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Strategic Implementation of SERVQUAL Dimensions to Strengthen Excellence Service in Secondary Education

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Abstract

Educational institutions in Indonesia are increasingly expected to shift from compliance-based quality management toward impact-based quality governance that is genuinely oriented toward customer satisfaction. Guided by the SERVQUAL model developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, this study aims to describe the strategic implementation of five service quality dimensions Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy at SMAN 3 Malang, a public secondary school recognized for its diverse academic and non-academic excellence programs. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the vice principal for public relations, the quality management unit, teachers, information-technology staff, and students, supported by field observation and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The findings show that each dimension has evolved beyond its conventional meaning: Tangibles through digital-based facilities, Reliability through standardized operating procedures reinforced by periodic evaluation, Responsiveness through proactive feedback mechanisms, Assurance through an integrated quality assurance system grounded in need-based competency development and instructional leadership, and Empathy through a student-centered, restorative approach. The five dimensions interact synergistically, transforming excellence service from mere administrative compliance into an institutionalized quality culture.

Keywords: SERVQUAL; excellence service; quality management

1. Introduction

The dynamics of globalization have driven a paradigm shift in the management of educational institutions. Modern education is no longer oriented solely toward the delivery of knowledge but is increasingly required to strengthen the quality of service provided to its customers. As a service provider, a school must be able to deliver educational service that is of high quality, competitive, and responsive to the needs and expectations of the community, concentrating every service effort on attitude, appearance, attentiveness, action, and responsibility that are coordinated well. Educational institutions in Indonesia are now required to shift from a quality orientation that is merely compliance-based toward impact-based quality governance, given that institutional quality should be regarded as a long-term strategic investment rather than a purely operational matter (Rochmawati et al., 2026)

Educational quality cannot be measured solely by compliance with administrative standards; it must also reflect the degree of customer satisfaction (Sallis, 2022). As demand for high-quality graduates increases, the public tends to choose schools that are able to provide quality service oriented toward customer needs. Customer preference is defined as a tendency of choice, whether favorable or unfavorable, formed on the basis of observation, action, and knowledge of the product or service offered (Azhari & Nawawi, 2024). The success of excellence service implementation is strongly influenced by a school's capacity to understand

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the preferences of its educational customers, which consist of internal customers (students, teachers, and education personnel) who experience and provide academic and non-academic service, as well as external customers (parents) who are particularly concerned with information transparency, graduate quality, and school reputation.

Efforts to fulfil customer preference in education are pursued through the implementation of excellence service, which in the educational context refers to service delivered to the fullest extent and beyond customer expectation (Rahman et al., 2021). Service is no longer limited to the completeness of facilities and infrastructure (Tangibles), but also encompasses service reliability (Reliability), responsiveness to customer needs (Responsiveness), assurance of service competence and quality (Assurance), and care and empathy toward customers (Empathy) (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Schools that are able to manage the five service dimensions consistently will possess a competitive advantage, build a positive institutional image, and cultivate long-term customer loyalty.

As a follow-up to Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 4 Tahun 2022 Tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan, which covers eight minimum standards competency of graduates, content, process, assessment, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, and financing fulfilment of these standards alone does not guarantee customer satisfaction if it is not accompanied by optimal service quality. This gap between administrative compliance and genuinely satisfying service underlines the continuing relevance of a service-quality perspective in evaluating the management of educational institutions.

A review of prior studies indicates that the integration of SERVQUAL-based excellence service strategy within the context of a public senior secondary school has not been specifically addressed. Anindya & Mindhayani (2021) applied the Customer Satisfaction Index and SERVQUAL methods to measure customer satisfaction in the laundry service industry, a context unrelated to education. Sasongko, (2021) examined the determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty through a literature review without empirical field data. Muslikhin et al., (2025) conducted a systematic review on excellence service strategy in education, concluding that professionalism and Total Quality Management strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty, but the study remained literature-based rather than an empirical case study. Supriyanto et al., (2024) examined academic service quality, student satisfaction, and loyalty within the context of higher education legal entities, a setting distinct from secondary education. Taken together, these studies indicate a research gap: no prior study has specifically integrated an analysis of excellence service implementation using the SERVQUAL dimensions through an empirical qualitative case study at the senior secondary school level.

