceived job performance mediating the influence of perceived academic quality on academic loyalty. However, it can be concluded from the debate that perceived academic quality and self-perceived job performance both have favourable effects on academic loyalty. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that self-perceived job performance mediates the academic quality-academic loyalty link. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H_7 : *Self-perceived job performance mediates the effect of perceived academic quality on academic loyalty*

Based on the foregoing posited relationships, the following research model is proposed:

Figure 1
Research model



Source: Authors' own work (2022).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a quantitative study because it generates objective data that can be communicated clearly using statistics and numbers. The objectivity of quantitative data is

a significant advantage and this can help to remove biases from the research and improve the accuracy of the findings.

The research methodology further looks at the questionnaire design and measures, sampling and data collection methods.

3.1. Questionnaire design and measures

Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire. There were five sections of the questionnaire: perceived academic quality (PAQ), academic loyalty (ACL), academic satisfaction (ACS), self-perceived job performance (SPJP) and demographics. On a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), all questions used to assess each component were rated. All of the measurement items were developed from previous studies and altered to match the objectives of this investigation. The items for perceived service quality dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangibles and responsiveness) were borrowed from Green (2014), Cronin and Taylor (1992), Prasad and Jha (2013), Chikazhe et al. (2020) and Parasuraman et al. (1985). The items for perceived academic loyalty were derived from Abas and Imam (2016) and Cronin and Taylor (1992). As for academic satisfaction, the items used were from studies by Makanyeza and Chikazhe (2017) and Parasuraman et al. (1985). Finally, the items for self-perceived job performance were derived from Ng and Priyono (2018), Onditi and Wechuli (2017) and Plantilla (2017) and they were also modified to align with the current study.

3.2. Sampling and data collection

University graduates working in Harare, Zimbabwe were the study's target population. From August to December 2021, the study sample was chosen from Harare. The purposive sampling method was employed as the study required specific information from a particular subset of our population of interest, i.e. university graduates. Harare was chosen since it is Zimbabwe's capital and home to a high number of businesses that employ university graduates from all over the country (ZimStat, 2018). Because of their experience with university education and work success, university graduates were chosen as the target demographic. Before sending the questionnaires to the targeted employees, managers in these companies were approached to explain the study goal. Respondents came from a variety of companies in a variety of industries, representing graduates from a variety of fields of study. 800 questionnaires were distributed in person to the respondents with the help of managers from randomly selected organisations. Respondents had a maximum of five days to respond. Only 714 of the 800 questionnaires were returned and usable. To ensure that the sample adequately represented the population, a wide number of respondents were considered to include graduates from all Zimbabwean universities. Respondents' profile is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Sample Profile

	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age of respondents	Below 30	71	10
	30–39	185	26
	40–49	321	45
	50–59	79	11
	60+	29	4
Gender	Male	564	71
	Female	150	29
Type of enrolment at the university	Part-time students	100	14
	Conventional students	364	51
	Block-release students	250	35
Year of completion	2000–2005	63	9
	2006–2010	100	14
	2011–2015	329	46
	2016–2019	222	31
Employment type	Contract	150	21
	Casual	14	2
	Permanent	550	77
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	236	33
	5–10 years	307	43
	11–15 years	114	16
	16–20 years	36	5
	Over 21 years	21	3
Highest level of qualification	Bachelor's degree	371	52
	Master's degree	286	40
	Doctoral degree	57	8

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of respondents (71 per cent) were between the ages of 30 and 49. Male respondents made up the majority (71 per cent) of those who took part in the survey. As regards the type of enrolment at the university, conventional students dominated the study (51 per cent) followed by block-release students (35 per cent). Graduates who completed studies between the year 2011 and 2019 represented the majority (46 per cent) of the respondents. Similarly, the majority (77 per cent) of respondents were permanently employed. Most (76 per cent) of the respondents vast working experience of not more than 10 years. In terms of the highest level of education, respondents with Bachelor's degrees (52 per cent) slightly higher (40 per cent) than those with Master's degrees.

3.3. Scale validation

Before completing structural equation modelling, scale validation was done in SPSS V21 and AMOS V21 utilising the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), convergent validity, and discriminant validity. To determine sample adequacy, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used. Table 2 shows the results of the exploratory factor analysis.

