

## **IMPROVING FREIGHT FORWARDING PERFORMANCE BY BUILDING COMPETENCIES TO EXECUTE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRANSACTION ELEMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to examine the effect of four customer service competencies on the performance of freight forwarding companies mediated by customer service transaction elements. The four competencies are customer insight skills, freight forwarding management, customer service management, and stakeholder management. The research uses quantitative methods with 6 variable constructs and 35 indicators that have been measured, valid, and reliable. The results showed that the four customer service competencies have a direct positive effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies and provide an indirect influence through the element of customer service transactions. This study recommends that freight forwarders provide more opportunities for customer service to interact with its customers and get sufficient training to be able to carry out the elements of customer service transactions properly. Educational institutions can cooperate with the government in issuing special customer service certifications in the freight forwarding industry. Future research can be directed at customer service with more juniors to get a broader view of the scope of work of customer service freight forwarding services.

***Keywords:** Customer service competencies, transaction elements, freight forwarding performance.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The World Bank periodically conducts surveys around the world every two years to rank the Logistics Performance Index (LPI). (Beysenbaev & Dus, 2020; Civelek et al., 2015; Hamed, 2019; World-Bank, 2023). The results of the LPI survey in 2023 show Indonesia's position at rank 61, down considerably compared to 2018 at rank 51. The six parameters used by the World Bank in measuring logistics performance are aspects of customs, infrastructure, international transportation, logistics competence, track &

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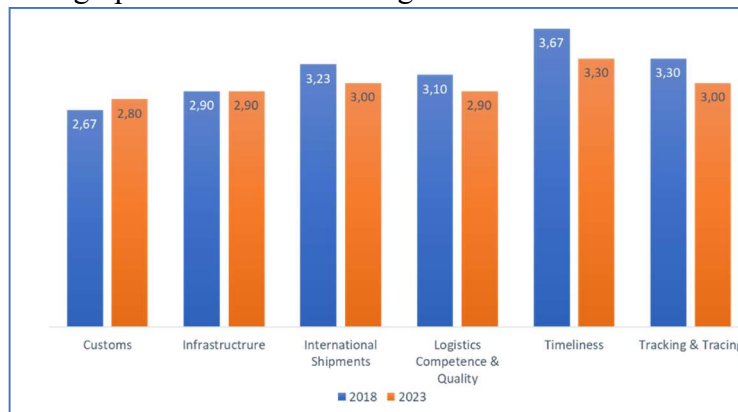
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trace system, and timeliness (Beysenbaev & Dus, 2020; Civelek et al., 2015; World-Bank, 2023).

The six parameters above mostly refer to international logistics activities facilitated by freight forwarding activities. The difference between Indonesia's logistics performance in 2018 and 2023 for each measurement parameter can be seen in Figure 1, where there is a decline in each parameter, except customs. Even compared to the other five ASEAN countries, Indonesia's LPI is the lowest and the only one to experience a decline in performance in 2023. As archipelagic countries, although they both experienced a decline in LPI, Japan is already ranked 13th, while Indonesia is ranked 61st. This condition directly puts Indonesia into the category of partial performers with the most logistical constraints seen in low- and middle-income countries. These logistics constraints include inadequate infrastructure, lack of technological development, geographical and demographic conditions and logistics network connectivity.



**Figure 1. Difference between LPI Parameters in 2018 and 2023.**

Source: (World-Bank, 2023)

The LPI score cannot describe a country's logistics performance holistically. However, the LPI score can be used as a benchmark by stakeholders and policy makers to identify appropriate policies and see opportunities for improvements that can be made in order to improve the quality of national logistics services. Although logistics systems and conditions in each country are different, the LPI can be held as a basic reference. (Beysenbaev & Dus, 2020). The LPI published by the World Bank provides feedback to stakeholders carrying out logistics activities in Indonesia. Indonesia's LPI results show the important role of freight forwarders in supporting the logistics system in Indonesia. (Chang & Thai, 2016; Huang et al., 2019; Rodrigue, 2020; Skiba & Karas, 2022). The performance of the freight forwarding company itself cannot be separated from the role of customer service, which shapes the standards and conditions for logistics operations (Hinson et al., 2020b; Kułyk et al., 2017). If the freight forwarding customer service does not have good competence and skills, there will be delays in the administrative process and shipping document errors that result in increased dwelling time (Kourouniotti et al., 2016; Purwoko & Maulina, 2019; Rodrigue, 2020; World Bank, 2015)

