

Academic Culture and Service Excellence as Predictors of Student Trust: A Case Study at Mandalika University of Education

Muhamad Suhardi¹, Zinnurain²

¹ Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Mataram, Indonesia; muhamadsuhardi@undikma.ac.id

² Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Mataram, Indonesia; zinnurain@undikma.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Academic culture and service excellence are widely recognized as key determinants of students' trust, which in turn shapes educational experiences and persistence in higher education. This study investigates their influence on students' trust at the Mandalika University of Education (UNDIKMA) Mataram during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. A descriptive verification design with a survey approach was employed. The sample comprised 100 students from the Faculty of Education and Psychology, purposively selected from the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th semesters. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression, correlation analysis, classical assumption tests, and hypothesis testing with SPSS 21.0. The findings indicate that academic culture and service excellence jointly exert a significant positive effect on students' trust in completing their studies at UNDIKMA. Both variables demonstrate meaningful contributions, confirming their role as predictors of trust. Strengthening academic culture and improving service excellence are critical for fostering students' trust and sustaining their commitment to academic completion. Continuous institutional efforts involving all academic stakeholders are necessary to enhance these dimensions and maintain student trust across academic years.

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Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Suhardi

Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Mataram, Indonesia; muhamadsuhardi@undikma.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary higher education, student trust has emerged as a critical construct influencing learning experiences, academic persistence, and institutional sustainability. Trust reflects students' confidence in the ability of universities to deliver quality education, uphold academic standards, and support their academic success. It also plays a mediating role in shaping student loyalty, which is defined as a sustained commitment to remain enrolled and complete a chosen program of study (Widhi et al., 2023; Permatasari et al., 2022; Sumadi et al., 2021). Prior studies have consistently shown that student loyalty and persistence are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including perceived value, satisfaction, service quality, organizational culture, and commitment (Armawan, 2023; Nurhikmah et al., 2022; Woen & Santoso, 2021). Among these, academic culture and service excellence directly shape students' academic experiences and perceptions of institutional credibility.

Academic culture refers to the system of shared values, norms, and practices that guide behavior within academic communities. It functions as a framework for regulating interactions between lecturers, students, and academic staff, while also fostering intellectual development and ethical conduct (Basri et al., 2023; Dina et al., 2023; Abidin, 2022). A strong academic culture promotes transparency, fairness, and consistency in academic processes, which are essential for building institutional trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hogan & O'Flaherty, 2022). In parallel, service excellence represents the institution's ability to provide high-quality, reliable, and responsive services that meet or exceed student expectations. This includes administrative efficiency, academic support, and interpersonal interactions that contribute to overall student satisfaction (Maryam, 2024; Maulyan et al., 2022; Muna & Muflich, 2022). Although service quality is often associated with satisfaction, its influence on trust is context-dependent and may vary across institutional settings (Singh & Jasial, 2021; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013).

Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a limited number of studies that integrate academic culture, service excellence, and trust within a unified framework, particularly in the context of private universities experiencing rapid institutional transformation. This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation to better understand how these factors interact in shaping student trust and, ultimately, academic persistence.

Within this broader context, Mandalika University of Education (UNDIKMA) provides a relevant case study. As a private higher education institution in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, UNDIKMA has undergone significant transformation, including its transition from the Mataram Institute of Teacher Training and Education and its merger with the University of West Nusa Tenggara. This development has expanded academic offerings and increased the number of study programs, reflecting enhanced institutional capacity and competitiveness. The university has also experienced consistent growth in student enrollment, indicating strong public interest and institutional attractiveness.

However, this growth has not been matched by optimal student completion rates. A considerable proportion of students experience delays in graduating, suggesting challenges in retention and academic persistence. Observations indicate that these challenges are associated with issues such as limited student engagement, unclear academic direction, suboptimal academic services, and weakened trust in study programs. These conditions point to the importance of strengthening both academic culture and service excellence as foundational elements in fostering student trust.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of academic culture and service excellence on students' trust at UNDIKMA. By situating the analysis within both theoretical and institutional contexts, this research seeks to contribute to the development of higher education management strategies that enhance student trust, improve retention, and support successful academic completion.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted at Mandalika University of Education (UNDIKMA) during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, over a period of five months from September 2024 to January 2025. The research subjects were undergraduate students in semesters 1, 3, 5, and 7 from the Faculty of Education and Psychology (FIPP), Mandalika University of Education. The large and diverse population, combined with limitations of time, funding, and research capacity, necessitated the use of sampling. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, in which participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, including active student status, representation from each semester level, and willingness to participate. As a non-probability sampling method, purposive sampling does not provide equal or random selection opportunities for all population members; therefore, potential sampling bias is acknowledged as a limitation and considered in the interpretation of the findings.

