

Instructional Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Service Quality in Higher Education: A Case Study from Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Service quality in higher education has become a key indicator of institutional effectiveness, particularly for universities seeking to remain competitive and responsive to student expectations. Although instructional leadership and organizational culture are recognized as important internal determinants of service performance, their combined influence on service quality and student satisfaction in private higher education institutions remains insufficiently explored. This study examines how instructional leadership and organizational culture interact to influence service quality and student satisfaction at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka, Indonesia. This research employed a qualitative case study design to explore leadership practices and cultural dynamics within the university's service system. Data were collected from 21 informants, including university leaders, administrative staff, and active students, through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that instructional leadership provides clearer task direction, strengthens employee discipline, and promotes more consistent workflow management. In parallel, a collaborative and open organizational culture improves interdepartmental coordination, enhances communication, and supports collective problem-solving in administrative services. The interaction between leadership guidance and cultural support increases service responsiveness, reduces procedural delays, and positively shapes students' perceptions of service quality. The study proposes an Instructional-Culture Service Model in which leadership functions as a structural driver while organizational culture sustains service performance. Aligning leadership practices with supportive cultural values is essential for achieving sustainable improvements in service quality and student satisfaction in higher education institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Service quality has become a critical dimension of institutional competitiveness in higher education, particularly as universities increasingly operate within market-oriented and accountability-driven environments. Higher education institutions are no longer evaluated solely based on their ability to produce competent graduates; they are also expected to deliver services that are responsive, accessible, and aligned with the expectations of students as primary stakeholders. In this context, the quality of administrative and academic services—including responsiveness, communication efficiency, and procedural clarity—plays an important role in shaping student satisfaction and institutional reputation (Nawi, 2023; Yarimoglu, 2023). Universities that fail to maintain consistent service performance often experience student dissatisfaction, administrative inefficiencies, and declining institutional credibility.

Within organizational management literature, leadership and organizational culture are widely recognized as key internal determinants of service quality. Leadership provides direction, establishes expectations, and coordinates organizational processes, while culture shapes the shared values, norms, and behavioral patterns that guide everyday work practices (Luthans, 2011). In educational organizations, instructional leadership has been particularly emphasized as a leadership approach that focuses on guiding institutional practices, clarifying goals, and ensuring the effective implementation of operational processes (Hallinger, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2023). Although originally conceptualized within school settings, instructional leadership principles—such as goal alignment, supervision, and performance monitoring—can also influence administrative performance and service delivery in higher education institutions. When leadership direction is clear and consistently applied, employees are more likely to maintain discipline, adhere to procedural standards, and deliver services efficiently.

Organizational culture complements leadership by sustaining behavioral consistency across institutional units. Culture provides the informal rules and shared understandings that regulate how employees interact, coordinate tasks, and respond to organizational challenges (Krauss & Vanhove, 2022). A collaborative and transparent culture encourages communication, strengthens teamwork, and supports continuous improvement in service delivery. Conversely, weak or fragmented cultural structures may lead to poor coordination, information delays, and inconsistent service experiences for students. Research in higher education management consistently shows that institutions with strong collaborative cultures tend to demonstrate higher levels of service effectiveness and employee engagement (Garcia & Jamias, 2023; Novitasari et al., 2024).

Despite the recognized importance of leadership and culture, existing studies have often examined these variables independently rather than as interacting determinants of service outcomes. Several studies emphasize the role of leadership in improving work discipline and administrative performance (Fauzi et al., 2023; Qodiriyah, 2023), while others focus on how organizational culture supports collaboration and quality assurance within educational institutions (Krauss & Vanhove, 2022). However, relatively few studies analyze how leadership practices and organizational culture jointly influence service quality and student satisfaction. Furthermore, empirical research on this relationship remains limited in the context of private higher education institutions in Indonesia, where administrative systems, governance practices, and organizational cultures may differ from those of public universities. This limitation is particularly significant because some studies report inconsistent findings regarding whether leadership or organizational culture exerts the stronger influence on organizational performance (Poon & Sundararajan, 2023). Consequently, a deeper examination of the interaction between these variables is needed to clarify their combined impact on service quality in higher education.