The failure to improve the six LPI parameters is an indicator of the high logistics costs in Indonesia. In terms of logistics costs, Indonesia is among the highest (World-Bank, 2023). Referring to the World Bank's 2020 calculation and the Ministry of Finance's 2021 report, Indonesia's logistics costs amounted to 24% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This figure is higher than other ASEAN member countries (World-Bank, 2023) (Kemenkeu, 2023). The progress of a country can be seen from the value of its international trade transactions through

export and import activities (Redmond & Nasir, 2020). Indonesia's exports and imports show a trend that tends to stabilize, although they fluctuate and experience a slowdown in early 2023 (BPS, 2023). Exports of oil and gas, agricultural and forestry products generally use sea transportation modes in the form of bulk ships. Non-oil and gas products can use sea, air or land transportation modes. The fishing industry requires special treatment using refrigerated containers. The largest imported commodities are raw or auxiliary materials for the needs of the manufacturing industry, followed by capital goods and consumer goods. Importation generally uses sea and air transportation modes, where the use of containers is the main choice. However, export and import data of ALFI (Indonesian Logistics and Forwarder Association) members show an increase in 2021 and 2022 as shown in Figure 2.

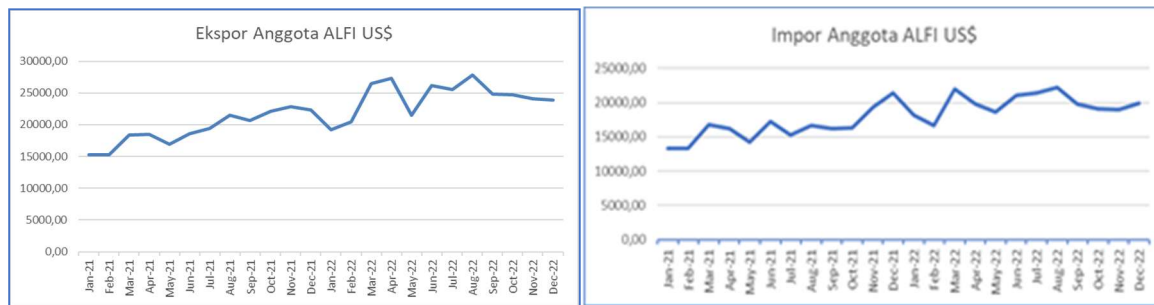


Figure 2. Export and Import Growth of ALFI Members

Source: (ALFI, 2023)

Logistics plays an important role in supporting export and import activities. Freight forwarding is a part of logistics that is directly related to export and import activities, especially its transportation activities, and deals with its customer companies, either directly or indirectly (Purwoko et al., 2023; Rodrigue, 2020; Schramm, 2012; Vidovic et al., 2015). According to Karingithi (2013) export and import activities can be used as indicators of the national economy, which is strongly influenced by the performance of freight forwarders. Transportation costs, which are part of logistics costs, are still a major problem for freight forwarding companies in Indonesia as providers of outsourced domestic and international shipping services. Freight forwarding companies in Indonesia are faced with the obstacle of fulfilling the delivery of goods that have not been effective and efficient, due to the limited capacity of transportation modes and the geographical conditions of Indonesia. Therefore, many Indonesian freight forwarding companies are unable to compete with logistics companies in other countries.