Table 2

Exploratory factor analysis

Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy		.921
	Approx. Chi-Square	20076.921
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	588
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

For sample adequacy, Field et al. (2012) recommended that KMO be more than 0.5 and that Bartlett's Test of Sphericity be significant at $p < 0.05$. These prerequisites were met by the results of the exploratory factor analysis. Because it maximises the total number of variables in the squared loading, i.e. squared correlations between variables and factors, the Varimax Rotation method was chosen for factor analysis. The rotation converged after 32 iterations, and the total variation explained by the data was 69.891%. Tangibility (TAN), reliability (REL), academic satisfaction (ACS), assurance (ASS), empathy (EMP), responsiveness (RESP), academic loyalty (ACL), and self-perceived work performance (SPJP) were all provided in the solution. As expected, the REL, ASS, TAN, EMP, and RESP dimensions were shown to be multi-dimensional in terms of perceived academic quality (PAQ). Items REL3, RES3, and RES4 were eliminated as indicated by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) due to low factor loadings of less than 0.6.

When determining convergent validity, the following factors were considered: measurement model fit indices, reliability, standardised factor loadings, crucial ratios, and average variance extracted (AVE). Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) was used to create the measurement model (Field, 2009). The results in Table 3 show that the measurement model fit indices met the minimum convergent validity criterion.

Table 3

Measurement model fit indices

Item	Actual	Recommended	Source
CMIN/DF	2.012	Between 0–5	
GFI	.905	>0.900	
AGFI	.910	>0.900	Field, 2012;
NFI	.908	>0.900	Hooper et al., 2008;
TLI	.914	>0.900	Reisinger and Mavondo, 2007
CFI	.933	>0.900	
RMSEA	.051	Between 0.05 and 0.10	

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

The measurement model shows a good fit as the value for χ^2/DF fell between 0 and 5 (Field, 2012). Furthermore, the GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI values were all greater than 0.9, despite

the fact that a good fit should be closer to 1. (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). Additionally, RMSEA results were between the recommended range 0.05 and 0.10 (Hooper et al., 2008).

Table 4 presents results for Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliabilities (CRel), standardised factor loadings (λ), critical ratios (CRs) and individual item reliabilities (IIRs) obtained when measuring convergent validity.

Table 4
 λ , IIR, CR, α and CRel

Constructs	Items	λ	IIR	CR	α	CRel
Reliability	REL1. The university provides the right service	.715	.612	–	.824	.836
	REL2. The same level of service is always provided	.769	.587	18.514***		
	REL4. The university keeps customer promises	.721	.504	15.362***		
Assurance	ASS1. Academic staff is knowledgeable	.738	.556	–	.811	.852
	ASS2. Academic staff has required experience	.759	.578	14.587***		
	ASS3. The university has modern education material	.818	.810	13.852***		
	ASS4. University has the right education material	.757	.619	10.158***		
Tangibility	TAN1. The university has modern learning materials	.788	.632	–	.823	.897
	TAN2. The university premise is clean	.875	.688	16.325***		
	TAN3. The university staff is always smartly dressed	.841	.678	17.001***		
	TAN4. The university infrastructure is good-looking	.795	.578	13.485***		
Empathy	EMP1. Management staff is considerate	.693	.493	–	.815	.846
	EMP2. Management understands customer needs	.784	.683	16.822***		
	EMP3. The university's level of service is consistent	.872	.778	14.354***		
	EMP4. University staff attend to customer problems	.753	.678	12.897***		
Responsiveness	RES1. Management is quick to respond to client enquiries	.856	.692	–	.845	.898
	RES2. The university staff is approachable	.978	.978	16.873		
Academic Satisfaction	ACS1. The university's service performance is beyond expectations	.901	.601	–	.905	.922
	ACS 2. The university live up to promises	.856	.754	20.978**		
	ACS 3. Compared to other universities, I am contented	.814	.777	21.526***		
	ACS 4. The university management delivers satisfactory service	.987	.834	20.810***		
	ACS 5. The university offers outstanding programmes	.797	.578	16.196***		
Academic Loyalty	ACL1. If I were faced with the same choice again, I would still choose the same university	.879	.707	–	.924	.966
	ACL2. I talk positive things about my institution	.867	.708	27.139***		
	ACL3. I prefer my institution of higher education to any other university	.922	.798	28.783***		
	ACL4. I inspire others to enrol with my institution	.974	.871	28.322***		
	ACL5. I am contented to be a patron of my institution	.893	.871	24.728***		
Self-Perceived Job Performance	SPJP1. My employer is contented about my performance at work	.877	.798	–	.902	.933
	SPJP2. My employer is pleased with my practical performance	.911	.854	26.953***		
	SPJP3. My employer is happy about my being able to work with minimum supervision	.892	.778	23.876***		
	SPJP4. My employer is happy with my knowledge	.903	.814	28.086***		
	SPJP5. My employer relies on me as a mentor for other employees	.908	.824	26.822***		

