

## Quality Performance of Rapid Bus Operation in Georgetown, Penang

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### Abstract

Service quality is an evaluation of how well a delivered service fulfilled client's expectations. The theory of "service quality" depends on several factors. This study, the researchers have relied on SERVQUAL attributes which comprise reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangible and assurance. An overview concerning poor service quality provided by Rapid Bus has lessened the confidence of users to use public bus in Georgetown, Penang. In accordance with problems arise mentioned, seven main objectives were determined to analyze level of service quality in this empirical study. Since the sample size is large, this research has been conducted using non-probability sampling technique. Also, cross-sectional survey has been applied to collect data from 417 respondents. The data acquired was evaluated by using correlation and regression technique. This indicator is a proper tool to determine service quality by taking respondents' expectations and perceptions on service quality offer. Additionally, the arrangement of questionnaire consists of Section A (demographic of respondents), Section B (service quality) and Section C until G (SERVQUAL). In this study, the main finding views that responsiveness is the most dominant dimension which affects service quality of Rapid Bus in Georgetown, Penang.

**Keywords:** Public Transport; Service Quality; SERVQUAL Dimension; Rapid Bus

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### INTRODUCTION

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Public transports are the main transportation that been used by public and it was design ease movement of people from one place to another. Considering the fact that it eases the movement of people, public transports also a key player in contributing its revenue into country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Transportation play a major backbone in economic growth as it encourage technological advancements in every country. As noted by Yang Berhormat, Loke Siew Fook, Minister of Transport in Malaysia, clarified that transport sector has considerably grow over 5% since 2004 and have been contributed 3.5% to country's GDP (Abas, 2019). It proves that the public transport sector is an important indicator in helping to boost the growth of Malaysia's economy through its contribution in GDP. Nevertheless, good service quality of public transportation is a significant element which can encourage more users to use Rapid Bus as the main transportation in Georgetown, Penang. Public transport must have a high-quality service to meet every passenger satisfaction (Baharom, 2014). According to Aziz & Mohammad (2020) stated that, a review of infrastructure and

facilities focused on the busiest bus stops in Penang. One checkpoint at Weld Quay bus stop is the most frequent use of Rapid Bus in Georgetown.

In many developing countries, public transportation is widely viewed as being of poor quality (Luke, 2020). This situation has resulted in a decline in the number of users using public transportation due to the poor service quality in Malaysia (Brohi, 2018). Currently, Light Rapid Transit (LRT), Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) have declined its ridership percentages especially in cities such as Kuala Lumpur (20%), Johor Bahru (15%), and Penang (11%), where the numbers have respectively revealed 1.3 million users are reluctant to use public transport because of various reasons related to poor service quality delivered (Azmi et.al, 2018). In respect on this circumstance, most Malaysian will depend on their own cars to travel from one location to other location in order to facilitate daily activity and the fact that the increasing of private transport ownership in Malaysia is continuously growing every year. According to the Road Transport Department 2019, about 31.2 million units of motor vehicles were registered until 31 December with an average of 1.1 million units per year from 2010 until 2019 (Lim, 2020). The risen of car and motor ownership in Malaysia is increasingly become a major problem due to service inefficiency which failed to fulfill user's demands and expectations (Zaherawati et.al, 2010).

Rapid Bus in Penang is struggling with catering to provide a better service quality to attract and fulfil the demand from the users to encourage the use of public transport in Georgetown. According to Saadon (2020), he stated that the perceived service quality inquired two dimensions which are functional (or process) dimension and technical (or outcome) dimension. In relation to those statements, Imam (2014) also mentioned that it is essential to focus on a few dimensions such as reliability, tangible and assurance to provide better services quality on public transportation. Based on the New Strait Times report, it states that despite being only a third the size of Singapore, Penang has about three times the number of roads per 1,000 people (Dermawan, 2019). It shows that, public transportation must improve its effectiveness and efficiency to draw more people using public transport. Moreover, review from the official page of Rapid Bus Penang in Facebook, it appears that the users' rate only 2.2 out of 5 stars. In consensus to that, it shows the users rely more on their own transport rather than using Rapid Bus due to poor service provided in Penang. Also, many users' complaints bad service quality offered by Rapid Bus Penang mostly involved punctuality of time, drivers' attitudes and less attention given on user's safety. Complaints on driver's behaviour, cleanliness of bus, safety, and comfort frequently been a major concern by

the users. For this reason, the main issue discussed in this research has examined the application of SERVQUAL model influenced service quality which has been developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985. This tool comprises five (5) dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibility and assurance. To sum up, the gap in this study is the service quality encourage the researcher to find the solution that related to the customer expectation toward the quality performance of Rapid Bus Operation in Georgetown, Penang. Where is, the management of Rapid Bus need to take necessary actions to improve quality services occasionally to ensure the service meets user's expectations.