The nature of freight forwarding activities is Business-to-Business (B2B), so relationships between personnel are highly prioritized (Gil-Saura et al., 2018; Kadlubek et al., 2022; Lucas, 2014; Shang & Lu, 2012). Customer service of logistics companies, especially freight forwarding, plays an important role in order to provide effective, efficient, and high-quality services (Gizaw et al., 2021; Shang & Lu, 2012; Yang & Xue, 2020). Customer service is one of the driving forces of freight forwarding activities that affect the performance of the freight forwarding company itself (Kadlubek, 2020; Shang & Lu, 2012). Increasing customer expectations and changing commodity markets require the role of customer service as a competitive weapon to accommodate them (Bowersox et al., 2020; Christopher, 2011; Lucas, 2014). The capacity of customer service human resources (HR) working in the freight forwarding sector is still very low. One of the

reasons, according to Lin & Chang (2018) is because they do not come from specialized logistics management schools, so their understanding and performance are based on experience (learning by doing). The professionalism of customer service in managing and managing export and import documents, including good coordination with related parties, is one of the factors that greatly affects the performance of freight forwarding companies.

Customer service in carrying out its functions must carry out three transaction elements, including the pre-transaction stage, transaction stage, and post-transaction stage (Christopher, 2011; Ciechomski & Strojny, 2022; Gizaw et al., 2021; Kadlubek, 2020; Kułyk et al., 2017). Research results (Kułyk et al., 2017) show the transaction stage as the stage most often carried out by customer service, followed by the pre-transaction stage, and the post-transaction stage. The three elements of the transaction must be carried out simultaneously and sequentially in order to carry out the customer service function properly. Therefore, freight forwarding service customers must have the competencies needed to carry out these three transaction elements in order to provide excellent service to customers (Kadlubek, 2020).

Grzeskowiak *et al.* (2022) in their study of students in logistics schools showed a mismatch between their competencies and those required in the workplace. Loyalty, commitment and responsibility are not competitive factors in the logistics industry, but rather communication and teamwork skills. Sadri *et al.* (2021) identified the competencies that must be possessed by the workforce of logistics service companies. These competencies are needed to strengthen the national logistics system. The most needed competencies for logistics services are successively according to Sadri *et al.* (Sadri et al., 2021) are foreign language skills, supervision implementation, and planning. The ability to get the right freight forwarding employees not only ensures that the business operates normally, but also can realize strong competitiveness (Nguyen, 2021). According to Pratama & Permatasari (2021) freight forwarder employees who do not have a maritime management background or maritime understanding competencies will experience problems when preparing export declarations of goods by sea. According to Ngamvichaikit (2017) provides three types of competencies that are very important for all freight forwarding employees, especially those related to multimodal transportation management, namely knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Research by Čižiuniene *et al.* (2016) shows the need for the HR department of transportation and logistics companies to pay attention to the competence of their employees so that employees feel more cared for and empowered. This will have an impact on reducing the level of potential employee movement (labor turnover). The HR department plays an important role in improving employee skills, creating employee incentive systems, and ensuring employee involvement in internal integration processes with suppliers and customers (Farmania et al, 2021). The customer service transaction element in this study is an intervening variable to analyze variations in direct and indirect effects, namely customer service competence as an exogenous variable on the performance of freight forwarding service companies as an endogenous variable.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory *Resource Based View* and *The Dynamic Capabilities View*

Profit-oriented companies will strive to survive, because organizations continue to face changes in the internal and external environment, and can even win the competition (Hanelt et al., 2021; Zinovieva & et.al, 2016). Changes in the internal environment relate to changes in goals, strategies, organizational policies, and human resource competencies. Changes in the external environment include cultural, educational, social, economic, technological, and political. Concrete

forms of these changes are rising costs, high interest rates, scarcity of various natural resources, and government regulations. Baden-Fuller & Teece (2020) point to the failure of dynamic competencies in the face of poor strategy, which concentrates on technologies and practices that facilitate integration within and across corporate boundaries. The researchers identified various characteristics of customer service competencies aimed explicitly at integrating functional areas within the firm and customers with whom the firm partners directly.

