

Employee Competence as a Determinant of Service Quality in Public Sector Institutions: Evidence from UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Employee Competence on Service Quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 45 respondents and analyzed through validity, reliability, and inferential statistical tests. The validity test confirmed that all questionnaire items were valid, while the reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.899 for Employee Competence and 0.856 for Service Quality. Descriptive analysis indicated that both Employee Competence and Service Quality were perceived positively by respondents, reflected in high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations. The core findings were derived from the inferential analysis, which confirmed a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The simple linear regression results showed that Employee Competence has a strong influence on Service Quality, with a regression coefficient of 0.876. The coefficient of determination revealed that Employee Competence explains 82.3% of the variance in Service Quality ($R^2 = 0.823$). Furthermore, the t-test results ($t = 8.939$; $p = 0.000$) supported the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that Employee Competence significantly affects Service Quality. These findings provide empirical evidence that enhancing employee knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes is a critical strategy for improving service quality in public sector institutions. The study contributes to the literature on public sector human resource management and offers practical implications for strengthening competency development programs to achieve sustainable service excellence.

Keywords: *Employee Competence, Service Quality, Public Sector, Human Resource Management*

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Introduction

Public service is a fundamental element in government administration, as the quality of services delivered serves as a primary indicator of institutional performance in meeting public needs. Government agencies are required to provide services that are efficient, accurate, transparent, and accountable as part of the implementation of good governance principles. In the context of regional revenue management, service quality plays a crucial role in determining taxpayer compliance and achieving regional revenue targets. Therefore, improving service quality cannot be separated from effective human resource management, particularly through enhancing employee competence, work motivation, and proportional workload management.

Employee competence is a key factor in supporting the creation of high-quality public services. Competence encompasses knowledge, technical skills, professional abilities, and work attitudes required to perform tasks effectively. Employees with high competence tend to complete their duties efficiently, minimize administrative errors, and provide appropriate solutions to service users [1]. Previous studies indicate that competence significantly influences service quality because employees who understand work procedures and possess adequate skills are more responsive to public needs [2]. Conversely, low competence may lead to service delays and decreased public satisfaction [3].

In addition to competence, work motivation plays a crucial role in determining public service quality. Work motivation refers to internal and external drives that encourage employees to perform optimally and achieve organizational goals. Highly motivated employees generally demonstrate greater enthusiasm, initiative, and commitment in delivering services [4]. Motivation can be influenced by reward systems, work environment, leadership, and career development opportunities [5]. Furthermore, research has shown that low work motivation negatively impacts productivity and reduces service quality provided to the public [6].

Workload is another important variable affecting service quality. Excessive workload can cause job stress, fatigue, and decreased concentration among employees [7]. Such conditions may result in administrative errors and slower service completion. On the other hand, a fairly distributed and proportional workload can enhance work effectiveness and maintain employee performance stability [8]. Thus, proper workload management becomes a strategic factor in maintaining consistent public service quality.

Service quality is not only directly influenced by competence, motivation, and workload but may also be mediated by job satisfaction. Job satisfaction reflects a positive emotional state arising when employees feel valued, supported, and able to fulfill their work expectations [9]. Employees who experience high job satisfaction tend to demonstrate better performance, stronger organizational commitment, and more professional service delivery [10]. Therefore, job satisfaction can function as an intervening variable that strengthens the relationship between internal employee factors and service quality outcomes.

In the context of the Regional Revenue Management Technical Implementation Unit (UPTD) of Sipirok under the Regional Revenue Agency (Bapenda) of North Sumatra Province, employees play a strategic role in providing services to taxpayers. The development of digital administrative systems and changes in taxation regulations require employees to continuously improve their competencies and adapt to policy dynamics. These challenges demand strong work motivation and balanced workload distribution to ensure optimal service delivery.

However, field observations indicate several existing issues, including service delays, inaccuracies in administrative processes, and inconsistencies in service standards. These problems may be associated with uneven levels of employee competence, fluctuating work motivation, and disproportionate workload distribution among staff members. Additionally, variations in job satisfaction levels may also influence how employees deliver services to the public.

Previous studies have examined the effects of competence, motivation, and workload on service quality; however, limited research integrates job satisfaction as an intervening variable within a comprehensive analytical model. Understanding the mediating role of job satisfaction

is essential to explain how internal employee factors indirectly influence service quality. A more integrative approach is therefore necessary to provide a deeper explanation of these relationships within the public sector context.

Based on the above discussion, examining the influence of employee competence, work motivation, and workload on service quality through job satisfaction at the UPTD Regional Revenue Management of Sipirok becomes both relevant and significant. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of human resource management literature in the public sector and practically to provide strategic recommendations for improving sustainable public service quality within the Regional Revenue Agency of North Sumatra Province.