This study presents an assessment of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction of public transport operations of Vancouver Lower Mainland in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. A judgement sample of 205 was collected from an urban population of the Translink system for the study. The SERVQUAL model, noted for its robustness in measuring customer satisfaction, was adapted for the study. The dimensions for the study were characterised along the lines of tangible and intangible for transport users to evaluate service quality of the system. The main findings of the study showed a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, overcrowding of buses and overall satisfaction with service. In addition, late-hour services had a significantly negative effect on overall satisfaction, value for fare paid and overall services provided by the operators.

### **Research Objective**

To investigate the most dominant dimension affecting service quality of Rapid Bus.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

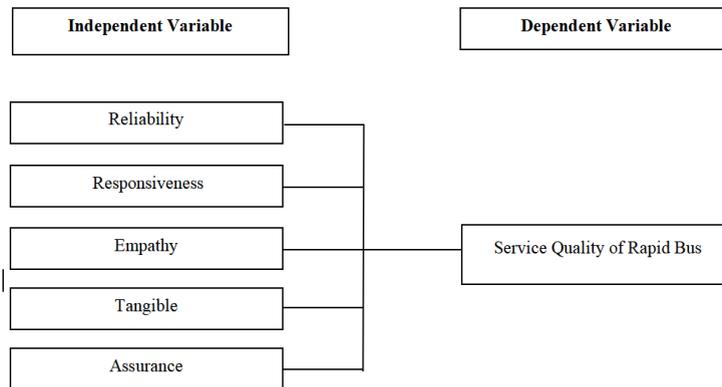


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework of the Service Quality of Rapid Bus in Georgetown, Penang*

Table 1: *Attributes of Five Dimensions in SERVQUAL*

Dimension	Attributes
Reliability	Reliability aspects relies on the promised time of public transport to arrive on time and be able to meet the expectation of the users.
Responsiveness	The willingness of service providers to assist the users in receiving an excellent and quick service at the same time.
Empathy	Empathy is the ability to comprehend or understand people's condition, perspectives and feelings through experience.
Tangible	Tangible services delivered by the service industry, which include the facilities and equipment, together with the appearance of service provide (employee).
Assurance	Assurance in general covers competence, civility, credibility, and security aspects from the staff.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Service Quality

As mentioned by Parasuraman et.al (1988), quality is defined as the degree and manner of difference among users' satisfaction and expectation. In other words, service quality revealed the level of service fulfils the user's expectations through the service

delivered. Part of that, study done by Junaida et.al (2011), proved that the SERVQUAL dimension has a positive relationship with the performance. Similarly, the quality of service is determined by the user's pleasure and expectations regarding the service provided. Furthermore, as stated by Wantara (2015), service quality can be measured as a key factor in the performance of the service sector, which is cost-effectiveness. In addition, maintaining and making continuous improvement in service quality able to attract new users but also influence the user's preference to choose a better service sector (Wantara, 2015). According to Lin (2007), stressed that good service quality certainly meets and fulfills the varied demands of the users. In other words, the evaluation from past experience determined overall users' satisfaction of products and services.

### **Reliability**

As stated by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), reliability is linked together with internal and external factors of service quality that work properly with better quality of service which consist of staff attitude, knowledge and ability. Reliability aspects relies on the promised time of public transport to arrive on time and be able to meet the expectation of the users. Moreover, this dimension implies that public transport must ensure the promised services are able to deliver dependably and accurately (Parasuraman, et.al, 1988). Likewise, this component often linked to the capability of providing the promised service in time. Also, this element concentrates on punctuality and frequency of services which intend to meet the requirements of the users. In study of reliability attribute in public transport, Van Oort (2016), describes that good reliability service enhances the overall quality of public transport, in the meantime reducing the growth of car dependency and encourage future generation to be practical in using public transport. Specifically, this dimension implies organization that delivers as well maintains its promises delivery in time, give the best service required and willing to solved problems eventually gain loyal users for the long term of period.

### **Responsiveness**

According to previous research, responsiveness is defined as the speed and timeliness with fast processing, prompt response to user's service requests, and low queuing time (Johnston, 1997). When it comes to environmental change, this dimension can be identified as a reaction to what the users wants. When timeliness is prioritised, a

company may retain current users while attracting new ones (Holweg, 2005). The importance of prompt service will affect the numbers of users in using provided service. The ability to deliver prompt service all the time is characterised as responsiveness (Govender & Naidu, 2011). According to another study, airline customer service staff should respond quickly and responsibly if there are events such as flight cancellations, delays, baggage loss, or emergency circumstances (Kim & Lee, 2011). This is because the higher the responsiveness of the service is provided, the higher the satisfaction level of users.

