Perceived quality, perceived value, customer expectations affecting students' satisfaction toward employment guidance service: A case of Shandong F Affairs Vocational University

ABSTRACT

With the expansion of higher education in China, graduate employment competition has intensified, making employability a key indicator of vocational university quality. Career guidance services play an important role in enhancing students' career development and employment outcomes, and evaluating these services from the perspective of student satisfaction is therefore essential.

Based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model, this study examines the effects of perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations on student satisfaction. Questionnaire data were collected from 400 graduating students of the Class of 2025 at Shandong Foreign Affairs Vocational University and analyzed using SPSS.

The results show that overall student satisfaction with career guidance services is relatively high. Perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations all have significant positive effects on satisfaction, with perceived quality exerting the strongest influence. These findings confirm the applicability of the ACSI model in vocational higher education and provide practical implications for improving career guidance services and graduate employability.

Keywords: Career Guidance Services; Student Satisfaction; Perceived Quality; Perceived Value; Customer Expectations; ACSI Model; Vocational Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

University student employment remains a significant challenge in higher education, closely linked to social stability and economic development. With the expansion of higher education enrollment, employment pressure on graduates has intensified, and structural mismatches in the labor market have become more evident. Huang Lixia and Mo Guifang (2024) argue that economic fluctuations and industrial restructuring have reduced overall job demand, while enterprises continue to seek high-level and specialized talents, resulting in a clear supply — demand mismatch. Career guidance services are therefore essential. However, Wang Yazeng (2022) found that many college graduates show passive employment attitudes and low satisfaction with university career guidance, highlighting the need to improve service quality from a student satisfaction perspective.

Research objectives

This study aims to investigate effects of perceived quality, perceived value and student expectation on student satisfactions toward college career guidance content, employment services provided by university, and college employment information services

Literature review

Customer Satisfaction Theory

Customer satisfaction theory originated in marketing and has been widely applied to service evaluation, including higher education. Scholars define satisfaction either as an emotional response to service experiences (Westbrook et al., 1983) or as a cognitive evaluation based on comparisons between

expected and perceived performance (Oliver, 1995). In educational contexts, this theory helps assess students' evaluations of service quality and effectiveness.

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model proposed by Fornell et al. (1996) explains satisfaction formation through customer expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, and satisfaction. Compared with other models, ACSI emphasizes perceived quality and perceived value as key antecedents of satisfaction, making it suitable for evaluating college career guidance services (Wu, 2020). Due to differences between education and commercial consumption, this study adopts an adapted ACSI framework, excluding customer complaints and loyalty variables.

Perceived quality reflects students' evaluations of service professionalism and effectiveness (Oliver, 1980; Zeithaml, 1988), while perceived value refers to the balance between benefits gained and time or effort invested (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997). Customer expectations provide the reference standard for satisfaction judgments (Oliver, 1980). These variables jointly form the theoretical basis for analyzing student satisfaction with university career guidance services.

Summary of Related Research

As an important indicator of higher education quality, satisfaction with college employment guidance services has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Existing studies mainly focus on satisfaction measurement and influencing factors, particularly under the "online + offline" service model widely adopted by Chinese universities since 2020. Research based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model shows that perceived quality and perceived value are the core determinants of student satisfaction.

Zhang Qingxiao and Zhang Zhihua (2018) found that perceived service quality has a significant positive effect on both perceived value and satisfaction, suggesting that employment

guidance should shift from short-term job assistance to full-cycle career education beginning at university entry. Du Xiaobin et al. (2021) further confirmed through path analysis that perceived quality and perceived value directly enhance student satisfaction. Using IPA analysis, Chen Ju (2024) demonstrated that accurately identifying student needs across guidance courses, labor market development, policy consultation, and employment assistance is crucial for improving service effectiveness. In addition, Liao Shijia (2022) and Zheng Linhong and Liu Qifeng (2022) highlighted the importance of diversified guidance methods, professional teaching staff, and sound service guarantee systems.

Overall, existing research indicates that improving service quality, personalization, and systemic support is essential for enhancing students' satisfaction with college employment guidance services.