Literature Review

Employee Competence

Employee competence refers to a comprehensive ability that encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes, and individual characteristics that enable a person to perform tasks effectively and achieve performance standards set by the organization [11]. It is understood as a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that employees must possess in order to carry out their work optimally (Ilham, 2024). Furthermore, competence reflects underlying personal characteristics that directly contribute to superior performance [12]. In the context of public organizations such as Panwaslu Kabupaten Dairi, competence is a critical element to ensure that employees act professionally, understand electoral regulations, and perform supervisory functions carefully and with integrity. A lack of competence may create risks of administrative and technical errors that could ultimately affect the quality of democratic processes. Beyond technical expertise in election supervision, competence also includes analytical capacity, communication skills, decision-making ability, problem-solving skills, and mastery of work procedures [13]. Employees are required to assess field conditions, understand local political dynamics, and make prompt decisions when identifying potential violations [14]. Such competencies are essential given the complexity of supervisory tasks, time pressures, and potential conflicts of interest. Employees with strong competence are more likely to maintain neutrality, integrity, and professionalism in their duties [15].

Employee competence is influenced by work experience, training programs, and organizational development initiatives. Continuous participation in technical and administrative training enhances employees' understanding of electoral regulations, violation-handling mechanisms, and field documentation techniques [16]. This indicates that competence can be systematically developed through structured education and training. Within Panwaslu Dairi, improving competence represents a strategic effort to ensure accurate supervisory performance in accordance with legal provisions. Moreover, competence has a direct relationship with employee performance, as competent individuals tend to work punctually, prepare reports carefully, and identify problems objectively [17]. According to Fadillah (2022), employee competence can be measured through several key indicators [18]: personal traits, which refer to consistent physical characteristics or behavioral responses when facing various situations; self-concept, which reflects attitudes, values, and self-perception regarding one's role and abilities; knowledge, defined as the understanding of information, procedures, and job-related matters; skills, which represent the ability to perform tasks effectively through technical and cognitive capacities; and work motives, which describe internal drives that consistently influence behavior, initiative, and sustained performance in achieving organizational goals.

Employee Service Quality

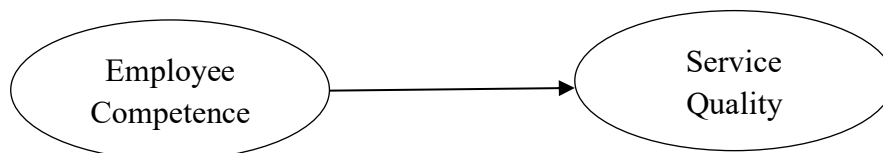
Employee service quality can be understood as the level of employees' ability to deliver services in accordance with established standards, procedures, and customer expectations. In public organizations, service quality is assessed not only from the final outcomes received by the community but also from the overall service process, including how employees interact, respond to needs, and provide solutions to customer problems. High-quality service reflects the

professionalism of employees in carrying out their responsibilities as public servants [19]. Quality service encompasses various dimensions such as timeliness, accuracy, friendliness, and politeness in interactions [20]. As users of public services, citizens expect services that are fast, simple, and free from unnecessary bureaucracy. Therefore, employees are required to possess both technical competence and appropriate service behavior to ensure that service processes run effectively and efficiently. Employee behavior in delivering services significantly influences customers' perceptions and experiences of the quality provided. Furthermore, service quality is closely related to employees' ability to understand community needs and expectations [21]. Employees must be responsive and adaptive in handling diverse service situations, including managing complaints or service obstacles. The ability to communicate information clearly, demonstrate empathy, and provide proactive assistance are essential elements in determining service quality [22].

Service quality is also inseparable from individual competencies such as communication skills, knowledge of the services provided, and mastery of operational procedures. Employees with adequate competence are able to work independently, make appropriate decisions, and minimize potential errors that could disrupt service processes. Such competencies should be strengthened through continuous training and development programs to ensure sustained improvement in service quality. In addition to individual competence, service quality is influenced by organizational factors, including work environment, organizational culture, and effective supervision [23]. Organizations that provide a supportive work environment, adequate facilities, and strong managerial support are more likely to enhance the quality of services delivered by employees [24]. Employees who feel valued and supported tend to demonstrate greater dedication in serving customers. Thus, employee service quality serves as a primary indicator of organizational success, particularly in public institutions such as Perumda Tirtanadi. High-quality service not only increases public satisfaction but also strengthens public trust in the institution [25]. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), service quality can be measured through five key indicators [26]: reliability, which refers to the ability to deliver promised services accurately and consistently; responsiveness, which reflects the willingness and promptness in assisting customers and handling complaints; assurance, which represents employees' competence, courtesy, and trustworthiness in building customer confidence; empathy, which indicates sincere and individualized attention to customers' needs and conditions; and tangibles, which relate to the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, and other visible evidence supporting service delivery.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

This study conceptualizes Employee Competence (X) as the independent variable and Service Quality (Y) as the dependent variable as shown on the following figure.



