

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Quality of service and loyalty of Undergraduate Students of the School of Administrative Sciences, UNMSM, Lima

ABSTRACT

The quality of service is a fundamental axis in education, not only because of the greater demands that exist today, but also because of the exponential growth of the number of universities in the country, which makes them seek to meet the needs of their students so that they recommend their home or continue their studies. For this reason, the objective of this research was to find the relationship between the quality of service and the loyalty of undergraduate students of the School of Administrative Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM). To achieve this, a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional and correlational method was used, through a 28-question questionnaire applied to 328 students. In this study, it was found that 76.9% of the students perceived the quality of service as medium-low, and 81.1% of the students had medium-low loyalty to the university. In conclusion, a moderate and positive relationship was found between service quality and student loyalty, with quality of support, academic quality, and quality of career opportunities being the factors most related to loyalty.

Keywords: quality; loyalty; satisfaction; students; education.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, higher education has undergone significant changes, as regulators of educational services have increasingly demanded better teacher preparation and more specialized educational programs. The number of higher education institutions has also grown exponentially. According to the National Superintendence of University Higher Education (SUNEDU, 2020), in 1980 Peru had thirty-six universities; by 2019, this number had increased to 139, with the greatest growth occurring between 2008 and 2012, with the creation of 30 new houses of studies. Thus, between 2008 and 2019, the number of students enrolled in higher education went from 771,000 to almost 1,510,000.

In this sense, universities are currently trying to improve the quality of the services they offer. Precisely because of the increase in the number of universities and the heterogeneity of the quality of higher education in Peru, in 2006 the Sistema Nacional de Evaluación, Acreditación y Certificación de la calidad (SINEACE, 2017) was created, which is the first accreditation model for university quality created in Peru, with the purpose of establishing a quality standard at the level of all higher education and university institutions.

Specifically, the purpose of this research is to find the relationship between the quality of service perceived by undergraduate students of the School of Administrative Sciences of UNMSM and loyalty. Although, according to the Central Office of Academic Quality and Accreditation of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (OCCA, 2024), the Schools of Administration, Tourism Administration and International Business Administration received the accreditation of educational quality from SINEACE in 2020, the present study will serve to evaluate how this accreditation is carried out in these schools. According to SINEACE (2016), the accreditation of institutions, more than recognition, should be an internal change and a constant self-evaluation of quality. This study is also important because it deals with an essential issue such as education, a fundamental pillar for the development of countries, also considering the importance

that services have acquired in the world GDP (Lovelock & Wirts, 2009).

In the case of education, because it is a service, the way to measure it is not straightforward due to the characteristics of the service itself. Kotler and Armstrong (2013) postulate that “Un servicio es un producto en sentido general, pero tiene características y necesidades de marketing especiales” [A service is a product in a general sense, but it has special marketing characteristics and needs] (p. 208). Lucas (2019) conducted a paper on consumer management and student loyalty, in which it was evident that if there is no good consumer management, loyalty will not be good either. Therefore, one way to manage customer experience is to provide them with the best quality of service.

It should be noted that according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022), one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is quality education. This, in turn, will contribute to other development goals such as ending poverty, gender equality, health and well-being, among others. Therefore, this study not only contributes to the evaluation of the quality of education provided to undergraduate students of the School of Administrative Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, but also contributes with results that contribute to the sustainable development of society.

Quality

Riveros (2007) defines it as “el nivel de cumplimiento de los requisitos del servicio que lo hacen preferido por el consumidor” [the level of fulfillment of service needs that makes it preferred by the consumer] (p.90). Müller de la Lama (1999) stated that the service creates a psychological response in the customer, and that it depends on how the service was provided. Similarly, Jain and Aggarwal (2017) described service quality as the gap between the expectation and the perception of the service. Garcia *et al.* (2002) postulated that “la evaluación de la calidad del servicio y la determinación de factores críticos son determinantes en la satisfacción del usuario” [the evaluation of service quality and the determination of critical factors are determinants of user satisfaction] (p.426).

Thus, Garcia *et al.* (2014) state that “la calidad es el mejor predictor de la fidelidad” [quality is the best predictor of loyalty] (p.124).