These issues are particularly relevant at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka (USK), a private regional university experiencing challenges in maintaining consistent administrative service performance. Preliminary observations indicate several organizational issues, including variations in employee discipline, limited coordination between administrative units, and delays in responding to student service requests. Such conditions suggest that internal governance factors—particularly leadership practices and organizational culture—may significantly influence the effectiveness of service delivery within the institution.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the interaction between instructional leadership, organizational culture, and service quality within a higher education context. Specifically, the research addresses two questions:

- (1) How does instructional leadership influence service quality in higher education institutions?
- (2) How does organizational culture interact with leadership practices to shape service quality and student satisfaction?

To address these questions, the study adopts a qualitative case study approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of organizational behavior, service dynamics, and student experiences within a real institutional setting (Yin, 2018). Data were collected through interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to capture multiple perspectives from university leaders, administrative staff, and students. By examining the interaction between leadership practices and cultural dynamics, the study seeks to generate contextual insights that may not be captured through purely quantitative approaches.

The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study proposes an Instructional–Culture Service Model that conceptualizes leadership and organizational culture as integrated determinants of service quality and student satisfaction in higher education. Practically, the study offers governance insights for universities seeking to strengthen administrative responsiveness, organizational coordination, and student-centered service systems.

2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a single-case design to explore how instructional leadership and organizational culture influence service quality and student satisfaction within a real institutional setting. Qualitative inquiry was considered suitable because it allows a deep, contextual interpretation of human behavior and service dynamics rather than numerical measurement. Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka (USK) was selected purposefully as the research site because it represents a private regional university that is currently undergoing management improvement, yet still faces discipline inconsistency, fragmented coordination, and latency in service response making it a relevant setting for investigating internal service governance.

Participants were categorized into three groups to gain multi-perspective insights: university leaders ($n = 4$), administrative staff within the student affairs division ($n = 7$), and active students as primary service users ($n = 10$), totaling 21 informants. Sampling was conducted using purposive selection, and additional participants were included until *data saturation* was reached indicated by a point where no new concepts, themes, or service patterns emerged during repeated interviews. The researcher engaged in participatory involvement, observing service interactions directly while maintaining reflexive field notes to capture subtle behavioral dynamics.

Data were collected through three techniques:

1. In-depth interviews, exploring perspectives on leadership behavior, work discipline, communication flow, service responsiveness, and student satisfaction;
2. Participant observation, focusing on real-time interactions, punctuality, task coordination, and quality assurance practices;
3. Document analysis, involving academic service manuals, meeting reports, monitoring logs, and administrative policy records.

Interview instruments were semi-structured, containing thematic question clusters on leadership instructions, cultural values, workflow clarity, inter-unit collaboration, and service barriers. Observation sheets recorded service events chronologically, while field notes captured reflective interpretations.

Data analysis followed Miles & Huberman's interactive cycle: data reduction → data display → conclusion drawing, conducted iteratively throughout the research period. Trustworthiness was strengthened through method triangulation, source triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-check validation.

Ethical considerations were fully observed. All participants received informed consent forms, participation was voluntary, personal identities were anonymized, and institutional permission and ethical clearance were obtained prior to fieldwork. The research was conducted over a period of six months, including planning, field immersion, transcription, coding, cross-verification, and final interpretation phases.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Instructional Leadership and Employee Discipline*

