

Analysis of the Competence of Tour Leader Svarga Tour and Travel on the Smooth Departure Process of Umrah Pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport

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ABSTRACT

The success of the Umrah pilgrims' departure process is influenced not only by the operational system of travel companies but also by the competence of Tour Leaders as the primary companions of pilgrims. Tour Leaders play an essential role in ensuring that each departure stage, from document verification to boarding procedures, is conducted effectively according to established standards. This study aims to analyze the competence of Tour Leaders in supporting the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport, managed by Svarga Tour and Travel, as well as to identify the challenges faced by Tour Leaders and the obstacles experienced by pilgrims during the departure process. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation involving five purposively selected informants consisting of Tour Leaders, an Operational Manager, and Umrah pilgrims. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that Tour Leader competence, including knowledge, communication skills, coordination abilities, problem-solving skills, and professional attitudes, significantly contributes to the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims. The main challenges include incomplete travel documents, schedule changes, late arrival of pilgrims, and differences in pilgrim characteristics. This study highlights the importance of Tour Leader competence as an operational factor in improving the effectiveness of Umrah departure services at airports.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Umrah in Indonesia has experienced rapid development in line with the increasing interest of the public in performing the pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Madyan et al., 2025). This condition encourages Umrah Pilgrimage Travel Organizers (PPIU) to improve service quality to meet the needs and expectations of pilgrims (Alamsyah & Muharram, 2024). In the service industry, service quality is one of the primary determinants of customer satisfaction and organizational sustainability (Amerta & Madhavi, 2023). Therefore, Umrah travel organizers are required to employ competent human resources to ensure that every stage of the service process is carried out effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with established operational standards (Pranata & Samsudin, 2021).

One of the most critical stages in organizing Umrah travel is the departure process at the airport. During this stage, pilgrims must complete several operational procedures, including document verification, airline check-in, security screening, immigration clearance, and boarding. These activities require close coordination among travel agencies, airlines, ground handling personnel, airport security officers, and immigration authorities. According to Rauch et al. (2025), airport operational efficiency depends heavily on effective coordination among stakeholders and the readiness of personnel involved in service delivery. Therefore, effective management at every departure stage is essential to ensure that pilgrims depart safely, orderly, and on schedule.

In the departure process, the Tour Leader serves as both a travel companion and an operational coordinator. The Tour Leader is responsible for ensuring the completeness of pilgrims' travel documents, providing information regarding departure procedures, coordinating group movements within the airport, and communicating with various operational stakeholders. In addition, Tour Leaders are expected to make prompt decisions when facing flight schedule changes, administrative issues, or other unexpected operational situations. These responsibilities require strong competencies in communication, coordination, leadership, and problem-solving to ensure the smooth implementation of departure procedures (Pamuji & Limei, 2023; Reski & Sonita, 2026). Consequently, the competence of the Tour Leader is considered one of the key factors influencing the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims.

Competence is generally defined as the combination of knowledge, skills, and behavioral characteristics that enable individuals to perform their duties effectively and professionally (Pamuji & Limei, 2023). In the context of Umrah travel services, Tour Leader competence includes understanding airport operational procedures, coordinating with multiple stakeholders, communicating effectively with pilgrims, and demonstrating professionalism throughout the departure process (Widiati et al., 2024). These competencies are essential for maintaining service quality while minimizing operational disruptions that may occur during departure.

Several previous studies have examined the competence of Tour Leaders in the context of religious tourism services. Aini & Ardiansyah (2025) found that Tour Leaders play a significant role in assisting pilgrims throughout the pilgrimage, thereby influencing overall service quality. Similarly, Reski and Sonita (2026) reported that Tour Leader competence contributes substantially to service quality through effective communication, coordination, and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, Widiati et al. (2024) emphasized that human resource quality is a major determinant of successful service delivery in the religious tourism industry. Ummah et al. (2025) demonstrated that Tour Leader competence positively affects pilgrims' satisfaction through responsive and professional services, while Febriani et al. (2026) highlighted communication skills as a critical factor in building pilgrims' trust during the pilgrimage experience.

However, previous studies have primarily focused on the relationship between Tour Leader competence and overall service quality or pilgrim satisfaction. Existing studies have rarely examined Tour Leader competence from an operational perspective, particularly in relation to ensuring the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at airports. Moreover, no previous study has specifically investigated the implementation of Tour Leader competencies during the departure process at Adi Soemarmo International Airport, where airport operational procedures require intensive coordination among travel agencies, airlines, ground handling personnel, immigration officers, and airport authorities.