Griful and Canela (2002) state that “para poder identificar las necesidades y expectativas que satisface un producto o servicio, es importante saber a quién va dirigido, o quiénes son los colectivos o clientes interesados en él” [in order to identify the needs and expectations that a product or service satisfies, it is important to know to whom it is addressed or who are the groups or customers interested in it] (p.9). Knowing that there are external and internal customers in organizations, we understand the importance of the term Total Quality, which includes not only the quality of the product/service, but also the organizational culture, the company’s approach to the market, and the management of resources. According to Day (2000), what distinguishes a market-driven company is that it has accessible and detailed market information that enables it to anticipate opportunities and respond faster than its competitors.

For this reason, Giménez *et al.* (2014) state that organizations that apply total quality management achieve better organizational results, and soft variables have a greater impact on business results. According to the International Service Marketing Institute (ISMI, 2001), there are no universally accepted parameters for measuring quality because it depends on whether it is a service or a product and the type of service or product. In their conclusions, Espino *et al.* (2023), after analyzing education in Peru and Latin America, point out that it is necessary to apply effective quality management in education in order to act quickly in today’s ever-changing environment. For this reason, the Secretariat of Public Management of Peru (2022), in its Modernization Policy, states that the State must provide modern and quality services to meet the needs of citizens.

Calabuig *et al.* (2012) postulated that consumers’ evaluation of quality is a long-term process that is the result of cognitive and affective psychosocial processes. The truth is that there is much controversy about whether perceived quality leads to user satisfaction and loyalty, since perceptions can vary greatly

from person to person due to previous experiences, tastes, and the fact that perceptions are personal, depending on how each individual perceives reality. However, according to Ibarra and Casas (2015), “las evidencias empíricas indican que la percepción del rendimiento del servicio por sí solo logra al menos predecir el comportamiento de los individuos” [empirical evidence shows that perceptions of service performance alone can at least predict individual behavior] (p.231).

There are several types of tests to quantify perceived quality, the most important of which are Servqual and Servperf. The former measures perceptual variables such as security, tangibles, reliability, empathy, and responsiveness and compares them to the expectations of the same study group. In contrast, the second model measures only perceptions, arguing that expectations do not always lead to user loyalty. A conclusion presented by Alén (2006) is that the Servqual and Servperf models cannot be applied in a general way but need to be adapted according to the service or industry.

Berry *et al.* (1985) created Servqual, a model for evaluating quality based on interviews in various industries in the United States, measuring expectations and perceptions in a 22-question questionnaire that evaluated 10 aspects of quality, which after statistical studies were reduced to 5: trust or empathy, responsibility, reliability, tangibility, and responsiveness. The gap between perceptions and expectations is measured by the Servqual model, which is very useful for service organizations because of its flexibility to adapt to different services.

Subsequently, the Servperf model emerged, which takes into account the customer’s perception in the performance of service quality, without considering the customer’s expectations (Cronin & Taylor, 1994, as cited in Ibarra & Casas, 2015). This is due to the fact that many studies have shown that expectations do not necessarily lead to satisfaction and, subsequently, loyalty.

The Hedqual model is a model that emerged in response to the lack of a specialized model to assess service quality in education in studies such as MBAS and PHDS. Icli and

Anil (2014) relied on existing questionnaires to construct a survey that was evaluated and validated by experts, leaving 26 questions and 5 dimensions in the end: Academic quality, quality of administrative services, quality of library services, quality of support services, and career opportunities. Hartono *et al.* (2019) conducted a study whose objective was to validate the Hedqual model in higher education and adapt it to quantify student loyalty and satisfaction. The model was adapted according to the surveys conducted and tested, and it was determined that the test is consistent in assessing academic and non-academic educational factors (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$). It was also found that the quality results have a positive effect on student satisfaction and loyalty. Subsequently, Urbano (2022) conducted a study among students of a private university in Trujillo, where he found a Spearman correlation of 0.78 between both variables, with the factors of educational service quality most related to loyalty: reliability (Spearman coefficient 0.748) and responsiveness (Spearman coefficient 0.762).

Quality in Education

UNESCO (2022) postulates that the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has hit the education sector hard, especially in underdeveloped countries; therefore, its current strategy is based on a sustainable international contribution where all countries help each other inclusively.

