



AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS FACED BY RAILWAY PASSENGERS: EVIDENCE FROM POLLACHI

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ABSTRACT

Pollachi Junction (POY) is an important railway station serving as a transportation hub for the region and providing essential passenger services and facilities. The present study examines the problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services. Specifically, the study investigates the association between selected socio-demographic variables and the level of problems faced by passengers and identifies the major problems reported by them. Primary data were collected from 105 passengers using a structured questionnaire through the snowball sampling technique. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the chi-square test, and Weighted Mean Score Analysis. The findings indicate that the majority of passengers experienced a moderate level of problems. The chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between problem level and marital status and monthly income, whereas no significant association was observed with age, gender, area of residence, educational qualification, and type of family. The Weighted Mean Score Analysis identified booking services as the major problem, followed by time and schedule, maintenance and amenities, hygiene, facilities in train compartments, and safety and security. The study suggests that priority attention should be given to improving booking services and other identified service areas to reduce passenger problems and enhance the effectiveness of railway services at Pollachi Railway Station.

KEYWORDS – Railway Passengers; Passenger Problems; Pollachi Railway Station; Railway Services; Service Quality; Passenger Facilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Railway transportation is a crucial mode of transportation that facilitates the movement of passengers and goods, connects communities, and contributes to economic development. Indian Railways constitutes one of the world's largest railway systems and plays a significant role in the country's passenger and freight transportation. With its extensive network and large volume of daily passenger and freight movement, the quality and efficiency of railway services are important for ensuring a reliable and accessible transportation system.

Pollachi is known for its agricultural activities, green landscapes, tea estates, and proximity to important tourist and ecological destinations. Pollachi Junction has historically served as an important railway link for the movement of goods and passengers. The station's railway services commenced with the Podanur–Pollachi section on 15 October 1915, and it subsequently developed as an important railway junction connecting Pollachi with different parts of Tamil Nadu and neighbouring regions. The station also serves passengers travelling for employment, education, business, tourism, and other purposes. Therefore, the quality and accessibility of services provided at Pollachi Railway Station are important to the local population and visitors.

Previous studies indicate that railway passengers experience several service-related problems, including delays in train operations, theft, poor hygiene, long queues, inadequate toilet maintenance, insufficient passenger amenities, and difficulties accessing railway services. Such problems may adversely affect passengers' overall evaluation of railway services. Margaret Divya and Nandhinidevi (2020) reported that passengers were moderately satisfied with railway services, with comparatively higher satisfaction regarding basic facilities and lower satisfaction concerning hygienic conditions. These findings indicate that the nature and intensity of passenger problems can influence their experience of railway services.

However, the problems experienced by passengers may vary across railway stations because of differences in infrastructure, service availability, passenger characteristics, and operational conditions. Therefore, location-specific empirical investigation is necessary to identify the major problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and to determine whether the level of problems varies across different socio-demographic groups. In this context, the present study examines the association between selected socio-demographic variables and the level of problems faced by Pollachi railway passengers. It identifies the major problems associated with the station and its services.



2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature for the present study is organised into theoretical and empirical perspectives to establish the conceptual foundation and research context of railway passenger problems. The theoretical literature provides the basis for understanding how passengers evaluate railway services and perceive deficiencies in service delivery. In this regard, the SERVQUAL Model helps explain service quality through dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, while Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) explains how differences between passengers' expectations and their actual service experience may result in perceived service problems. The empirical literature examines the problems reported by railway passengers across different geographical locations, particularly in relation to hygiene, booking services, punctuality, maintenance, safety, security, and passenger amenities. Accordingly, the literature review is presented under theoretical literature and empirical literature to provide a comprehensive foundation for the present study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study integrates the SERVQUAL Model and Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) to provide a comprehensive theoretical basis for examining problems faced by railway passengers. SERVQUAL provides a service-quality perspective by identifying key dimensions through which passengers evaluate service delivery, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the context of railway services, these dimensions can be reflected through the physical condition and maintenance of railway facilities, booking services, punctuality and scheduling, hygiene, passenger amenities, safety and security, and assistance provided to passengers.

Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory complements the SERVQUAL perspective by explaining how passengers evaluate their service experiences in relation to their expectations. Passengers form expectations regarding the quality, reliability, accessibility, cleanliness, safety, and convenience of railway services. When the actual service performance falls below their expectations, negative disconfirmation occurs, which may result in passengers perceiving deficiencies or problems in the service. Conversely, when service performance meets or exceeds expectations, passengers are less likely to perceive the service as problematic.

Accordingly, the combined framework considers SERVQUAL as the basis for identifying the dimensions of railway service performance, while EDT provides the theoretical explanation for passengers' evaluation of those services. In the present study, the identified problem areas include booking services, time and schedule, maintenance and amenities, hygiene, facilities in train compartments, and safety and security. The study further examines whether the level of problems varies according to selected socio-demographic characteristics of passengers and identifies the major problems through Weighted Mean Score Analysis.

2.2 Empirical Literature

The existing literature on railway passenger problems can be broadly organised into themes relating to hygiene and basic amenities, safety and security, booking and accessibility of services, punctuality and scheduling, and infrastructure and passenger facilities.

2.2.1 Hygiene and Basic Amenities

Hygiene and basic passenger amenities are consistently identified as important concerns in railway services. **Mageshwari and Vasanthi (2019)** found that the availability and hygienic quality of food and catering services, drinking water, and refreshment facilities were major obstacles faced by passengers at Tiruchirappalli Junction. Similarly, **Anbupriya and Subadra (2017)** reported that poor toilet maintenance was one of the major problems experienced by passengers in the Erode railway division. **Ejii Samuel Obe et al. (2022)** also identified poor sanitary conditions and inadequate toilet maintenance among the major challenges faced by railway passengers. These findings indicate that the availability, cleanliness, and maintenance of basic amenities remain important components of the passenger experience.

2.2.2 Safety and Security

Safety and security constitute another significant concern in railway transportation. **Arivumalar and Mohan (2023)** reported security problems among railway line staff working night shifts, particularly in substations. From the passenger perspective, **Ejii Samuel Obe et al. (2022)** identified theft as one of the major challenges associated with rail transportation in South West Nigeria. **Rajeshwari and Elangovan (2014)** similarly found that passengers experienced theft during travel and heavy crowding while boarding trains. These studies suggest that passenger safety, security, crowd management, and protection of personal belongings require continued attention in railway services.

2.2.3 Booking and Ticketing Services

The accessibility and efficiency of ticketing services have also emerged as important passenger concerns. **Makesh and Mathankumar (2018)** reported inadequate ticket facilities as one of the major problems faced by passengers in Madurai. **Ejii Samuel Obe et al. (2022)** further identified long queues at reservation counters as a significant challenge. These findings indicate that the efficiency of booking and reservation facilities can influence the convenience of passengers, particularly where conventional ticketing and reservation systems involve waiting and congestion.



2.2.4 Punctuality and Time Management

Punctuality is another recurring concern in the railway literature. **Ejii Samuel Obe et al. (2022)** identified late arrival of trains as one of the major challenges faced by passengers. Similarly, **Anbupriya and Subadra (2017)** reported late arrival of trains as a major problem among passengers in the Erode railway division. The recurrence of punctuality-related problems across different railway contexts highlights the importance of reliable scheduling and timely train operations in passenger service delivery.

2.2.5 Infrastructure and Passenger Facilities

Problems related to railway infrastructure and passenger facilities have also been reported in previous studies. **Makesh and Mathankumar (2018)** identified old railway tracks and the poor condition of rolling stock as major problems faced by passengers. **Rajeshwari and Elangovan (2014)** highlighted heavy crowding during boarding as a significant passenger concern. In addition, **Arivumalar and Mohan (2023)** reported inadequate sanitation facilities for women employees in railway substations. These findings demonstrate that infrastructure quality, physical facilities, and adequate passenger-support systems are important aspects of railway service provision.

