



Evaluating the Delivery and Quality of Rural Tourism Services in Eco-Lodges of Guilan Province

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Abstract

Purpose- This study aims to examine the delivery and quality of rural tourism services from the perspective of managers of eco-lodges in Guilan Province, Iran. It also seeks to identify the key reasons behind the lack of adoption of service quality standards by these managers. The significance of the topic lies in its contribution to sustainable tourism development, enhancement of rural residents' quality of life, and improvement of tourist satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach- This applied research employed a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through both library and field methods. The statistical population included all licensed eco-lodges in Guilan Province (126 units), which were studied using a census method. Data collection was carried out using the standard SERVQUAL questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, factor analysis, and the Friedman test.

Findings- The results revealed a significant gap between the current quality of services and the desired standards in the eco-lodges of Guilan. Most managers perceived the official service quality standards as inefficient or impractical. The primary reasons cited included inadequate infrastructure, insufficient training, and weak supervisory systems.

Research limitations/implications- The study is limited to a single province and reflects solely the managers' viewpoints. Future research is recommended to include the perspectives of tourists and regulatory authorities. Additionally, developing and localizing service quality assessment models tailored to the characteristics of rural accommodations is suggested.

Practical implications- To enhance service quality, the study recommends providing training programs for managers, improving tourism infrastructure, revising service quality indicators, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems. Showcasing successful models from other regions can also help increase the efficiency of eco-lodges.

Originality/ value- By focusing on the perspectives of service providers as key stakeholders, this study offers a novel contribution and can serve as a reference for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and investors aiming to improve rural tourism service quality.

Keywords- Eco-lodge, Rural tourism, Service quality, Service standards, Guilan Province

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the tourism industry has emerged as one of the largest service sectors globally, contributing significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) of many countries and becoming a key pillar of sustainable economic, social, and cultural development (Ranjpour et al., 2011). With its diverse capacities, particularly in developing societies, tourism can serve as an effective tool for income redistribution, job creation, and the empowerment of local communities (Mirzadeh Kouhshani & Dehghani, 2016). Covering a wide range of activities and services, tourism is regarded as one of the most critical service sectors in today's world, and it is projected to become the most profitable economic sector in the near future (Najafi-Kani et al., 2009). Among its various forms, rural tourism has gained particular importance, especially in countries like Iran that possess abundant natural, historical, and cultural resources. This form of tourism is recognized as a means for developing underprivileged areas, increasing rural household incomes, promoting indigenous culture, and preserving natural resources and cultural heritage (Badri et al., 2009; Rezvani, 2008). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017) also emphasizes rural tourism as a significant model for fostering community participation. In this context, eco-lodges have become a vital infrastructural component of rural tourism, playing a major role in attracting tourists, enhancing the quality of travel experiences, and creating economic opportunities. Over the past decade, eco-lodges in Iran have experienced substantial growth, and Guilan Province, known for its natural and cultural richness, has been a prominent part of this trend (Alaoddini & Aminzadeh, 2014). According to the Guilan Provincial Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, by the end of 2022, a total of 126 licensed eco-lodges were operating in the province, reflecting strong interest from investors and tourism authorities in community-based tourism development. Despite this quantitative growth, there is growing evidence of serious challenges concerning the delivery and quality of services in these accommodations. Many

managers and operators of eco-lodges consider the formal service quality standards issued by governmental agencies to be unrealistic or difficult to implement (Bazrafshan, 2017). Under such conditions, the expansion of eco-lodges, without effective monitoring systems and without addressing the necessary supporting infrastructure such as human resource training, transportation, marketing, and quality management, may not lead to improved tourist satisfaction. On the contrary, it may result in a decline in travel experience quality and growing distrust among tourists (Firoozi, 2019; Madanian & Shokrchizadeh, 2019).

Previous studies have primarily focused on tourist satisfaction (Soliman Fallah, 2022), customer loyalty (Modoodi Arkhoudeh et al., 2020), the socio-economic impacts of eco-lodges (Annabestani et al., 2018; Saghafi-Asl, 2022), and the empowerment of rural women (Bozorjomehri et al., 2019). However, the perspectives of eco-lodge managers, as the primary actors in the delivery of tourism services, especially within a localized and regional framework such as Guilan Province, have been largely overlooked. The main innovation of the present study lies in addressing this research gap—namely, a comprehensive and systematic investigation of the experiences and perspectives of eco-lodge managers in Guilan regarding service quality, the challenges they face, and the reasons behind their reluctance to adopt formal service quality standards. This study adopts the well-established SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), a validated tool for measuring service quality gaps from the viewpoint of both consumers and providers. Through field-based data analysis, the research aims to portray a realistic picture of the current state of service quality in rural eco-lodges and to offer actionable recommendations for standardization, training, and policymaking. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the delivery and quality of rural tourism services from the perspective of eco-lodge managers in Guilan Province, aiming to answer the central question: What are the key barriers to the effective implementation of formal service quality standards in these establishments, and how can the overall service quality be enhanced? The findings are expected to contribute significantly to the reform

of rural tourism policies, improvement of tourist satisfaction, increase in return visits, and ultimately, the economic sustainability of eco-lodges in the region.

2. Research Theoretical Literature

The present study is grounded in a conceptual framework encompassing key notions such as rural tourism, eco-lodges, tourism services, service quality, and models of quality assessment. This section aims to elucidate the theoretical underpinnings and relevant conceptual constructs related to service quality in rural eco-lodging.

2.1. Rural Tourism and Its Role in Local Development

Rural tourism, as an emerging form of sustainable tourism, serves multiple functions across economic, social, cultural, and environmental domains. It generates employment opportunities, reduces rural outmigration, increases household income, and promotes the conservation of cultural and natural heritage (UNWTO, 2017; Badri et al., 2009). As this type of tourism operates in close interaction with the local community, the design and delivery of its services and infrastructure must be adapted to the specific cultural and environmental context (Rezvani, 2008; Bazrafshan, 2017).

2.2. Eco-Lodges as a Key Infrastructure of Rural Tourism

Eco-lodges represent a core infrastructural element of rural tourism. By leveraging local resources, traditional architecture, and family-based management models, they offer visitors an authentic and immersive experience (Alaeddini & Aminzadeh, 2014). Due to their direct integration into the daily lives of host communities, these lodges serve not only as accommodation facilities but also as platforms for cultural and educational exchange.

According to Goldner and Ritchie (2013), eco-lodges create memorable and unique experiences by aligning local elements with tourists' needs. Rooted in natural environments, their facilities are designed to be sustainable, contributing to the conservation of ecologically sensitive areas while

generating income for local residents. They provide an interactive and meaningful encounter with both nature and culture, with planning, design, and operation that consciously address environmental and cultural sensitivities (Borouj, 2012).

Eco-lodges offer nature enthusiasts a unique and memorable experience worth exploring. They also create substantial opportunities for small and family-run businesses, whose success is often influenced by the quality of host-guest interactions within a homestay setting. The active participation of rural families plays a critical role in shaping tourist satisfaction and achieving sustainable local development.

The expansion of eco-lodges can serve as a model for sustainable ecotourism development, fostering community empowerment and attracting local investment. By creating new employment opportunities in rural areas, they contribute to improving livelihoods and curbing the excessive migration toward urban centers.