Muñoz *et al.* (2022) state that in order to use educational quality as a strategy, guidelines must be followed and regulated by regulatory bodies. The National Superintendence of University Higher Education (SUNEDU, 2016) established eight basic quality conditions for Peruvian universities: academic objectives, educational offerings, infrastructure and equipment, research lines, qualified teachers, educational services, labor insertion mechanisms, and transparency. Ortiz and Pariona (20-23) conducted a literature review on educational management and how it affects the quality of services, especially in Latin America. They concluded that educational management has a significant impact on the quality of services provided, and that it is impossible to apply the same model to different areas and even to institutions with similar characteristics, since

each educational institution is unique. Therefore, it is important to analyze the problems of each institution in order to properly manage its quality (p. 8). Topaloğlu *et al.* (2022) came to similar conclusions in their study where, after evaluating the information by experts, it was concluded that there are unique aspects of quality for each institution that should be considered according to its reality.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is an intermediate element between service quality and user loyalty (Chao, 2008, cited in Vera, 2012). Quality has a direct impact on loyalty, which means that every company should strive to achieve quality. According to Vera and Espinosa (2014), greater user satisfaction makes it possible to increase the price of the service and achieve greater frequency of purchase. For this reason, more companies are betting on monitoring the quality of their products and services and maintaining good standards in them to ensure customer satisfaction and thus retain them for longer.

Loyalty

Within the field of management, there are several approaches or theories regarding loyalty. The oldest approach to loyalty defines it as a behavior in which repurchase predominates (Copeland, 1923, as cited in Duque-Oliva & Ramírez-Angulo, 2014). Vera and Espinosa (2014) mention that a customer who is loyal shows higher repurchase rates for his preferred brand than for others in the same category, and this greater attachment to the brand can make the customer stay with it longer, despite possible promotions or discounts from other brands. According to Srivastava and Rai (2018), a good service or product will inspire customer loyalty.

There are different concepts or ways to describe what a loyal customer is. In the past, it was defined in a one-dimensional way, but nowadays it is described as a complex multidimensional quality, with the following approaches. In the first one, loyalty is a form of behavior that includes repeated purchases from the same company or an increase in the strength of the relationship with the company (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978, cited in Setó, 2003).

According to many authors, this behavioral approach is oriented towards the service-providing establishment and, for this reason, many agree that it is not an integral construct for defining customer loyalty.

Subsequently, the attitudinal approach emerged as a disagreement of some researchers with the behavioral approach. This approach criticized the behavioral approach by observing that customers' repeat purchases are due to their internal predisposition and proposed the attitudinal perspective, which takes into account repurchase intentions, psychological attachment, recommendations to third parties, satisfaction, and perceived quality (Day, 1969, as cited in Elasri, 2018). Yang and Peterson (2004) describe loyalty under a multidisciplinary approach, which includes both attitudinal and behavioral approaches.

Loyalty could be measured from a behavioral aspect, evaluating a person's purchases in a given period of time, or evaluating his or her attitude (how he or she views the company and what affection it arouses in him or her), generally through surveys. These surveys are often long and their results are often ambiguous and take a long time to complete and analyze. It was in this scenario that Reichheld (2003), based on Taylor's experience, started 2-year research applying surveys to customers of different organizations to identify purchase behaviors related to subsequent recommendations about the evaluated company and its growth. He was looking for a simple and effortless way to evaluate and found that the question "Would you recommend the service or product to a friend or colleague?" was not only a predictor of loyalty, but also a predictor of profitability. In fact, in the many companies where he conducted the study, there was a direct correlation between customers who recommended the company and differences in competitors' growth rates. According to the same author, the best indicator of customer loyalty is the recommendation, because when a customer recommends a company, he is not only indicating that he was satisfied with the value he received, but also that he is using his reputation as a reference; and to do so, he must have intense loyalty. Based on this question, he created the Net Promoter Score (NPS).

El NPS, also known as the ratio of promoters to detractors, is based on the aforementioned question that asks customers to rate their loyalty on a Likert scale of 0 to 10, with scores of 9 and 10 indicating that they are promoters or would recommend the service or product; those who rate the company with scores of 7 and 8 are passively satisfied customers; and those who give scores of 0 to 6 indicate that they are detractors and will not recommend the product and/or service. Subtracting the percentage of detractors from promoters gives the percentage of loyal customers. In this sense, according to the author, this ratio can be particularly useful for companies because it can be used to make comparisons with other companies, from region to region, the sales team in different parts of the world, and even from brand to brand within the same company.

