



The Role of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in Supporting Passenger Service Operational Activities of PT PELNI Makassar Branch: Implementation of the 2024 Passenger Service SOP under Normal and Peak-Season (Mudik) Conditions

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Abstract. This study examines how the updated passenger service Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of PT PELNI, officially implemented on 2 February 2024, supports passenger service operations at the Makassar Branch, and how that procedure performs when it is placed under extreme operational pressure. Rather than assessing SOP compliance in general terms, the study focuses on the 2024 update and compares its implementation under two contrasting load conditions: ordinary daily operations and the annual Idul Fitri homecoming peak (mudik), one of the largest recurring mobility events in Indonesia. The research is positioned in the specific context of Indonesian archipelagic sea transport, in which PT PELNI operates a multi-port network that includes remote and small-island ports and government-assigned Public Service Obligation (PSO) and pioneer routes, so that a single standardised procedure must be executed across ports with very different levels of facilities, digital connectivity, and staffing. A descriptive qualitative single-case design was used. Data were collected between October 2025 and April 2026 through non-participant observation in two blocks (normal condition and peak condition), semi-structured interviews with six informants involved in passenger service operations, and documentation, including the 2024 SOP document, passenger manifests, and complaint records. Data were analysed through coding by service stage and by load condition, data display in a comparison matrix, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation and member checking. The results show that the 2024 SOP has strengthened procedural consistency, role clarity, and inter-unit coordination, and that procedural fidelity is high in the pre-onboard, onboard, and post-onboard stages under normal load. Under peak load, however, three critical points emerge at which the formal procedure is bridged by improvised, non-codified staff practices: queue and gate control before boarding, capacity-related comfort and complaint handling on board, and crowd flow control during disembarkation. Technical disruption of the digital check-in system and limited surge staffing were the main triggers of deviation. The study argues that in an archipelagic PSO network the effectiveness of standardisation depends less on procedural completeness than on surge capacity, digital system reliability, and codified escalation authority, and it proposes a stage-based framework of conditional standardisation together with a peak-season annex to the existing SOP.

Keywords: *Standard Operating Procedure, Passenger Service, Maritime Transport, Peak-Season (Mudik) Surge, Service Quality, Operational Resilience*

1. INTRODUCTION

The transportation sector in Indonesia has developed significantly over time, driven by the increasing need for mobility and inter-island logistics across the archipelago. As a maritime country, Indonesia relies heavily on sea transportation to connect its many islands and support both economic and social activities. In this context, maritime transport companies play a crucial role in ensuring smooth passenger and cargo movement. One of the key operators is PT PELNI Cabang Makassar, which serves passenger and goods transportation, particularly in eastern Indonesia. The company is expected to provide fast, accurate, and reliable services to support national connectivity.

In daily operations, PT PELNI Cabang Makassar manages various coordinated activities such as ticketing services, ship schedule arrangements, and inter-departmental communication. These activities require a well-structured working system to ensure smooth execution and minimize operational disruptions. To support this need, organizations implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) as formal working guidelines. SOP consists of step-by-step instructions that employees must follow in carrying out their duties. With SOP in place, work processes become more systematic and aligned with company standards.

According to Tambunan (2013), SOP is a work guideline containing procedures that must be carried out systematically to complete a task. Meanwhile, Fandy Tjiptono (2014) defines SOP as written instructions used as a guide to ensure work is effective and efficient. These definitions highlight that SOP serves as a foundation for consistent work implementation. It helps employees reduce errors while improving the quality of their performance. Therefore, SOP becomes an essential instrument in organizational management.

Wibowo (2016) explains that the main purpose of SOP is to ensure consistency in task execution according to established standards. SOP also provides clear working guidance for employees, ensuring tasks are performed in a structured manner. It helps reduce mistakes, simplifies supervision, and improves efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, SOP supports organizational discipline by standardizing work procedures. These objectives make SOP a critical component in operational management systems.

The functions of SOP are also widely recognized in organizational practice. Tambunan (2013) states that SOP acts as a working guide, a control and supervision tool, and a basis for employee performance evaluation. It also serves as a mechanism to improve overall work quality. Furthermore, SOP contributes to maintaining consistency in task execution across departments. This ensures that organizational goals can be achieved more effectively.