2.3. Quality of Tourism Services

The concept of service quality is recognized as one of the most influential factors affecting tourist satisfaction, customer loyalty, and the competitiveness of tourism businesses (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Uzunboyly, 2016). Service quality is commonly defined as “the degree of conformity between a customer’s perception of the delivered service and their expectations” (Gronroos, 2000). In today’s dynamic and competitive market environment, where rapid changes and increasing customer demands prevail, service quality has evolved into a critical and strategic asset. Accordingly, numerous tools and models have been developed to assess it. These tools vary in terms of their definitions, content, and measurement approaches. Some have been introduced as conceptual models, designed to evaluate different dimensions of service performance. Overall, the most widely recognized tools for measuring service quality, identified through comprehensive studies (Seth et al., 2005), are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Service Quality Measurement Models.

(Source: [Seth et al., 2005](#))

	Model name	Author(s)	Year	Method of measuring service quality
1	E-Service Quality Model	Santos	2003	Through dimensions of activities and incubatory
2	IT-Based Model	Zhu et al.	2002	SERVQUAL dimensions based only on perceptions
3	Perceived Value Retail Service Quality Model	Sweeney et al.	1997	Functional quality through five SERVQUAL dimensions and technical quality through one SERV dimension
4	PCP Attributes Model	Philip & Hazlett	1997	Core, central (middle), and peripheral features
5	IT Linkage Model	Berkley & Gupta	1994	– (no description)
6	Performance-Based Model	Cronin & Taylor	1992	Based on 22 SERVQUAL items but only performance-based
7	Combined Service Quality Model	Brogowicz et al.	1990	Functional and technical quality based on traditional management activities (planning, implementation, control)
8	Gap Model	Parasuraman et al.	1988	Ten dimensions of service quality
9	Functional–Technical Quality Model	Gronroos	1984	Functional and technical quality

In the tourism sector, service quality not only influences tourists' overall experiences but also plays a pivotal role in promoting the sustainable development of host regions and empowering local communities ([Martín-Cejas, 2006](#); [Haghighi et al., 2011](#)). Domestic studies have also emphasized the importance of service quality in enhancing tourist satisfaction, and a positive and significant correlation has been reported between service quality and customer loyalty ([Modoodi Arkhoushi et al., 2020](#); [Khatibzadeh et al., 2012](#)).

2.4. Challenges of Service Quality in Eco-Lodges

Despite the quantitative growth of eco-lodges, numerous challenges persist in the domain of service quality. Among the most critical challenges are: the lack of trained personnel, absence of localized standardization systems, inadequate supportive infrastructure, and the inefficiency of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ([Firoozi, 2019](#); [Bazrafshan, 2017](#)). Many eco-lodge managers, due to the experiential nature of their work, have limited familiarity with formal service quality requirements. In some cases, they even perceive such requirements as contradictory to local and indigenous conditions ([Guilan Cultural Heritage Office, 2022](#)).

2.5. Service Quality Measurement Models

Several models have been developed to assess service quality, among which the SERVQUAL model—introduced by [Parasuraman et al. \(1988\)](#)—has gained widespread acceptance. This model evaluates service quality across five key

dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL serves as a diagnostic tool for identifying gaps between customer expectations and their perceptions of delivered services. It has been widely applied in tourism-related research ([Seth et al., 2005](#); [Loke et al., 2011](#)). In the present study, the SERVQUAL model is employed to assess the quality of services offered by eco-lodges in Guilan Province from the perspective of lodge managers. Based on the model's output, the existing gaps between expected standards and actual performance have been analyzed and are illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Geographical Scope of the Research

The spatial scope of this research encompasses Guilan Province, located in northern Iran. Known for its diverse and unique characteristics, including various natural, historical, and cultural attractions alongside high biodiversity, Guilan possesses considerable potential for the development of multiple types of tourism. Since 1965 (1344 in the Iranian calendar), Guilan has been officially recognized as an independent province within Iran's administrative divisions. According to the latest administrative delineations, Guilan Province comprises 17 counties (see [Figure 2](#)), 52 cities, 43 districts, 109 rural districts, and 2,583 inhabited villages. The counties of Guilan Province, listed alphabetically, are: Astara, Astaneh-ye Ashrafiyeh, Amlash, Bandar Anzali, Talesh, Khomam, Rasht, Rezvanshahr, Rudbar, Rudsar, Siahkal, Shaft,

Somesara, Fuman, Lahijan, Langarud, and Masal. Bandar Anzali is the smallest county in terms of area, whereas Rudbar is the largest in the province. Unlike many other provinces with relatively low rural populations, Guilan has a significant rural population of 927,660 individuals, accounting for 37% of the province's total population. This considerable proportion of rural inhabitants has facilitated rural tourism as one of the accessible and prominent tourism types in the region. Among

the common services in rural tourism are eco-lodges, which are widely distributed throughout Guilan's rural areas, as shown in Table 2. Given the spatial distribution of eco-lodges across rural regions of Guilan, rural tourism represents a key tourism model in the province, capable of attracting a substantial number of tourists annually with the primary objective of staying in these eco-lodges.

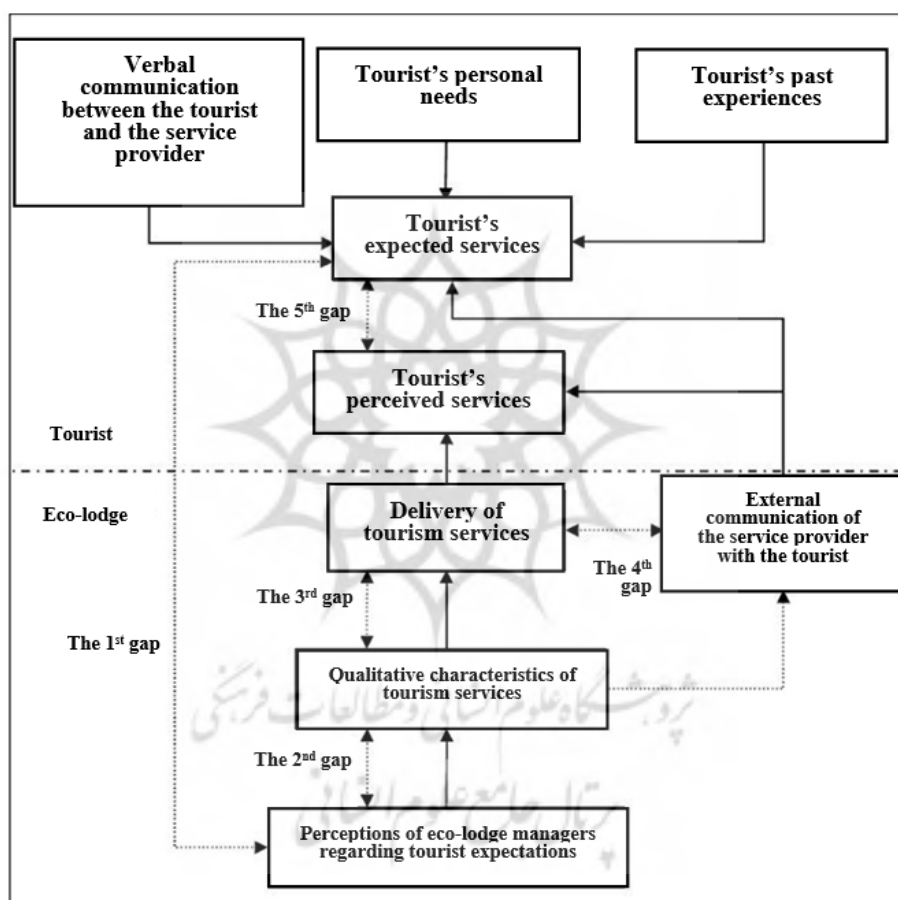


Figure 1. Gaps in the SERVQUAL Model Based on Tourism Services with Summaries and Additions.

