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Quality of Service of the Bandar Deli Passenger Terminal, Belawan Port at PT PELINDO I

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Abstract. The increasing demand for quality public services in the transportation sector requires port operators to improve service delivery to ensure passenger satisfaction and competitiveness. This study examines the service quality of the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal managed by PT Pelindo I, which plays a strategic role as a major passenger gateway in North Sumatra. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, interviews with key, main, and additional informants, as well as documentation. The analysis employed the SERVQUAL model, covering five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The findings indicate that the tangible dimension remains inadequate due to limited facilities and infrastructure, while reliability is constrained by delays in ship departure schedules. Responsiveness is considered good, as officers are relatively quick in handling passenger needs and complaints. Assurance is fairly well implemented, although security monitoring facilities such as CCTV require improvement. Empathy is rated positively, as staff generally demonstrate friendliness and professionalism. The study concludes that service quality at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal is still uneven across dimensions, requiring improvements in waiting room facilities, parking areas, schedule management, and security systems to enhance overall service delivery. This research contributes to the discourse on public service quality in the port sector and offers practical insights for improving passenger terminal services in Indonesia.

Keywords: Public Service; Quality of Service; Port

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INTRODUCTION

Public service delivery is a fundamental aspect of governance that directly affects citizen welfare, trust, and participation in state institutions. In Indonesia, which is characterized by its vast archipelagic geography, the transportation sector—particularly maritime transportation—plays a vital role in connecting regions, facilitating mobility, and supporting economic growth. Ports function not only as logistics centers for goods but also as service providers for passengers, making them central to both economic development and the fulfillment of public needs.

As a maritime nation, Indonesia depends heavily on its port infrastructure to ensure equitable access and integration across islands. The government has emphasized the importance of maritime development through initiatives such as the “Tol Laut” program, which aims to reduce disparities in logistics and strengthen inter-island connectivity. Within this framework, passenger terminals serve as critical gateways that embody the quality of public services provided by the state and its enterprises. Service quality at these terminals not only

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influences the comfort and satisfaction of passengers but also determines the competitiveness of maritime transportation compared to other modes such as aviation and land transport.

The Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal is one of the most strategic terminals in Indonesia. Located in North Sumatra and facing the Malacca Strait—one of the busiest international sea lanes—the terminal is a vital link between Medan and other major ports such as Batam and Jakarta. Belawan is considered the third-largest passenger port in Indonesia after Jakarta and Surabaya, handling hundreds of thousands of passengers annually. Its strategic importance is amplified by the fact that Medan is a major economic hub in Sumatra, meaning that Belawan not only serves local mobility but also functions as a national transportation gateway.

However, the terminal faces significant challenges in maintaining service quality amid rapid growth in passenger volume. Data show that the number of passengers increased dramatically from 72,872 in 2021 to 246,282 in 2023—an increase of more than 238% within just two years. This sharp growth has created mounting pressure on terminal infrastructure, including waiting rooms, parking facilities, and supporting amenities. Inadequate facilities result in frequent overcrowding, congestion, and discomfort for passengers. Moreover, delays in ship departures highlight weaknesses in operational reliability, further undermining passenger trust.

Beyond infrastructure, service quality also depends on the performance of human resources. Staff responsiveness, professionalism, and empathy are essential for shaping passenger experiences. While many passengers acknowledge the friendliness and helpfulness of terminal staff, challenges remain in ensuring consistent responsiveness during peak travel seasons. Security systems also require attention, as limited CCTV coverage and insufficient personnel weaken passenger confidence in safety. These conditions illustrate the multidimensional nature of service quality, where both structural and interpersonal aspects must be addressed simultaneously.

Scholarly studies reinforce the importance of examining service quality in transportation. Research on Tirtonadi Bus Terminal in Surakarta (Novembria et al., 2021) revealed that while minimum service standards were met, passenger expectations were not fully satisfied. Studies at Wiriadinata Airport in Tasikmalaya (Wiwit & Bintoro, 2019) and Sekupang Domestic Ferry Terminal in Batam (Simatupang et al., 2023) similarly highlight gaps in reliability and tangibles, even as responsiveness and empathy were rated positively. These findings suggest a recurring pattern across transportation hubs in Indonesia: infrastructural and operational weaknesses undermine overall service quality despite strong interpersonal service delivery.