The hypothesis is:

Ha : Employee competence has a positive and significant effect on service quality at UPTD Sapirok, North Sumatra.

Ho : Employee competence does not have a positive and significant effect on service quality at UPTD Sapirok, North Sumatra.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the effect of employee competence on service quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. The research design was explanatory in nature, as it aimed to test hypotheses and analyze the causal relationship between the independent variable (employee competence) and the dependent variable (service quality).

The population in this study consisted of 45 employees working at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. Given the relatively small population size, the study applied a saturated sampling technique (census method), in which the entire population was used as the research sample. Therefore, all 45 employees served as respondents to ensure comprehensive and representative findings.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to all respondents [27]. The questionnaire items were developed based on theoretical indicators of employee competence (traits, self-concept, knowledge, skills, and motives) and service quality (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles). Responses were measured using a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In addition, secondary data were obtained from institutional reports, official documents, and other relevant sources to support the analysis [28]. The data were analyzed using quantitative statistical methods with SPSS version 25.0. Several analytical procedures were conducted. First, validity testing was performed to determine whether each questionnaire item accurately measured the intended variable. An item was considered valid if the calculated correlation coefficient (r-count) was greater than the critical value (r-table) [29]. Second, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha, where a value greater than 0.70 indicated that the instrument was reliable.

The regression model used in this study was expressed as: $Y=a+bX$, Where:

Y = Service Quality

X = Employee Competence

a = Constant

b = Regression Coefficient

Furthermore, a t-test was applied to determine whether employee competence significantly affected service quality. The hypothesis was accepted if the t-count was greater than the t-table value or if the significance level (p-value) was below 0.05. Finally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to measure how much variance in service quality could be explained by employee competence. The R^2 value ranged from 0 to 1, where a value closer to 1 indicated stronger explanatory power of the independent variable.

This methodological approach enabled the study to empirically examine the influence of employee competence on service quality and provided statistical evidence as well as practical implications for improving public service performance at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The initial step in the descriptive analysis was to examine the key summary statistics for the two primary composite variables: Employee Competence (EC) and Service Quality (SQ). Each composite variable was calculated as the average score of its five respective indicators. This analysis provided a general overview of the data distribution and overall respondent perceptions.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employee Competence (EC)	45	3.80	5.00	4.39	0.45
Service Quality (SQ)	45	3.60	5.00	4.30	0.43

Source: Analysis of provided data, N=45

Based on the descriptive analysis, both Employee Competence and Service Quality demonstrated highly positive results. The composite Employee Competence variable had a mean score of 4.39, indicating that respondents generally perceived their level of competence

as very good. Similarly, the composite Service Quality variable had a mean of 4.30, suggesting that the quality of services delivered at UPTD Sipirok was also perceived positively by the respondents.

The relatively low standard deviation values (0.45 for Employee Competence and 0.43 for Service Quality) indicate that the responses were closely clustered around the mean. This reflects a high level of consistency among respondents in evaluating both their competence and the quality of services provided. Overall, the findings suggest that employee competence and service quality were perceived positively and consistently across the sample of 45 employees.

Validity and Reliability Tests

Validity was assessed using Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation (r-value) by correlating each item score with the total score of its respective variable (corrected item-total correlation). For a sample size of N = 45, the degree of freedom (df) is N – 2 = 43. At a 5% significance level (two-tailed), the critical r_{table} value is approximately 0.294. An item is considered valid if its r_{value} > r_{table} (0.294).

Table 2. Validity Results

Item	r value	r table	Result
EC1	0.692	0.294	Valid
EC2	0.836	0.294	Valid
EC3	0.775	0.294	Valid
EC4	0.633	0.294	Valid
EC5	0.830	0.294	Valid
SQ1	0.827	0.294	Valid
SQ2	0.822	0.294	Valid
SQ3	0.630	0.294	Valid
SQ4	0.479	0.294	Valid
SQ5	0.656	0.294	Valid

The results indicate that all five items of Employee Competence and all five items of Service Quality have correlation coefficients significantly higher than the critical r_{table} value (0.294). Therefore, all questionnaire items were declared valid, meaning they effectively measured their respective constructs.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, which measures internal consistency. An instrument is generally considered reliable if Cronbach’s Alpha is greater than 0.60.