The data reveal that instructional leadership greatly influences patterns of discipline among administrative staff. Interview transcripts show that most informants associate discipline with punctual attendance, structured workflow, and timely service execution. One student stated: *"Pelayanan terasa lebih cepat kalau staf datang tepat waktu dan langsung bekerja, tidak menunggu diperintah"* (S-03) "Services feel faster when staff arrive on time and immediately begin working without waiting to be instructed". Supervisory practices were also visible during observation sessions, where leaders were observed conducting routine walkthroughs to monitor workflow and service desks. These practices correlated with a noticeable reduction in employee tardiness especially in units where monitoring was more frequent. Clarity of task distribution emerged as a recurrent theme. Administrative staff acknowledged that guidance from leadership helped them distinguish urgent tasks from routine work, preventing overlap and delays. A staff member expressed: *"Instruksi yang jelas membuat kami tahu mana yang harus didahulukan, jadi pekerjaan tidak menumpuk"*, "Clear instructions help us determine which tasks should be prioritized, so work does not accumulate." (A-05). However, enforcement of discipline varied among units. Some divisions demonstrated high punctuality and consistent reporting, while others showed looser adherence to procedures. This uneven implementation resulted in visible differences in response time and service speed from one department to another.

Table 1. The Impact of Instructional Leadership on Employee Discipline

Observed Aspect	Field Findings	Impact on Services
Punctual Attendance	Employees are more consistent in adhering to work hours	Students perceive services as faster
Procedural Compliance	Leaders provide clear instructions	Administrative processes become systematic
Direct Supervision	Leaders routinely monitor staff activities	Reduces service delays
Priority Guidance	Instructions help in sequencing workloads	Services become more structured
Enforcement of Rules	Uneven across units	Variations in service quality among units

All tabulated information is derived from primary field data; personal identifiers have been anonymized. Images or visual documentation (Figures/Photos) are used only as descriptive field records and involve participants who granted verbal consent during observation.

3.2 *Organizational Culture and Interdepartmental Integration*

The results show that organizational culture at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka plays a central role in shaping interdepartmental interaction and service flow. The strongest cultural indicator identified in interviews and observations is staff solidarity, reflected through spontaneous cross-unit assistance during high-volume service periods. One administrative staff member noted, "When one section becomes crowded, other units help immediately so students don't wait too long" (A-04). Field records during registration week confirmed this pattern, where shared task execution accelerated service processing. Open communication also appeared as a dominant cultural driver. Many informants emphasized that transparent information exchange reduces error potential and shortens decision pathways. A student stated, *"Service goes faster when departments communicate directly instead of*

passing responsibility back and forth" (S-02). Despite this strength, several respondents reported that coordination is still disrupted by late information transfer across units, resulting in inconsistent service speed between departments. These discrepancies suggest that integration mechanisms are functioning, yet not uniformly embedded.

Table 2. The Role of Organizational Culture in Service Integration

Aspect of Organizational Culture	Field Findings	Impact on Service Integration
Solidarity Values	Staff assist each other in completing tasks	Services are delivered more quickly
Open Communication	Regular interdepartmental discussions occur	Reduces miscommunication
Coordination Meetings	Conducted on a regular basis	Enhances alignment among units
Collective Responsibility	Staff perceive tasks as shared	Services become more consistent
Technical Barriers	Interdepartmental information not always timely	Integration remains suboptimal

Table 2 illustrates that solidarity values are among the key factors in strengthening the organizational culture at USK Majalengka. Students reported faster services when staff supported each other in completing tasks. Open communication across departments proved effective in reducing miscommunication. Regular coordination meetings played an important role in enhancing service alignment among units. A sense of collective responsibility also emerged, whereby staff did not only focus on their individual tasks but also contributed to the smooth execution of their colleagues' responsibilities.



Figure 1. Service Discussion and Coordination Forum at USK Majalengka

Routine coordination meetings serve as a structural space where cultural values are reinforced. Figure 1. Service Discussion and Coordination Forum at USK Majalengka (original documentation) shows leaders, staff, and students participating together, indicating an institutionalized channel for evaluation and shared decision-making. From field observation, these meetings often produced actionable service improvements, though implementation speed varied among units. Therefore, while collaborative cultural attributes are present and beneficial, their effectiveness remains dependent on consistent interdepartmental follow-through and strengthened information flow.

