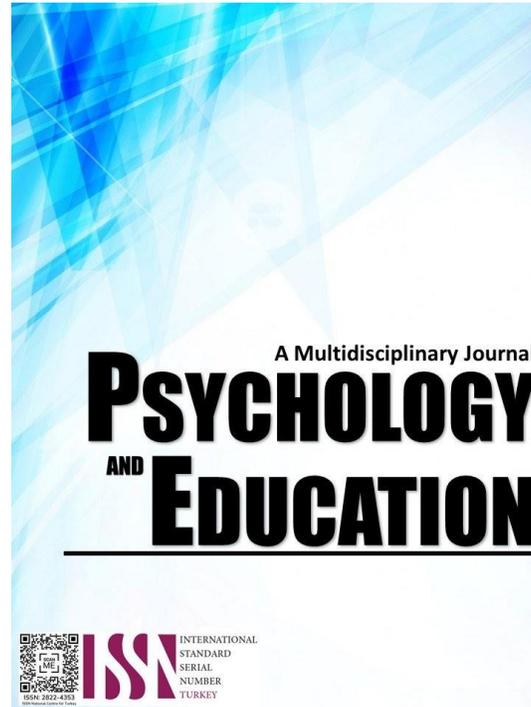


**QUALITY SERVICE, ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES, INSTITUTIONAL FIT,  
AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS: IMPLICATIONS TO COLLEGE  
STUDENTS RETENTION RATE**



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## Quality Service, Academic Support Services, Institutional Fit, and Financial Considerations: Implications to College Students Retention Rate

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### Abstract

The research explored the influence of quality service, academic support, institutional fit, and financial factors on the retention rates of third and fourth-year students in paramedical and non-paramedical programs at Liceo de Cagayan University. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected through a researcher-developed instrument administered to 334 participants from 12 colleges within the university. The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was employed to analyze the relationships among the variables. Results indicated that students generally value the quality of services provided, particularly appreciating the expertise of academic advisors; however, they voiced concerns regarding trust and consistency in service delivery. While campus engagement and financial aid services received positive feedback, there were significant gaps in students' understanding of available options and overall institutional support, highlighting areas for improvement to boost retention and satisfaction. The correlation analysis confirmed a significant relationship between retention rates and the factors studied. Consequently, it is recommended that college administrators enhance communication and standardize services, expand academic support and flexible learning options for working students, promote active student engagement, and encourage future research focused on interventions that improve student satisfaction and retention, fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

**Keywords:** *quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, retention rate*

### Introduction

Education is significant for a country's economic growth because it helps people become more skilled and productive in their work. In the current economic and social environment, higher education institutions are under a lot of pressure to keep students and improve completion rates due to a decline in initial enrollment. Student retention is a big issue globally, and better completion rates positively impact a school's financial and academic standing. However, it's challenging to increase retention rates, especially as students look for unique and memorable educational experiences and consider their education as a consumer choice for future professional success.

Retention rate is the percentage of students who return to the same college after their first year. According to Bishop (2019), to become successful college graduates, students need to have access to colleges, as obtaining a college degree is important. Thus, the college retention rate is a significant aspect of a college's success in providing a positive learning environment and helping students succeed academically (Eresia-Eke et al., 2020).

In American higher education, retention is a significant focus, whether due to the increasing expenses in private institutions or the decreasing funding in public ones (Cramer, 2023). It's widely recognized that maintaining both the quality and quantity of enrolled students is crucial for the success of these institutions. However, despite extensive research and efforts, the consistent statistic remains that about 50% of first-time first-year students do not graduate (Myers & Myers, 2017).

In the Philippines, as per data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has reported significant changes in college dropout rates in the Philippines before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the academic year 2019-2020, the attrition rate was recorded at 17.56%. This figure represents the percentage of students who either dropped out or temporarily left college during that academic year. For the academic year 2023-2024, CHED projects the attrition rate to be 35.15%, a notable increase from the pre-pandemic figures. This rate reflects a decrease from the previous year's 40.98% but still indicates a significant impact on student retention due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, particularly financial difficulties faced by families.

These statistics highlight the challenges faced by students in the Philippines, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, where financial constraints and other factors have contributed to increased dropout rates. The situation underscores the need for further research and intervention to improve student retention in higher education.

Universities are offering outstanding student services to aid in achieving educational goals. As noted by Knight et al. (2016), freshmen students face a high risk of dropping out if these services are lacking. Tinto (1993) also emphasizes that a deficiency in support services leads to first-year students not returning to college. To address these concerns, it is crucial to meet the social needs of students by providing modern, clean-living facilities on campus, vibrant cafeterias offering their preferred food, timely delivery of financial aid, peer tutoring/mentoring programs, conflict-free class registration, and safe, well-maintained residential halls.