Table 3. Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Benchmark	Result
Employee Competence (EC)	0.899	> 0.60	Reliable
Service Quality (SQ)	0.856	> 0.60	Reliable

The Employee Competence scale achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.899, while the Service Quality scale achieved 0.856. Both values are well above the 0.60 benchmark, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The validity and reliability analyses confirm that the research instrument was both valid and reliable. All questionnaire items effectively measured their respective variables, and the scales demonstrated strong internal consistency. Therefore, the data were suitable for further statistical analysis, including regression testing.

Regression Analysis

Simple Linear Regression

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of Employee Competence on Service Quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. The analysis used composite scores (mean values) of each variable derived from the questionnaire responses.

Table 4. Regression Results

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.214	0.412	–	0.520	0.606
Employee Competence	0.876	0.098	0.907	8.939	0.000

Dependent Variable: Service Quality

Based on the analysis, the regression equation can be expressed as: $Y=0.214+0.876X$. The regression coefficient (B) for the Employee Competence variable is 0.876. This indicates that for every one-point increase in the employee competence score, Service Quality is expected to increase by 0.876 points, assuming other factors remain constant.

The significance value (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level, confirms that there is a significant and positive relationship between Employee Competence and Service Quality. The standardized beta coefficient (Beta = 0.907) indicates that Employee Competence has a very strong influence on Service Quality. The t-value (t = 8.939) further confirms that the effect is statistically significant.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

The coefficient of determination (R²) was calculated to measure the proportion of variance in Service Quality that can be explained by Employee Competence.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.907	0.823	0.819

The analysis results show that the R² value is 0.823, which means that 82.3% of the variance in Service Quality can be explained by Employee Competence. The remaining 17.7% of the variance is influenced by other factors not included in this research model, such as organizational systems, leadership, infrastructure, or service procedures. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.907) indicates a very strong positive relationship between Employee Competence and Service Quality. This is consistent with the statistically significant regression results obtained previously.

These findings confirm that Employee Competence has a substantial positive contribution to Service Quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. In other words, improvements in employee knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes significantly enhance the quality of public services delivered to the community.

Hypothesis Testing (t-Test)

The hypothesis testing was conducted using a t-test to determine whether the independent variable (Employee Competence) has a positive and significant influence on the dependent variable (Service Quality).

Table 6. T-test Result

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
(Constant)	0.214	0.412	–	0.520
Employee Competence	0.876	0.098	0.907	8.939

Dependent Variable: Service Quality

The calculated t-value (t_{calculated}) for the Employee Competence variable is 8.939. This value is compared with the critical t-value (t_{table}) based on the degrees of freedom (df), calculated as: $df=N-k-1$

Where:

N = 45 (number of respondents)

k = 1 (number of independent variables)

$df=45-1-1=43$

For a one-tailed test with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and $df = 43$, the critical t-value (t_{table}) is approximately 1.681. Since the calculated t-value (8.939) is greater than the critical t-value (1.681), it can be concluded that: $t_{calculated} > t_{table}$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

Furthermore, the significance value (p-value) for the Employee Competence variable is 0.000. Because the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level α (0.05), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

Based on the t-test results, it can be concluded that Employee Competence has a positive and significant influence on Service Quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. This finding supports the assumption that employees' knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities play a crucial role in determining the quality of public services delivered to the community. In the context of public sector institutions, improving employee competence directly translates into measurable improvements in service quality performance.

Conclusion

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the research data, this study successfully achieved its primary objective, which was to examine the effect of Employee Competence on Service Quality at UPTD Sipirok, North Sumatra. The descriptive analysis indicated that respondents generally perceived employee competence and service quality to be at a high level, as reflected by strong mean scores and relatively low standard deviations, suggesting consistent perceptions among respondents.

The results of the validity and reliability tests confirmed that all research instruments were both valid and reliable. Each questionnaire item met the required validity threshold, and the Cronbach's Alpha values demonstrated strong internal consistency for both variables. These findings indicate that the measurement tools were appropriate and dependable for further statistical analysis.

Most importantly, the inferential analysis provided empirical evidence that Employee Competence has a positive and statistically significant influence on Service Quality. The regression results showed a positive coefficient ($B = 0.876$), indicating that improvements in employee competence are associated with substantial increases in service quality. The t-test results confirmed that this effect is statistically significant ($t = 8.939$; $p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.823$) revealed that 82.3% of the variance in Service Quality can be explained by Employee Competence. This finding underscores the dominant role of employee competence as a key determinant of service quality, while the remaining 17.7% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

In conclusion, this research validates the premise that Employee Competence is a strategic factor in enhancing Service Quality within public sector institutions. Competent employees—equipped with adequate knowledge, technical skills, and professional attitudes—contribute directly to improving the quality of public services delivered to the community. The findings provide meaningful theoretical contributions to public sector human resource management and offer practical implications for policymakers and administrators at UPTD Sipirok to prioritize competency development as a pathway toward sustainable service excellence.

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