Table 2. Number of Eco-lodges in Guilan Province by County (in Alphabetical Order)
(Source: Guilan Provincial Office of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism, Winter 2023)

	County	Number of Licensed Eco-lodges
1	Astara	1
2	Astaneh-ye Ashrafiyeh	3
3	Amlash	3
4	Bandar-e Anzali	0
5	Talesh	13
6	Khomam	5
7	Rasht	15
8	Rezvanshahr	9

	County	Number of Licensed Eco-lodges
9	Rudbar	16
10	Rudsar	11
11	Siahkal	7
12	Shaft	12
13	Someh Sara	5
14	Fuman	9
15	Lahijan	8
16	Langarud	5
17	Masal	4
Total		126

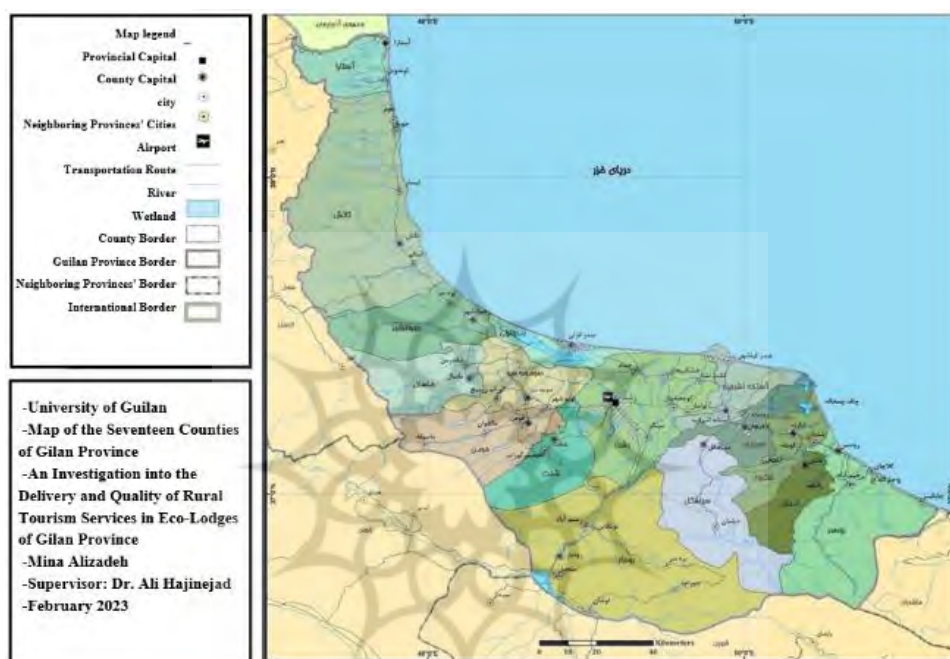


Figure 2. Map of the 17 Counties of Guilan Province.

(Source: Research Findings, 2024)

According to Table 2, Rudbar County—with a total of 16 eco-lodges—has the highest number of rural ecolodging facilities in Guilan Province, while Astara County, with only one eco-lodge, ranks the lowest in this regard. Notably, Bandar Anzali County has no registered eco-lodges. Given the variety and diversity of tourist attractions, the geographical and altitudinal dispersion of eco-lodges, and the relatively easy access to tourism infrastructure, it can be argued that part of the pathway and infrastructure necessary for tourism development in the province has already been established. Consequently, the lack of comprehensive tourism growth may be attributed to other limiting factors, such as the quality of tourism services.

3.2. Methodology

The present study adopts an applied and descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to assess the delivery and quality of rural tourism services from the perspective of eco-lodge managers in Guilan Province. The research seeks to identify existing service quality gaps and offer practical recommendations for improving rural tourism services. In terms of purpose, the research is applied; in terms of methodology, it is descriptive-analytical. The descriptive component was employed to understand and characterize the managers' perceptions regarding service delivery and quality, while the analytical component was used to explore relationships among variables and analyze service quality gaps. Data collection was

conducted through both library and field methods. In the documentary phase, relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research were compiled by reviewing books, academic articles, theses, reports, and reputable databases. The fieldwork involved the use of the standardized SERVQUAL questionnaire along with semi-structured interviews conducted with eco-lodge managers.

The statistical population of the study comprised all officially licensed eco-lodge managers in Guilan Province. According to the latest data provided by the Guilan Provincial Department of [Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts](#), the total number of licensed eco-lodges as of winter 2022 was 126. Given the limited size of the population, a census method was employed, aiming to collect data from all members of the target population.

The primary instrument for data collection was the SERVQUAL questionnaire, which measures

service quality across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The questionnaire was adapted to reflect the specific conditions of rural tourism in Guilan and utilized a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). To complement the questionnaire data and gain deeper insights into the reasons behind managers’ disagreement with certain service standards, semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted. These interviews were designed based on the responses obtained from the questionnaires. Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review by tourism professionals and academic faculty. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha test, the results of which confirmed the acceptable reliability of the data collection tool.

Table 3. Results Obtained from the Cronbach’s Alpha Test

	Five SERVQUAL Dimensions	Alpha / Reliability Coefficient
1	Tangibility Index (Questions 1 to 4)	0.664
2	Reliability Index (Questions 5 to 9)	0.513
	Responsiveness Index (Questions 10 to 13)	0.500
4	Assurance Index (Questions 14 to 17)	0.689
5	Empathy Index (Questions 18 to 22)	0.726

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 26. The statistical methods employed included: Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution tables, to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents; One-sample t-test, to compare the mean responses with a reference level; Factor analysis, to identify key components of service quality from the perspective of eco-lodge managers; Friedman ranking test, to determine the relative importance of the service quality dimensions.

To facilitate access to managers operating in remote rural areas, data collection was conducted through online (electronic) questionnaires. Furthermore, during the semi-structured

interviews, research ethics principles were observed, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Addressing the issue of tourism service quality and gaining a precise understanding of the associated challenges significantly contributes to enhancing the overall level of service delivery in the tourism sector. Based on the theoretical framework and relevant literature, a comprehensive assessment of the five SERVQUAL dimensions and their sub-components was deemed necessary to evaluate the current status of rural tourism service quality in Guilan Province from the managers’ perspectives. Accordingly, the conceptual model of the research is presented in [Figure 3](#).

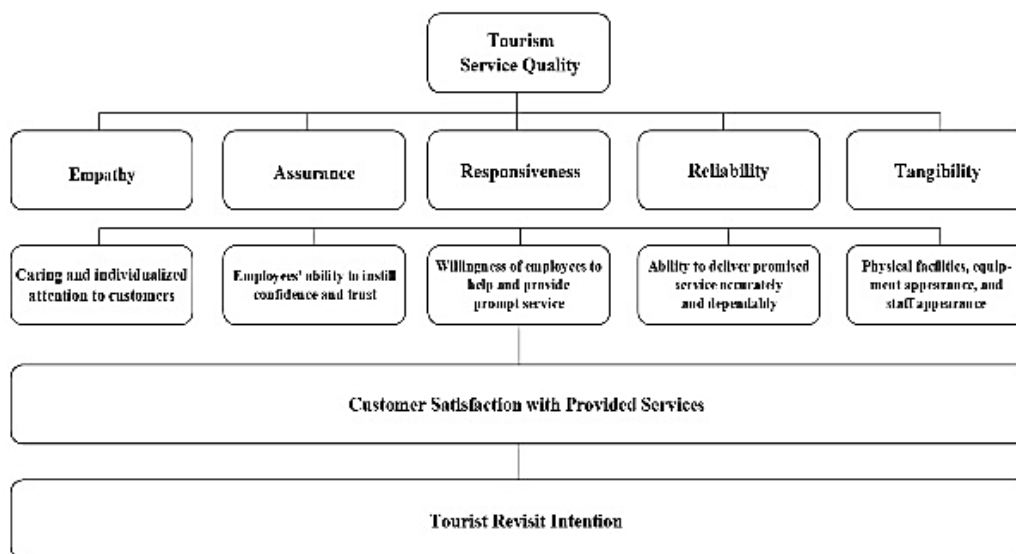


Figure 3. Conceptual Research Model Based on SERVQUAL Dimensions.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Population