From a benefit perspective, SOP provides multiple advantages for organizations. Wibowo (2016) emphasizes that SOP improves work efficiency, reduces errors, speeds up processes, enhances service quality, and maintains consistency in operations.

Additionally, Hasibuan (2016) notes that SOP strengthens employee discipline and supports more effective organizational performance. These benefits show that SOP is

not only procedural but also strategic in improving service delivery. Therefore, its implementation is crucial in service-based companies like PT PELNI.

Operational activities refer to core organizational functions that ensure services and goods are delivered effectively. According to T. Hani Handoko (2015), operations are the main activities performed by organizations to produce goods or services. In service companies such as PT PELNI, operations focus heavily on customer service delivery. Moenir (2010) further explains that service is a series of activities carried out to fulfill customer needs in accordance with applicable procedures. This highlights the importance of structured operational systems.

Passenger service in maritime transport includes all activities from pre-departure, during travel, to arrival at the destination (Moenir, 2010). These services include administration, comfort, safety, and information provision. Ratminto (2015) states that passenger service quality is a key determinant of organisational performance in transportation companies. Therefore, maintaining high service standards is essential for customer satisfaction. SOP plays a major role in ensuring these service standards are consistently applied.

The relationship between SOP and operational activities is very strong and interdependent. SOP acts as a guideline that regulates how tasks should be performed in daily operations. According to Wibowo (2016), SOP helps ensure that operational processes run in a structured and efficient manner while reducing errors. Without proper SOP implementation, operational activities may become disorganized and less effective. Therefore, SOP serves as a foundation for operational success in organizations.

The role of SOP in passenger service is highly significant in standardizing procedures and improving efficiency. Hasibuan (2016) emphasizes that SOP minimizes work errors while improving service quality and customer satisfaction. Fandy Tjiptono (2014) also highlights that SOP ensures professional and structured service delivery. Previous studies, such as Deselfia DNM Sahari (2023), show that SOP implementation at PT PELNI Cabang Makassar supports operational effectiveness and improves service quality. Similarly, Ristu Ardiansyah and Boiziardi (2021) found that SOP implementation still faces challenges such as limited supervision and infrastructure constraints. Another study by Parizi Salman (2022) states that SOP updates are necessary to adapt to operational changes and improve efficiency.

Recent developments have changed the operating environment in which these procedures must work. After the COVID-19 pandemic, sea passenger traffic in Indonesia recovered rapidly, while passenger expectations regarding speed, information, digital ticketing, and comfort increased (UNCTAD, 2023; Nguyen, 2025). It was in this context that PT PELNI issued an updated passenger service SOP, which was officially implemented on 2 February 2024. This study therefore does not treat SOP as a general management concept, but focuses specifically on the 2024 update: whether a recently standardised procedure is able to answer contemporary service demands, and where it is not yet able to do so.

The geographical and institutional setting of PT PELNI makes this question analytically interesting. PT PELNI does not operate a single short crossing but a nationwide network of long-distance, multi-port voyages that connects major hubs with remote and small-island ports, and it carries government-assigned Public Service Obligation (PSO) and pioneer shipping mandates. Standardisation in such a network is

not a simple compliance exercise, because the same procedure must be executed at ports that differ sharply in terminal facilities, digital connectivity, and staffing levels, while demand on PSO routes cannot be refused or managed through pricing in the way a purely commercial operator might. Makassar, as one of the busiest hubs in eastern Indonesia and a transit point for several PSO routes, is a strategic site for observing how standardisation behaves under these constraints.

