



## Examining the Relationship Between Lecturer Service Quality and Student Retention

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/jemr.v5i3.2317>

### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Lecturer Service Quality; Student Retention; Higher Education

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This study aims to examine the relationship between lecturers' service quality dimensions—assurance, tangibles, empathy, reliability, and responsiveness—and student retention in higher education. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 212 first-year, second-semester students selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a self-constructed questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed through descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The findings revealed that all dimensions of lecturers' service quality were rated at a high level, with tangibles obtaining the highest mean score (4.05) and reliability the lowest (3.85). Student retention was also categorized as high (mean = 3.65). Furthermore, all service quality dimensions showed positive and significant relationships with student retention. Assurance ( $r = 0.453$ ) and tangibles ( $r = 0.450$ ) demonstrated the strongest relationships, followed by empathy ( $r = 0.337$ ), reliability ( $r = 0.331$ ), and responsiveness ( $r = 0.169$ ). The study implies that higher education institutions should prioritize strengthening lecturers' competence and professionalism while improving reliability in teaching practices to enhance student retention.

#### Article History:

Received: February 2026; Revised: March 2026; Accepted: April 2026

#### Please cite this article in APA style as:

Lasut, E. M. M. (2026). Examining the Relationship Between Lecturer Service Quality and Student Retention. *Journal of Educational Management Research*, 5(3), 3258-3270.

## INTRODUCTION

Private higher education institutions (PTS) are currently facing increasingly complex challenges in maintaining institutional sustainability and competitiveness in the global education market (Doan et al., 2025; Lin & Chen, 2025). One of the most critical issues is student attrition and dropout, which directly affect institutional income, accreditation performance, and public reputation. In highly competitive educational environments, retaining existing students is considered more cost-effective than continuously recruiting new students (Montesinos-Chávez et al., 2025; Prananto et al., 2025). Therefore, student retention has become a strategic concern for higher education

management worldwide. In the context of higher education services, lecturers play a central role because they directly interact with students through teaching, mentoring, and academic guidance. The quality of lecturer services influences students' academic experiences and institutional attachment. Previous studies indicate that students are more likely to remain in an institution when they perceive lecturers as competent, responsive, and supportive. Consequently, improving lecturer service quality is not only an academic issue but also an institutional sustainability strategy that is socially and economically important for higher education institutions (Eresia-Eke et al., 2020; Hussain, 2022).

Service quality theory proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating service performance through five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Xie et al., 2025). In educational settings, these dimensions are reflected in lecturers' professional appearance, consistency in teaching, responsiveness to student needs, competence, and personal attention toward students. Tangibles refer to the physical appearance of lecturers and the adequacy of instructional facilities such as LCD projectors, modules, and digital learning media. Reliability concerns lecturers' ability to deliver lectures consistently, fairly, and according to schedule (Makena, 2025; Ragusa, 2025). Responsiveness emphasizes lecturers' willingness to assist students promptly, while assurance relates to lecturers' competence, credibility, and ability to build trust. Empathy refers to lecturers' understanding of students' difficulties and their willingness to provide individual academic support. Student retention theory explains that students are more likely to persist when they experience academic and social integration within the institution. Therefore, lecturer service quality is theoretically linked to retention because positive academic interactions strengthen students' trust, satisfaction, and commitment to continue their studies (Grützmaier et al., 2025).

Despite the importance of lecturer service quality, many private universities still experience difficulties in meeting students' academic expectations. Previous studies found that gaps frequently occur between expected and perceived educational services, particularly in assurance and responsiveness dimensions (Jeni & Syafril, 2025; Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026). In practice, some lecturers are still perceived as inconsistent in assessment, less responsive to student concerns, and lacking professional commitment in carrying out academic responsibilities. Such conditions may reduce students' satisfaction and weaken their attachment to the institution. Furthermore, private universities face stronger retention challenges compared to public universities because students tend to behave more like consumers who evaluate educational quality based on service experiences. Inadequate lecturer service quality may lead students to transfer institutions or discontinue their studies. This issue is