To analyze the demographic and professional characteristics of eco-lodge managers, six variables were examined: gender, age, educational attainment, place of birth (local or non-local), eco-lodge operational status (active or inactive), and years of operation. According to the data in Table 4, the majority of respondents were male. Out of the 58 participants, 39 individuals (67.2%) were male, and 19 individuals (32.8%) were female, indicating a relatively higher male presence in the management of eco-lodges in Guilan Province. The largest share of respondents belonged to the age group of 40–54 years (39.43%), followed by those aged 25–39 years (37.9%), while the smallest proportion belonged to the 55–69 age group (22.3%). This distribution suggests that most eco-lodge managers are middle-aged. In terms of

education, bachelor's degree holders accounted for 39.7% (23 individuals), followed by master's degree holders at 27.6% (16 individuals). The least frequent educational level was doctoral degree, held by only 2 individuals (4.3%). The majority of the managers were local to Guilan Province, with 50 individuals (86.2%) identifying as local and only 8 individuals (13.8%) being non-local. This highlights the predominance of local stakeholders in the management of rural eco-lodges. Of the 58 eco-lodges surveyed, 51 (87.9%) were operational, while 7 (12.1%) were inactive, indicating that most facilities were active during the study period. Additionally, 45 eco-lodges (77.6%) had been operating for less than five years, while 13 (22.4%) had between five to ten years of experience, suggesting that the majority of lodges are relatively newly established and are currently in their growth phase.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	Female	19	32.8%	32.8%
	Male	39	67.2%	100%
Age	25-39	22	37.9%	37.9%
	40-54	23	39.43%	77.33%
	55-69	13	22.3%	100%
Education	Dropout	3	5.2%	5.2%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
	Diploma	9	15.5%	20.7%
	Associate degree	5	6.8%	29.3%
	Bachelor's degree	23	39.7%	69%
	Master's degree	16	27.6%	96.6%
	Doctorate (PhD)	2	3.4%	100%
Place of Birth	Native	50	56.2%	86.2%
	Non-native	8	13.8%	100%
Accommodation Operation Status	Active	51	87.9%	87.9%
	Inactive	7	12.1%	100%
Work Experience	> 5 years	45	77.6%	77.6%
	5-10 years	13	22.4%	100%

This section analyzes managers' responses to items measuring service quality across the five SERVQUAL dimensions: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Table 5 presents the distribution of agreement levels for each statement. In the Tangibility dimension, over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements such as "staff are neat and well-groomed" and "the physical appearance of facilities matches the type of service provided." This reflects managers' sensitivity to the physical appearance of eco-lodges. In the Reliability dimension, high levels of agreement were observed—up to 91% on certain items—regarding trust, commitment to promises, and effective response. These findings

indicate a strong emphasis on honesty and accountability among respondents. For the Responsiveness dimension, a high percentage of managers disagreed with statements suggesting that expectations of staff responsiveness are unrealistic, highlighting the importance placed on prompt response and guest support. In the Assurance dimension, more than 90% of respondents agreed with the necessity of employee support and providing a sense of security for guests. In terms of Empathy, most managers emphasized the importance of personalized attention to customers. However, a portion of the responses revealed uncertainty or operational constraints in fully meeting this expectation.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Demographic Characteristics

Indicator	Items		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Tangibility	Eco-lodges should have up-to-date and modern equipment.	n.	5	5	5	1	21	7	14
		(%)	8.6	8.6	8.6	1.7	36.2	12.1	24.1
	Eco-lodges should have significant physical facilities.	n.	0	5	1	10	16	19	7
		(%)	0	8.6	1.7	17.2	27.6	13.8	12.1
	Eco-lodge staff should appear clean and well-groomed.	n.	1	1	0	1	1	13	41
		(%)	1.7	1.7	0	1.7	1.7	22.4	70.7
R	The physical appearance of the facilities should match the type of services provided.	n.	1	0	2	1	4	28	22
		(%)	1.7	0	3.4	1.7	6.9	48.3	37.9
		n.	1	0	0	0	1	13	43

Indicator	Items		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	When eco-lodges promise to do something, they should follow through.	(%)	1.7	0	0	0	1.7	22.4	74.1
	Eco-lodges should show genuine interest in solving guests' problems.	n.	0	1	0	2	3	10	42
		(%)	0	1.7	0	3.4	5.2	17.2	72.4
	Eco-lodges should be dependable.	n.	0	0	0	1	1	3	53
		(%)	0	0	0	1.7	1.7	5.2	91.4
	Eco-lodges should deliver their services at the promised time.	n.	0	0	0	0	2	16	40
		(%)	0	0	0	0	3.4	27.6	69.0
	Eco-lodges should keep accurate records.	n.	0	1	0	6	4	17	30
		(%)	0	1.7	0	10.3	6.9	29.3	51.7
Responsiveness	Guests should not expect eco-lodges to inform them of the exact time services will be performed.	n.	15	20	4	2	7	6	4
		(%)	25.9	34.5	6.9	3.4	12.1	10.3	9.6
	It is unrealistic for guests to expect excellent service from the staff of these eco-lodges.	n.	25	13	7	4	4	4	1
		(%)	43.1	22.4	12.1	6.9	6.9	6.9	1.7
	Staff at eco-lodges should not always be expected to be willing to help guests.	n.	17	20	10	1	5	5	0
		(%)	29.3	34.5	17.2	1.7	8.6	8.6	0
	Eco-lodge staff should respond promptly to guests' requests.	n.	1	0	0	0	6	28	23
		(%)	1.7	0	0	0	10.3	48.3	39.7
Assurance	Guests should be able to trust the staff of these eco-lodges.	n.	1	0	0	1	1	20	35
		(%)	1.7	0	0	1.7	1.7	34.5	60.3
	Guests should feel safe in their transactions with eco-lodge staff.	n.	0	0	0	0	2	17	39
		(%)	0	0	0	0	3.4	29.3	67.2
	Eco-lodge staff should be courteous.	n.	0	0	0	0	1	12	45
		(%)	0	0	0	0	1.7	20.7	77.6
	Staff should be adequately supported by the eco-lodge managers to do their jobs properly.	n.	0	0	0	0	0	18	40
		(%)	0	0	0	0	0	31.0	69.0
Empathy	Eco-lodges should not be expected to give individual attention to guests.	n.	5	8	1	2	8	21	13
		(%)	8.6	13.8	1.7	3.4	13.8	36.2	22.4
	Staff at these eco-lodges cannot be expected to provide personal attention to guests.	n.	5	3	3	5	8	24	10
		(%)	8.6	5.2	5.2	8.6	13.8	41.4	17.2
	It is unrealistic to expect the staff to understand guests' specific needs.	n.	7	15	4	9	6	13	4
		(%)	12.1	25.9	6.9	15.5	10.3	22.4	6.9
	It is unrealistic to expect these eco-lodges to act in the best interests of their guests.	n.	7	7	10	5	17	12	0
		(%)	12.1	12.1	17.2	8.6	29.3	20.7	0
	These eco-lodges should not be expected to operate during hours convenient to all guests.	n.	8	6	5	2	13	21	3
		(%)	13.8	10.3	8.6	3.4	22.4	36.2	5.2

4.2. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Population

To analyze the collected data, one-sample t-test, factor analysis, and Friedman ranking test were employed. These statistical methods are discussed in the following subsections.