A second characteristic of the Indonesian setting is the annual demand shock produced by the national mobility calendar. The Idul Fitri homecoming season (*mudik*) concentrates a very large volume of inter-island passenger movement into a short window, so that terminal and shipboard capacity is tested far beyond ordinary daily conditions. Existing studies on SOP and service quality in Indonesian sea transport (Herno Della & Rachmannullah, 2021; Ardiansyah & Boiziardi, 2021; Salman, 2022; Sahari, 2023) largely evaluate service under ordinary operating conditions, while the international literature discusses passenger transport service quality measurement (Mikuličić et al., 2024), SOP compliance behaviour (Eskandarzadeh et al., 2023), port SOP improvement (Tampubolon et al., 2025), and the resilience of transport systems after the pandemic (Nguyen, 2025) largely without connecting them to a specific, newly updated service procedure. Little is therefore known about how a recently updated SOP behaves precisely at the moment when the service system is most stressed. That is the gap addressed by this study.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions. First, how is the 2024 passenger service SOP implemented across the pre-onboard, onboard, and post-onboard stages at PT PELNI Makassar Branch? Second, what critical points emerge when the same SOP is executed under peak-season (*mudik*) demand compared with normal daily operations? Third, under what conditions does standardisation actually improve service quality in an archipelagic PSO network? The study offers two contributions. Theoretically, it develops a stage-based framework that distinguishes the SOP provision, the observed practice, and the adaptive practice that bridges the two under surge conditions, and it formulates the notion of conditional standardisation. Practically, it derives a peak-season annex and a degraded-mode protocol that can be integrated into the existing SOP.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and their role in supporting passenger service operations at PT PELNI Cabang Makassar. The study focuses on describing real conditions in the field without using statistical calculations, relying instead on observations and interviews. This approach is chosen because it allows a deeper understanding of how SOP is applied in daily operational activities. The research is conducted at PT PELNI Cabang Makassar from October 2025 to April 2026. The object of the study includes employees involved in passenger service operations and related administrative processes.

The data used in this study consists of qualitative information gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is obtained directly from employees through interviews regarding the implementation of SOP in operational services. Secondary data is collected from documents, books, and other references related to SOP

and operational management. To support data collection, several techniques are applied, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation is carried out by directly monitoring passenger service activities at PT PELNI Cabang Makassar to understand real operational conditions.

Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to prepare guiding questions while still giving respondents the flexibility to elaborate on their answers. Documentation is used to collect supporting information from written and visual records relevant to the study. The data analysis technique applied is descriptive qualitative analysis, which involves collecting data from observations and interviews, grouping the data based on research focus, analyzing the implementation and role of SOP, and drawing conclusions from the findings. This process helps explain how SOP is applied in practice and how it contributes to improving passenger service operations.

The study is designed as a single-case study. The case was selected purposively because PT PELNI Makassar Branch is one of the busiest passenger hubs in eastern Indonesia and serves as a transit point for PSO and pioneer routes, so that both routine and surge conditions can be observed at the same service facility. The fieldwork window of October 2025 to April 2026 was chosen deliberately, because it contains ordinary operating months as well as the Ramadan and Idul Fitri homecoming peak of 2026. This makes a within-case comparison possible: the same SOP, the same terminal, and largely the same staff observed under two different load conditions. Observation was therefore organised into two blocks, namely a normal-condition block (10–28 November 2025, six observation sessions) and a peak-condition block (13–28 March 2026, covering D-7 to H+7 of Idul Fitri 1447 H, eight observation sessions).

Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct involvement in passenger service operations. In total, six informants participated, comprising the branch passenger service supervisor, a check-in and Departure Control System officer, a boarding gate officer, a customer service and information officer, an onboard passenger service crew member, and a security and crowd control officer. To protect anonymity, informants are reported using the codes I1 to I6, and verbal informed consent was obtained before each interview. Interviews lasted between 37 and 62 minutes and were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia; quotations presented in this paper are verbatim translations, with the original wording retained in the research records. Table 1 summarises the profile of the informants.