### **Logistics and Transportation Management**

Transportation is the activity of moving cargo in the form of goods and passengers using transport facilities and infrastructure safely, safely, integrated, fast, smoothly, on time, and according to plan (Anggraini et al., 2016; Bowersox et al., 2020; Purwoko et al., 2019; Senna et al., 2020). Transportation management in Nguyen's opinion (Nguyen, 2021) is part of logistics management. Transportation speed is important because customers value fast service. Increased speed causes costs to skyrocket, so it is necessary to maximize efficiency. An efficient and responsive supply chain allows them to surpass their competitors in business performance (Chopra & Peter, 2002; Natto, 2014; Xu & Liu, 2014).

### **Company Performance Freight forwarding**

A country's logistics performance plays an important role in the economy as a catalyst for the relationship between competitiveness and prosperity (Civelek et al., 2015). Logistics performance is influenced by several factors, such as inventory flexibility, continuous improvement, supply chain design, operational monitoring and control, and the competence of logistics actors (Bowersox et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021). A country's logistics performance is presented as a survey report by the World Bank, the Logistics Performance Index (Beysenbaev & Dus, 2020; Civelek et al., 2015; Hamed, 2019; World-Bank, 2023). The performance of freight forwarding companies is also related to logistics performance, especially in relation to globalization and international trade (Bowersox et al., 2020; Hamed, 2019). International trade itself is the exchange of goods or services across national jurisdictions (Rodrigue, 2020). The World Bank LPI results show that the six logistics components asked to respondents all refer to freight forwarding activities. The six components are customs efficiency, quality of trade and transportation-related infrastructure, international shipping at competitive prices, competence and quality of logistics services, track and trace facilities; and timeliness of delivery (Beysenbaev & Dus, 2020; Civelek et al., 2015; Hamed, 2019; World-Bank, 2023).

### **Competence Customer Service**

Customer service plays a very important role in carrying out integrated logistics activities, especially in freight forwarding, given that there are three flows in the supply chain that must be maintained (Nguyen, 2021). One component of the LPI is the competence and quality of logistics services (World-Bank, 2023). Customer service competence will lead to improved service quality in achieving performance, increased competitiveness and customer satisfaction (Russ-Eft, 2014). According to Hinson *et al.*,<sup>(2020)</sup> customer service competence is one of the important factors of customer satisfaction survey results. The competencies needed by customer service according to Robert (Lucas, 2014) include adaptability, attention to detail, caring, collaboration, communication skills, creative and broad thinking, focus on results, initiative, negotiation, problem solving, and professionalism. Researchers proposed four competencies for freight forwarding customer service to possess. The first competency is the skill of understanding



customers or having customer insights (Lee & Song, 2018; Skiba & Karas, 2022). The second competency is the skill of understanding knowledge and running operations in the freight forwarding field (Ngamvichaikit, 2017; Yang & Xue, 2020). The third competency is customer service management skills (Knapp, 2015; Russ-Eft, 2014). The fourth competency is stakeholder management skills (Bak, 2018; McGahan, 2021).

### Customer Service Transaction Elements

The customer service transaction element in this study is the ability of customer service to provide services to customers starting from pre-transaction, transaction, and post-transaction (Christopher, 2011; Gizaw et al, 2021; Kułyk et al, 2017; Schramm, 2012). Pre-transaction elements are all activities in preparation for transactions or operations, such as company policies, SOP and KPI agreements, and accessibility. Transaction elements are physical distribution activities and are supported by administrative activities. Included in this stage is notification of delivery status to customers. Post-transaction elements include all activities after the transaction has been completed, such as handling complaints and demands and feedback processes.

## 3. METHODS

The stages in this research start from a pre-research survey to observe, see and hear all phenomena in the field, study literature related to the use of relevant theories, and re-study the results of previous research. Population according to Cooper & Schlinder (2014) is the total collection of elements that are expected to make several conclusions. The population in the study was 3,521 freight forwarding companies that were members of ALFI, of which 43% or 1,514 companies were located in the Jakarta area (ALFI, 2023). The sample in this research was obtained using a purposive sampling technique from ALFI members (Etikan, 2016). From a population of 1,514 ALFI members in Jakarta, a target study population of 491 freight forwarding companies will be taken, where one company can be represented by more than one customer service person.