SMAN 3 Malang was selected as the research site because it is one of the schools with a wide range of excellence programs, both academic and non-academic, such as Bedhol, the Pagelaran Seni Citra SMAN Tiga (PSCS), international school partnerships, Bhawikarsu Night (B-Night), and various sports extracurricular activities, reflecting the school's commitment to providing diverse and high-quality educational service (Al-Faruq, 2019). Building on this context, the present study aims to describe the strategic implementation of the five service quality dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy) at SMAN 3 Malang. The findings are expected to provide an empirical account of how a public secondary school translates service-quality theory into everyday practice, offering a practical

contribution for school leaders and a reference for other educational institutions seeking to strengthen excellence service oriented toward customer satisfaction.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A case study design was chosen because it enables an in-depth and comprehensive investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context at a single research site (Hadie Efendy, 2018). This design was considered appropriate for capturing the complexity of service-quality implementation as it is actually enacted by school management, teachers, and students, rather than merely measuring it through standardized numerical indicators. Data were presented in descriptive form, with the researcher acting as the key instrument who directly engaged with the field to select informants, collect information, and interpret findings.

2.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMAN 3 Malang, located at Jl. Sultan Agung No. 7, Klojen, Malang, East Java, a public secondary school with a range of academic and non-academic excellence programs. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in service delivery and quality management, comprising the Vice Principal for Public Relations, the Head of the Quality Management Unit, the Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, teachers, information-technology staff, and students as the primary customers of the school's educational service.

2.3 Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. In-depth, semi-structured interviews, combining free and guided interview techniques, were conducted with the informants above to explore strategies, policies, and lived experience related to the five service quality dimensions. Field observation was carried out to directly examine facilities, service processes, and interaction patterns between the school and its customers. Documentation was collected in the form of standard operating procedures, service satisfaction survey reports, and school policy documents to complement and cross-check the data obtained from interviews and observation.

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model of (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of four continuous stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documents were condensed by selecting, focusing, and coding information relevant to each SERVQUAL dimension, then displayed in descriptive narrative form to identify emerging patterns before conclusions were drawn and verified against the research focus.

2.5 Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was established following (Moleong, 2007) through credibility, dependability, and confirmability checks. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, source and technique triangulation cross-checking information among students, teachers, and school management, and across interview, observation, and documentation data and member checking with informants. Dependability was maintained through repeated field verification and consultation with the research supervisor, while confirmability was ensured by maintaining an auditable trail of interview transcripts and supporting documents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The qualitative findings reveal that the implementation of SERVQUAL-based Excellence Service in the secondary education context is carried out through a comprehensive service management strategy that integrates physical resources, standardized procedures, digital technology, quality assurance, and customer-oriented practices. Rather than treating service quality as a collection of independent activities, the school has embedded the five SERVQUAL dimensions into its organizational management system. This integration enables service delivery to become more systematic, adaptive, and responsive to the evolving expectations of students and parents.

The findings further indicate that the implementation of service quality extends beyond improving administrative efficiency. Instead, it represents an institutional commitment to creating an educational environment in which technology, human resources, organizational culture, and continuous evaluation operate as complementary components of educational service quality. The adoption of digital technologies supports operational effectiveness, while standardized procedures and collaborative practices ensure that services remain consistent, accountable, and focused on customer needs. Consequently, the five SERVQUAL dimensions function as mutually reinforcing elements rather than separate dimensions of service performance.

Analysis of interviews, observations, and institutional documents demonstrates that each SERVQUAL dimension is translated into concrete managerial strategies. The Tangibles dimension emphasizes continuous investment in physical and digital infrastructure to support teaching and administrative services. Reliability is strengthened through standardized operational procedures and routine managerial evaluation to ensure consistency in service delivery. Responsiveness is reflected in structured feedback mechanisms that enable the school to respond quickly to stakeholder concerns and continuously improve service quality. Assurance is achieved through competency development, instructional supervision, and integrated quality assurance systems that enhance stakeholder trust. Meanwhile, Empathy is demonstrated through personalized educational services and collaborative support involving teachers, counselors, parents, and school leaders. The strategic implementation of each SERVQUAL dimension is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategic Implementation of SERVQUAL Dimensions at SMAN 3 Malang