The determination of sample size was based on the Machin and Campbell (1987) formula, which is commonly used in correlational research to estimate the minimum sample required to detect a statistically significant relationship between variables. This formula takes into account the level of

significance (α), statistical power ($1-\beta$), and the smallest correlation coefficient (r) expected to be meaningfully detected. The values of $Z\alpha$ and $Z\beta$ were obtained from the standard normal distribution table according to the predetermined significance level and desired power, while the value of r was determined based on theoretical and empirical considerations from previous studies. The calculation yielded a required sample size of 98.779, which was rounded up to 100 students to ensure adequate statistical power.

Data were collected using four techniques: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The questionnaire was developed in the form of a five-point Likert scale and included items measuring variables such as students' engagement in the learning process, perceptions of instructional methods, and academic motivation. Examples of questionnaire items include statements such as "I actively participate in classroom discussions" and "The teaching methods used by lecturers help me understand the course material." Content validity was established through expert judgment by two lecturers with expertise in education and psychology. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to enrich and clarify the quantitative data, while documentation was used to collect supporting data from academic records and institutional documents.

Ethical considerations were addressed by informing all participants about the purpose, procedures, and potential benefits of the study prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with assurances that respondents' identities and responses would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. Institutional permission was obtained from the faculty as a form of organizational approval for conducting the study. Prior to data analysis, key statistical assumptions were examined in a concise and systematic manner, including tests of linearity, independence of observations, and multicollinearity among independent variables, to ensure that the data met the requirements for valid and reliable analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

In order to obtain comprehensive and accurate data in this study, several testing steps were carried out, namely starting from the analysis requirements test, homogeneity test, multicollinearity test, heteroscedasticity test, autocorrelation test to the research hypothesis test. The descriptive percentage analysis results obtained were that the academic culture variable had an average of 81% with the criteria of "good". For the excellent service variable, it had an average of 85% with the criteria of "good". In the initial stage, analysis requirements were carried out in the form of a data normalization test. This is done to find out whether there is a normal distribution or vice versa, both in the dependent variable, independent variable, or both. The results of the normality test in this study showed that the results obtained were 0.614 with a significance level of $0.845 > 0.05$. So this is evidence that the residual data is normally distributed.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

Statistic	Value
N	100
Mean of residuals	0.000
Standard deviation	2.665
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	0.614
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.845

Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, the asymptotic significance value (2-tailed) was 0.845, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This result indicates that the residual data are

normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality required for further parametric statistical analysis has been fulfilled, and the data are suitable for subsequent inferential testing.

Furthermore, in the homogeneity test activity, it is important to clarify that although the analysis was initially stated as using Levene's Test, the results presented in Table 2 actually correspond to a one-sample t-test with a test value of 100, not a test of homogeneity of variance. The results are shown as follows:

Table 2. Homogeneity Test

Variable	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic Culture	23.372	98	0.000
Service Excellence	-89.497	98	0.000

Based on these results, the significance values (Sig. 2-tailed) for both variables are 0.000, which are lower than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the mean scores of both Academic Culture and Service Excellence are significantly different from the test value of 100. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that the sample mean is equal to 100 is rejected. However, from a methodological perspective, it must be emphasized that a one-sample t-test does not test homogeneity of variance. Homogeneity should be assessed using Levene's Test or a similar procedure that specifically evaluates the equality of variances across groups. Thus, it can be concluded that the data presented cannot be used to determine homogeneity, but rather only indicate a significant difference between the sample means and the hypothesized value. For proper homogeneity testing, the appropriate Levene's Test output should be used and reported separately.