Note: – CR is fixed; *** p < 0.001

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

Table 4 shows that, as proposed by Monteiro and Soares (2017), all structures had CRel with a cut-off point above 0.6. All of the elements were likewise over Bagozzi and Yi (1988)'s recommended cut-off point of 0.6. At $p < 0.001$, the CRs were sufficiently large and noteworthy. IIRs were all at least 0.5 (Kuo et al., 2009).

To ensure discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVEs) was compared to squared inter-construct correlations (SICCs) (Henseler et al., 2014).

Table 5
AVEs and SICCs

Construct	MEAN	SD	REL	ASS	TAN	EMP	RES	ACS	ACL	SPJP
Reliability (REL)	3.751	1.155	.758							
Assurance (ASS)	4.120	.979	.395	.674						
Tangibility (TAN)	4.365	.967	.485	.355	.701					
Empathy (EMP)	3.924	.903	.304	.400	.401	.682				
Responsiveness (RES)	3.598	1.002	.417	.397	.120	.401	.578			
Academic Satisfaction (ACS)	3.936	.991	.448	.391	.211	.306	.321	.613		
Academic Loyalty (ACL)	3.899	.957	.496	.303	.299	.291	.275	.418	.609	
Self-Perceived Job Performance (SPJP)	4.150	.905	.398	.442	.173	.199	.157	.402	.378	.605

Note: Diagonal elements in bold represent AVEs

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

As shown in Table 5, all constructs had AVEs greater than 0.5 and this indicates that conditions necessary for satisfying discriminant validity were achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4. RESULTS

AMOS 21 was used to test hypotheses H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , H_4 , H_5 , H_6 and H_7 . The bootstrapping method with bias correlated intervals was used to test the mediation analysis. PAQ was modelled as a second-order construct with dimensions REL, ASS, TAN, EMP, and RESP. The structural model was estimated using MLE (Henseler et al., 2014).

Before testing for mediation, direct relationships (H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , H_4 and H_5) were tested using structural equation modelling in AMOS V21. The structural model showed acceptable model fit indices (CMIN//DF = 2.008; GFI = .919; AGFI = .907; NFI = .917; TLI = .939; CFI = .964; RMSEA = .068). Table 6 shows the hypothesis test results for H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , H_4 and H_5 .

Table 6
Results of hypotheses testing ($H_1 - H_5$)

Hypothesis	Hypothesised Relationship	SRW	CR	Remark
H1	Academic Satisfaction → Academic Loyalty	.221	9.784***	Supported
H2	Academic Satisfaction → Self-Perceived Job Performance	.295	11.014***	Supported
H3	Self-perceived Job Performance → Academic Loyalty	.305	8724***	Supported
H4	Perceived Academic Quality → Academic Loyalty	.270	13.974***	Supported
H5	Perceived Academic Quality → Self-Perceived Job Performance	.309	19.036***	Supported

Notes: SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at $p < 0.001$, ns not significant

The results shown in Table 6 demonstrate that all research hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5) were supported. This indicates that there are positive relationships among: academic satisfaction – academic loyalty, academic satisfaction – self-perceived job performance, self-perceived job performance – academic loyalty and perceived academic quality – self-perceived job performance.

The effect of self-perceived job performance on the effect of academic satisfaction on academic loyalty was also tested using structural equation modelling in AMOS V21. Table 7 shows the results of the tests of hypotheses H₆ and H₇.

Table 7
Results of hypotheses testing (H₆ and H₇)

Hypotheses	Path	Description	Path Coefficient	Comments
H ₁	ACS → SPJP → ACL	SPJP mediates the effect of ACS on ACL	.415***	Partial mediation
H ₂	PAQ → SPJP → ACL	SPJP mediates the effect of PAQ on ACL	.529***	Partial mediation

Source: Authors' own work (2022).