Dimension	Key Strategy	Main Indicators
Tangibles	Digital-based tangible service	LCD projectors and audio systems in every classroom; digital learning media; location-based attendance replacing RFID cards; phased, priority-based infrastructure investment
Reliability	Standardized service management	Unit-based Standard Operating Procedures (curriculum, student affairs, administration, public relations, library, laboratory, facilities); monthly management evaluation
Responsiveness	Continuous, feedback-based service improvement	Monthly B-Aspirasi forum; quarterly Service Satisfaction Survey; structured follow-up of complaints and suggestions
Assurance	Integrated quality assurance system	Need-based competency development; lesson-study-based supervision; instructional leadership; monitoring through Employee Performance Targets (SKP), monthly reports, and digital daily journals
Empathy	Student-centered, restorative service	Diagnostic assessment for learning personalization; cross-unit collaboration among homeroom teacher, counselor, subject teacher, and parents; restitution-triangle approach to student problems

Overall, the strategic implementation presented in Table 1 demonstrates that SERVQUAL-based Excellence Service is institutionalized as an integrated management framework rather than a series of isolated service initiatives. The combination of digital transformation, standardized governance, continuous evaluation, professional capacity building, and student-centered support creates a service ecosystem that promotes educational service quality in secondary education. These findings suggest that sustainable service quality is achieved through the interaction of organizational systems and human-centered practices, where digital innovation strengthens not replaces the interpersonal dimensions of educational services. The following subsections provide a detailed explanation of each SERVQUAL dimension based on the qualitative findings.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Tangibles: Toward Digital-Based Tangible Service

Findings on the Tangibles dimension show that SMAN 3 Malang no longer defines physical evidence of service in the conventional sense of buildings, classrooms, or learning facilities alone. Tangible evidence has shifted toward what may be termed digital-based tangible service, an integration of physical facilities with information-technology infrastructure as part of the educational service system. This transformation is reflected in the gradual digitalization of service delivery, the provision of technology-based learning tools such as LCD projectors and audio systems in every classroom, the use of digital learning media, and the replacement of RFID-card attendance with a location-based attendance system. Such innovations indicate that tangible evidence in the digital era is no longer measured solely by

the visible existence of facilities, but also by the capacity of those facilities to support the effectiveness, efficiency, and accessibility of service for the entire school community.

This finding is consistent with (Latupeirissa et al., 2024), who argue that service digitalization allows customers to obtain information more quickly, easily, transparently, and efficiently, making it an important part of public service innovation, including in education. The development of this dimension is nevertheless not without constraints: informants reported that budget limitations prevent the school from meeting every facility need simultaneously, requiring management to set priorities, optimize existing assets, and extend their service life through planned maintenance. This strategy resonates with Deming's notion of continuous improvement (Jagusiak-kocik, 2017) in which quality is achieved not through the largest resources but through an organization's capacity for sustained, incremental innovation. Analyzed through (Zeithaml, 1988) service-quality perspective, Tangibles functions as the first impression that shapes customer perception of institutional quality; at SMAN 3 Malang, that impression is increasingly built not only through a clean and representative physical environment, but also through a technology-supported learning and administrative experience that reinforces the school's professionalism, credibility, and competitiveness.

3.2.2 Reliability: Standardized Service Management as Quality Assurance

The Reliability dimension shows that service quality at SMAN 3 Malang is built through a standardized management system rather than reliance on individual competence alone. Reliability is realized through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued for every working unit curriculum, student affairs, administration, public relations, the library, laboratories, and facilities so that service delivery proceeds consistently and systematically regardless of which personnel are on duty. This finding reflects quality assurance through standardized service management, in which service quality depends on organizational systems rather than particular individuals, consistent with (Crosby, 1980) definition of quality as conformance to requirements aimed at minimizing errors toward zero defects.