According to Hair *et al.* (2019) sample size depends on the number of indicators used in all variables. In general, a sample size of more than 100 is better, but a sample size of smaller than 100 is acceptable, depending on the research background (Hair et al., 2019). The number of samples is equal to the number of indicators multiplied by five to ten. In this study there were five variables studied with a total of 35 indicators. With the following calculation:  $n = 6$  (between 5 and 10)  $\times$  35 indicators = 210 respondents. So the minimum sample size in this study was 210 respondents.

The data sources in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from the field using a questionnaire instrument. Researchers use a survey instrument that contains statements regarding the research variables asked to respondents. The data scale used is a Likert scale of one, strongly disagree, to five (Jahanshahi et al., 2012). Secondary data was obtained from published reports from related agencies, company data, industry association data, national and international books and journals, and scientific articles relevant to this research topic. The data analysis method used in this research uses SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) analysis with the help of AMOS version 26 for Windows statistical software. SEM is a statistical technique used to build and test statistical models which are usually in the form of causality or causality models (Sunyoto et al., 2018).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted on 210 respondents. A total of 140 people or 67% are men and the remaining 70 people or 33% are women. The large number of male respondents as customer service is due to the fact that many have an operational background in the freight forwarding industry. Respondents aged between 25-30 years as many as 67 people or 32%. Followed by respondents aged between 36-40 years as many as 54 people or 26%, 31-35 years old as many as 52 people or 25%, and the remaining 23 people or 16% aged 19-24 years and 40-50 years. This shows that at the manager level most are at a young to mature age and are a very productive age. Based on the last education, the most respondents were from the group of respondents who had a bachelor's degree, namely 192 people or 91%. A total of 12 people or 6% have the latest Postgraduate / Master's education, and 1% of respondents have the latest doctoral education. Meanwhile, as many as 5 people or around 2% have the last high school education. This shows that to occupy a customer service position, a fairly high level of education is needed to support success in carrying out their duties.

#### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis in the reliability construct test is used to show the extent to which a measuring instrument can provide relatively the same results when measured twice or more on the same subject. The results of confirmatory factor analysis of exogenous variables can be seen in Figure 3.

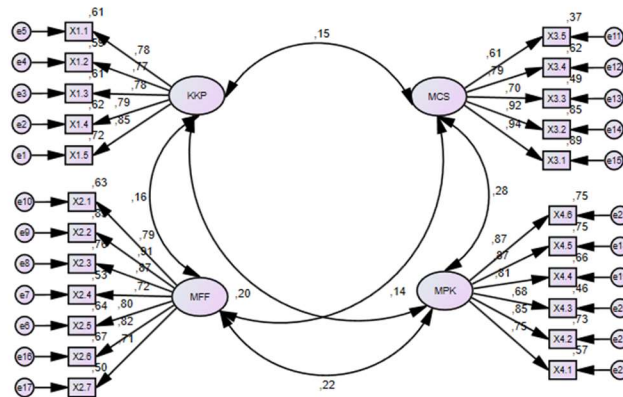


Figure 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test for Exogenous Variables

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024

KKP is an abbreviation for Customer Understanding Skills Competency. MFF is Freight Forwarding Management Skills Competency. MCS is Customer Service Management Skills Competency. And MPK is the Skills Competency for Managing Stakeholders. Confirmatory factor analysis of exogenous variables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test for Exogenous Variables

	Estimate	Estimate	
X1.5 ← KKP	0,847	X3.5 ← MCS	0,610
X1.4 ← KKP	0,790	X3.4 ← MCS	0,788

		Estimate			Estimate
X1.3 ←	KKP	0,781	X3.3 ←	MCS	0,698
X1.2 ←	KKP	0,769	X3.2 ←	MCS	0,923
X1.1 ←	KKP	0,783	X3.1 ←	MCS	0,942
X2.5 ←	MFF	0,798	X4.5 ←	MPK	0,868
X2.4 ←	MFF	0,725	X4.4 ←	MPK	0,812
X2.3 ←	MFF	0,874	X4.3 ←	MPK	0,681
X2.2 ←	MFF	0,909	X4.2 ←	MPK	0,854
X2.1 ←	MFF	0,792	X4.1 ←	MPK	0,755
X2.6 ←	MFF	0,821	X4.6 ←	MPK	0,865
X2.7 ←	MFF	0,706			

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024

An indicator is said to have good validity if the loading factor (estimated) value of the test results is greater than 0.5. The confirmatory factor analysis test gave results for all factor loading coefficients greater than 0.5, on the four customer service competency variables studied. Thus, all indicators show good validity in measuring the four customer service competency variables.