Nevertheless, limited research has examined passenger service quality in major seaports of Sumatra, particularly at the scale and strategic importance of Belawan. Previous studies often rely on quantitative surveys, leaving a gap in qualitative investigations that can capture the depth of passenger experiences and provide richer insights into service dynamics. This research seeks to fill that gap by applying the SERVQUAL framework in a qualitative context to analyze five dimensions of service quality—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on a strategic passenger terminal with rapid passenger growth, its qualitative methodological approach, and its emphasis on both structural and human dimensions of service quality. The research problem is formulated as follows: To what extent does the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal provide service quality that meets passenger expectations, and which dimensions require improvement? The objective is to analyze service quality using the SERVQUAL framework and to propose actionable recommendations for improving passenger services at Belawan and similar terminals across Indonesia.

Through this study, it is expected that insights will be gained not only for PT Pelindo I as the operator but also for policymakers and scholars concerned with public service delivery in the transportation sector. By addressing both infrastructural and interpersonal factors, this research contributes to strengthening maritime connectivity and enhancing public trust in government-owned service institutions.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the quality of public services at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal managed by PT Pelindo I. The study applies the SERVQUAL framework developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), which consists of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This framework is used as the main analytical tool to assess both the strengths and weaknesses of service delivery at the terminal. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including terminal management staff, operational officers, and passengers who had direct experience using the terminal services. The purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that respondents possessed relevant knowledge and experience in relation to the research objectives. Observations focused on service delivery processes, facilities, and passenger interactions within the terminal. Documentation, such as internal reports and official regulations related to port management, was used to complement the primary data. Secondary data were obtained from

academic literature, government regulations, and previous studies on service quality in transportation and port management. This data provided a theoretical foundation and comparative perspective for analyzing the findings.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive techniques. The process involved organizing, reducing, and interpreting the collected data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and service gaps across the SERVQUAL dimensions. Triangulation of data sources—interviews, observations, and documents—was applied to ensure the credibility and validity of findings. The methodological design of this research aims not only to describe the current condition of service quality at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal but also to provide practical insights for improving service delivery and enhancing passenger satisfaction in the context of Indonesia's port sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of service quality at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal was conducted using the SERVQUAL model, which measures five core dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This framework provides a comprehensive tool to evaluate both the structural and human aspects of service delivery. The findings reveal that service quality at the terminal is multidimensional and complex, shaped not only by the availability of physical infrastructure but also by the attitudes, professionalism, and responsiveness of frontline staff. This aligns with Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry's (1990) argument that customer satisfaction is determined by the gap between expectations and perceptions, across tangible and intangible aspects of service.

In the context of public services, particularly transportation, service quality plays a dual role: it ensures operational efficiency while also fostering citizen trust in government-owned enterprises such as PT Pelindo I. A failure in service quality—whether due to infrastructural inadequacy or unreliable schedules—can diminish public confidence in maritime transport and encourage passengers to shift to alternative modes of transportation, such as air travel. Conversely, positive service interactions, even amid structural limitations, can sustain a baseline level of satisfaction and trust.

This section discusses the research findings dimension by dimension, followed by comparative and theoretical reflections. The discussion integrates field evidence, passenger perceptions, and previous studies to provide a holistic understanding of service quality dynamics at Belawan Terminal.

1. Tangibles (Physical Evidence)

The tangible dimension refers to the physical facilities, equipment, and overall appearance of the service environment. Based on observations and passenger feedback, the tangible aspect of the Belawan Passenger Terminal remains inadequate in supporting the rapid increase in passenger volume. The waiting areas are often overcrowded, especially during festive seasons such as Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, and New Year. The existing seating capacity is far below the number of passengers served, forcing many people to stand or sit on the floor while waiting. Similarly, parking areas are insufficient, leading to disorganized vehicle placement, traffic congestion, and even unsafe conditions when passengers must navigate crowded spaces. Complaints were also raised about the high parking fees that are not proportional to the quality of facilities provided.