Table 1. Profile of informants and interview coverage

Code	Position / unit	Service stage covered	Condition observed	Interview date
I1	Passenger service supervisor, Makassar Branch	All stages	Normal and peak	12/11/2025
I2	Check-in and Departure Control System officer	Pre-onboard	Normal and peak	18/03/2026
I3	Boarding gate officer	Pre-onboard	Peak	20/03/2026

I4	Customer service and information officer	Pre-onboard and onboard	Normal and peak	21/11/2025
I5	Onboard passenger service crew	Onboard	Normal and peak	24/03/2026
I6	Security and crowd control officer	Pre-onboard and post-onboard	Peak	26/03/2026

Observation followed a structured sheet derived directly from the 2024 SOP document, so that practice could be compared step by step with the written procedure. In every session the researcher recorded whether each SOP step was executed, skipped, or modified; queue length and estimated waiting time at the check-in counter and at the boarding gate; the number, type, and duration of technical disruptions, such as unavailability of the check-in or boarding-pass system; the type of staff improvisation observed when the prescribed step could not be carried out; and the number of passenger complaints together with the time required to resolve them. Documentation consisted of the 2024 passenger service SOP, branch standard operating instructions, daily passenger manifests for the observed sailings, announcement scripts, and complaint records.

Data were analysed through an interactive qualitative procedure consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Reduction was carried out through two coding cycles: the first assigned each data fragment to a service stage (pre-onboard, onboard, post-onboard) and the second assigned it to a load condition (normal or peak) and to a category of procedural behaviour (full execution, modification, omission, or improvised bridging). The reduced data were displayed in a matrix that places the SOP provision, the observed practice, and the observed deviation side by side, which is the basis of Table 2 in the results section. Trustworthiness was addressed through source and technique triangulation, by comparing interview statements with observation notes and documents, through member checking of the interview summaries with the relevant informants, and by maintaining an audit trail of field notes, observation sheets, and coded transcripts.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULT

Organisational Context and the 2024 SOP Update

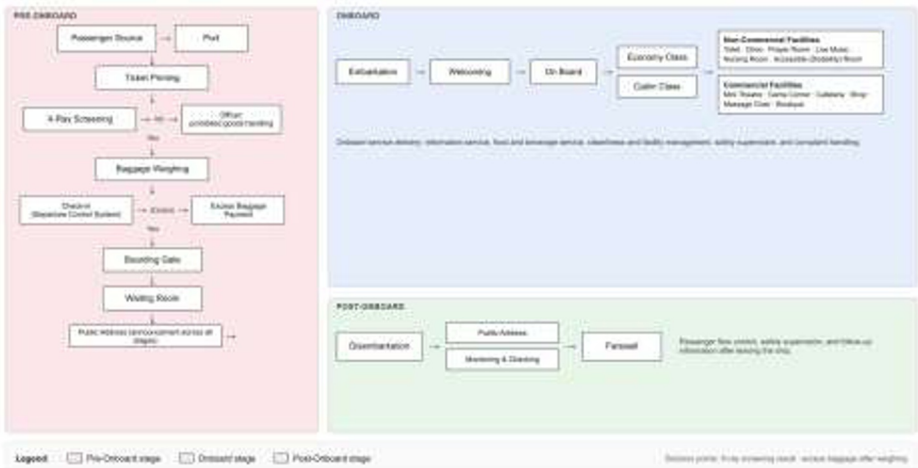
PT PELNI Cabang Makassar is part of PT Pelayaran Nasional Indonesia (Persero), a national shipping company established on April 28, 1952. Over time, the company has undergone various developments in both organizational structure and operational scope. It plays an important role in providing sea transportation services for passengers and goods across Indonesia, especially in remote and island regions. The company also supports government programs such as Public Service Obligation (PSO), pioneer shipping routes, and national logistics distribution. These responsibilities show that

PELNI is not only profit-oriented but also carries a strong public service function in maintaining national connectivity.

In operational practice, PELNI manages a wide range of activities that require strong coordination between departments. These include ticketing services, schedule management, passenger handling, cargo services, and communication between operational units. Because of this complexity, a standardized working system is necessary to ensure all activities run in an organized and controlled manner. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are therefore implemented as a formal guideline to regulate every stage of service delivery. SOP ensures that employees understand their roles clearly and follow consistent procedures in performing their tasks.