The results shown in Table 7 illustrate that the path ACS – SPJP – ACL was significant (path coefficient = 0.415; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the influence of academic satisfaction on academic loyalty is somewhat mediated by self-perceived job performance. Thus, H₆ was supported.

In AMOS V21, structural equation modelling was used to investigate the role of self-reported work performance in mediating the effect of perceived academic quality on academic loyalty. The structural model had satisfactory fit indices (CMIN//DF = 2.691, GFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.909, CFI = 0.977 and RMSEA = 0.059).

The results displayed in Table 7 illustrate that the path PAQ – SPJP – ACL was significant (path coefficient = 0.529; $p < 0.001$). The results suggest that self-perceived job performance partially mediates the effect of perceived academic quality on academic loyalty. Therefore, H₇ was supported.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Theoretical implications

Literature confirms direct and positive relationships that exist among customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, service quality and perceived job performance (Ali et al., 2016; Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Onditi & Wechuli, 2017; Mulyono et al., 2020; Plantilla, 2017; Zaini et al., 2020). However, few studies have looked at the role of self-perceived job performance in mediating the effect of academic satisfaction and perceived academic quality on academic loyalty in the services marketing business, notably in the industry and education domain within emerging markets. The purpose of the current study was to fill this information gap. According to the findings, the effect of academic satisfaction and perceived academic quality on academic loyalty was, to a degree, mediated by self-perceived work performance.

By concentrating on the mediation role of self-perceived job performance on the effects of academic satisfaction and perceived academic quality on academic loyalty in the higher education sector, the current study is a pioneer in the services marketing body of knowledge. As a result, the findings of the study support previous empirical research on the links between service quality,

employee performance, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Plantilla, 2017; De Matos Pedro et al., 2018; Solimun & Fernandes, 2018; Yee, 2018; Rostami et al., 2019; Chikazhe et al., 2020;). According to the findings of the study, university graduates become loyal to training institutions that provide good and exceptional service quality. The claim supports previous evidence (Ali et al., 2016) that customer satisfaction and loyalty are influenced by service quality. Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that university graduates become loyal to their training institutions if they are content with the skills they have learned, or if they are performing well at work.

The finding is corroborated by studies by Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016), Espinoza et al. (2019) and Iskhakova et al. (2020) in which they contend that graduates' performance at the workplace has long been established to influence graduate loyalty to training institutions.

5.2. Practical implications

The results of the study underscore the importance of academic loyalty in order to promote management and administration within the higher education sector in emerging markets. The higher education sector should take cognisance of the factors that influence academic loyalty. Thus, universities within emerging markets should focus on matters to do with academic satisfaction and quality. Academic quality should be improved by ensuring that tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness are given priority as they determine superior service within the higher education sector (Plantilla, 2017). If universities raise the level of academic quality, academic loyalty is achieved. Also, universities should pay more attention to academic satisfaction to achieve academic loyalty. This can be accomplished by providing good programmes, ensuring that the level of service meets the needs of clients, and giving up-to-date learning materials and the correct service the first time around. Universities should ensure that they employ qualified and knowledgeable staff that equip graduates with specific skills/competencies required for the job. In practice, graduates must be able to apply expertise and also be able to work with minimal supervision. This can be addressed by universities through maintaining a constant evaluation of programs to meet evolving business demands. This is crucial because continuous programme reviews assist colleges in providing graduates with marketable capabilities. It also aids in the production of qualified graduates who are ready to work anywhere in the world. The findings of the study could be used to improve higher education policies within related emerging markets like Zimbabwe. Thus, universities may institute regular audits on academic service delivery levels as this could assist the production of competent graduates.

5.3. Limitations of the study

There are some flaws in this study that need to be addressed in future research. To begin, data was gathered from only one city, Harare. Also, the current study focused solely on the perspectives of university graduates. This makes it harder to extrapolate the findings.

5.4. Future research suggestions

Future research could benefit from being expanded to include more cities in Zimbabwe and abroad. Future research could improve the findings by taking into account the perspectives of students and employers. Third, comparative studies are encouraged in industries other than higher education because they can contribute significantly to the research.

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