Research Framework
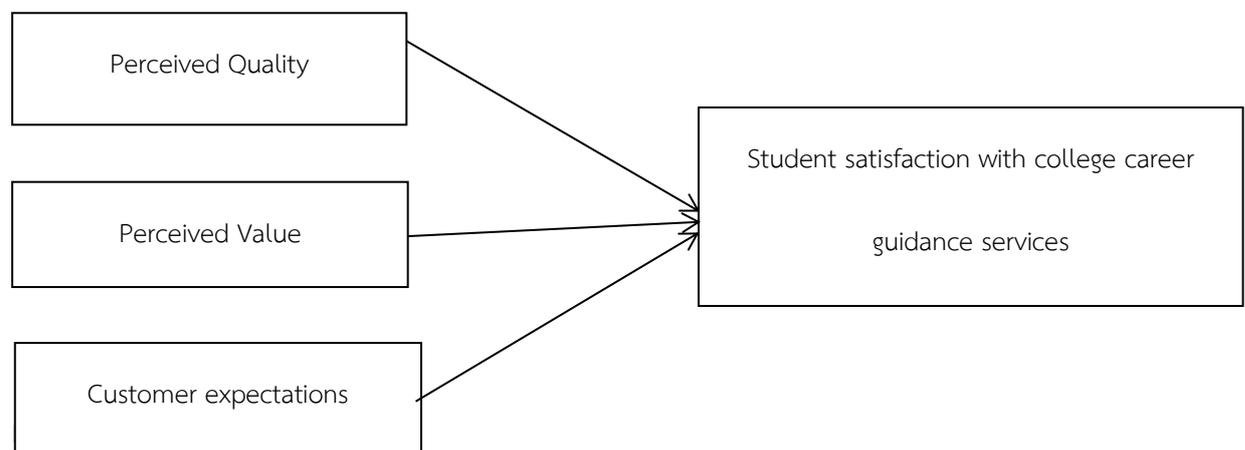
Research Hypothesis

Based on the ACSI model, this study proposes three hypotheses: perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations each have a significant positive impact on college students' satisfaction with university employment guidance services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population comprised all 9,113 graduates of Shandong Foreign Affairs Vocational University in 2025. Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error, a sample size of about 400 was deemed adequate. Convenience sampling was employed, supplemented by stratified sampling based on the proportion of graduates in each secondary college to enhance representativeness.

Research Tools, Data Collection, and Analysis

This study employed an online questionnaire distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform. The instrument was developed based on relevant literature and revised with expert feedback, and its content validity was confirmed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with all items exceeding 0.50. The questionnaire included four sections: demographic information, career guidance services, students' perceptions (perceived quality, perceived value, and expectations), and overall satisfaction, measured on a five-point Likert scale. A pilot test with 30 respondents showed good reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.812–0.942). Using stratified sampling, 400 valid responses were collected from 2025 graduates of Shandong Foreign Affairs Vocational University. Data were analyzed with SPSS using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, correlation, and regression, with no multicollinearity or autocorrelation detected.

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

A total of 400 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Most respondents were female (56.25%), aged 21–25 (89.25%), and from urban areas (71.25%). Science and engineering majors were the largest group. Most students perceived job hunting as difficult, with employment status mainly "signed" or "no clear direction."

Regression analysis

Table 1. Regression analysis (n=400)

	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	0.973	0.125		7.766	0.000
Perceived quality	0.222	0.032	0.285	6.954	0.000
Perceived value	0.214	0.032	0.275	6.666	0.000
Customer expectations	0.270	0.032	0.343	8.529	0.000

$R^2 = 0.484$, Adj-R = 0.480, F = F(3,400)=123.759,p=0.000

Regression results indicate that perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations significantly and positively affect student satisfaction with career guidance services. The model explains 48% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = 0.480), shows no multicollinearity or autocorrelation, and passes the F-test, confirming strong overall model fit.

Table 2 Results of the hypothesis test

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Content	Result
H1	There is a significantly positive-directional influence relationship between Perceived quality and Student satisfaction with college career guidance services	Accepted
H2	There is a significantly positive-directional influence relationship between Perceived value and Student satisfaction with college	Accepted

	career guidance services	
H3	There is a significantly positive-directional influence relationship between Customer expectations and Student satisfaction with college career guidance services	Accepted

The empirical results support all proposed hypotheses. Perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations each have a significant positive influence on student satisfaction with college career guidance services, confirming the effectiveness of the proposed research model.

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter analyzes questionnaire data using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Overall, students report medium-to-high satisfaction with career guidance services, indicating general recognition but room for improvement. Participation is highest in practical services such as internships and employment lectures, while demand for personalized guidance remains strong.

Regression results show that perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectations have significant positive effects on student satisfaction, explaining 48.0% of the variance. All hypotheses are supported, validating the applicability of the ACSI model in vocational higher education. However, limited service diversity and personalization remain key issues. Future studies should expand samples and methods, while universities should enhance service innovation and precision to improve guidance effectiveness.

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