3.3 Service Quality and Student Perceptions

The results show that service quality at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka is shaped by two dominant factors: administrative performance and campus facilities. Students consistently reported that administrative efficiency particularly in registration, document processing, and academic consultation strongly affects their satisfaction. One student stated, "When the administrative queue is short and responses are fast, learning feels smoother and less stressful" (S-07). Field observations confirm periodic improvements in service workflow, especially during peak periods such as course

registration and graduation document requests. However, several students also expressed concern that service outcomes fluctuate between units, indicating that standardization has not been fully achieved across the institution. Physical and digital infrastructure also influenced student perceptions. Interview data revealed that students rated services more positively when classroom comfort, ICT access, and campus information systems were functioning effectively. Conversely, limited facility availability during high usage periods created dissatisfaction, particularly in laboratory access and internet connectivity. These patterns align with the perspective that high-quality services depend not only on staff competence but also on environmental support. Administrative staff similarly emphasized that service quality improves when leadership, culture, and facility readiness operate in coherence rather than separately.



Figure 2. Discussion on Facility and Infrastructure Development at USK Majalengka

Efforts to enhance campus resources were visibly documented through ongoing development programs. Figure 2. Discussion on Facility and Infrastructure Development at USK Majalengka reflects the institutional commitment to upgrading infrastructure as part of its quality improvement agenda. The presence of university leaders in the discussion highlights the strategic positioning of facilities as a core dimension of service management rather than a supporting component only.



Figure 3. Students as Representations of Service Quality and Future Aspirations

The student perspective is further illustrated in Figure 3. Students as Representations of Service Quality and Future Aspirations, where students appear engaged in collaborative academic activity. Their posture and interaction indicate an environment supportive of participatory learning, which several informants described as a positive service experience. One respondent remarked, *“Facilities may still need improvement, but the learning atmosphere encourages us to express ideas and think critically”* (S-11). Thus, students do not only receive services passively; they actively shape the perception of service quality through their engagement and expectations of academic development.

3.4 Customer Satisfaction as a Service Outcome

The findings indicate that customer satisfaction, as represented in this study by students, acts as the primary output of service performance at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka. Interview data show that satisfaction is most strongly influenced by three elements: service speed, facility readiness, and staff responsiveness. Students repeatedly emphasized that well-coordinated administrative procedures reduce waiting time and create a sense of service professionalism. One student reported, "If the process is quick and staff respond immediately, it really affects how comfortable we feel studying here" (S-14). Conversely, delays in information transfer between departments were frequently cited as the main cause of dissatisfaction, particularly during peak academic activities.

Staff interviews confirm that leadership instructions support workload organization and task delegation, although limited personnel and high service volume occasionally slow response times. Meanwhile, university leaders acknowledged that satisfaction gaps occur when organizational culture has not yet fully aligned across units. They emphasized that improved monitoring and shared cultural commitment are needed to ensure equitable service delivery. Observational data further show that inconsistencies between departments become most visible when student service demand increases, reinforcing the importance of integration for maintaining satisfaction levels.

3.5 Discussion

The study demonstrates that instructional leadership at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka directly improves service discipline, clarity of workflow, and administrative responsiveness. Unlike the Findings section, which explains *what happened*, this Discussion interprets *why it matters*. The results suggest that leadership functions as a structural control mechanism, ensuring predictable service flow through instruction, monitoring, and procedural reinforcement. This aligns with Nordin et al. (2022) and confirms that directive-based governance increases compliance with service procedures. However, the present research goes further by showing that instructional leadership is most effective when integrated with a collaborative culture, not when applied in isolation.

This work extends Hallinger's instructional leadership model in two ways. First, while Hallinger emphasizes direction-setting and supervision, this study adds organizational culture as an interactive dimension rather than a contextual backdrop. Instructional leadership shapes behavior, but culture sustains it, making quality improvements more durable. Second, the model is transposed into a higher-education environment, whereas most prior research focuses on K-12 institutions. Thus, the study offers a Higher-Education Adaptation of Hallinger's Framework, where instructional leadership influences not only teaching but also administrative service ecosystems.