In this section, the quality status of service dimensions provided in eco-lodges was examined based on the SERVQUAL model by analyzing the mean and standard deviation of its indicators.

According to Table 6, the "Assurance" dimension achieved the highest mean score (6.293) among all service quality dimensions. In contrast, the "Responsiveness" dimension received the lowest evaluation, with a mean score of 1.758. These results indicate that although the level of assurance was assessed relatively favorably, rapid and effective responsiveness remains a critical area requiring improvement.

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Indicators

Indicators	Population	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Tangibility	58	4.310	1.788	0.234
Reliability	58	5.741	1.370	0.180
Responsiveness	58	1.758	1.128	0.148
Assurance	58	6.293	0.973	0.127
Empathy	58	2.775	1.665	0.218

The one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean scores of the indicators significantly differed from a neutral benchmark value of 5, based on the 7-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire (Test Value = 5). According to the test rule, if both the lower and upper bounds of the confidence interval are positive, the variable's mean is significantly greater than the test value. Conversely, if both bounds are negative, the mean is significantly lower than the test value.

As shown in Table 7, the dimensions of Reliability and Assurance have both lower and upper bounds of the confidence interval above zero, indicating that their mean values are significantly higher than the test value. On the other hand, the dimensions of Tangibility, Responsiveness, and Empathy have both bounds below zero, indicating significantly lower mean values compared to the test value.

Table 7. Findings from the T-test and Significance Level

Indicators	T statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level	Lower limit	Upper limit
Tangibility	-2.936	57	0.005	-1.160	-0.219
Reliability	4.119	57	0.000	0.380	1.101
Responsiveness	-21.870	57	0.000	-3.538	-2.944
Assurance	10.116	57	0.000	1.037	1.589
Empathy	-10.171	57	0.000	-2.662	-1.781

To determine the relative importance and prioritization of the study indicators, the Friedman ranking test was used. This test identified the perspectives of eco-lodge managers in Guilan Province regarding the importance and priority of

each SERVQUAL dimension. According to the results presented in Table 8, the "Assurance," "Reliability," and "Tangibility" dimensions were assigned the highest ranks in terms of priority.

Table 8. Friedman Ranking Test of the Indicators

Indicators	Mean rank
Tangibility	2.92
Reliability	3.99
Responsiveness	1.46
Assurance	4.41
Empathy	2.22

Table 8 confirms the statistical significance of these rankings with a p-value less than 0.05, justifying the use of the Friedman test.

Table 9. Significance Level of the Friedman Ranking Test of the Indicators

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	155.977	4	0.000

Based on the results of the Friedman ranking test, the first dimension, Tangibility, is prioritized with higher importance for the items presented in Table 10, specifically Item 3: “Eco-lodge staff should be

clean and well-groomed in appearance.” and Item 2: “Eco-lodges should have notable physical facilities.”

Table 10. Friedman ranking test for the first indicator: Tangibility

Item	Tangibility	Mean rank
1	Eco-lodges should have up-to-date and modern equipment, including amenities such as cooling, heating, beds, etc.	1.93
2	Eco-lodges should have significant physical facilities.	1.94
3	Staff at eco-lodges should be clean and well-groomed in appearance.	3.29
4	The appearance of the physical facilities of eco-lodges should be appropriate to the type of services offered.	2.84

The significance level was below 0.05, indicating that the Friedman test is appropriate for ranking these indicators.

Table 11. Significance level of the Friedman ranking test for the first indicator: Tangibility

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	66.150	3	0.000

For the second dimension, Reliability, as shown in Table 11, the following items received higher priority, Item 8: “Eco-lodges should deliver their

services exactly at the promised time.” and Item 7: “Eco-lodges should be dependable.”

Table 12. Friedman ranking test for the second indicator: Reliability

Item	Reliability	Mean rank
5	When eco-lodges promise to provide a service, they must fulfill it.	3.09
6	The staff of eco-lodges should show genuine interest in resolving guests' problems.	2.97
7	Eco-lodges must be reliable.	3.47
8	Eco-lodges should deliver their services exactly at the promised time.	3.98
9	Eco-lodges must properly maintain the records of their guests.	2.47

According to Table 12, the significance level was less than 0.05, supporting the validity of the Friedman ranking.

Table 13. Significance level of Friedman test for the second indicator, Reliability

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	30.175	4	0.000

Regarding the third dimension, Responsiveness, [Table 13](#) shows that the prioritized items are: Item 13: “Eco-lodge staff should promptly respond to

guests’ requests.” and Item 10: “It is not reasonable to expect eco-lodges to specify the exact time of service delivery to guests.”

Table 14. Friedman test for the third indicator, Responsiveness

Item	Responsiveness	Mean rank
10	It should not be expected from eco-lodges to inform guests of the exact timing of their services.	2.35
11	It is unrealistic for guests to expect good and excellent services from eco-lodges.	1.88
12	Staff of eco-lodges should not always be expected to be willing to help guests.	2.01
13	Staff of eco-lodges must respond to guests' requests promptly.	3.76

[Table 14](#) confirms that the significance level is below 0.05, validating the use of the Friedman test

for these rankings.

Table 15. Significance level of Friedman test for the third indicator, Responsiveness

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	96.482	3	0.000

For the fourth dimension, Assurance, as detailed in [Table 15](#), the following items hold higher priority: Item 16: “Eco-lodge staff should be polite.” and

Item 15: “Guests should feel secure in their transactions with eco-lodge personnel.”

Table 16. Friedman test for the fourth indicator, Assurance

Item	Assurance	Mean rank
14	Guests should be able to trust the staff of eco-lodges.	2.29
15	Guests should feel secure in their interactions with the staff of eco-lodges.	2.48
16	The staff of eco-lodges should be polite.	2.68
17	Staff should receive sufficient support from eco-lodge managers to perform their duties properly.	2.54

[Table 16](#) shows a significance level under 0.05, confirming the appropriateness of the Friedman

ranking test.

Table 17. Significance level of Friedman test for the fourth indicator, Assurance

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	10.673	3	0.014

Finally, for the fifth dimension, Empathy, [Table 17](#) indicates that the following items are of higher importance: Item 19: “It is not expected for eco-

lodge staff to provide personalized attention to customers.” and Item 18: “One should not expect eco-lodges to offer individual attention to guests.”

Table 18 – Friedman test for the fifth indicator, Empathy

Item	Assurance	Mean rank
18	Eco-lodges should not be expected to provide individual attention to customers.	3.55
19	It is unreasonable to expect the staff of eco-lodges to offer personal attention to customers.	3.56
20	It is unrealistic to expect eco-lodges to seek the best interests of customers.	2.40
21	It is unrealistic to expect staff to understand all the needs of customers.	2.41
22	Eco-lodges should not be expected to serve customers at all hours.	3.09

According to Table 18, the significance level is below 0.05, confirming the use of Friedman test for

ranking these items.

Table 19. Significance level of Friedman test for the fifth indicator, Empathy

Total number of observations	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
58	43.362	4	0.000

4.3. Factor Analysis

To identify the main factors affecting the quality of rural tourism services in eco-lodges, factor analysis was employed. Prior to conducting the factor analysis, it is necessary to ensure the adequacy of the sample size. For this purpose, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were utilized.

The KMO index is used to determine sampling adequacy and ranges between 0 and 1. If the KMO

value is at least 0.6, the data is considered suitable for factor analysis. Otherwise, the factor analysis results may not be valid. In this study, the KMO value was 0.6, indicating that the data are appropriate for factor analysis. Furthermore, the significance level of Bartlett's test was less than 0.05, confirming the suitability of the factor analysis for identifying the underlying structure.