particularly significant because student dropout not only affects students personally but also causes financial and reputational losses for institutions. Therefore, understanding the relationship between lecturer service quality and student retention is essential for developing effective institutional management strategies (Forid et al., 2024; Kamal & Mudaris, 2026).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that service quality positively influences student retention in higher education. Reliability and empathy were reported to contribute significantly to retention through improved student satisfaction. Educational service quality also enhances retention, with student satisfaction acting as a mediating variable (Guo et al., 2025). Transparent and fair academic services foster trust and institutional commitment among students. Moreover, lecturers' consistency and competence strengthen students' confidence in academic systems, thereby encouraging persistence (Joseph et al., 2025). These studies confirm that lecturer-related services are important determinants of student retention. However, previous studies mainly focused on direct effects or mediation models without comprehensively comparing all SERVQUAL dimensions simultaneously. In addition, several studies were conducted in non-Indonesian contexts, making the findings difficult to generalize to private higher education institutions with different educational cultures and service expectations. Therefore, additional research is required to examine how each service quality dimension contributes to student retention in a different institutional context (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Although previous studies provide valuable insights, inconsistencies remain regarding which dimensions of lecturer service quality most strongly influence student retention. Some studies found that empathy did not significantly influence satisfaction in digital learning environments because lecturer-student interactions became increasingly impersonal. In contrast, other studies identified empathy as a significant predictor of retention. Similarly, tangibles are often considered less influential than interpersonal dimensions, yet some studies suggest that modern teaching facilities and professional appearance shape students' perceptions of institutional quality. These contradictory findings indicate a significant research gap concerning the contextual relevance of each SERVQUAL dimension. Furthermore, limited studies specifically examine lecturer service quality and retention among first-year students, despite the first academic year being the most vulnerable period for dropout. This study offers novelty by examining all five dimensions of lecturer service quality simultaneously and focusing on first-year university students. The study contributes to the literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how lecturer service quality influences student retention in private higher education.

Based on the identified issues and research gaps, this study aims to analyze the level of lecturer service quality and student retention, as well as examine the significance of the relationship between lecturer service quality dimensions and student retention. This study focuses on five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Student retention is operationalized as students' intention to remain enrolled and complete their studies within the same institution. The main argument of this study is that positive perceptions of lecturer service quality contribute significantly to stronger student retention. It is assumed that students who perceive lecturers as competent, reliable, responsive, empathetic, and professional are more likely to maintain academic commitment and continue their studies. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions by strengthening the application of SERVQUAL and retention theory in higher education and offering institutional recommendations for improving lecturer competence, academic services, and student retention strategies.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to examine the relationship between lecturer service quality and student retention. A correlational design is appropriate for identifying the degree and direction of relationships among variables without manipulating the research setting or establishing experimental causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was selected because the study aimed to determine whether lecturer service quality dimensions were significantly associated with student retention. The study was conducted at private higher education institutions in North Sulawesi Province. The location was selected because private universities in the region face increasing challenges related to student retention and institutional sustainability. In addition, first-year students are considered highly vulnerable to dropout during the transition period into higher education, making this context relevant for retention research (Eresia-Eke et al., 2020).

The population of this study consisted of all active first-year, second-semester undergraduate students enrolled in private higher education institutions. First-year students were selected because they had already experienced academic interaction with lecturers for at least one semester, enabling them to evaluate lecturer service quality more accurately. The sample consisted of 212 students selected using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was chosen due to accessibility, time limitations, and the ease of obtaining respondents who were willing to participate in the study. This sampling technique has been widely applied in higher education research

involving student respondents (Forid et al., 2022; Hussain, 2022). Data were collected using a self-constructed questionnaire developed based on SERVQUAL dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, as well as student retention indicators including intention to stay, institutional commitment, and academic integration. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) to reduce central tendency bias. Data collection was conducted offline during students' free time between classes, and informed consent was provided prior to questionnaire administration.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to describe the overall tendency and distribution of respondents' perceptions regarding lecturer service quality and student retention. Mean score interpretation followed the classification proposed by Sugiyono (2019): 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.40 (moderate), 3.41–4.20 (high), and 4.21–5.00 (very high). Inferential analysis was conducted using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to test the significance and strength of the relationship between lecturer service quality dimensions and student retention. The interpretation of the correlation coefficient followed Talar and Gozaly (2025) criteria for assessing relationship strength. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level, where a significance value below 0.05 indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This section presents the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of lecturer service quality dimensions and student retention. The descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the level of each service quality dimension and the level of student retention. Furthermore, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was employed to examine the significance and strength of the relationship between lecturer service quality dimensions and student retention.

### Descriptive Statistics of Lecturers' Service Quality Dimensions

The descriptive statistics of lecturer service quality dimensions and student retention are presented in Table 1. The analysis includes the minimum score, maximum score, mean score, and standard deviation for each variable.

**Tabel 1. The Mean Score of Lecturers' Service Quality Dimensions**

|                | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Reliability    | 212 | 4       | 5       | 3.85 | 0.895          |
| Responsiveness | 212 | 3       | 5       | 3.98 | 0.777          |

|                       |     |   |   |      |        |
|-----------------------|-----|---|---|------|--------|
| Assurance             | 212 | 3 | 5 | 4.02 | 0.7701 |
| Emphaty               | 212 | 3 | 5 | 3.94 | 0.8385 |
| Tangible              | 212 | 3 | 5 | 4.05 | 0.7511 |
| Retention             | 212 | 4 | 5 | 3.65 | 0.69   |
| Valid N<br>(listwise) | 212 |   |   |      |        |

Table 1 shows that all dimensions of lecturer service quality were categorized as high. Tangible obtained the highest mean score (M = 4.05), followed by Assurance (M = 4.02), Responsiveness (M = 3.98), Empathy (M = 3.94), and Reliability (M = 3.85). Student retention was also categorized as high with a mean score of 3.65. However, retention had the lowest mean score compared to all lecturer service quality dimensions. These findings indicate that students generally perceived lecturer service quality positively, although their intention to remain enrolled was relatively lower.