Although certain modern facilities have been introduced—such as an automatic gate, skybridge connection to the railway station, nursing room, and health clinic—their presence is not enough to offset the general inadequacy of space and comfort. Compared to studies in other transportation hubs, such as the Sekupang Ferry Terminal in Batam (Simatupang et al., 2023), the weaknesses in Belawan are more pronounced because of the sheer volume of passengers. This indicates that the tangible dimension is the weakest aspect of service quality at the terminal and requires immediate infrastructural investment.

2. Reliability

The reliability dimension concerns the ability to provide services accurately, consistently, and according to promises. In the context of Belawan Terminal, reliability issues are most evident in ship departure schedules. The study found that delays in departures remain a common occurrence, creating dissatisfaction and frustration among passengers who expect punctuality in their travel plans. While some delays are attributable to operational issues with shipping companies, passengers generally perceive the terminal management as responsible for ensuring coordination. This perception undermines the credibility of PT Pelindo I as a reliable service provider.

On the positive side, ticketing and check-in procedures have been digitized, reducing manual errors and improving the speed of administrative processes. However, these improvements are overshadowed by persistent issues with scheduling and capacity management. Comparatively, research at Tirtonadi Surakarta Bus Terminal (Novembria et al., 2021) also revealed gaps in reliability, but those were less severe due to lower passenger

volume. The case of Belawan demonstrates how reliability problems are amplified when infrastructural capacity does not match operational demands.

3. Responsiveness

Responsiveness relates to the willingness and readiness of staff to assist passengers, handle requests, and respond to problems. Findings from this study suggest that responsiveness is one of the relatively strong dimensions of service quality at the Belawan Passenger Terminal. Staff members are generally attentive and proactive in handling passenger needs. For example, during peak seasons when overcrowding occurs, management provides temporary facilities such as tents and additional seating outside the main terminal building. Officers also assist passengers with special needs, such as the elderly or those with disabilities, by offering wheelchairs and priority boarding support. Furthermore, customer service counters are available to address inquiries and complaints, and staff are perceived as approachable and courteous. Despite these strengths, the responsiveness dimension still faces limitations. Passengers noted that the number of service staff is insufficient to handle the surge in demand during high-traffic periods, leading to longer waiting times for assistance. Compared to the case of Wiriadinata Airport in Tasikmalaya (Wiwit & Bintoro, 2019), where responsiveness was found to be a key determinant of passenger satisfaction, Belawan demonstrates a similar trend but at a larger scale, requiring more systematic reinforcement of human resources.

4. Assurance

Assurance reflects the ability of service providers to instill trust and confidence, which encompasses staff professionalism, security, and knowledge of procedures. The study found that assurance at the Belawan Terminal is moderately strong but still has critical areas for improvement. Passengers generally recognize staff as polite, professional, and competent in providing information and guidance. This positive perception contributes to a sense of trust in the personnel. However, the dimension of security remains problematic. Surveillance systems, such as CCTV, are insufficiently deployed, reducing the effectiveness of monitoring in high-risk areas such as boarding gates and parking lots. Moreover, during times of overcrowding, the lack of adequate security personnel creates potential risks for both safety and order. These findings resonate with research on ferry terminals in Batam, where assurance was positively evaluated but inconsistencies in security enforcement weakened overall service quality. Strengthening assurance in Belawan requires not only additional investment in surveillance technology but also regular training for staff in handling emergency situations and managing passenger flow under pressure.

5. Empathy

The empathy dimension concerns the provision of personalized attention and care to passengers. Empathy at the Belawan Passenger Terminal is relatively strong, as staff are generally perceived as friendly, approachable, and willing to assist. Special services such as a nursing room, health facilities, and support for passengers with special needs reflect management's awareness of the importance of inclusivity in service delivery. Nevertheless, the sense of empathy can be diminished during peak traffic periods. When overcrowding occurs, staff members are unable to provide adequate individual attention, leading to perceptions of neglect among some passengers. This inconsistency highlights the interdependence between empathy and tangible resources: staff professionalism alone cannot compensate for infrastructural inadequacies. Comparisons with previous studies, such as those in Surakarta and Batam, reveal that empathy consistently ranks as one of the strongest dimensions across transportation terminals in Indonesia. The Belawan case confirms this pattern but also illustrates the vulnerability of empathetic service delivery in contexts of extreme overcrowding.