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that railway passengers encounter multiple and location-specific problems, particularly concerning hygiene, safety and security, booking facilities, punctuality, infrastructure, and basic passenger amenities. However, the prominence of individual problems differs across railway stations and geographical contexts. The existing evidence therefore supports the need for a location-specific investigation of Pollachi Railway Station to identify the problems that are most prominent among its passengers and to examine whether problem levels vary across socio-demographic groups. This provides the basis for the present study

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The literature indicates that railway passengers experience a range of problems relating to hygiene, booking facilities, punctuality, infrastructure, safety, and passenger amenities. However, the prominence of these problems varies across geographical locations. Previous studies conducted at Tiruchirappalli, Erode, Madurai, Salem, and other railway contexts have reported different major passenger problems, indicating that railway service-related problems are influenced by the specific characteristics and service conditions of individual locations.

Despite the availability of studies on railway passenger problems in different locations, limited empirical evidence is available concerning the problems specifically faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station. This geographical and empirical gap necessitates a location-specific investigation to determine whether the level of problems varies according to passengers' socio-demographic characteristics and to identify the major problems associated with Pollachi Railway Station and its services.

Accordingly, the following research questions are formulated:

1. Is there a significant association between selected socio-demographic variables and the level of problems faced by Pollachi railway passengers?
2. What are the major problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services?

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Railway passengers interact with various services and facilities during their journey, including ticket and booking services, time and scheduling, hygiene, maintenance, passenger amenities, and safety and security. The problems experienced in these service areas may vary according to the characteristics and circumstances of individual passengers. Therefore, examining the association between selected socio-demographic characteristics and the level of problems faced by passengers can provide useful insights into passenger-specific service requirements. Further, identifying and ranking the major problems at Pollachi Railway Station can help highlight the areas requiring greater attention from railway authorities. In this context, the present study is undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the association between selected socio-demographic variables and the level of problems faced by Pollachi railway passengers.
2. To identify the major problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is quantitative, descriptive, and empirical in nature. The sampling unit consisted of Pollachi railway passengers. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 105 respondents during March 2026 to May 2026 through a structured questionnaire using the snowball sampling technique. A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed, of which 115 were collected. After scrutiny and examination, 105 questionnaires were found suitable for further analysis. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the chi-square test, and Weighted Mean Score Analysis with the help of SPSS 25.

6. ANALYSIS

The collected primary data were systematically analysed to address the objectives of the study. The analysis is presented in the following sections:



6.1 Demographic Analysis

Simple percentage analysis was employed to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the Pollachi railway passengers, including age, gender, area of residence, marital status, educational qualification, type of family, and monthly income.

Table - 1
Socio-Economic Profile of the Passengers

Demographic Variables	No. Of Passengers (N=105)	Percentage
Age		
Up to 20 years	20	19.0
21-40 years	46	43.9
41-60 years	28	26.6
Above 60 years	11	10.5
Gender		
Male	55	52.4
Female	50	47.6
Area of residence		
Town	42	40.0
Village	63	60.0
Marital Status		
Married	49	46.6
Unmarried	56	53.4
Education Qualification		
Up to HSC	31	29.5
Undergraduate	36	34.3
Postgraduate	24	22.9
Professionals	14	11.3
Type Of Family		
Joint	38	36.2
Nuclear	67	63.8
Monthly Income		
Up to Rs. 15000	37	35.3
Rs.15,001-Rs.30,000	40	38.1
Rs.30,001-Rs.50,000	14	13.3
Above Rs.50,000	14	13.3

(Source – Primary data)

Table 1 presents the socio-economic profile of the 105 Pollachi railway passengers included in the study. The age distribution shows that the largest proportion of passengers (43.9%) belongs to the 21–40 years age group, followed by those aged 41–60 years (26.6%). In terms of gender, 52.4% of the respondents are male, while 47.6% are female, indicating a relatively balanced representation of both genders.