The SOP for passenger services at PT PELNI was officially implemented on 2 February 2024 as part of an effort to improve service quality and operational standards. This SOP is designed to create a structured and uniform system across all service points. It covers the entire passenger journey, starting from pre-departure services, onboard services, until post-arrival procedures. By organizing services into clear stages, the company aims to ensure that every process is carried out in a consistent, efficient, and safe manner. This structure also helps reduce operational confusion among staff and improves coordination between units.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the passenger service process at PT PELNI Makassar Branch consists of three main stages, namely pre-onboard, onboard, and post-onboard services, with a public address function that runs across the entire chain. Figure 1 also shows the two decision points at which passengers may be diverted from the standard flow, namely the result of X-ray screening for prohibited goods and the payment of excess baggage after weighing and check-in through the Departure Control System, as well as the division of onboard facilities into non-commercial and commercial services. The following subsections report the findings for each stage, first under normal operating conditions and then under peak-season conditions.



Source: Authors, adapted from the passenger service SOP of PT PELNI (2024) and field observation at PT PELNI Makassar Branch.

Figure 1. Passenger Service SOP Process at PT PELNI Makassar Branch

Pre-Onboard Service Results

The first stage, pre-onboard service, covers ticket validation and identity checking, X-ray screening, baggage weighing, check-in through the Departure Control System (DCS), payment of excess baggage, boarding gate control, waiting room management, and boarding preparation. Under normal operating conditions the sequence prescribed by the SOP was executed as written: in five of the six normal-condition observation sessions the full sequence was completed without deviation, the average waiting time at the check-in counter was seven minutes, and the longest observed queue contained 42 passengers. Informants related this consistency to the clearer division of counter duties introduced by the 2024 update, as one officer explained: “Since the 2024 procedure was issued, each counter knows exactly what it has to check. I no longer have to ask my supervisor who verifies the identity document and who prints the boarding pass” (I2, check-in and DCS officer, 18/03/2026).

The picture changed under peak-season conditions. During the peak-condition block, observation recorded queues that extended beyond the terminal hall, reaching approximately 60 metres, between 09.15 and 11.40, while 38 per cent of passengers on the observed sailing arrived less than 60 minutes before the scheduled departure. Rather than abandoning the procedure, staff bridged it: they opened an additional manual verification lane and called passengers by destination and deck through the public address system, a measure that is not written in the 2024 SOP but was reported as a routine response during the homecoming season. As one gate officer stated: “When the hall is full we cannot keep one single line. We call the passengers by destination and by deck, and we ask the security officers to open a second lane; otherwise the gate is blocked before boarding even starts” (I3, boarding gate officer, 20/03/2026).

Technical disruption was the second recurring trigger of deviation at this stage. On 17/03/2026 the DCS check-in and boarding pass printing system was unavailable for approximately 45 minutes, and the counter reverted to manual verification against the printed manifest, which lengthened the average processing time per passenger from 40 seconds to 95 seconds and produced 23 complaints at the information desk. Similar disruptions were recorded on four occasions during the fieldwork, with a total downtime of 132 minutes. Interviews indicate that the fallback to manual processing is a locally learned practice rather than a codified procedure: “If the system is down we go back to the manifest and record the boarding by hand. That is not written anywhere in the procedure; we learned it from the previous peak season” (I2, check-in and DCS officer, 18/03/2026).

Onboard Service Results

The onboard stage represents the core of the passenger experience during the voyage and, as shown in Figure 1, covers information services, food and beverage provision, cleanliness management, facility management for both non-commercial facilities such as toilets, the clinic, the prayer room, the nursing room, and the accessible room, and commercial facilities such as the cafeteria, mini theatre, game corner, shop, and boutique, as well as complaint handling. Under normal conditions, observation on a Makassar–Baubau sailing with an occupancy rate of 68 per cent

showed that meal distribution took place at the scheduled times, cleaning of public areas was carried out three times per day as required by the SOP, and the nine complaints recorded during the voyage were resolved within an average of 18 minutes.

Under peak-season conditions the same procedures were carried out with visibly reduced service margins. On the peak sailing observed, occupancy reached 118 per cent of the registered passenger capacity, and passengers were also seated in public corridors and open deck areas, which is not accommodated by the facility management provisions of the SOP. Queues at the cafeteria and at the toilets reached 25 persons at 12.30, the number of complaints rose to 47 per voyage, dominated by toilet cleanliness and the availability of seating, and the average resolution time increased to 46 minutes. Crew members responded by adding an unscheduled cleaning cycle, repeating announcements on deck discipline, and assigning additional personnel to the information point, again without a written instruction: “When the ship is that full the schedule still has to run. We add one cleaning round, we repeat the announcement about the deck, and we place one more officer at the information point so that the complaints do not pile up” (I5, onboard passenger service crew, 24/03/2026).