The SERVQUAL analysis reveals that service quality at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal is uneven across dimensions. Tangibles and reliability emerge as the weakest aspects, primarily due to infrastructural limitations and inconsistent departure schedules. Responsiveness and empathy are relatively strong, sustained by staff professionalism and proactive service measures. Assurance lies in between, with notable gaps in security infrastructure and surveillance. The findings mirror broader patterns identified in the literature: human interaction dimensions such as responsiveness and empathy are consistently strengths in Indonesian transportation terminals, while physical infrastructure and reliability remain persistent challenges. This suggests that cultural and organizational values emphasizing politeness and hospitality play a role in strengthening interpersonal service, but these strengths cannot fully compensate for systemic weaknesses in infrastructure and operational management.

From the tangible dimension, the study concludes that physical facilities at the terminal remain inadequate to accommodate the rapid growth of passengers. The waiting areas are often overcrowded, parking facilities are insufficient, and basic amenities such as seating, cleanliness, and comfort do not meet passenger expectations. Although some improvements such as skybridge facilities, automatic gates, and health clinics have been introduced, these efforts are not yet proportional to the demand. This indicates that tangible aspects remain the weakest element of service quality and must become the focus of infrastructure development.

Regarding the reliability dimension, the study reveals that operational consistency is still lacking. Ship departure delays occur frequently, undermining passenger trust and satisfaction. While digitized ticketing and check-in systems have improved administrative reliability, these advances are overshadowed by persistent scheduling issues. The inability to ensure punctuality highlights a gap in coordination between PT Pelindo I and shipping operators, making reliability another critical challenge to address.

In the responsiveness dimension, the findings are more positive. Terminal staff are generally quick in providing information, assisting elderly passengers and people with disabilities, and responding to complaints. During periods of high passenger traffic, management takes proactive steps by adding temporary facilities such as tents and extra chairs. However, responsiveness declines during peak seasons when the number of staff is insufficient to handle passenger demands. This suggests that responsiveness is a strength of Belawan Terminal, but one that requires reinforcement through better staffing strategies.

The assurance dimension demonstrates moderate performance. Passengers generally acknowledge the professionalism, politeness, and competence of staff, which contributes to a sense of trust. However, gaps remain in safety and security. Limited CCTV coverage and insufficient security personnel reduce passengers' sense of assurance, especially during overcrowding. This shows that while assurance benefits from human resource professionalism, it still depends heavily on institutional investments in security infrastructure and systems.

Finally, the empathy dimension emerges as one of the stronger aspects of service quality. Staff members are perceived as friendly, approachable, and willing to provide personal attention to passenger needs. The existence of facilities such as nursing rooms and medical clinics also reflects a commitment to inclusivity. Nevertheless, empathy is not always consistently experienced, particularly during peak travel seasons when staff are overwhelmed by large passenger volumes. This demonstrates that empathy, while a strong cultural and organizational value, cannot fully substitute for structural and resource limitations.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the quality of services at the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal using the SERVQUAL framework. The analysis shows that service quality is not evenly distributed across dimensions, with certain areas requiring urgent improvement while others already demonstrate relative strengths. In summary, this study concludes that the service quality of the Bandar Deli Belawan Passenger Terminal is uneven: tangibles and reliability remain the weakest dimensions, responsiveness and empathy are relatively strong, and assurance occupies

an intermediate position. These findings affirm that service quality in maritime transportation is shaped by the interplay of both structural capacity and human interaction. Improving tangible infrastructure and operational reliability, while sustaining staff responsiveness and empathy, is essential to achieving balanced and satisfactory service quality at the terminal.

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