### The Relationship between Reliability and Student Retention

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between reliability and student retention. The correlation results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. The Relationship between Reliability and Students' Retention Correlations**

|             |                     | Reliability | Retention |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Reliability | Pearson Correlation | 1           | .331**    |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     |             | .000      |
|             | N                   | 212         | 212       |
| Retention   | Pearson Correlation | .331**      | 1         |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000        |           |
|             | N                   | 212         | 212       |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 indicates that the significance value was 0.000, which was lower than 0.05, meaning that the null hypothesis was rejected. The Pearson correlation coefficient between reliability and student retention was 0.331, indicating a moderate positive relationship. This finding demonstrates that students who perceived lecturers as more reliable also tended to show stronger intentions to remain enrolled and complete their studies.

### The Relationship between Responsiveness and Student Retention

The relationship between responsiveness and student retention was analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. The Relationship between Responsiveness and Students' Retention**

| <b>Correlations</b> |                     |           |                |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
|                     |                     | Retention | Responsiveness |
| Retention           | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .169*          |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     |           | .014           |
|                     | N                   | 212       | 212            |
| Responsiveness      | Pearson Correlation | .169*     | 1              |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .014      |                |
|                     | N                   | 212       | 212            |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows that the significance value was 0.014, which was lower than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The Pearson correlation coefficient between responsiveness and student retention was 0.169, indicating a weak positive relationship. This result suggests that lecturer responsiveness was positively associated with student retention, although the strength of the relationship was relatively low compared to other dimensions.

#### **The Relationship between Assurance and Student Retention**

The correlation analysis between assurance and student retention is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. The Relationship between Assurance and Students' Retention**

| <b>Correlations</b> |                     |           |           |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                     |                     | Retention | Assurance |
| Retention           | Pearson Correlation | 1         | .453**    |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     |           | .000      |
|                     | N                   | 212       | 212       |
| Assurance           | Pearson Correlation | .453**    | 1         |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000      |           |
|                     | N                   | 212       | 212       |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 reveals that the significance value was 0.000, indicating a statistically significant relationship between assurance and student retention. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.453, showing a moderate positive relationship approaching a strong correlation. This indicates that higher perceptions of lecturer competence, credibility, and professionalism were associated with stronger student retention intentions.

#### **The Relationship between Empathy and Student Retention**

The correlation analysis between empathy and student retention is presented in Table 5.

**Tabel 5. The Relationship between Empathy and Students' Retention**

| Correlations |                     |         |
|--------------|---------------------|---------|
|              | Retention           | Empathy |
| Retention    | Pearson Correlation | 1       |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .337**  |
|              | N                   | .000    |
| Empathy      | Pearson Correlation | .337**  |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 1       |
|              | N                   | .000    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 demonstrates that the significance value was 0.000, indicating a significant relationship between empathy and student retention. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.337, which falls within the category of moderate positive correlation. This finding indicates that students who perceived lecturers as empathetic tended to demonstrate stronger commitment to remain enrolled at the institution.

### The Relationship between Tangible and Student Retention

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between tangible and student retention. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Tabel 6. The Relationship between Tangible and Students' Retention**

| Correlations |                     |          |
|--------------|---------------------|----------|
|              | Retention           | Tangible |
| Retention    | Pearson Correlation | 1        |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .450**   |
|              | N                   | .000     |
| Tangible     | Pearson Correlation | .450**   |
|              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 1        |
|              | N                   | .000     |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows that the significance value was 0.000, indicating a statistically significant relationship between tangible and student retention. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.450, indicating a moderate positive relationship approaching a strong correlation. This finding suggests that students who positively perceived lecturers' professional appearance and teaching facilities also tended to exhibit stronger retention intentions.

### Discussion

The findings revealed that all dimensions of lecturer service quality were categorized as high, indicating that students generally perceived lecturers positively in terms of professionalism, competence, responsiveness, empathy,

and teaching facilities. Among the five dimensions, tangible obtained the highest mean score, suggesting that students strongly valued lecturers' physical appearance and the adequacy of instructional facilities. This finding is consistent with the SERVQUAL theory, which explains that tangibles are the most visible dimension of service quality and often become the first basis for evaluating service performance (Milki et al., 2026). In higher education, professional appearance and modern teaching facilities may shape students' perceptions of institutional credibility and academic quality. Practically, this finding suggests that higher education institutions should continue investing in teaching facilities and professional standards to maintain positive student perceptions.