This limitation represents the research gap addressed in the present study, namely the lack of empirical evidence regarding how Tour Leader competencies contribute to the effectiveness and smoothness of airport departure operations for Umrah pilgrims.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on analyzing Tour Leader competence within the specific context of Umrah departure operations at Adi Soemarmo Airport. Unlike previous studies that mainly evaluated Tour Leader competence in terms of service quality or pilgrim satisfaction, this study examines competence as an operational factor influencing the success of departure activities. Furthermore, this research identifies the competencies required by Tour Leaders in managing travel documents, coordinating with multiple stakeholders, communicating with pilgrims, solving operational problems, and ensuring compliance with airport procedures. Consequently, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of Tour Leader competence during the pre-departure stage and contributes practical recommendations for improving the quality of Umrah travel services.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at Svarga Tour and Travel, several operational challenges were identified during the departure process, including pilgrims arriving late at the gathering point, incomplete travel documents, changes in flight schedules, and diverse pilgrim characteristics requiring different assistance approaches. Additionally, some pilgrims, particularly first-time international travelers and elderly pilgrims, experienced difficulties in understanding airport procedures. These findings indicate that competent Tour Leaders are essential for anticipating operational challenges, coordinating stakeholders effectively, and ensuring that the departure process proceeds in an orderly manner according to organizational service standards. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the competence of Tour Leaders at Svarga Tour and Travel in supporting the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to obtain a comprehensive picture of the competence of Tour Leaders in supporting the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport (Alamsyah & Muharram, 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the phenomena that occur in the field based on the experiences, perceptions, and work practices of informants who are directly involved in the operational process of pilgrim departure (Junaidi et al., 2026).

The research was carried out at Svarga Tour and Travel with an observation location on the departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport, Boyolali, Central Java. The object of the research is the competence of the Tour Leader in carrying out the task of assisting pilgrims from the process of preparing for departure to boarding the plane.

The research informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of informants based on direct involvement in the departure operational process (Baye, 2025). The informants consist of a Svarga Tour and Travel Operational Manager, two active Tour Leaders, and two Umrah pilgrims who have participated in departures through the company. The selection of informants is carried out to obtain information from the perspective of management, operational implementers, and service users so that the data obtained is more comprehensive.

Data collection was carried out through three techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation (Ataman et al., 2024). The interview is used to gather information about the implementation of the Tour Leader's duties, the form of competence possessed, operational constraints, and the experience of pilgrims during the departure process. Observation was carried out by directly observing the activities of the Tour Leader when accompanying pilgrims at the airport (Buitelaar & Kadrouch-Outmany, 2023). Documentation is used as supporting data in the form of photos of activities, company operational standards, and administrative documents related to the pilgrim departure process (Ibrahim, 2022).

Data analysis refers to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña models, which include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn (Ridiyawati et al., 2025). The data reduction stage is carried out by selecting information that is relevant to the research objectives. Furthermore, the data is presented systematically in the form of narrative descriptions and tables to facilitate the interpretation process. The last stage is carried out by drawing conclusions based on the patterns found during the study.

The validity of the data was tested through triangulation techniques, which are comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation (Azizah et al., 2025). The application of triangulation aims to increase the credibility of research results so that the information obtained can be scientifically accounted for.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tour Leader's Competence on the Smooth Departure Process of Umrah Pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport

The results of the study show that the competence of Tour Leaders at Svarga Tour and Travel has a very important role in supporting the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport. This competence is reflected in the mastery of knowledge of departure operational procedures, skills in communicating and coordinating with various parties, and professional attitude in providing services to pilgrims. These three aspects complement each other to create an orderly, effective, and operationally compliant departure process, which is consistent with the concept of competence proposed by Pamuji & Limei (2023) and the importance of human resource quality emphasized by Widiati et al. (2024).

Based on the results of the interview with the Operational Manager and Tour Leader, before departure, the completeness of the pilgrims' documents was checked, such as passports, visas, flight tickets, and other identities. The Tour Leader also ensures that each pilgrim receives information about departure schedules, baggage arrangements, and service stages at the airport. This step was taken to minimize administrative errors that have the potential to hinder the departure process, which supports the findings of Rauch et al. (2025) that effective airport operations require well-prepared operational procedures and coordination among stakeholders.

During the check-in process, the Tour Leader is responsible for coordinating the pilgrims to follow procedures in accordance with airline regulations. After the check-in process is completed, the Tour Leader accompanies pilgrims through security screening, immigration checks, and the departure waiting area. At every stage, the Tour Leader continuously provides guidance, especially for first-time international travelers and elderly pilgrims who require more intensive assistance. These findings are in line with Aini & Ardiansyah (2025), who emphasized the important role of Tour Leaders in accompanying pilgrims throughout the pilgrimage process.

In addition to technical abilities, the results of the study also show that communication skills are among the most dominant competencies. The Tour Leader is able to deliver information clearly and understandably, enabling pilgrims to feel more confident in following each departure procedure. Effective communication also facilitates coordination with airline personnel, ground handling staff, airport security officers, and immigration officers when flight schedule changes or administrative problems occur. This finding supports the studies of Reski & Sonita (2026), who highlighted communication and coordination as key competencies of Tour Leaders, and Febriani et al. (2026), who identified communication skills as an important factor in building pilgrims' trust.

From the attitude aspect, Tour Leaders demonstrate professional behavior through discipline, responsibility, patience, and the ability to remain calm when facing unexpected situations. This professional attitude increases pilgrims' confidence in the services provided and helps create a conducive departure atmosphere. These findings reinforce the competency dimensions described by Pamuji & Limei (2023) and support the relationship between professional service and pilgrim satisfaction reported by Ummah et al. (2025).