Table 20. Bartlett's test and KMO index for assessing sample adequacy

Statistical value of the KMO	Significance level
0.6	0.002

Table 20 presents the correlation of each variable with itself.

Table 21. Correlation matrix between variables

Indicators	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Tangibility	1.000	0.119	-0.214	0.199	-0.100
Reliability	0.119	1.000	-0.075	0.216	-0.110
Responsiveness	-0.214	-0.075	1.000	-0.222	0.531
Assurance	0.199	0.216	-0.222	1.000	-0.110
Empathy	-0.100	-0.110	0.531	-0.110	1.000

Table 21 shows the initial communalities and extracted communalities. The first column represents the communalities before extraction; hence all initial communalities are equal to one. In the second column, higher extracted communalities indicate that the extracted factors

better represent the variables. Variables with extracted communalities less than 0.5 are not prioritized and may be removed. The variables Assurance, Reliability, and Tangibility were considered prioritized indicators.

Table 22. Initial and extracted communalities of indicators

Indicators	Initial communalities	extracted communalities
Tangibility	1.000	0.673
Reliability	1.000	0.754
Responsiveness	1.000	0.537
Assurance	1.000	0.767
Empathy	1.000	0.598

The gap analysis results yield three possible states: First, when customers' perceptions exceed their expectations, the quality is considered excellent; second, when customers' perceptions match their

expectations, the quality is regarded as good; third, when customers' perceptions fall below their expectations or do not meet them, the quality is considered poor.

Table 23. Gap between expectations and perceptions regarding service quality based on respondents' opinions and standard criteria

	Items	Perceptions	Expectations	Gap	Service Quality
1	Eco-lodges should have up-to-date and modern equipment.	4.8	4.3	0.5	Excellent
2	Eco-lodges should have significant physical facilities.	5.1	6.6	-1.5	Poor
3	Eco-lodge staff should appear clean and well-groomed.	6.5	7	-0.5	Poor
4	The physical appearance of the facilities should match the type of services provided.	6.1	6.3	-0.2	Poor
5	When eco-lodges promise to do something, they should follow through.	6.6	6.7	-0.1	Poor
6	Eco-lodges should show genuine interest in solving guests' problems.	5.6	5.7	0.8	Excellent
7	Eco-lodges should be dependable.	6.9	7	-0.1	Poor
8	Eco-lodges should deliver their services at the promised time.	6.7	5.5	1.2	Excellent
9	Eco-lodges should keep accurate records.	6.2	7	-0.8	Poor
10	Guests should not expect eco-lodges to inform them of the exact time services will be performed.	3.0	5.5	-2.5	Poor
11	It is unrealistic for guests to expect excellent service from the staff of these eco-lodges.	2.4	1.3	1.1	Excellent
12	Staff at eco-lodges should not always be expected to be willing to help guests.	2.5	2.5	0.0	Good
13	Eco-lodge staff should respond promptly to guests' requests.	6.2	6.2	0.0	Good
14	Guests should be able to trust the staff of these eco-lodges.	6.5	6.5	0.0	Good
15	Guests should feel safe in their transactions with eco-lodge staff.	6.6	5.8	0.8	Excellent
16	Eco-lodge staff should be courteous.	6.8	7	-0.2	Poor
17	Staff should be adequately supported by the eco-lodge managers to do their jobs properly.	6.7	5.8	0.9	Excellent
18	Eco-lodges should not be expected to give individual attention to guests.	5.0	4.8	0.2	Excellent
19	Staff at these eco-lodges cannot be expected to provide personal attention to guests.	5.1	4.8	0.3	Excellent
20	It is unrealistic to expect the staff to understand guests' specific needs.	3.8	2.5	1.3	Excellent
21	It is unrealistic to expect these eco-lodges to act in the best interests of their guests.	3.9	3.4	0.5	Excellent
22	These eco-lodges should not be expected to operate during hours convenient to all guests.	4.4	6	-1.6	Poor

Table 23 presents the gaps between expectations and perceptions regarding service quality, categorized according to the three states mentioned above.

Table 24 shows the gaps between expectations and perceptions of service quality based on the mean

Table 24. Gap between expectations and perceptions regarding service quality based on the average questions of each indicator

	Indicators	Mean	Service quality
1	Tangibility	0.4	Excellent
2	Reliability	0.0	Good
3	Responsiveness	-0.3	Poor
4	Assurance	0.4	Excellent
5	Empathy	0.1	Excellent

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Considering that quality is precisely what tourists demand at the time-of-service delivery, understanding the perspectives of service providers and the underlying reasons for their service delivery approach is of great importance. The SERVQUAL method can effectively assist in this regard and facilitate more effective future planning. Using this tool, service quality was examined across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Focusing on the research questions and objectives, this study concentrated on managers of eco-lodges as a subset of rural tourism service providers. According to the findings, 67.2% of respondents were male, and the largest age group (39.43%) fell within the 40–54 years range. Among respondents, 39.7% held a bachelor's degree. Notably, based on the respondents' educational level, the minimum requirement for participating in the Facility Management Course—which is a prerequisite for obtaining an eco-lodge license (Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, 2019), is a bachelor's degree. According to Table 4, 27.5% (i.e., 17 out of 58 participants) did not meet the educational requirements for holding an eco-lodge license. Furthermore, 86.2% of respondents were native to the province. One important criterion for issuing an operation license for eco-lodges is local residency; however, 13.8% (8 out of 58 participants) were non-native. Additionally, 87.9% of respondents were currently active in eco-lodge operations, while 12.1% were inactive due to reasons such as

scores of each dimension. According to the results, the largest gap was observed in the Responsiveness dimension, while the smallest gap was in the Tangibility dimension.

the seasonal nature of their business or non-residency. Regarding experience, 77.6% of respondents had less than five years of work experience, while 22.4% had between five to ten years. The first eco-lodge in Guilan Province was established in 2015, and by mid-2019, the number of eco-lodges registered by the provincial Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts was 27 units. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the World Tourism Organization's recommendations to postpone travel until after the pandemic, the issuance of eco-lodge licenses in Guilan increased. This growth may largely be attributed to low-interest loans (single-digit rates) granted to applicants. While quantitative growth in eco-lodge numbers aims to diversify and multifacet rural employment, creating an exceptional opportunity to strengthen the rural economy, the main concern is the ongoing increase without adequate control or sustainable monitoring processes. This situation adversely affects the quality of rural tourism-related businesses. To rank the quality dimensions, the Friedman test was employed. According to respondents, among the five dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy), assurance, reliability, and tangibility had higher priority. To determine service quality levels, the SERVQUAL gap model was used. Results based on the gap between expectations and perceptions indicated that among the 22 tourism products evaluated, 10 were of excellent quality, 3 were of good quality, and 9 were of poor quality. Examining the mean gap scores for each dimension

revealed that among the five dimensions, three demonstrated excellent quality, one exhibited good quality, and one showed poor quality. Specifically, tangibility and assurance had a positive gap of 0.4, empathy scored 0.1, reliability was neutral at 0.0, and responsiveness showed a negative gap of -0.3. Thus, the largest gaps between expectations and perceptions were observed in the responsiveness and reliability dimensions, indicating that service delivery scored lowest in customer satisfaction.