## **Empathy**

Based on Donnelly et.al (1995) statement, empathy is known as concern to meet or identify the needs of users. Empathy is the ability to comprehend or understand people's condition, perspectives and feelings through experience. In a situation where the users are having or facing problems, service provide must be able to comprehend and solve their user's problems. Zeithaml et.al (2006), define empathy as the firm's caring, individualised attention to its customers. It is critical for users to feel unique and special, and service providers are expected to understand their needs (Zeithaml et.al, 2017). Liu et.al (2014) defined that empathy as a company's obligation of care and personalised attention to its users in order to make them feel special and valuable, resulting into users' loyalty.

## **Tangible**

Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) also stated that physical appearance effected on the user's evaluation towards service quality. Furthermore, users can see and experienced the tangible services delivered by the service industry, which include the facilities and equipment, together with the appearance of service provide (employee). It could be noted that, tangibility has a major impact on user's satisfaction towards service quality. As a means of public transport, the services should meet tangible criteria in order attract and satisfied the users. According to Dagon (2006), successful transportation industry is referring to those who are able to fulfill essential standard of tangibility such as comfort in their services. In this context, it means that users who using transportation services must feel comfortable. This referred to the facility which has a variety of amenities that give comfort to the users such as air conditioning.

## **Assurance**

Assurance can be portrayed as the ability of the service provider and its staff to inspire users confidence via their knowledge and civility (Zeithaml et.al, 2017). To put differently, assurance in general covers competence, civility, credibility, and security aspects. Grönroos (1990) explains that this attribute influences overall perceived service quality, where staff are an important factor in providing services to users because of the inseparability of service production and consumption, as well as service co-production. As a result, the assurance dimension in transportation industry is a significant component that attracts users' attention when evaluating the service provider ability to deliver services. As a result, the assurance dimension in transportation industry is a significant component that attracts users' attention when evaluating the service provider ability to deliver services. Staff who are able to connect their users to the organisation display confidence and trust (Zeithaml et.al, 2006). Therefore, service provider is obligate to ensure the staff obey towards their responsibility in performing the task.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection**

The data was gathered via distribution of the questionnaire in this research. In order to achieve the objective of this study, a cross-sectional design has been applied to collect the data at one specific point at the same time. In addition, the information from the respondents were kept as confidential as for academic purposes. The data was collected using face-to-face method and via direct link (access to the questionnaire survey using bar code provided at Weld Quay station and posted on the official Facebook of Rapid Penang). The questionnaire was created into bilingual (English and Malay) in order to reach respondent's insight.

In this study, the questionnaire was developed from the previous study conducted by Parasuraman which emphasized on SERVQUAL model. The questionnaire was divided into seven parts. Section A is about respondent's profile which comprise gender, age, job status and frequency of using Rapid Bus per week while Section B is represent statements of service quality. Meanwhile, Section C until G namely reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangible, and assurance were evaluated. The researchers asked respondents' permission whether they are willing to partake in

the survey or not, especially those at the waiting area in the bus terminal since they had limited time to answer and complete the questionnaire.

## Data Analysis

With the reference of this study, the data analysis was carried out using a reliable tool. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) wherein this tool is widely used to perform quantitative analysis. Multiple Regression was used to discover the most influential dimension of service quality of Rapid Bus in Georgetown, Penang.

## Sampling Technique

For the purposes of this study, non-probability sampling was chosen. One of the advantages of this sampling are, it is measured less expensive, less complex and also easy to use as compared to probability sampling. Therefore, the researchers used convenience sampling to select the sample from the population because they are easily retrieved. The researchers easily selected any public bus users as a sample or respondents for this research. Hence, not every user has an equal probability to become a respondent and only the most easily accessible respondents were chosen. By applying this sampling technique, the study can be performed in a well-timed manner, convenient, and cost effective. Preferably, it is an appropriate method that meet eligibility criteria to test a sample when the population is too big to assess. Thus, 417 Rapid Bus users in Weld Quay station will be considered as a sample involved in this study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: *Result of Multiple Regression Analysis*

Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	t-value	P-value	Decision
Reliability	0.172	0.061	2.835	P = 0.005 < 0.005	Significant
Responsiveness	0.204	0.081	2.519	P = 0.012 < 0.05	Significant
Empathy	0.172	0.070	2.471	P = 0.014 < 0.05	Significant

<b>Tangible</b>	0.147	0.065	2.273	P = 0.024 < 0.05	Significant
<b>Assurance</b>	0.211	0.064	3.315	P = 0.001 < 0.05	Significant
<b>R square =</b>	0.646				
<b>F value =</b>	91.424				
<b>P value =</b>	0.000				

Table 2 reveals the summary of multiple regression analysis. According to the table, responsiveness dimension has the largest values of standardized coefficient Beta which is 0.081 as compared to standardized Beta value from reliability, empathy, tangible and empathy. Based on the results, it shows that, all the independent variables are able to explain 64.6% of the variance in the service quality. Meanwhile, another 35.4% is explained by another dimension. Additionally, the ANOVA table reveals that the model is statistically significant to be used for prediction. As indicated by the result shown, responsiveness is the most dominant dimension affecting service quality. This is because the standardized beta value is greater than others which is 0.081. Moreover, the P value for this variable is  $0.000 < 0.05$ . Thus, there is a significant relation between responsiveness dimension towards service quality.