The findings also contribute theoretically to service-quality literature by modifying Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model. SERVQUAL traditionally measures reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. This research proposes two additional lenses leadership and culture as upstream determinants of service reliability. Rather than positioning satisfaction as an outcome of service attributes alone, the revised model illustrates that customer satisfaction emerges from leadership culture synergy that enables those attributes. This expands the SERVQUAL framework specifically for university service settings, generating a new conceptual pathway: Instructional Leadership → Organizational Culture → Service Quality → Student Satisfaction.

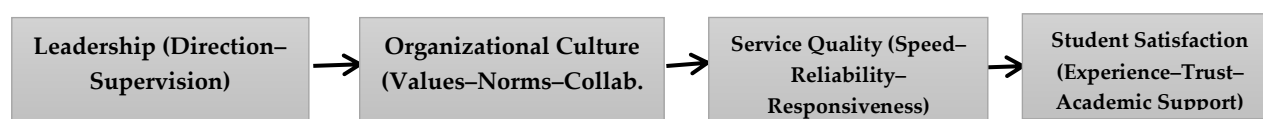


Figure 4. Instructional-Culture Service Model

This model illustrates how instructional leadership shapes organizational culture, which then enhances service quality and ultimately increases student satisfaction. Leadership acts as the structural

driver, culture as the sustaining mechanism, and service quality as the operational output leading to satisfaction.

Comparative literature also supports the significance of this integration. Similar patterns were recorded in ASEAN institutions where collaborative campus culture accelerated administrative services (Arifin, Malaysia 2023). South Asian universities reported that directive leadership improved discipline but required cultural participation to avoid rigidity (Dhungana, Nepal 2022). Studies in African higher education further emphasize that leadership without cultural cohesion results in fragmented service reform (Ndlovu, South Africa 2021). By aligning with and advancing these global perspectives, this research positions Indonesian private universities within an international discourse on leadership-based service governance.

The findings imply that service reform cannot rely solely on supervisory leadership or infrastructure enhancement. Staff initiative must be protected through shared decision-making, leaders must apply instruction proportionally, and communication systems must be digitized to minimize inter-departmental delay. The conceptual contribution of this study the Instructional Culture-Based Service Quality Model may serve as a template for institutions seeking measurable improvements in student satisfaction. Future testing in multi-institution or cross-regional contexts would strengthen generalizability and validate leadership–culture interactions in diverse higher-education landscapes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that instructional leadership and organizational culture jointly play a critical role in improving service quality and student satisfaction at Universitas Sindang Kasih Majalengka. The findings indicate that instructional leadership strengthens employee discipline, punctuality, and clarity of work procedures, while a collaborative organizational culture supports cooperation, information sharing, and collective responsibility among staff, thereby enhancing the consistency and responsiveness of administrative services. The interaction between these two dimensions suggests that leadership functions as a structural driver that directs service processes, whereas organizational culture sustains and reinforces performance through shared norms and collaborative practices. Consequently, service quality in higher education should not be viewed solely as the outcome of managerial instruction but as the product of a synergistic relationship between leadership practices and organizational culture, as reflected in the proposed Instructional–Culture Service Model linking leadership, culture, service quality, and student satisfaction. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The use of a single-case qualitative design limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific institutional context, and the participatory observation method may introduce interpretive bias even though triangulation and member checking were applied to enhance trustworthiness. Therefore, future research is recommended to test and refine the proposed model across multiple higher education institutions, including both public and private universities in diverse regional settings. Employing mixed-method or longitudinal research designs could also provide stronger evidence regarding causal relationships between leadership, culture, and service outcomes. In addition, integrating other variables—such as digital service systems, total quality management (TQM) practices, or institutional governance policies—may help develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding service quality improvement in higher education institutions.

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