The results obtained from data analysis revealed that managers of eco-lodges hold diverse and sometimes conflicting views regarding service quality standards. In some cases, their perspectives markedly diverge from official regulations, a discrepancy evident across various dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. In the tangibility dimension, although the majority of managers emphasized the importance of staff cleanliness, appropriate appearance of facilities, and availability of suitable equipment, a group expressed opposition to the use of modern equipment, considering it inconsistent with the traditional nature of eco-lodges. This viewpoint reflects a desire among some managers to preserve the authenticity of the environment and provide tourists with a genuine local experience. Regarding reliability, most respondents stressed the necessity of trust, timely service delivery, and maintaining records. Only a few opposed these aspects due to concerns about unpredictable conditions or personal considerations. In terms of responsiveness, a significant portion of managers believed that eco-lodges should promptly respond to tourists' needs, asserting that high responsiveness directly correlates with customer satisfaction and the continuity of lodge operations. In the assurance dimension, virtually no opposition to the proposed indicators was observed. Managers highlighted that polite behavior, ensuring a sense of security, and supporting staff are indispensable requirements in managing eco-lodges. Concerning empathy, while some managers argued that equal attention should be given to all tourists, most acknowledged the importance of understanding individual customer needs. However, lack of adequate training and human resource shortages

were cited as primary barriers to realizing this dimension effectively.

The findings of this study provide a realistic picture of the challenges and capacities related to service quality in Guilan Province's eco-lodges from the managers' perspective. Consistent with [Latifian et al. \(2020\)](#), who reported that assurance and reliability were highly significant and relatively well-evaluated in Golestan Province eco-lodges, the responsiveness dimension emerged as a weakness in both studies, highlighting a widespread challenge in delivering swift and effective services across rural eco-lodges nationwide. Similarly, [Reisinejad et al. \(2022\)](#) found in Mazandaran Province that insufficient training and a shortage of specialized human resources are major obstacles to achieving quality in the empathy and responsiveness dimensions—issues also emphasized in the present study. Managers recognized the importance of understanding tourists' individual needs but identified resource and training deficiencies as critical challenges. Based on the findings, although most managers emphasize the necessity of improving service quality, they express critical and sometimes opposing views toward official standards. These oppositions mainly stem from three key factors: the misalignment of standards with local realities, lack of resources and training, and weaknesses in supervisory structures. Comparing these results with global experiences—particularly those presented at the 1995 International Ecotourism Conference in Costa Rica—eco-lodges in other countries operate with a clearer understanding of tourism and its products, and regard compliance with service quality standards as part of their professional identity. In contrast, many eco-lodge managers in Guilan Province, and broadly in Iran, are unfamiliar with the concept of service quality as an intangible tourism product or perceive it as conflicting with the simplicity, locality, and self-management of their lodges. Previous studies such as [Alaeddini & Aminzadeh \(2014\)](#) and [Firoozi \(2019\)](#) have similarly emphasized that the absence of professional training, lack of systematic evaluation frameworks, and the scarcity of specialized institutions in the ecotourism sector have led eco-

lodges to rely more on individual experiences and managerial preferences rather than scientific and standardized frameworks. Given the expansion of ecotourism as a forward-looking and sustainable approach in the tourism industry, attention to service quality is not only a professional necessity but also a fundamental condition for the survival and development of these units in competition with other forms of tourism. As highlighted, service quality should be regarded not merely as a formal obligation but as a value respecting tourists' rights, enhancing travel experiences, and fostering sustainable local development.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Conduct thorough assessments of the conditions and challenges faced by eco-lodges to inform decisions on non-renewal of licenses.
- Revise the licensing criteria for eco-lodges, particularly by removing the mandatory requirement of holding a bachelor's degree.
- Review the curriculum of facility management courses and differentiate the specific training needed for eco-lodge managers from the general facility management training programs.
- Develop and implement targeted training programs to increase awareness among managers and staff regarding regulations and classification standards for eco-lodges.
- Organize consultation sessions tailored to the profile and circumstances of each eco-lodge.
- Establish continuous and periodic evaluations of eco-lodge operations using participatory approaches.
- Initiate research and academic projects independent of government agencies to promote the improvement of tourism service quality in eco-lodges.
- Motivate staff to respond promptly to tourists' issues by enhancing incentive systems through the activation of reward mechanisms.
- Foster a supportive environment to strengthen empathy among managers and employees.
- Encourage staff to deliver services within the promised timeframes.

Ultimately, the development of ecotourism cannot be achieved solely through quantitative growth in the number of eco-lodges. Adherence to quality principles, respect for local culture, strengthening infrastructure, and providing specialized training

are essential to steer this sector towards sustainability and genuine growth.

Throughout various stages of the research, numerous limitations and challenges were encountered. The most significant ones are as follows:

- The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the tourism sector. According to estimates by the World Tourism Organization, global tourism is not expected to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels (i.e., 2019) until the end of 2024, under the most optimistic scenarios.
- According to data on Iranian tourism, the most adversely affected occupations during the pandemic were tour guides and eco-lodge operators. This has led to a noticeable decline in motivation among these two target groups to remain active in the tourism sector.
- Some respondents were unwilling to complete the questionnaire due to a lack of trust in the Guilan Provincial Office of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.
- Some respondents declined participation because of grievances over the non-renewal of their operating licenses by the same office.
- Another factor for reluctance to respond was the requirement to attend training courses as a condition for license renewal, which was perceived as burdensome.
- A number of eco-lodge managers were not interested in attending training sessions, either due to lacking the required educational qualifications or because the institutions authorized to conduct such courses were not recognized or trusted by them.
- Distrust towards academic research projects was also evident. Many managers believed that the Guilan Provincial Office of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts had, in recent years, made several unfulfilled promises to encourage participation in research, resulting in both financial and non-financial burdens for participants.
- A lack of familiarity with tourism and the specific concepts addressed in the questionnaire was another issue, with some respondents stating that managing an eco-lodge was not their primary occupation.
- Some managers lacked the literacy and background knowledge needed to complete the questionnaire,

as several did not possess even a high school diploma.

- Limited access to social media also posed a challenge. Consequently, the questionnaire was distributed via SMS to all 126 eco-lodge managers, and follow-up phone calls were made to ensure its receipt.
- Inadequate internet access prevented some participants from responding to the online questionnaire.

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Authors' contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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بررسی نحوه ارائه و کیفیت خدمات گردشگری روستایی در اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی استان گیلان

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چکیده مبسوط

۱. مقدمه

پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی نحوه ارائه و کیفیت خدمات گردشگری روستایی از منظر مدیران اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی استان گیلان انجام شده است. امروزه گردشگری به‌عنوان یکی از ارکان اصلی توسعه پایدار، نقش مهمی در اقتصاد، اشتغال‌زایی و تقویت هویت فرهنگی ایفا می‌کند. در این میان، گردشگری روستایی به‌ویژه از طریق اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی، به ابزاری کارآمد برای توانمندسازی جوامع محلی، کاهش مهاجرت و حفظ میراث طبیعی و فرهنگی تبدیل شده است. استان گیلان با توجه به برخورداری از منابع طبیعی و فرهنگی غنی، به یکی از مهم‌ترین مقاصد گردشگری کشور بدل شده و تعداد اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی آن در سال‌های اخیر رشد چشمگیری داشته است. با این حال، افزایش کمی این واحدها، لزوماً به ارتقای کیفیت خدمات منجر نشده و این موضوع به یکی از چالش‌های جدی در مسیر توسعه پایدار گردشگری در استان بدل شده است.