The service quality in higher education directly influences student satisfaction and retention rates, emphasizing the importance of consistently delivering the best services that align with students' needs (Cahyono et al., 2020). Quality service encompasses creating a conducive learning environment, ensuring campus safety, offering diverse educational and extracurricular activities, and providing a range of support services. This holistic approach, including access to technology, library resources, and counseling/advising,

contributes to student success in academic pursuits.

Moreover, providing quality service in higher education, as highlighted by Nsiah and Mensah (2014), is crucial for retaining students and creating loyalty. Cahyono et al. (2020) emphasize that excellent service not only leads to student satisfaction but also encourages them to recommend the institution to others. Student satisfaction, directly linked to service quality, involves timely responses, helpful staff, and a diverse range of services. This positive experience contributes to a favorable view of the institution, fosters student engagement, and enhances academic performance, as underscored by Weerasinghe and Fernando (2017).

While previous studies have individually analyzed each component—quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations—their combined impact on student retention has not been comprehensively studied.

This study aimed to examine these interconnected factors and their implications for college students' retention rates, filling a crucial gap in our understanding of how they interact to influence student persistence. This can help the institution to better understand the needs of their students and improve their services and resources to increase retention rates. By understanding the relationship between these variables, colleges or institutions can better understand what services they need to provide to keep students enrolled and satisfied. This information can then be used to improve retention rates and ensure that students are receiving the best possible education.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study was quantitative research. In particular, it was descriptive-correlational research. This design choice aided in the interpretation of the relationship between variables, as discussed by Gall et al. (1993), as cited in Yalley (2017). This design was relevant in the study because it enabled an exploration of the levels and relationships among quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations, providing insights into their collective impact on college student retention rates.

### Respondents

Liceo de Cagayan University is a private non-sectarian basic and higher education institution situated in Cagayan de Oro, which stands as a beacon of educational excellence in the Philippines. Recognized for its dedication to delivering high-quality education, this institution boasts a diverse array of academic programs designed to cater to various fields of study. With a rich history and a reputation for academic excellence, Liceo de Cagayan University serves as ideal research setting to delve into the factors influencing student retention. Its commitment to providing a conducive learning environment, strong academic support services, and attention to institutional fit and financial considerations make it a compelling case study for examining strategies aimed at retaining students in higher education. Through this study, the researcher aimed to shed light on the effective practices and policies implemented by Liceo de Cagayan University, contributing valuable insights to the broader conversation on student retention in academic institutions.

The respondents of the study were the third-year and fourth-year students enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 (with a total of 1,528 and 1,030 students enrolled respectively or a total of 2558 students based on the automated official record). From this population of students, a sample size of 334 was determined using Slovin's formula.

### Instrument

The study employed a five-part self-made descriptive questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert Scale to gather data. The researcher collected responses through a customized survey distributed via Google Form and in-person, allowing participants who consented to complete the questionnaire (Budur et al., 2021). This method facilitated clear and direct results, assessing aspects related to quality service, academic support, institutional fit, financial considerations, and retention rates, using a total of 134 items rated from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," corresponding to scores of 5 to 1. The questionnaire items were assessed using a 5-point rating scale.

According to Middleton (2020), reliability and validity are two important ideas that are especially relevant in the context of quantitative studies, where accurate measurement is necessary. These notions are taken into account when assessing the quality of research.

A pilot test of the research instrument was conducted with 30 students who were not part of the main study. Only items that fall within the acceptable range of 0.7 to 0.99 was kept after each item's reliability coefficient on the instruments was evaluated individually. Items will be removed from the item total correlation if their coefficients are less than 0.30. The final collection of items—those found to be trustworthy and legitimate throughout this procedure—was included in the survey itself.

### Procedure

The researcher personally supervised the distribution of research instruments to ensure the proper execution of the study. A formal request for permission to use these instruments on third- and fourth-year students across all undergraduate programs was submitted in a letter addressed to the dean of Liceo de Cagayan University's School of Business, Management, and Accountancy. Alongside the research tools, respondents received a consent letter and an informed consent form, affirming their voluntary participation. Following approval, the research instruments, along with instructions, was dispatched, and later, collected after a few weeks.

Upon collection, the researcher promptly and thoroughly reviewed the collected data. Subsequently, a comprehensive analysis and

interpretation of the data was conducted using appropriate statistical methods. This process entails a scrutiny of the information to identify patterns, trends, and relationships, allowing the extraction of meaningful insights and the formulation of conclusions based on the acquired data.

### **Data Analysis**

The study gathered data through a Google Form and in-person survey and analyzed it using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The research used the mean and standard deviation to assess research problems 1 to 5.

To investigate the significant relationship between college retention rates and factors such as quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations, the researcher utilized the Spearman correlation. This method was chosen because it does not require the variables to adhere to a specific distribution or have equal variances, which was important since the data did not conform to a normal distribution. Consequently, Spearman's correlation is more adaptable and suitable in situations where the assumptions underlying other correlation methods, like Pearson's correlation, may be violated.