Post-Onboard Service Results

The post-onboard stage covers disembarkation, passenger flow control, safety supervision, monitoring and checking of the passenger areas, and the farewell function shown in Figure 1. Under normal conditions, observation showed that disembarkation followed the sequence prescribed by the SOP, with announcements delivered 20 minutes before berthing and passengers released by deck, so that the ship was cleared in approximately 35 minutes without congestion at the gangway. Monitoring and checking after disembarkation was carried out by the crew, and follow-up information was provided at the terminal when needed. During the peak block, however, approximately 1,450 passengers disembarked at Baubau at the same time, the gangway area became congested for approximately 18 minutes, and the sequential release by deck was abandoned in practice, so that clearing the ship took 62 minutes, or 27 minutes longer than under normal conditions: “During the homecoming season everyone wants to get off first. We stand at the gangway and hold the flow ourselves, because the procedure only states that passengers are released by deck” (I6, security and crowd control officer, 26/03/2026).

Roles, Responsibilities, and Cross-Stage Findings

Coordination becomes more effective and overlapping responsibilities can be avoided. This structure also supports smoother workflow between departments and strengthens overall operational control. As a result, service delivery becomes more organized and aligned with company standards.

Across the three stages, the implementation of the 2024 SOP produced several observable positive effects. The clearest is improved consistency of service delivery: the same sequence of steps was repeated across sailings and across shifts, which reduced variation between officers at the same service point. Efficiency also improved, since the division of counter duties and the use of the DCS reduced duplicated checking and shortened the processing time per passenger under normal load. All six informants stated that the written procedure gives them a defensible reference when passengers question a decision, and that it increases their confidence in handling irregular

situations, as one supervisor put it: “The procedure gives us one common reference. If a passenger protests, we can show which step applies, and coordination with the security unit and the ship’s crew starts from the same document” (I1, passenger service supervisor, 12/11/2025).

The constraints identified in the field can be grouped into four categories. The first is demand concentration and passenger behaviour, expressed in late arrival before departure, queue jumping, and crowding at the gate during peak hours, observed in six of the eight peak sessions. The second is human resource capacity: eight officers were on duty for approximately 2,350 departing passengers during the peak sailing, compared with five officers for approximately 620 passengers on a normal day, and no formal surge staffing scheme is contained in the SOP. The third is technical and infrastructural, including the check-in system disruptions described above, the limited number of X-ray units and boarding gates, and waiting room seating for only about 350 persons. The fourth is coordination and comprehension, since coordination with the port authority, security units, and onboard crew relies on informal communication during surges, and four of the six informants could not state the escalation rule that applies when the prescribed procedure cannot be carried out.

Several corrective measures were already in place during the observation period. These include socialisation of boarding rules to passengers through the public address system and social media, additional briefing and training for officers before the peak season, periodic evaluation of the SOP at branch level, upgrading of the check-in system to reduce disruption, closer coordination meetings with the port authority and security units before major departures, and gradual improvement of terminal facilities. These measures were reported as effective in reducing friction, but they remain largely reactive and are not yet codified as a distinct peak-season procedure within the SOP document.

Table 2. SOP implementation under normal and peak-season (mudik) conditions

Stage	Key SOP provision	Normal condition (observed)	Peak (mudik) condition (observed)	Critical point / adaptive practice
Pre-onboard	Ticket validation, X-ray screening, baggage weighing, DCS check-in, gate control, waiting room	Full sequence executed; average waiting time 7 minutes	Queues up to 180 passengers; late arrival 38 per cent; system downtime 45 minutes	Additional manual lane and destination-based calling; manual fallback not codified
Onboard	Information, food and beverage, cleanliness, facility and complaint management	Scheduled meals; three cleaning cycles; complaints closed in 18 minutes	Occupancy 118 per cent; corridor seating; 47 complaints per voyage	Unscheduled cleaning and extra announcements; no capacity-contingent service standard
Post-onboard	Disembarkation sequence, flow	Release by deck or class;	Simultaneous disembarkation;	Sequential release

	control, monitoring and checking, farewell	ship cleared in 35 minutes	gangway congestion 18 minutes	abandoned; crowd control improvised with security units
Cross-stage	Division of roles between management, branch, and onboard crew; public address	Coordination through scheduled briefings	Coordination through informal channels during surge	No written escalation authority or surge staffing scheme