What is the most dominant dimension affecting the service quality of Rapid Bus?

The objective of this study is to investigate the most dominant dimension affecting service quality of Rapid Bus. The output from multiple regression analysis in table 4.12 has resulted that, standardized beta for responsiveness has reported as the highest score which  $B=0.081$ . Therefore, it shows that responsiveness is the most dominant dimension affecting service quality. Throughout this finding, it confirmed that responsiveness has a strong affect towards service quality. Responsiveness is the most agreed features that has been chosen by the respondents compared to other dimensions. Moreover, responsiveness plays the most important roles to provide the best quality in services in Bus Rapid. Responsiveness influences service quality relatively service provider should be helpful and prompt in providing service so that loyalty from the users is obtained.

The result is consistent with a survey conducted by Sam et.al (2018), Lwesya and Jaffu (2017), Demir et.al (2015) and So et.al (2006) which views that

responsiveness dimension is the most influential variable in service quality of transportation. As stated by Ceylan and Ozcelik (2016), one of the vital components of SERVQUAL is the ability to solve problems that was found to be affected by responsiveness in his research. The “ability to solve problems” measures the performance of the employee at all levels. Also, Agrawal (2008), found that staff's behavior (which in link with responsiveness attribute) as most important determinant of service quality in order to satisfy users. This is inline with the study done by Junaida et.al (2011), where is proven that the SERVQUAL dimension has a positive relationship with the performance.

## **Research Limitations and Recommendations**

### *Constraints of Movement Due to COVID-19 Pandemic*

The researchers were only able to collect 257 out of 417 responses at Weld Quay station. This is because most of the users are unable to ride frequently Rapid Bus due to COVID-19 pandemic along with the enforcement of Movement Control Order (MCO) that restricted their movement. Therefore, the researchers are facing difficulties to collect the actual sample size at the station. Additionally, changes of normal operating trips that have been reduced to 50% where normally the buses will be having 17 trips per day. Nevertheless, due to the current pandemic the buses are allowed to operate nine (9) trips per day. Besides, the number of users has been limited to 50% where the capacity of users is allowed to ride up to 18 people (maximum) compared to normal capacity which is 35 people. For that reason, both limitations had influenced the response rate of the study.

### *Changes of Rapid Bus Main Station*

Previously, Weld Quay was the main station linked with the ferry terminal of Pangkalan Raja Tun Uda. However, starting 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, ferry service ceased operating, thus this caused the changes of main station Weld Quay to be placed to Swettenham Pier. Hence, this affected only fewer of the users who used Rapid Bus in that station.

### *P-TRANSQUAL Model*

P-TRANSQUAL model is utilized to study service quality. As mentioned by Bakti et.al (2015) this model is based on the existing SERVQUAL model, focusing on four (4) dimensions that consist of reliability, personnel, tangible and comfort as discussed in previous article. Further, this dimension helps to enhance the study to analyze other important factors that may contribute to improvement in service quality guidelines to service providers and also, the researchers can have better view and comprehension of this model.

### *Widen the Scope of Respondent*

In future research, it is important to focus on different respondents that can influence research factors such as collecting data from tourists. This is because the differences in views and experiences from tourists allow researchers to make comparisons and study the service quality gap between local and foreign public transport. Indirectly, the findings of the study help Rapid Bus providers make continuous improvement on service quality.

### *Widen the Scope of Various Public Transportation*

Future research should also focus on using various public transportation such as taxis, Grab car, ferry (but previously was shifted to boat) and train (KTM) so that the researchers can analyses quality attributes on local public transport and user's influence on modal choice, demand, and customer satisfaction using SERVQUAL model. This is because various modes of public transport may have different types of service quality criteria.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research on measuring service quality has focused primarily on how to meet or exceed the external customer expectations. These perspective can also be applied to the employees of a firm in this case, other major gaps could be closed in the service quality gaps model (Kang et al. 2002). Apart of that, there is a study that proven that

the SERVQUAL dimension has a positive relationship with the performance (Junaida et.al . 2011). Overall research findings of this study is significant, shown that the relationship between service quality of Rapid Bus in Weld Quay station and SERVQUAL dimension that comprise reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangible and assurance. This result able to help in transport provider to improve the quality of services at the same time can affect the users perception and satisfaction, besides to gain user attention to fully utilized the public transport.

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