In order to study the variable of quality of educational services, this research considered measuring its perception through the Hedqual Educational Quality Test, which was modified according to the university and level of education. Within the perceived quality, the following aspects were considered: academic quality, quality of support, administrative quality, quality of career opportunities, and quality of library services. Similarly, in this study, the variable of student loyalty was considered based on the recommendations made by the student of the university to a friend or another student, supporting the Net Promoter Score theory. To complement this last variable, aspects such as the satisfaction generated by the service and whether the student will carry out a subsequent study in this House of Studies were also considered. Therefore, the following hypotheses were made in this study:

H0: There is no significant relationship between service quality and loyalty of undergraduate students at the School of Administrative Sciences, UNMSM, Lima.

H1: There is a revealing relationship between the quality of service and the loyalty of undergraduate students at the School of Administrative Sciences, UNMSM, Lima.

METHODS

This research was correlational because it looked for the relationship between the variable

of service quality and user loyalty. It was also quantitative because it measured the results numerically. The research design was non-experimental and cross-sectional, since the variables were not intentionally manipulated and the information was collected at a single moment of the research. The population of the study was the undergraduate students of the School of Administrative Sciences who are studying Administration, International Business Administration and Tourism Administration. From this total, a sample of 328 students was selected and given the questionnaire based on the Hedqual test and the modified Net Promoter Score. The questionnaire was first validated with experts, then a pilot sample was made and finally the survey was carried out. The results were analyzed using SPSS version 26.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, one of the first results of the study was to verify that the Cronbach's Alpha of the sample was 0.938; that is, the value obtained was excellent, which means that the model is reliable. Table 2 shows the normality by means of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, which for the sample is 0.934, indicating that the model's sampling adequacy is excellent.

It was also found, as shown in Figure 1, that more than half of the students surveyed (53.35%) perceived the quality of the educational service as medium, while 76.83% of the students perceived it as medium-low and 76.52% perceived it as medium-high.

Similarly, as shown in Figure 2, it was found that 49.70% of the students have medium loyalty; 81.10% find the loyalty medium-low, and 68.6% find it medium-high. For both perceived educational quality and student loyalty, a moderate value of 50% or more was found, which would indicate a correspondence between both variables.

As shown in Table 3, to evaluate the correlation between both variables, Spearman's Rho was used with a significance of 0.05%, obtaining a positive two-tailed significance of 0.524, which indicates that the relationship between the variables is moderate. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that perceived quality of service and student loyalty are related.

It was found in the present study that there is a relationship between academic quality and student loyalty since the Spearman coefficient is 0.438 for both variables; this means that there is a relationship that is moderate two-tailed and positive between both variables. Of the 328 students surveyed, 53.4% (175) of the students perceive that the quality of service is medium; and 49.7% (163) students indicated that they have medium loyalty to the university. Of the students who perceived service quality as medium, 30.5% indicated that they have medium loyalty and 7.3% high loyalty to the university. From the above, it can be inferred that a large part of those who perceive medium service quality have medium and high loyalty to the university.