Reliability is further reinforced through monthly management evaluations involving the principal, vice principals, and unit heads to review SOP effectiveness, identify service obstacles, and formulate corrective action based on evidence such as stakeholder input, satisfaction-survey results, and internal monitoring. This evidence-based decision-making process reflects the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle central to Deming's continuous-improvement philosophy (Sokovic et al., 2022) in which every finding from evaluation is followed up through procedural refinement rather than treated as a static, one-time compliance exercise. Analyzed through the SERVQUAL framework (Zeithaml et al., 1990) Reliability at SMAN 3 Malang extends beyond administrative accuracy to reflect the school's capacity to sustain service quality amid changing policy, technology, and rising community expectations. Documented, periodically evaluated procedures also strengthen accountability, ensuring that service does not depend on personal discretion but on institutional standards, gradually cultivating a shared quality culture among the entire school community.

3.2.3 Responsiveness: From Reactive to Proactive, Feedback-Based Service

Findings on Responsiveness indicate that SMAN 3 Malang has shifted away from reactive service responding only after complaints arise toward a proactive, participatory, continuous-improvement-oriented service model. This shift is embodied in the monthly B-Aspirasi forum and the quarterly Service Satisfaction Survey, structured mechanisms for gathering, analyzing, and following up on aspirations, criticism, suggestions, and complaints from students, parents, teachers, and staff. Rather than merely measuring the speed of staff response, responsiveness at this school is expressed through a two-way communication mechanism that allows customers to participate actively in evaluating service before problems escalate, an approach that may be described as anticipatory service.

This finding reinforces (Azhari & Nawawi, 2024) who argue that customer input, criticism, and complaints constitute strategic information for evaluating the effectiveness of a service system. Notably, the study found a shift in how complaints are perceived: rather than being treated as indicators of organizational failure, as in traditional service paradigms, complaints at SMAN 3 Malang are positioned as sources of organizational learning that inform procedural refinement. This reflects the Total Quality Management principle of customer focus (Rochmawati et al., 2026) in which customers are treated as strategic partners rather than passive service recipients. Structured feedback mechanisms also cultivate a participatory culture and a sense of ownership among the school community, while periodic follow-up on every input strengthens accountability and customer trust. Responsiveness thus functions not as an incidental reaction to complaints, but as an integrated component of the school's broader quality-assurance cycle.

3.2.4 Assurance: Building Trust through an Integrated Quality Assurance System

On the Assurance dimension, findings show that SMAN 3 Malang builds customer trust through an integrated quality assurance system that combines need-based competency development, collaborative instructional supervision, professional leadership, and data-based performance monitoring. Rather than training staff uniformly, the school first identifies competency gaps based on performance evaluation, policy change, technological development, and field needs, reflecting a strategic, targeted approach to professional development. Competency development is reinforced through lesson-study-based supervision, conducted not as inspection but as collaborative professional learning in which teachers observe, reflect on, and refine one another's teaching practice, cultivating a professional learning community consistent with the concept of a learning organization.

School leadership plays a central role in this dimension: the principal functions not merely as an administrator but as an instructional leader who guides, motivates, and facilitates competency development, and who is directly involved in supervision, program evaluation, and data-based decision-making. Trust is further reinforced through performance monitoring instruments Employee Performance Targets (SKP), monthly reports, and digital daily journals that make service delivery measurable, documented, and verifiable rather than dependent on subjective judgment. Collectively, these practices mirror Juran's Quality Trilogy of quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement, as reflected in (Rochmawati, 2023) forming a continuous quality-assurance cycle. Analyzed through the SERVQUAL framework, Assurance at SMAN 3 Malang is thus built not solely through individual staff competence but

through an organizational system that guarantees consistency, transforming Assurance from a personal attribute into an institutionalized quality culture.

3.2.5 Empathy: A Student-Centered, Restorative Service Culture

Findings on the Empathy dimension show that SMAN 3 Malang implements service oriented toward the needs, characteristics, and development of each student through a humanistic, adaptive, and restorative approach. Empathy is expressed not merely through the courtesy of individual teachers, but through a broader student-centered service system. This is evident in the use of diagnostic assessment at the start of learning to map each student's initial ability, interests, and learning style, informing how teachers design differentiated instructional strategies, illustrating that empathy is enacted by understanding customer needs before, and not only in response to, service delivery.