The measurement continues with the construct of intervening variables and endogenous variables, the results of which are presented in Figure 5. ETCS stands for Customer Service Transaction Elements and KP stands for Freight Forwarding Company Performance. Confirmatory factor analysis of intervening variables and endogenous variables is presented in Figure 4 and explained in Table 2.

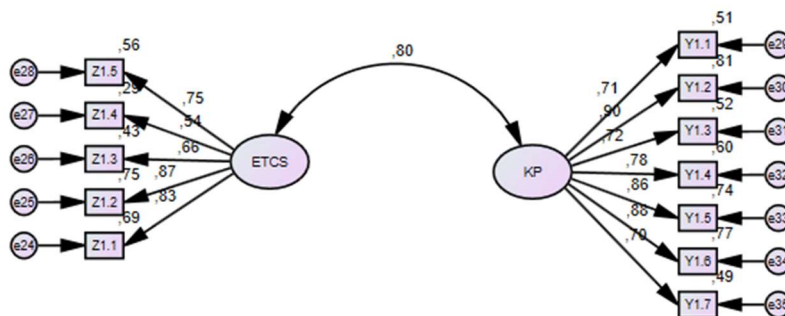


Figure 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test of Intervening Variables and Endogenous Variables

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024



**Tabel 2 Uji Analisis Faktor Konfirmatori Variabel *Intervening* dan Variabel Endogen**

	Estimate	Estimate
Z1.1 ← ETCS	0,832	Y1.2 ← KP 0,898
Z1.2 ← ETCS	0,865	Y1.3 ← KP 0,723
Z1.3 ← ETCS	0,657	Y1.4 ← KP 0,777
Z1.4 ← ETCS	0,537	Y1.5 ← KP 0,862
Z1.5 ← ETCS	0,745	Y1.6 ← KP 0,875
Y1.1 ← KP	0,711	Y1.7 ← KP 0,699

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024

Based on the results of the confirmatory factor analysis test, the results showed that all loading factor coefficients were greater than 0.5, both on customer service transaction element variables and freight forwarding company performance. Thus, all indicators show good validity in measuring elements of customer service transactions and the performance of freight forwarding companies.

### Reliability Construct Test

The results of the construct analysis test for the reliability of exogenous variables are presented in Table 4. Meanwhile, the results of the construct analysis test for the reliability of intervening variables and endogenous variables are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Exogenous Variable Reliability Construct Analysis Test**

	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Loading Factor<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ei=1- LF<sup>2</sup></i>	CR	AVE
X1.5 ← KKP	0.847	0.717	0.283	0.895	0.631
X1.4 ← KKP	0.79	0.624	0.376		
X1.3 ← KKP	0.781	0.610	0.390		
X1.2 ← KKP	0.769	0.591	0.409		
X1.1 ← KKP	0.783	0.613	0.387		
Amount	3.970	3.156	1.844		
X2.7 ← MFF	0.706	0.498	0.502	0.928	0.650
X2.6 ← MFF	0.821	0.674	0.326		
X2.5 ← MFF	0.798	0.637	0.363		