۲. روش تحقیق

این پژوهش با روش توصیفی-تحلیلی و با رویکرد کاربردی انجام شده است. جامعه آماری تحقیق شامل کلیه اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی دارای مجوز در استان گیلان (۱۲۶ واحد) بود که به روش سرشماری بررسی شدند. برای گردآوری داده‌ها از پرسشنامه استاندارد SERVQUAL استفاده شد که پنج بعد ملموسات، قابلیت اطمینان، پاسخگویی، اعتماد و همدلی را می‌سنجد. علاوه بر پرسشنامه، مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته با مدیران اقامتگاه‌ها نیز انجام شد تا داده‌های کیفی برای تفسیر بهتر نتایج فراهم گردد. داده‌ها با استفاده از نرم‌افزار SPSS نسخه ۲۶ و آزمون‌های آماری T-تک‌نمونه‌ای، تحلیل عاملی و آزمون فریدمن تحلیل شدند.

۳. یافته‌های تحقیق

یافته‌های پژوهش نشان داد که بین کیفیت خدمات ارائه‌شده و انتظارات موجود بر اساس استانداردهای ملی شکاف معناداری وجود دارد. در این میان، شاخص «اعتماد» بالاترین میانگین را در بین پنج بعد مدل SERVQUAL داشت، در حالی که شاخص «پاسخگویی» پایین‌ترین سطح رضایت را از دیدگاه مدیران به خود اختصاص داد. این امر نشان می‌دهد که اگرچه مدیران اقامتگاه‌ها در ایجاد حس اعتماد و امنیت برای مهمانان موفق بوده‌اند، اما در پاسخگویی سریع و به‌موقع به نیازها و درخواست‌های گردشگران ضعف‌هایی وجود دارد که نیاز به توجه جدی دارد. بررسی دقیق‌تر هر شاخص نشان داد که در زمینه ملموسات، ظاهر فیزیکی اقامتگاه‌ها و آراستگی کارکنان نسبتاً مطلوب ارزیابی شده، اما تجهیزات مدرن و امکانات رفاهی متناسب با استانداردهای خدمات کمتر از سطح انتظار بوده است. تحلیل داده‌های جمعیت‌شناختی پاسخ‌دهندگان نیز حاوی نکات قابل‌توجهی است. اکثریت مدیران شرکت‌کننده در پژوهش مرد بودند (۶۷/۲ درصد) و بیش‌ترین فراوانی مربوط به گروه سنی ۴۰ تا ۵۴ سال بود. حدود ۴۰ درصد پاسخ‌دهندگان دارای مدرک کارشناسی و بیش از ۸۶ درصد آن‌ها بومی استان گیلان بودند. همچنین، بیش از ۷۷ درصد از اقامتگاه‌ها سابقه فعالیت زیر پنج سال داشتند که نشان از جدیدالتأسیس بودن بسیاری از این واحدها دارد. این ترکیب جمعیتی می‌تواند به‌عنوان فرصتی برای آموزش و توانمندسازی نسل جدید مدیران اقامتگاه‌ها تلقی شود. بر اساس نتایج تحلیل عاملی، شاخص‌های اعتماد، قابلیت اطمینان و ملموسات بیش‌ترین میزان واریانس تبیین‌شده را داشتند. همچنین آزمون فریدمن نیز نشان داد که این سه شاخص از اولویت بیش‌تر از دیدگاه مدیران برخوردارند. در مقابل، پاسخگویی و همدلی، کم‌ترین

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از سوی دیگر، لازم است نظام ارزیابی و نظارت خدمات گردشگری نیز بازنگری شود. به جای تمرکز صرف بر کنترل و جریمه، باید نظامی تعاملی و مبتنی بر یادگیری ایجاد شود تا اقامتگاه‌ها در مسیر بهبود مستمر قرار گیرند. همچنین معرفی و الگوسازی از اقامتگاه‌های موفق در سطح ملی و منطقه‌ای می‌تواند انگیزه و راهنمای عمل برای دیگر واحدها فراهم کند. در کنار آن، استفاده از فناوری‌های نوین برای رزرواسیون، مدیریت ارتباط با مشتری و بازخوردگیری، می‌تواند کیفیت تجربه گردشگران را به‌طور محسوسی افزایش دهد.

در جمع‌بندی، این پژوهش بر پایه دیدگاه‌های مدیران اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی، تصویری واقعی از وضعیت کیفیت خدمات در استان گیلان ارائه می‌دهد. این دیدگاه‌ها می‌توانند به‌عنوان منابع ارزشمند برای سیاست‌گذاران، برنامه‌ریزان و فعالان صنعت گردشگری روستایی مورد استفاده قرار گیرند. با توجه به اهمیت فزاینده گردشگری روستایی در توسعه مناطق کمتر برخوردار، توجه به کیفیت خدمات و ایجاد چارچوب‌هایی بومی، منعطف و قابل‌اجرا، ضرورتی انکارناپذیر است. یافته‌های این پژوهش می‌تواند به طراحی نظام‌های مؤثر ارزیابی، آموزش هدفمند و تدوین دستورالعمل‌های واقع‌گرایانه کمک کند و نقش مؤثری در ارتقاء رضایت گردشگران، افزایش بازدید مجدد و تحقق توسعه پایدار در مناطق روستایی کشور ایفا نماید.

کلیدواژه‌ها: اقامتگاه بوم‌گردی، گردشگری روستایی، کیفیت خدمات، استاندارد خدمات، استان گیلان.

تشکر و قدرانی

پژوهش حاضر حامی مالی نداشته و حاصل فعالیت علمی نویسندگان است.

اهمیت را در ذهن مدیران داشتند. این یافته نشان می‌دهد که تمرکز مدیران بیش‌تر بر جنبه‌های فیزیکی و ملموس خدمات و ایجاد حس اعتماد بوده و به ابعاد نرم‌تر و بین‌فردی مانند همدلی و پاسخگویی توجه کمتری شده است. از این رو، لازم است در برنامه‌های آموزشی و استانداردسازی، بر تقویت ابعاد پاسخگویی و همدلی نیز تأکید شود. از جمله نکات قابل‌تأمل در نتایج کیفی تحقیق، دلایل عدم پذیرش کامل استانداردهای کیفیت خدمات توسط مدیران اقامتگاه‌هاست. بیشتر مدیران معتقد بودند که استانداردهای رسمی اغلب با شرایط واقعی اقامتگاه‌ها و بافت فرهنگی و اقتصادی روستاها همخوانی ندارد. به‌طور مشخص، مشکلاتی مانند نبود زیرساخت‌های لازم، کمبود نیروی انسانی آموزش‌دیده، ضعف در آموزش‌های تخصصی، ناهماهنگی استانداردها با شرایط بومی، و ناپایداری درآمد ناشی از فصلی بودن گردشگری، به‌عنوان موانع کلیدی در اجرای صحیح استانداردهای کیفیت عنوان شدند. برخی از مدیران حتی استانداردها را بیش از حد نظری و غیرقابل اجرا ارزیابی کرده‌اند.

۴. بحث و نتیجه‌گیری

بر این اساس، پژوهش حاضر پیشنهاد می‌دهد که برای ارتقاء کیفیت خدمات گردشگری در اقامتگاه‌های بوم‌گردی، رویکردی مشارکتی در تدوین و اجرای استانداردها اتخاذ شود؛ به‌گونه‌ای که مدیران اقامتگاه‌ها، کارشناسان محلی، و نهادهای نظارتی به‌صورت مشترک در تدوین شاخص‌ها مشارکت کنند. همچنین، برنامه‌های آموزشی برای مدیران و کارکنان اقامتگاه‌ها باید به‌صورت کاربردی و مبتنی بر نیازهای واقعی طراحی شود. توسعه زیرساخت‌ها، به‌ویژه در حوزه حمل‌ونقل و فناوری اطلاعات، می‌تواند بستر مناسبی برای بهبود کیفیت خدمات فراهم کند.



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