Empathy is further realized through cross-functional collaboration among homeroom teachers, guidance-and-counseling teachers, student-affairs staff, subject teachers, and parents in addressing student issues holistically, considering academic, social, emotional, and family circumstances together. Notably, student behavioral issues are addressed through a restitution-triangle approach that emphasizes dialogue, reflection, and relationship repair rather than punitive sanction, helping students understand the impact of their actions and take conscious responsibility for improvement. This finding reinforces (Barata, 2003) concept of excellence service as a combination of attitude, attention, care, and concrete action that exceeds customer expectation, and aligns with the service principles of (Zulkarnain & Sumarsono, 2018), emphasizing fairness, openness, and dignified problem resolution. In managerial terms, this humanistic culture reflects the Total Quality Management principle of customer focus in practice, positioning student needs as the basis for instructional planning, problem resolution, and policy evaluation, evidence that empathy has evolved from an interpersonal value into a managerial strategy supporting sustained service quality.

3.2.6 Integration of the Five Dimensions

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the five SERVQUAL dimensions do not function as separate service components but operate as an integrated management framework for enhancing educational service quality in secondary education. Each dimension contributes a distinct yet complementary strategic function within the school's service system. The Tangibles dimension establishes the technological and physical infrastructure necessary to support effective educational services; Reliability ensures consistency through standardized procedures and systematic governance; Responsiveness promotes organizational adaptability by incorporating continuous stakeholder feedback into service improvement; Assurance strengthens institutional credibility through competency development, instructional supervision, and integrated quality assurance mechanisms; while Empathy reinforces personalized, student-centered support through collaborative relationships among teachers, counselors, school leaders, students, and parents.

Rather than emphasizing technological innovation alone, the findings suggest that sustainable educational service quality emerges from the interaction between digital infrastructure, organizational management, professional capacity, and human-centered service practices. Digital transformation therefore serves as an enabling mechanism that

enhances operational efficiency, whereas excellence service provides the organizational culture and interpersonal values required to translate technological capabilities into meaningful educational experiences. This interaction indicates that technology and human-centered service are mutually reinforcing rather than competing elements of educational quality management.

The strategic integration of the five SERVQUAL dimensions also reflects a shift in school management from fragmented service delivery toward a holistic quality-management approach. Service quality is continuously maintained through the alignment of infrastructure development, standardized operational procedures, systematic evaluation, instructional leadership, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. Such integration enables the school to respond proactively to changing customer expectations while maintaining consistency in service delivery and organizational performance.

These findings further suggest that SERVQUAL can be operationalized not merely as an evaluation framework but as a strategic management model for educational institutions undergoing digital transformation. By embedding the five service-quality dimensions into daily managerial practices, schools are able to strengthen organizational resilience, improve service responsiveness, and foster continuous quality improvement. Consequently, the implementation of SERVQUAL-based Excellence Service extends beyond administrative compliance and evolves into an institutionalized quality culture embedded within technology utilization, leadership practices, governance systems, human-resource development, and stakeholder relationships. This institutional transformation is consistent with the transition from compliance-based quality management toward impact-based educational quality governance advocated in contemporary Indonesian education management (Rochmawati et al., 2026).

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that SMAN 3 Malang has strategically implemented all five SERVQUAL dimensions Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy each of which has evolved beyond its conventional definition into a more comprehensive, system-based practice: digital-based tangible service, standardized and continuously evaluated reliability, proactive and participatory responsiveness, an integrated quality assurance system, and a student-centered, restorative approach to empathy. Rather than functioning as separate indicators, the five dimensions interact synergistically to form a comprehensive service-quality management system that reflects the principles of Total Quality Management, particularly continuous improvement and customer focus. These findings suggest that excellence service in secondary education is best understood not as compliance with minimum administrative standards, but as an institutionalized quality culture built through the integration of technology, standardized systems, responsive communication, competency-based assurance, and humanistic care. School leaders may use these findings as a strategic reference for strengthening service quality, while future research is recommended to examine the sustainability of these strategies across other public secondary schools and to explore quantitatively the extent to which each dimension contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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