With respect to area of residence, the majority of passengers (60.0%) are from villages, whereas 40.0% reside in towns. Regarding marital status, 53.4% of the respondents are unmarried, compared with 46.6% who are married. In terms of educational qualification, undergraduates constitute the largest group (34.3%), followed by passengers educated up to HSC (29.5%) and postgraduates (22.9%). With respect to family type, the majority of respondents (63.8%) belong to nuclear families, while 36.2% belong to joint families.

Regarding monthly income, the largest proportion of respondents (38.1%) falls within the Rs. 15,001–Rs. 30,000 income categories, followed by those earning up to Rs. 15,000 (35.3%). Overall, the respondents represent diverse socio-demographic characteristics, providing an appropriate basis for examining the association between these characteristics and the level of problems faced by Pollachi railway passengers.

6.2 Association between problem and demographic variables

The problem index revealed that the majority (56 %) of the passengers faced a moderate level of problems at the Pollachi railway station and its services. To analyse the association between problem level and demographic variables, a chi-square test was employed.

**Table 2**
Chi-square Analysis Table

S.No.	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	χ^2 Value	df	Status
1	Age	Problem	8.428	6	Not significant
2	Gender	Problem	2.710	2	Not significant
3	Area of residence	Problem	0.273	2	Not significant
4	Marital Status	Problem	13.568	2	Significant**
5	Education Qualification	Problem	12.422	6	Not significant
6	Type Of Family	Problem	0.424	2	Not significant
7	Monthly Income	Problem	18.936	6	Significant**

(Source – Primary data)

Table 2 presents the results of the chi-square test examining the association between selected socio-demographic variables and the level of problems faced by Pollachi railway passengers. The results indicate that age, gender, area of residence, educational qualification, and type of family do not have a statistically significant association with the problem level of passengers. The calculated χ^2 values for age (8.428, df = 6), gender (2.710, df = 2), area of residence (0.273, df = 2), educational qualification (12.422, df = 6), and type of family (0.424, df = 2) are not statistically significant at the specified levels.

In contrast, a statistically significant association is observed between marital status and problem level ($\chi^2 = 13.568$, df = 2, significant at the 1% level). Similarly, monthly income has a statistically significant association with problem level ($\chi^2 = 18.936$, df = 6, significant at the 1% level). These findings indicate that the level of problems experienced by passengers varies significantly according to their marital status and monthly income, whereas no statistically significant variation is established for age, gender, area of residence, educational qualification, or type of family.

6.3 Major Problems Faced by Pollachi Passengers

To identify and rank the major problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services, Weighted Mean Score Analysis was employed. The problems were classified into major service areas, including maintenance and amenities, booking services, hygiene, safety and security, time and schedule, and facilities in train compartments. A higher weighted mean score indicates a greater level of problem perceived by the passengers.

Table 3
Problem Faced by Pollachi Passengers

PROBLEMS	5	4	3	2	1	MS	WMS	RANK
Maintenance and Amenities								
Inadequate maintenance of basic and additional amenities	22	32	37	6	8	3.5	3.56	III
Poor maintenance of electrical fittings, windows, doors, and shops	35	35	27	4	4	3.9		
Lack of maintenance of seats, berths, and luggage racks	23	24	25	26	7	3.3		
Booking Services								
Difficulty in ticket and parcel booking	60	35	9	1	0	4.5	4.08	I
Lack of response to the refund of the tickets	27	59	18	1	0	4.1		
Pantry car services are not easily accessible	25	34	39	5	2	3.7		
Hygiene								
Lack of hygienic food, drinking water, and refreshment facilities	36	35	28	2	4	3.9	3.51	IV
Unhygienic waiting and retiring rooms	23	24	25	26	7	3.3		
Insufficient ventilation	22	28	23	25	7	3.3		
Safety and Security								
Inadequate Safety and security arrangements	28	26	33	16	2	3.6	3.37	VI
No assistance or information for senior citizens and disabled passengers.	17	30	34	18	6	3.3		
Clock rooms are not safe for keeping our luggage.	17	29	24	27	8	3.2		
Time and Schedule								
Improper time management	33	38	18	7	9	3.8	3.68	II
Inaccurate information	39	26	12	16	12	3.6		
Facilities in Train Compartments								