The next step taken is to conduct a multicollinearity test. This is done with the aim of determining the strong correlation between the independent variables in the proposed regression model. If a strong correlation is found, then this can mean that there is a multicollinearity constraint that must be overcome. So the same step was taken by the researcher, namely by calculating the data using SPSS 21.00, with the results in table 3 below:

Table 3. Multicollinearity Test Results

Predictor Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Academic Culture	0.621	1.611
Service Excellence	0.731	1.368

The results of the multicollinearity test indicate that the tolerance values for Academic Culture (0.621) and Service Excellence (0.731) are greater than 0.10, while the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are 1.611 and 1.368, respectively, both of which are below the critical threshold of 10. These findings demonstrate that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in the regression model. Therefore, the regression analysis meets the multicollinearity assumption, and the independent variables can be analyzed simultaneously without causing distortion in the estimation of regression coefficients.

Table 4. Glejser Test Results

Predictor Variable	t-value	Sig.
Academic Culture	-1.134	0.260
Service Excellence	1.309	0.194

The results of the Glejser test show that the significance values for Academic Culture (Sig. = 0.260) and Service Excellence (Sig. = 0.194) are greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that none of the independent variables significantly affect the absolute residuals. Therefore, it can be

concluded that the regression model does not exhibit heteroscedasticity and satisfies the assumption of homoscedasticity, allowing the regression analysis to be conducted reliably.

The next step is testing multiple regression analysis. Constant value = -4.552, which is an indicator that the average Trust Level When academic culture and service excellent show a value of zero. Here is in table 5:

Table 5. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
Constant	-4.552	5.089	-	-0.894	0.373
Academic Culture	0.195	0.094	0.170	2.068	0.041
Service Excellence	0.474	0.117	0.314	4.041	0.001

The multiple linear regression coefficient for the academic culture variable is 0.195, which is positive. This indicates that if the academic culture variable increases by 1 unit while service excellence remains constant, student trust will increase by 0.195 units. This finding implies that the better the implementation of academic culture, the higher the level of student trust. Furthermore, the t-value obtained is 2.068 with a significance value of 0.041 (< 0.05), indicating that academic culture has a statistically significant effect on student trust. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant partial effect of academic culture on the level of student trust at Mandalika University of Education, meaning the hypothesis is accepted.

The multiple linear regression coefficient for the service excellence variable is 0.474, which is also positive. This means that if the service excellence variable increases by 1 unit while academic culture remains constant, student trust will increase by 0.474 units. This result shows that improving service excellence will significantly enhance student trust. Additionally, the t-value of 4.041 with a significance value of 0.001 (< 0.05) indicates that service excellence has a statistically significant effect on student trust. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant partial effect of service excellence on the level of student trust at Mandalika University of Education, and the hypothesis is accepted.

Furthermore, the correlation coefficients obtained from the data analysis are interpreted based on the guidelines proposed by Cohen and Field. According to Jacob Cohen (1988), the strength of correlation can be classified into small ($r \approx 0.10$), medium ($r \approx 0.30$), and large ($r \geq 0.50$) effect sizes. In addition, Andy Field (2013) emphasizes that correlation coefficients should be interpreted contextually, considering both statistical significance and practical relevance within the research setting. Therefore, the interpretation of the correlation results in this study refers to these standards to ensure a more robust and internationally recognized analytical framework. This needs to be done as an effort to determine the degree of closeness between Academic Culture and Excellent Service with Student Trust at Mandalika University of Education. The guideline table is as follows:

Table 6. Correlation Coefficient Interpretation Guidelines

Coefficient Interval	Correlation Level
0,80 – 1,000	Very Strong
0,60 – 0,799	Strong
0,40 – 0,599	Quite Strong
0,20 – 0,399	Low
0,00 – 0,199	Very Low

The next step is multiple linear regressions testing, where this test is carried out with the aim of determining how much influence the variables X1 and X2 have on Y. In this study, what will be tested is how much influence Academic Culture and Service Excellent have on Student Trust at Mandalika Education University. The results of the multiple linear regression calculation are shown in table 6 which shows that the multiple correlation coefficient value between Academic Culture and Service

Excellent on Student Trust at Mandalika Education University is 0.555. The determination coefficient value of the regression equation is 0.308 with an adjusted determination coefficient value of 0.279. Because more than one variable is used in the regression equation, the appropriate determination coefficient to use in explaining this equation is the adjusted determination coefficient. Based on table 6, the adjusted determination coefficient value is 0.279, this means that variable X1 (Academic Culture) and variable X2 (Service Excellent) contribute to Student Trust (Y) by 27.9%. While the rest is $100\% - 27.9\% = 72.1\%$, influenced by other factors.