### **Results and Discussion**

Following proper procedure, the research was able to progress. Here are the main findings of the study:

The first statement of the problem investigated the level of quality service perceived by the participants in terms of assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility. It claimed that students perceive their college's quality service as good, with a mean score of  $M=4.15$ . They feel confident in academic advisors and the reliability of information about academic programs, but feel hesitant to seek help or advice from faculty and staff. The college communicates its services clearly and effectively, but there is uncertainty among students regarding their trust in advisors. To elevate service quality, the university must address inconsistencies across departments, actively seek feedback, and commit to continuous improvement.

Students perceive the college's response to student feedback as good, but there is room for improvement due to inconsistencies in staff and department delivery, communication gaps, and resource limitations. The reliability of the university is high, with a mean score of 4.10 for reliable systems for registering for classes and accessing resources. However, a lower mean score of 3.92 indicates inconsistencies in service delivery, which could undermine student trust and satisfaction. Students perceive the university's responsiveness as good, with a mean score of  $M=3.95$ , falling under the "Good Service" interpretation. However, there is a gap preventing them from perceiving the college's quality service as "Very Good." Overall, students generally agree on the quality of services provided by their college, with "Assurance" receiving the highest mean score.

The second statement of the problem looked into the level of students perceived academic services in terms of academic counseling/advising, resource materials and libraries, and technology support. The study found that students generally appreciate academic advisors' knowledge and assistance in developing personalized academic plans. However, there are areas for improvement in how support is perceived. Students feel confident in using technology for academic assignments and coursework, but there is a potential gap in support. Library services are also a priority, with students valuing comfortable study areas, knowledgeable staff, and flexible hours. However, there is a need for libraries to adapt their hours and strategies to retain students and ensure the availability of the latest academic materials. Overall, students' academic support services are generally positive, however there is a need for institutional improvement to achieve a very good level.

The third statement of the problem measured the level of students' institutional fit in terms campus engagement and sense of belonging. The study shows that students generally feel satisfied with their college's campus engagement opportunities, leading to higher retention rates and improved academic outcomes. Engaged students are more connected to their institution and peers, resulting in better academic performance and social integration. However, barriers or lack of awareness may hinder participation in campus activities. Students' institutional fit in terms of campus engagement is strong, suggesting that there is room for improvement to achieve a very strong fit. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering diversity, building meaningful relationships, and providing support services. Active engagement with faculty, peers, and academic content leads to academic success and persistence.

The fourth statement of the problem investigated the level of students' financial considerations in terms of financial aid and affordability. The findings revealed that students generally have a positive perception of the university's financial aid services, indicating that they are transparent and effective in providing financial aid options. This satisfaction contributes to the university's reputation and attracts future students. However, there are still gaps in understanding available options and the financial aid office's responsiveness to inquiries. Affordability concerns are also highly considered. Addressing financial literacy gaps and providing targeted support is crucial for improving students' financial health and academic performance, suggesting room for improvement in order to be in a very highly considered level.

The fifth statement of the problem investigated the level of college students' retention rate. The data revealed that college students' retention rates are influenced by factors such as belief in the value of education, relationships with faculty and staff, and perceived quality of education. Students who believe their education will prepare them for future success are more likely to remain enrolled. However, the lowest scores indicate doubts about their university selection and the need for early intervention strategies. The overall

retention rate is 3.97, indicating a strong foundation for student satisfaction. To improve retention, the university may prioritize improving courses, fostering relationships, and addressing concerns about choice satisfaction. By addressing these areas, the university may create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students, suggesting room for improvement in achieving a very good retention rate.

The last statement of the problem investigated the possibility of a correlation between quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations. The study found a strong positive relationship between college students' retention rate and its four independent variables: quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations. Institutional fit, which aligns with students' values and expectations, has the strongest relationship with retention. Academic support services, which include tutoring, advising, and mentoring, also play a crucial role in student satisfaction and retention. Quality service, which includes administrative support, teaching quality, and campus facilities, has the third strongest relationship. Financial considerations, such as tuition costs and financial aid, have the weakest relationship but still have a strong impact on retention rates. Therefore, these variables play a critical role in enhancing student satisfaction and retention.

## Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, the following conclusions are presented:

The findings revealed that overall, students perceive the college's services positively, with high satisfaction in areas such as academic advising, technology support, and financial aid transparency. However, the study also identifies several areas that require institutional improvement to achieve a very good service level.

One key area for improvement is consistency in service delivery across departments. While students generally feel confident in advisors and the reliability of information, there are inconsistencies in staff responsiveness and resource limitations that undermine trust and satisfaction. To address this, the university may focus on improving communication, actively seeking feedback, and committing to continuous improvement.