The findings of this study show that the competence of Tour Leaders not only functions as an individual's ability to perform work but also as an important factor supporting the quality of pilgrim departure services. The better the competence possessed by Tour Leaders, the lower the likelihood of operational obstacles that may disrupt the smooth departure process. This finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that Tour Leader competence contributes directly to operational effectiveness during the airport departure stage, complementing previous findings that mainly focused on service quality and pilgrim satisfaction (Aini & Ardiansyah, 2025; Reski & Sonita, 2026; Ummah et al., 2025).

Obstacles Faced by Tour Leaders in the Departure Process of Umrah Pilgrims

Based on the results of interviews and observations, Tour Leaders still face various obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the departure process. These obstacles originate from both internal and external factors. The most frequent obstacle is pilgrims arriving late at the gathering point. This condition reduces the time available for document verification and check-in procedures, requiring Tour Leaders to adjust operational workflows. This finding is consistent with Rauch et al. (2025), who emphasized that airport operational efficiency depends on proper coordination and timely operational management.

In addition, some pilgrims had not prepared complete travel documents before departure. Consequently, the Tour Leader had to recheck document completeness, requiring additional time before pilgrims could proceed to check-in. Changes in flight schedules and departure gates also presented operational challenges. Under these circumstances, the Tour Leader had to coordinate immediately with airline personnel while simultaneously communicating updated information to pilgrims. These findings support Reski & Sonita (2026), who identified coordination and problem-solving as essential competencies for Tour Leaders.

Another obstacle involved differences in pilgrims' characteristics. Elderly pilgrims required more intensive assistance than those with previous international travel experience. Therefore, Tour Leaders were required to adapt their communication approaches and service strategies according to the needs of each pilgrim. Overall, the findings indicate that communication, coordination, and problem-solving are indispensable competencies for Tour Leaders in addressing operational challenges, which is consistent with Pamuji & Limei (2023) and Widiati et al. (2024).

Obstacles Experienced by Pilgrims During the Umrah Departure Process

The results of the study show that most obstacles experienced by pilgrims were related to their limited understanding of airport departure procedures. Some pilgrims admitted that they were still confused about the check-in process, security screening, immigration procedures, and boarding, particularly those traveling abroad for the first time. These findings are consistent with Aini & Ardiansyah (2025), who emphasized the importance of Tour Leaders in guiding pilgrims throughout their journey.

In addition, some pilgrims did not fully understand baggage regulations, resulting in mistakes regarding cabin and checked baggage. This situation prolonged the baggage inspection process and required additional assistance from the Tour Leader. This finding further highlights the importance of Tour Leader competence in providing operational assistance, as emphasized by Widiati et al. (2024).

Psychological factors also represented significant challenges. Pilgrims without previous international travel experience tended to feel anxious when undergoing security and immigration inspections. In these situations, the presence of the Tour Leader provided reassurance through direct explanations and continuous assistance. For elderly pilgrims, physical limitations posed additional challenges, including carrying luggage, moving between service areas, and understanding instructions provided by airport personnel. The assistance provided by Tour Leaders enabled pilgrims to complete all departure procedures more comfortably. These findings support Ummah et al. (2025), who reported

that responsive and professional services improve pilgrims' confidence and satisfaction, as well as Febriani et al. (2026), who emphasized the importance of communication in fostering trust.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the obstacles experienced by pilgrims are not limited to administrative issues but are also influenced by travel experience, physical conditions, and understanding of airport procedures. Therefore, the role of the Tour Leader is essential in providing education, guidance, and reassurance throughout the departure process. This study strengthens previous findings by demonstrating that Tour Leader competence contributes not only to service quality but also to the operational success of the Umrah departure process (Reski & Sonita, 2026; Widiati et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study on the competence of Tour Leaders at Svarga Tour and Travel in supporting the smooth departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport, it can be concluded that Tour Leader competence has a significant role in ensuring effective and orderly departure operations. The competence of Tour Leaders is reflected in their knowledge of airport procedures, communication and coordination skills, problem-solving abilities, and professional attitudes when providing services to pilgrims. These competencies enable Tour Leaders to minimize operational obstacles, assist pilgrims during departure procedures, and ensure that the departure process runs according to company standards. The study also found several challenges, including incomplete travel documents, changes in flight schedules, differences in pilgrim characteristics, and limited understanding of airport procedures among some pilgrims. However, these challenges can be managed through effective communication, coordination, and decision-making skills possessed by Tour Leaders. This study contributes to understanding the role of Tour Leader competence from an operational perspective, particularly in managing the departure process of Umrah pilgrims at Adi Soemarmo Airport. Therefore, Svarga Tour and Travel is recommended to continuously improve Tour Leader competence through training programs related to communication, service excellence, emergency management, and aviation regulation updates. Companies should also strengthen pre-departure preparation programs to improve service quality and ensure a smoother Umrah departure process in the future.

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