Non-availability of curtains, screens	24	39	28	11	3	3.7	3.43	V
No extra coaches during peak and festival seasons.	11	26	43	22	3	3.2		
Limited charging points	22	35	24	15	9	3.4		

(Source – Primary data)

Table 3 presents the major problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services based on Weighted Mean Score Analysis. The results indicate that Booking Services recorded the highest weighted mean score of 4.08 and ranked first among the six major problem categories. Within this category, difficulty in ticket and parcel booking recorded the highest individual mean score of 4.47, followed by lack of response to ticket refunds (4.07) and limited accessibility of pantry car services (3.71). These findings indicate that booking-related services represent the most prominent problem area reported by the passengers.

Time and Schedule ranked second with a weighted mean score of 3.68. Within this category, improper time management recorded a higher mean score (3.75) than inaccurate information (3.61), indicating that time management was the more prominent concern within this category.

Maintenance and Amenities ranked third with a weighted mean score of 3.56. Among its individual problems, poor maintenance of electrical fittings, windows, doors, and shops recorded the highest mean score (3.89), followed by inadequate maintenance of basic and additional amenities (3.51) and lack of maintenance of seats, berths, and luggage racks (3.29).

Hygiene ranked fourth with a weighted mean score of 3.51. The highest-rated problem within this category was the lack of hygienic food, drinking water, and refreshment facilities, with a mean score of 3.92. Unhygienic waiting and retiring rooms (3.29) and insufficient ventilation (3.31) received comparatively lower scores.

Facilities in Train Compartments ranked fifth with a weighted mean score of 3.43. The non-availability of curtains and screens recorded the highest mean score in this category (3.67), followed by limited charging points (3.44) and the non-availability of additional coaches during peak and festival seasons (3.19).

Finally, Safety and Security recorded the lowest category weighted mean score of 3.37 and ranked sixth. Within this category, inadequate safety and security arrangements recorded the highest mean score (3.59), followed by lack of assistance or information for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (3.32) and concerns regarding the safety of luggage in cloakrooms (3.19).

Overall, the Weighted Mean Score Analysis indicates that booking services are the most prominent problem area, followed by time and schedule, maintenance and amenities, hygiene, facilities in train compartments, and safety and security. The findings suggest that improving booking and ticketing facilities should receive priority attention from the railway authorities.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made to the railway authorities:

1. The problem index indicates that the majority of passengers experienced a moderate level of problems at Pollachi Railway Station and its services. The chi-square analysis further indicates a significant association between problem level and marital status and monthly income. Therefore, railway authorities may examine the specific service requirements of these passenger groups and introduce appropriate passenger-oriented service improvements.
2. Booking services, which recorded the highest weighted mean score and ranked first among the identified problem areas, require priority attention. The railway authorities may improve ticket and parcel booking facilities, reduce waiting time, strengthen counter services, and improve the efficiency of ticket refund procedures.
3. Time and schedule management ranked second among the major problem areas. The railway authorities may strengthen the accuracy and timely dissemination of train schedules and passenger information to reduce inconvenience caused by delays and inaccurate information.
4. Maintenance and amenities ranked third. Regular maintenance of electrical fittings, windows, doors, shops, seats, berths, luggage racks, and other passenger amenities should be strengthened to improve the quality and usability of station facilities.
5. Hygiene-related facilities should receive greater attention, particularly the availability and cleanliness of food, drinking water, and refreshment facilities. Regular monitoring of hygiene standards may be undertaken to ensure adequate and safe passenger amenities.
6. The railway authorities may strengthen passenger safety and security arrangements through appropriate surveillance, security personnel, emergency assistance facilities, and better support for senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
7. To address the difficulty in ticket and parcel booking, the railway authorities may consider increasing the availability of UTS ticketing facilities and strengthening counter capacity, particularly during periods of high passenger demand.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the problems faced by passengers at Pollachi Railway Station and its services by analysing the association between selected socio-demographic characteristics and the level of problems and by identifying the major service-related problems experienced by passengers. The empirical findings indicate that the majority of passengers experienced a moderate level of problems at the railway station and its services. The chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between marital status and problem level and between monthly income and problem level, whereas age, gender, area of residence, educational qualification, and type of family did not show a significant association. Further, the Weighted Mean Score Analysis identified booking services as the most prominent problem area, followed by time and schedule, maintenance and amenities,



hygiene, facilities in train compartments, and safety and security. Within the booking-service category, difficulty in ticket and parcel booking recorded the highest individual problem score. These findings provide location-specific empirical evidence that the prominence of railway service problems varies across passenger groups and service dimensions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be interpreted through the combined lens of the SERVQUAL Model and Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). The identified problem areas correspond to different dimensions of railway service quality, including the tangible aspects of maintenance, amenities and hygiene; reliability-related aspects of time and scheduling; responsiveness associated with booking and passenger assistance; and assurance reflected in safety and security. The findings are also consistent with the logic of EDT, whereby passengers may perceive service deficiencies when actual service performance falls below their expected level. Thus, the study extends the application of these theoretical perspectives to the context of a semi-urban railway station, where the relative prominence of service problems may differ from findings reported for other railway locations. However, the present study does not directly test expectation–performance gaps or individual SERVQUAL dimensions; therefore, the theoretical contribution should be understood as a conceptual interpretation of the empirical findings rather than a statistical validation of the theories.

The findings have important practical implications for railway administrators and policymakers. Since booking services emerged as the highest-ranked problem, priority may be given to improving ticket and parcel booking facilities, reducing waiting time, strengthening refund mechanisms, and increasing ticketing capacity during periods of high demand. Improvements in time and schedule management, maintenance of station amenities, hygiene facilities, passenger facilities, and safety and security arrangements may further reduce the problems experienced by passengers. The significant association between problem level and marital status and monthly income also suggests that passenger service planning should consider differences in the requirements of different passenger groups rather than adopting a completely uniform approach.

The study also contributes to the existing empirical literature on railway passenger problems by providing evidence from Pollachi Railway Station. Previous studies conducted in different geographical settings have identified different dominant problems, including hygiene, toilet maintenance, punctuality, ticketing, crowding, theft, and infrastructure deficiencies. The present study similarly demonstrates that the relative importance of passenger problems is location-specific, with booking services emerging as the leading problem in the Pollachi context. This reinforces the need for railway authorities to undertake station-specific assessments rather than relying exclusively on findings from other railway divisions or geographical locations.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations. The investigation is restricted to 105 passengers at Pollachi Railway Station, and snowball sampling was employed for data collection. Consequently, the findings should not be generalised to all railway passengers without further evidence. In addition, the study focuses on perceived problems and does not directly measure passenger expectations, perceived service performance, or satisfaction. Future research may therefore employ larger probability-based samples and comparative studies involving multiple railway stations. Future studies could also operationalise the SERVQUAL dimensions and EDT constructs directly, examine the relationship between service-quality gaps and passenger satisfaction, and incorporate variables such as digital ticketing, accessibility, passenger loyalty, and service recovery. Such research would allow the theoretical framework to be empirically tested and provide stronger evidence for evaluating the effectiveness of railway service policies and interventions.

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