Another area that needs attention is academic support services. While students value the knowledge and assistance of academic advisors, there are gaps in support for library resources and technology. The university may adapt its strategies to ensure the availability of the latest academic materials and provide comprehensive technology support to students.

Institutional fit, particularly campus engagement, is a strength of the university, contributing to higher retention rates and improved academic outcomes. However, barriers or lack of awareness may hinder participation in campus activities. The university may focus on fostering diversity, building meaningful relationships, and providing support services to enhance students' sense of belonging.

Financial considerations, such as financial aid and affordability, are crucial factors influencing student satisfaction and retention. While students generally have a positive perception of the university's financial aid services, there are gaps in understanding available options and the responsiveness of the financial aid office. The university may address financial literacy gaps and provide targeted support to improve students' financial health and academic performance.

The retention rates of college students indicate that several important factors influence their decision to remain enrolled, including their belief in the value of education, positive relationships with faculty and staff, and perceptions of educational quality. However, many students express uncertainty about their choice of university, which is a significant concern that must be addressed. While the university has a decent retention rate of 3.97, reflecting overall student satisfaction, there is still potential for improvement. By focusing on enhancing course quality, fostering stronger connections between students and faculty, and alleviating students' doubts regarding their university selection, the institution can cultivate a more supportive environment.

Finally, the study found a strong positive relationship between retention rates and the four independent variables: quality service, academic support services, institutional fit, and financial considerations. By prioritizing improvements in these areas, the university may create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students, ultimately enhancing student satisfaction and retention.

Overall, while the university has many strengths but there is room for improvement in achieving a very good level of service. By addressing inconsistencies in service delivery, enhancing academic support services, fostering institutional fit, and improving financial considerations, the university may provide a transformative educational experience for its students.

The following recommendations are suggested considering the abovementioned findings and conclusions. To enhance the educational experience and outcomes for students at Liceo de Cagayan University, several recommendations can be made for school administrators, academic support staff, faculty members, students, financial aid office, higher education institutions and future researchers.

Higher education institutions may develop holistic support frameworks by integrating academic advising with mental health services and financial counseling into a single point of access for students. Institutions may conduct regular diversity training for faculty and staff to promote inclusivity and cultural competence across campus. Utilizing data analytics tools to monitor student engagement and retention metrics will enable institutions to identify trends and make data-driven decisions for enhancing support services.

School Administrators may take specific actions to enhance student support and satisfaction. First, they may develop a comprehensive

communication plan that includes regular newsletters, social media updates, and informational sessions to keep students informed about available resources. Second, they may implement a structured feedback system, such as surveys or focus groups, to gather student input on service quality and areas for improvement. Additionally, administrators may prioritize resource allocation by conducting a needs assessment to identify gaps in academic support services and invest in staff training programs that focus on customer service and effective communication skills.

Faculty members may establish formal mentorship programs that pair students with faculty mentors based on academic interests or career goals. Collaborative initiatives can involve coordinating with academic support staff to integrate information about available resources into course syllabi and discussions. Additionally, faculty may incorporate active learning strategies into their teaching methods, such as group projects or interactive discussions, to foster a more engaging classroom environment. Hosting informal office hours or "meet-and-greet" events can also encourage students to connect with faculty outside of the classroom.

Academic support staff may establish a centralized academic support center that consolidates tutoring, advising, and technology support into one accessible location. Proactive outreach initiatives may include scheduling regular check-ins with students who are struggling academically or have low engagement levels. Furthermore, staff members may participate in ongoing professional development workshops that focus on best practices in academic advising and tutoring techniques. Creating a resource library with instructional materials and guides might also help staff provide consistent and high-quality support.

Students may actively seek out available academic support services by attending workshops or tutoring sessions offered by the institution. Participating in feedback opportunities—such as surveys or town hall meetings—will allow them to voice their concerns and suggestions regarding service quality. Forming or joining peer study groups can create a supportive network for collaborative learning. Additionally, students may engage in campus activities by attending events or joining clubs that align with their interests, thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

Financial aid offices may organize regular workshops that explain financial aid options, application processes, and scholarship opportunities for students and their families. Establishing a dedicated hotline or chat service for financial aid inquiries will ensure timely responses to student questions. Additionally, creating easy-to-understand informational materials—such as brochures or online guides—may help explain financial aid processes. Implementing financial literacy programs that cover budgeting, student loans, and managing expenses will empower students to make informed financial decisions.

Future researchers may focus on longitudinal studies that track student perceptions over multiple semesters or years to assess the impact of institutional changes on satisfaction and retention rates. Conducting comparative research between different institutions will help identify effective practices that could be shared across campuses. Additionally, researchers may focus on gathering qualitative data through interviews or focus groups with diverse student populations to understand their unique challenges better and tailor recommendations accordingly.

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