			<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Loading Factor<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ei=1- LF<sup>2</sup></i>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
X2.4	←	MFF	0.725	0.526	0.474		
X2.3	←	MFF	0.874	0.764	0.236		
X2.2	←	MFF	0.909	0.826	0.174		
X2.1	←	MFF	0.792	0.627	0.373		
		Amount	5.625	4.552	2.448		
X3.5	←	MCS	0.610	0.372	0.628		
X3.4	←	MCS	0.788	0.621	0.379		
X3.3	←	MCS	0.698	0.487	0.513	0.898	0.644
X3.2	←	MCS	0.923	0.852	0.148		
X3.1	←	MCS	0.942	0.887	0.113		
		Amount	3.961	3.220	1.780		
X4.6	←	MPK	0.865	0.748	0.252		
X4.5	←	MPK	0.868	0.753	0.247		
X4.4	←	MPK	0.812	0.659	0.341		
X4.3	←	MPK	0.681	0.464	0.536	0.918	0.654
X4.2	←	MPK	0.854	0.729	0.271		
X4.1	←	MPK	0.755	0.570	0.430		
		Amount	4.835	3.924	2.076		

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024

A construct is said to have good reliability if the construct reliability (CR) value is greater than 0.7. Table 4 shows the CR value of the competency variable for customer understanding skills is 0.895. CR variable competency skills freight forwarding management of 0.928. CR of the customer service management skills competency variable is 0.898. CR variable competency skills managing stakeholders of 0.918. Thus, the exogenous constructs have good reliability.

**Table 4. Construct Analysis Test Reliability of Intervening Variables and Endogenous Variables**

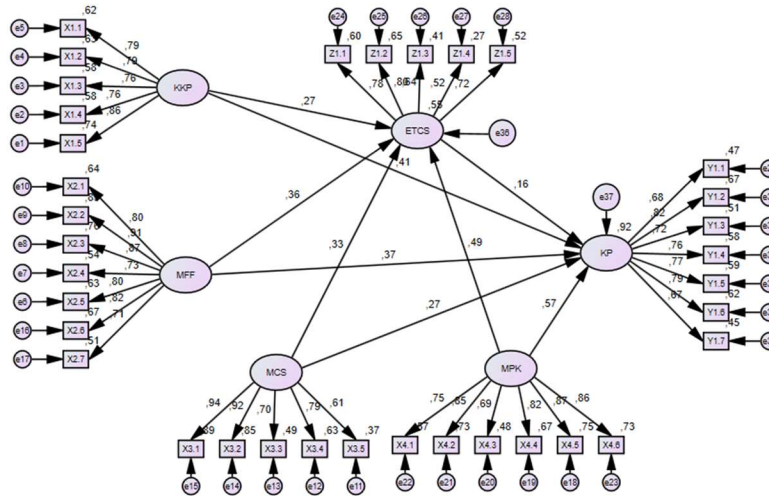
			<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Loading Factor<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ei=1- LF<sup>2</sup></i>	CR	AVE
Z1.1	←	ETCS	0.832	0.692	0.308		
Z1.2	←	ETCS	0.865	0.748	0.252		
Z1.3	←	ETCS	0.657	0.432	0.568	0.853	0.543
Z1.4	←	ETCS	0.537	0.288	0.712		
Z1.5	←	ETCS	0.745	0.555	0.445		
Amount			3.636	2.715	2.285		
Y1.1	←	KP	0.711	0.506	0.494		
Y1.2	←	KP	0.898	0.806	0.194		
Y1.3	←	KP	0.723	0.523	0.477		
Y1.4	←	KP	0.777	0.604	0.396	0.923	0.634
Y1.5	←	KP	0.862	0.743	0.257		
Y1.6	←	KP	0.875	0.766	0.234		
Y1.7	←	KP	0.699	0.489	0.511		
Amount			5.545	4.436	2.564		

Source: Primary Data Processing Results, 2024

Because the CR value on the customer service transaction element variable is 0.853 and on the freight forwarding company performance variable is 0.923, greater than 0.5, the intervening and endogenous constructs have good reliability.

### SEM Structural Test

SEM analysis in this study aims to find out more clearly about improving freight forwarder performance by building competencies to carry out customer service transaction elements. The results of the analysis of the resulting SEM model are presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 5 Structural Model Analysis Results**  
 Source: Research results processed with AMOS 24.0 (2024)

Based on the analysis of research results, Table 6 can be created in the form of a recapitulation of hypothesis testing.