Taken together, the results show a two-sided pattern. The 2024 SOP is applied with high procedural fidelity under normal load, where it demonstrably supports structured workflows, coordination, and consistency across the pre-onboard, onboard, and post-onboard stages. Under peak-season load, the same procedure remains the reference point, but its sequence is bridged by improvised practices at three specific points, namely queue and gate control, capacity-related comfort and complaint handling on board, and crowd flow control during disembarkation, as summarised in Table 2. The determinants of these deviations are not the content of the procedure itself but the availability of surge staffing, the reliability of the digital check-in system, and the absence of a codified escalation rule.

3.2 DISCUSSION

The high procedural fidelity observed under normal load supports the classic argument that a written procedure reduces variability by fixing the sequence of work and the allocation of responsibility (Tambunan, 2013; Wibowo, 2016). The specific contribution of the 2024 update, as reported by the informants, lies less in introducing new service elements than in clarifying who performs which step at which service point, which is consistent with findings that SOP compliance depends strongly on how clearly the task and its accountability are defined rather than on the existence of the document as such (Eskandarzadeh et al., 2023). In this respect the 2024 SOP does answer part of the modern service agenda: it stabilises a previously uneven boarding process and integrates the digital check-in step into the formal flow.

The peak-season findings, however, qualify that conclusion. The deviations recorded during the homecoming period were not violations in the sense of neglect; they were improvised measures that preserved the objective of the procedure, namely orderly and safe passenger flow, while breaking its prescribed sequence. This pattern is best interpreted through the literature on service quality and system resilience rather than through compliance alone. Studies of passenger transport service quality show that reliability and responsiveness are the dimensions most exposed when demand exceeds design capacity (Mikulić et al., 2024), and gap analyses of Indonesian ferry services report exactly this concentration of service gaps at terminal handover points (Herno Della & Rachmannullah, 2021). Post-pandemic assessments of maritime operations similarly emphasise that formal procedures perform well within an expected load envelope and require explicit surge and recovery provisions beyond it (UNCTAD, 2023; Nguyen, 2025). The results of this study indicate that the 2024 SOP has been designed for the ordinary envelope and not yet for the surge envelope.

The technical disruptions recorded at the check-in counter point to a second, less obvious implication. Digitalisation of ticketing and check-in raises throughput and reduces duplicated verification, and in that sense, it is a precondition of the standardised flow depicted in Figure 1. At the same time, it concentrates risk: when the system is unavailable, the entire pre-onboard sequence depends on a manual fallback that is learned informally and is not written into the SOP. Standardisation and digitalisation therefore interact in a double-edged way, and a procedure that codifies only the normal digital path leaves the most fragile moment of the service chain unstandardised. A degraded-mode protocol, specifying who authorises manual processing, which documents are accepted, and how passengers are informed, would extend the logic of the SOP to precisely the situation in which it is most needed.

These findings also have to be read against the archipelagic and public service character of the operator. Unlike a short commercial crossing, a PELNI sailing is a long, multi-port voyage in which the same procedure must be executed at hub terminals and at small ports with far weaker facilities, and in which PSO obligations mean that demand cannot be limited by price or refused when capacity is tight. Studies of SOP improvement in Indonesian port services show that procedural revision produces service quality gains only when it is matched by supervision capacity and infrastructure (Ardiansyah & Boiziardi, 2021; Tampubolon et al., 2025), and the present case extends that observation to the passenger side of an inter-island network. Standardisation across heterogeneous ports cannot mean identical execution everywhere; it has to mean an identical service objective with explicitly differentiated execution paths according to the facilities, connectivity, and staffing available at each node.