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha Test

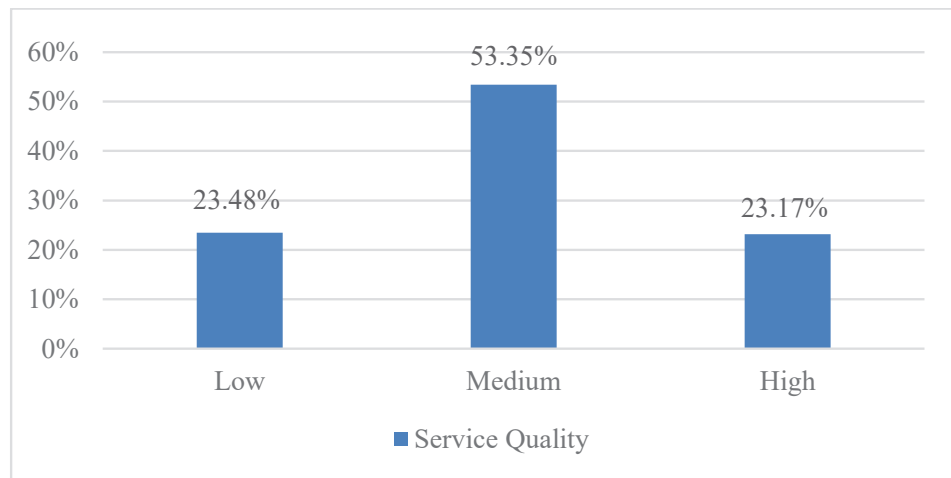
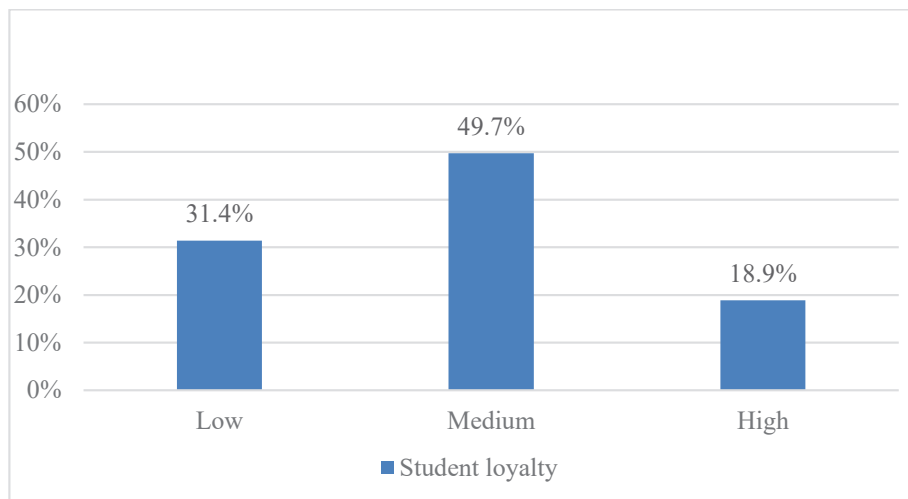
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of elements
.938	28

Note. Prepared by author, 2024.

Table 2
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test

KMO	No. of elements
.934	28

Note. Prepared by author, 2024.

Figure 1*Perceived Service Quality Survey**Note. Prepared by author, 2024***Figure 2***Student Loyalty Survey**Note. Prepared by author, 2024***Table 3***Quality of Service / Student Loyalty Correlation*

		Quality of Service (grouped)	Fidelidad de los estudiantes (agrupada)
Spear- man's Rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.524**
	Sig. (bilateral)	.	.000
	N	328	328
	Coeficiente de correlación	.524**	1.000
	Sig. (bilateral)	.000	.
	N	328	328

Note. Information obtained from the survey applied. Prepared by author, 2024.

It was also observed that the quality of administrative services and student loyalty obtained a Spearman coefficient of 0.318 for both variables; this means that there is a low, two-tailed and positive relationship between both variables.

A correlation of 0.376 was found between the variables quality of library services and student loyalty; this means that there is a low, two-tailed and positive relationship between both variables.

Similarly, the relationship between support service quality and student loyalty was found to be 0.494 for both variables; this means that there is a moderate, two-tailed and positive relationship between the two variables. Of all the students surveyed, 53% (174) perceived a medium quality of support services, while 49.7% (163) students perceived a medium loyalty to the university.

A correlation of 0.564 was also found between the quality of career opportunities and student loyalty for both variables; this means that there is a moderate, two-tailed and positive relationship between both variables. This variable has the highest correlation with the loyalty of the students. Of the 328 students surveyed, 56.7% (186) have a medium perception of the quality of career opportunities; similarly, 49.7% (163) students had a medium loyalty to the university.

DISCUSSION

In this study, all the variables of service quality that were evaluated were found to be related to student loyalty. Tassara (2017) conducted research with similar results, finding that there is a relationship between the perception of service quality and student loyalty and that this was acceptable. Similarly, Figueroa *et al.* (2023) found that both educational quality and student relationship management are related to student loyalty in their study conducted at the University of Tabasco in Mexico.

According to the study conducted by Ashraf *et al.* (2018), service quality, corporate image and perceived value are the key to achieving brand loyalty. Similarly, Cabana *et al.* (2016) conducted a study on educational loyalty in

engineering students, where it could be observed that loyalty is significantly affected by the quality of teaching and student learning. Dangaiso *et al.* (2022) analyzed the e-learning service provided to students in a developing country in the COVID-19 era, and as a result obtained a positive relationship between perceived e-learning service quality and student satisfaction. Torrico-Irahola (2023) conducted a qualitative review of academic texts on educational quality, and his main findings were that quality always implies the satisfaction of customer expectations under service or product standards. In this study, it was found that 63.7% (209) of the students agree and strongly agree that they are satisfied with the service provided.