The results also demonstrated that reliability had the lowest mean score among all lecturer service quality dimensions, although it still fell within the high category. This finding indicates that consistency in delivering lectures, assessment practices, and academic commitments remains a challenge in higher education institutions. The result supports previous findings that inconsistencies in lecturer performance may create gaps between student expectations and actual academic experiences. Theoretically, this finding strengthens Talar and Gozaly (2025) argument that academic integration is influenced by consistent academic experiences provided by lecturers. From a practical perspective, institutions should prioritize strengthening lecturer reliability through clearer academic policies, monitoring systems, and professional development programs to ensure consistency in teaching and assessment practices.

The correlation analysis revealed that all lecturer service quality dimensions had positive and significant relationships with student retention. Reliability showed a moderate positive relationship with retention, confirming that students who perceived lecturers as consistent and dependable were more likely to remain enrolled. This finding is in line with studies conducted by Eresia-Eke et al. (2020), which identified reliability as an important determinant of student satisfaction and retention. The result also supports the assumption that students require stable and predictable academic experiences to develop trust in the institution. Theoretically, this finding reinforces the relevance of academic integration theory proposed by Kamilah (2026), which emphasizes that students' persistence is influenced by positive academic interactions. Practically, universities should improve teaching consistency, punctuality, and assessment transparency to strengthen student retention.

Responsiveness was found to have the weakest relationship with student retention compared to other dimensions (Plantade-Gipch et al., 2025). Although the relationship was statistically significant, the correlation strength was relatively low. This finding differs slightly from studies emphasizing the importance of lecturer responsiveness in educational services but aligns with

research suggesting that students in digital learning environments rely less on immediate lecturer responses because alternative communication channels are available (Forid et al., 2022). The increasing use of learning management systems, online discussion platforms, and peer collaboration may reduce students' dependence on direct lecturer responsiveness. Theoretically, this finding indicates that responsiveness may no longer be the dominant determinant of retention in modern educational settings. Nevertheless, from a practical perspective, lecturers should still maintain adequate responsiveness to ensure students feel academically supported and respected (Fadere et al., 2024).

Among all dimensions, assurance demonstrated the strongest relationship with student retention. This finding suggests that lecturer competence, credibility, and professionalism are highly influential in shaping students' intentions to continue their studies. The finding is consistent with previous research showing that students who perceive lecturers as knowledgeable and trustworthy are more likely to develop stronger institutional commitment (Eresia-Eke et al., 2020). In private higher education institutions, where students often behave as educational consumers, assurance may serve as an indicator of academic value and institutional quality. Theoretically, this finding confirms the importance of trust-building processes in higher education retention models. Practically, universities should strengthen lecturer competence through pedagogical training, certification programs, and continuous professional development to enhance students' confidence in academic services (Bartolo & Tinmaz, 2025).

The study also revealed that empathy and tangible dimensions significantly influenced student retention. Empathy showed a moderate positive relationship, indicating that students still value lecturers' personal attention and emotional support despite the increasing digitalization of education (Plantade-Gipch et al., 2025). This finding differs from studies arguing that empathy has become less influential in online learning environments, but supports the view that emotional support remains important, especially for first-year students who are still adapting to university life. Meanwhile, the strong relationship between tangible and retention indicates that students associate professional appearance and modern teaching facilities with educational quality and institutional seriousness. This finding extends previous literature by demonstrating that tangible aspects may have a stronger influence in private higher education contexts than previously assumed. Therefore, institutions should balance investments in lecturer competence, interpersonal support, and modern teaching facilities to improve student retention comprehensively (Akbar, 2026).

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that all dimensions of lecturer service quality positively influence student retention, with Assurance (competence) and Tangible (professional appearance and teaching facilities) emerging as the most

influential predictors, while Reliability, despite being critical, remains the weakest dimension in private universities. This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating the relative importance of both technical competence and visible professionalism in shaping student retention, extending SERVQUAL theory into the higher education context and providing empirical evidence from Indonesian private universities. Practically, the study offers guidance for university administrators to prioritize improvements in lecturer reliability, maintain high standards of tangible resources, foster assurance through pedagogical training, and support empathy and responsiveness to enhance overall retention. However, the study is limited to first-year students in a single province, and factors beyond lecturer quality, such as tuition cost, campus facilities, and social support, were not examined. Future research could explore the relationship between lecturer service quality and retention across institutions with different accreditation levels or tuition ranges to assess whether these findings are generalizable across diverse educational contexts.

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