On this basis the study proposes the notion of conditional standardisation. A service SOP in an archipelagic PSO network should be understood not as a single fixed script but as a script with declared operating conditions, and its effectiveness is determined by three factors identified in the data: the surge capacity buffer in staffing and terminal facilities, the reliability of the digital systems on which the standard path depends, and the presence of codified escalation authority that tells officers what to do, and who decides, when the standard path becomes infeasible. The stage-based framework used in this paper, which sets the SOP provision, the observed practice, and the adaptive bridging practice side by side for each stage, offers a transferable instrument for identifying where a procedure loses traction, and it extends existing service quality work by locating the failure points at the handover between stages rather than within any single stage.

Practically, the analysis suggests five measures. First, a peak-season annex should be added to the 2024 SOP, containing threshold-based triggers, for example the opening of additional verification lanes once the queue exceeds a defined length, together with a surge staffing plan agreed in advance with the port authority and security units. Second, a degraded-mode protocol should be written for check-in system disruption. Third, capacity-contingent onboard service standards should be defined, particularly for cleaning cycles and complaint resolution times when occupancy approaches the passenger limit. Fourth, disembarkation should be governed by a written sequential release rule with a designated coordinator. Fifth, a small set of monitored indicators, such as waiting time at check-in, system downtime, and complaint closure time, should be attached to the SOP so that its performance can be evaluated rather than assumed.

The study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting these conclusions. It is a single-case, qualitative study of one branch and one peak cycle, so the findings describe mechanisms rather than measure their prevalence, and the perspective is that of operators and documents rather than of passengers. Future research could compare several PELNI branches with different facility levels, add a passenger-side survey using established service quality instruments to quantify the gaps identified here, follow more than one peak cycle to test whether adaptive practices become codified over time, and use queueing or simulation models to establish the thresholds at which the standard procedure ceases to be feasible.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the passenger service Standard Operating Procedure implemented by PT PELNI on 2 February 2024 plays an important role in supporting passenger service operations at the Makassar Branch, and that its performance is conditional on operational load. The procedure regulates all stages of service, from pre-onboard through onboard to post-onboard activities, and under normal conditions it is executed with high fidelity, so that operational processes become more organised, consistent, and easier to supervise. The presence of SOP also helps employees understand their duties more clearly, which contributes to smoother coordination between departments.

The findings indicate that SOP implementation has a positive impact on service efficiency and quality. It helps improve the accuracy of administrative processes, speed up service delivery, and maintain order during passenger handling. In addition, SOP contributes to better service consistency and supports employee performance in carrying out operational tasks. Interviews and observations also show that SOP assists staff in maintaining structured workflows during daily operations.

Under peak-season conditions, however, the same procedure reaches its limits at three specific points: queue and gate control before boarding, capacity-related comfort and complaint handling on board, and crowd flow control during disembarkation. At these points officers bridge the procedure with improvised measures that protect its objective but depart from its sequence. The triggers are demand concentration and passenger behaviour, limited surge staffing, disruption of the digital check-in system, reliance on informal coordination, and limited terminal facilities, rather than deficiencies in the wording of the procedure itself.

Accordingly, the study concludes that standardisation in an archipelagic public service network should be understood as conditional standardisation: an identical service objective with explicitly declared operating conditions and differentiated execution paths. Strengthening the 2024 SOP therefore requires a peak-season annex with threshold-based triggers and a pre-agreed surge staffing plan, a degraded-mode protocol for system disruption, capacity-contingent onboard service standards, a written sequential release rule for disembarkation, and a small set of monitored performance indicators attached to the procedure. The existing corrective measures, namely passenger socialisation, staff training, periodic SOP evaluation, system upgrading, and facility improvement, remain relevant but should be codified rather than applied reactively.

In conclusion, the 2024 SOP is a necessary but not sufficient instrument for optimal passenger service at PT PELNI Makassar Branch. It improves structure, efficiency, and service quality under ordinary conditions, while its effectiveness under surge conditions depends on surge capacity, digital system reliability, and codified escalation authority. Because the study covers a single branch and a single peak cycle, further research across branches and peak cycles, complemented by passenger-side measurement, is needed to test and generalise these findings.

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