The next step is to calculate the results of the simultaneous F test analysis can be seen in the following table:

Table 7. Results of F test analysis (Simultaneous)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1062.402	4	265.600	35.890	0.000
Residual	703.038	95	7.400	–	–
Total	1765.440	99	–	–	–

Based on the results of the simultaneous F test calculation using SPSS 21.00, it can be seen that $F = 35.890$ with a significance level value of $0.000 < 0.05$, this means that H1 is accepted. So H1 which states that there is a significant and simultaneous influence of academic culture and service excellence on the level of student trust at Mandalika University of Education, is declared accepted.

Furthermore, the results of the t-test analysis (partially) can be seen in the following table 8:

Tabel 8. Results of t-Test Analysis (Partially)

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
Constant	-4.552	5.089	–	-0.894	0.373
Academic Culture	0.195	0.094	0.170	2.068	0.041
Service Excellence	0.517	0.172	0.403	2.996	0.004

Based on the results of the partial t-test analysis, the academic culture variable shows a t-value of 2.068 with a significance value of 0.041 (< 0.05). These results indicate that academic culture has a positive and significant effect on student trust. Therefore, the hypothesis (H2) is accepted, meaning that academic culture partially influences the level of student trust. Meanwhile, the service excellence variable shows a t-value of 2.996 with a significance value of 0.004 (< 0.05). These results indicate that service excellence has a positive and significant effect on student trust. Thus, the hypothesis (H3) is accepted, meaning that service excellence partially influences the level of student trust.

The next step is to calculate the simultaneous determination coefficient (R^2) as in the following table:

Table 9. Simultaneous Determination Coefficient

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.776	0.602	0.585	2.720

Based on Table 9, the Adjusted R^2 value is 0.585 (58.5%). This indicates that the variables of academic culture and service excellence simultaneously contribute 58.5% to the variation in student trust. In other words, 58.5% of the changes in student trust can be explained by these two independent variables included in the model. Meanwhile, the remaining 41.5% is influenced by other variables outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, the R value of 0.776 indicates a strong relationship between the independent variables (academic culture and service excellence) and the dependent

variable (student trust). The simultaneous effect reflects the combined contribution of both variables in explaining student trust, which cannot simply be interpreted as the sum of their partial effects, but rather as an integrated influence within the regression model.

Table 10. Results of Partial Determination Coefficient Test (r^2)

Predictor Variable	Zero-order r	Partial r	Part r	r^2 (Partial Contribution)
Academic Culture	0.506	0.208	0.134	0.018
Service Excellence	0.304	-0.053	-0.034	0.001

Based on the analysis conducted, the partial value of academic culture is 0.208, so the magnitude of the influence of the academic culture variable on the level of trust is $0.208 \times 100\% = 4.32\%$. The results of the addition with the help of the SPSS 21.00 program show that the t-value is 2.068 with a significance of $0.041 < 0.05$. It can be concluded that hypothesis 2 (H2) which states that there is a positive and significant influence between academic culture and the level of student trust is accepted. Acceptance of H2 indicates that the higher the academic culture that grows on campus, the more student trust will increase.

The partial value of the excellent service variable is 0.053, so the magnitude of the influence of the excellent service variable on the level of trust is $-0.053 \times 100\% = -0.28\%$, or the magnitude of the influence of excellent service has very little effect on the level of student trust. The calculation results using the SPSS 21.00 program show that the t-value is -0.521 with a significance of $0.603 > 0.05$. This means that hypothesis 3 (H3), which states that there is a positive and significant influence between excellent service and the level of student trust, is rejected. Rejection of the H3 hypothesis means that the higher the level of excellent service, the lower the level of student trust.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Positive Direct Influence of Academic Culture on Trust

The finding that academic culture has a positive and direct influence on trust can be explained not merely as a confirmation of existing theory, but as a reflection of the institutional dynamics at Mandalika University of Education (UNDIKMA). In a higher education context, particularly in teacher education institutions, academic culture manifests through shared norms such as academic integrity, collegial interaction, openness in communication, and consistency between institutional values and academic practices. These elements play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of institutional reliability and moral credibility. When students experience a learning environment that consistently upholds fairness, transparency, and intellectual respect, trust emerges as a rational response to reduced uncertainty in academic interactions.