Jiménez (2021), in his research, showed that the dimensions that had the highest correlation with the quality of the service were the quality of the academic content and the technological aspect, with Spearman correlation values of 0.829 and 0.827, respectively. Mejía (2021) developed a research in undergraduate students of the administrative career, in which he observed that one of the dimensions with the lowest qualification within the quality was the administrative support. In this research, results very similar to the two studies mentioned above are evident, since a higher rating by students as moderate to high quality was found for the dimension of quality of support services (74.39%), followed by academic quality (73.5%) and the quality of career opportunities (73.5%), which was not rated by students as the best. Administrative quality (71.7%) and library service quality (71.9%) would be aspects to improve, since in this study they were found to have a correlation with student loyalty.

It is worth mentioning that this study was conducted at a time when the post-COVID-19 measures were decreasing, since the students surveyed had partially resumed face-to-face attendance after spending more than 2 years with virtual classes. Probably for this reason, the quality of support was rated as moderate to high, since it was a quality feature that they could observe and appreciate during their virtual classes. Vilela *et al.* (2021) postulate that there were positive effects that the students learned thanks to the virtual classes, such as

self-management of their time, responsibility and development of digital skills. Similarly, the pandemic helped teachers to develop digital skills and competencies.

Lastly, this research found that administrative quality and quality of library services have a low correlation with respect to student loyalty. In contrast, academic quality, quality of support services and quality of career opportunities have a moderate correlation with student loyalty. Precisely the dimensions with the highest correlation with loyalty are the ones with the best quality perception scores by students; even so, these dimensions are considered with moderate scores by students, which indicates that there are still factors to be improved.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, it is evident that the service quality variable is related to student loyalty; that is, academic quality, administrative quality, support service quality, library service quality, and career opportunity quality are all related to student loyalty at the UNMSM Undergraduate School of Management. As all dimensions of quality are moderately or poorly related to loyalty, this indicates that all of them should be improved to reach a correlation level closer to 1.

A moderate relationship was found between the quality of academic services and student loyalty, which means that there is still room for improvement in this dimension. One factor to improve, according to the results of this research, would be to have a flexible academic curriculum, since 65.5% of the respondents (215 students) strongly disagreed, disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with this premise.

Administrative quality is one of the aspects that needs to be improved, since this study found a low correlation with student loyalty. Aspects to improve in this dimension would be to optimize attention so that the response to students is faster, in addition to notifying them in advance before making a change in classes. In order to improve this aspect, the training of administrative staff could be promoted.

The quality of library services is another factor to be improved, since it is one of the dimensions with the lowest correlation with student loyalty. Among the factors identified in this research as opportunities for improvement were more flexible library opening hours and greater availability of physical books. Consideration could be given to hiring more specialized library staff to extend the hours of operation and to consider purchasing a larger number of available books.

The quality of the support service was one of the dimensions with the highest score in relation to the others; nevertheless, it was found that there are still factors that need to be changed in order to provide a better service to the students, which is more so in the current times where there is the possibility of connecting remotely to take undergraduate courses, a situation that the students surveyed have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that the students surveyed felt that technical support problems were not resolved quickly. An opportunity for improvement was also identified in having a technical support team available for emergencies. In order to solve the aforementioned support needs, it is suggested to hire more technical staff to provide a timely solution to the students and to establish a communication channel with the support staff.

The quality of career opportunities is the dimension that most correlates with student loyalty. This study shows that students highly value the prestige of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos; however, in all the dimensions, students disagree and totally disagree (45%) that they will have a greater professional development after graduating from the University; therefore, it would be advisable that UNMSM could promote pre-professional internships and links with companies; this would make students aware of what awaits them as professionals after graduating from the University.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the perception of educational quality and its relationship with loyalty among undergraduate students in the School of Administrative

Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos.

A limitation of the study was the access to the students, since the research was carried out during a period when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in this School, the students were attending in person only a few days a week. In other faculties, the students were still taking virtual classes in their entirety; therefore, the sampling was done in a single School with 3 professional schools to obtain an assessment of how quality was occurring there. To get an overall picture of the perception of quality at the university, it would be advisable to conduct similar studies in other faculties at UNMSM.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Author Contributions

Greta María Almora Vargas (lead author): research, methodology, software, writing (original draft, review, and editing, etc.)