This finding aligns with Miedema's (2022) argument that trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk in institutional relationships. However, the present study extends this perspective by showing that, within UNDIKMA, trust is not formed primarily through transactional exchanges but through prolonged exposure to academic norms embedded in teaching, assessment, and lecturer-student interactions. Hogan and O'Flaherty (2022) emphasize that organizational culture functions as a behavioral guide for members in solving problems, which in an academic setting translates into predictable and ethical institutional conduct. Empirical studies in international higher education contexts similarly report that a strong academic culture enhances institutional trust by fostering psychological safety and value congruence (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Thus, the influence of academic culture on trust at UNDIKMA is best understood as a socially constructed process rooted in shared academic values rather than as an abstract cultural ideal.

3.2.2 Service Excellence and Its Limited Influence on Trust

Contrary to theoretical expectations, service excellence did not demonstrate a strong or consistent influence on trust in this study. This finding warrants critical reflection, particularly within the context of a public higher education institution such as UNDIKMA. One plausible explanation lies in students' expectations of academic institutions, where administrative and service-related interactions are often perceived as supplementary rather than central to their academic experience. Unlike commercial service settings, students may prioritize academic credibility, lecturer competence, and learning climate over procedural service efficiency when forming trust judgments.

From a measurement perspective, it is also possible that the indicators of service excellence used in this study were more aligned with operational efficiency (e.g., responsiveness, administrative procedures) than with relational or affective dimensions of service that are more strongly associated with trust formation. This aligns with findings from higher education research indicating that service quality affects satisfaction more directly than trust, particularly when institutional legitimacy is already assumed (Sing & Jasial, 2021; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Additionally, Novitasari (2022) notes that service quality operates in a dynamic interaction with user expectations; when services meet only baseline expectations, their impact on trust may become statistically insignificant.

Furthermore, institutional factors such as bureaucratic rigidity, standardized procedures, and limited personalization in academic services may dilute the perceived relevance of service excellence in shaping trust. In this sense, trust at UNDIKMA appears to be more structurally anchored in academic norms than in service encounters. This finding challenges the assumption proposed by Daryanto and Setyobudi (2014) that service quality universally serves as a primary antecedent of trust, suggesting instead that its influence is context-dependent and mediated by institutional character.

3.2.3 Positioning the Findings in a Global Context

International empirical studies support the differentiated roles of culture and service quality in trust formation. For example, studies in European and Asian universities have shown that academic ethos and governance transparency exert a stronger influence on institutional trust than administrative service quality (Rienties et al., 2015; Thomlison & Jackson, 2021). These findings reinforce the conclusion that in academic institutions, trust is less transactional and more normative in nature. Therefore, the results of this study contribute to the global discourse by highlighting that trust in higher education, particularly in teacher-training universities, is more deeply rooted in academic culture than in service excellence.

In sum, the findings suggest that strengthening trust at UNDIKMA requires prioritizing the cultivation of a coherent and value-driven academic culture, while improvements in service excellence should be strategically aligned with students' academic expectations. This nuanced understanding advances the literature by demonstrating that trust formation in higher education is context-sensitive and cannot be fully explained through generic service-quality models alone.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that academic culture and service excellence jointly influence students' trust at Mandalika University of Education (UNDIKMA), although their effects differ in strength. Academic culture emerges as the more decisive factor in shaping student trust, as trust is primarily formed through consistency between institutional values and academic practices, such as fair assessment, constructive academic interaction, and a strong sense of institutional identity. In contrast, service excellence does not show a significant direct effect on trust, indicating that administrative and procedural services alone are insufficient to foster trust without being supported by a strong and value-driven academic culture. These results highlight that trust formation in higher education is a complex process influenced not only by organizational practices but also by deeper normative and relational factors.

Based on these conclusions, university leadership should prioritize strengthening academic culture by promoting academic mentorship, transparent governance, and the internalization of institutional values across the academic community. Service improvement efforts remain important but should be aligned with academic objectives and student expectations so that they effectively support the university's core educational mission. Future research is encouraged to explore trust formation in broader and comparative institutional contexts, apply longitudinal designs to capture changes over time, and include mediating variables such as student engagement or academic satisfaction to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trust in higher education.

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