**Table 5 Recapitulation of Hypothesis Testing**

Alternative Hypothesis (H <sub>1</sub> )	Path (Relationship)	Path Coefficient	t value Calculated (>1,96)	Null Hypothesis Conclusion (H <sub>0</sub> )
H1	competency skills understanding customers → company performance	0.407	7.680	Diterima
H2	competency skills freight forwarding management → company performance	0.369	6.828	Diterima
H3	competency skills customer service management → company performance	0.272	5.211	Diterima
H4	competency skills managing stakeholders → company performance	0.568	8.451	Diterima
H5	customer service transaction elements → company performance	0.160	2.465	Diterima
H6	competency skills understanding customers → customer service transaction elements	0.271	4.333	Diterima

Alternative Hypothesis (H <sub>1</sub> )	Path (Relationship)	Path Coefficient	t value Calculated (>1,96)	Null Hypothesis Conclusion (H <sub>0</sub> )
H7	competency skills freight forwarding management → customer service transaction elements	0.362	5.613	Diterima
H8	competency skills customer service management → customer service transaction elements	0.326	4.816	Diterima
H9	competency skills managing stakeholders → customer service transaction elements	0.486	7.263	Diterima

### The influence of customer understanding skills competency on company performance

The performance of a freight forwarding company is the result of the company's overall work in achieving goals, as an impact of the company's strategy and the extent of the achievements that have been achieved by a product produced by the company (Rodrigue, 2020;; Yadegari et al., 2019). Company performance shows management skills in achieving its goals such as financial management, quality products and services, stakeholder satisfaction, long-term organizational survival using appropriate strategies and action plans (Sawalha et al., 2013). The performance of freight forwarding companies is directly determined by management's ability to manage financial, operational and market-based performance (Kurniati & Nurcahyo, 2018). Financial and operational performance dominate in influencing the company's performance holistically compared to market-based performance in terms of value added market. Improvements in work productivity through improved service quality, on-time delivery, and rapid response are preferred by customers to use the products and services offered (Jahanshahi et al., 2012). This condition directly impacts the company's comprehensive performance.

Companies that focus on customers by listening, being friendly, and empathizing can drive company performance. Customer service freight forwarding is required to have customer insight so that they can understand and understand the needs and behavior of their customers (Katuse, 2020; Lee & Song, 2018). The results of testing Hypothesis 1 (H1) show that the competence of skills to understand customers has a positive and significant effect on company performance. The standardized coefficient value obtained is 0.407, the CR value is 7.680, and the significance is 0.000 (p < 0.05). This positive and significant effect indicates that changes in the competence of customer understanding skills are significantly related to changes in company performance. This result is consistent with research conducted by (Christopher, 2011), Vidovic *et al.* (Vidovic et al., 2015), Katuse (Katuse, 2020), dan Lee & Song (Lee & Song, 2018).

However, this competence in understanding customer skills is not strong enough to explain its influence on the performance of freight forwarding companies. In fact, this competency aims to improve customer service's ability to predict future profits for the company and identify real



market segmentation, based on data and information related to the volume and behavior of its customers (Christopher, 2011; Lee & Song, 2018; Wright et al., 2021). Freight forwarding customer service must be able to understand the characteristics of the customer's industry, know the commodities being transported, the goods handling system, and know the required documents and permits related to government and international regulations that apply to the customer's industry. Freight forwarding customer service must also understand the beginning, end results, and continuity of customer supply chain operations, including who the suppliers are and who the freight forwarder customers are.

### **The influence of freight forwarding management skills competency on company performance**

Competency in freight forwarding management skills really helps customer service in understanding and comprehending freight forwarding products, which includes understanding transportation modes, customs handling, licensing, etc (Bowersox et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2019; Schramm, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021). The results of testing H2 show that freight forwarding management skills competency has a positive and significant effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.369, the CR value was 6.828, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between freight forwarding management skills competency and company performance. These results are in accordance with the results of research conducted by (Ngamvichaikit, 2017), Zhang *et al.* (Zhang et al., 2021), dan Nguyen (Nguyen, 2021).

The main function of freight forwarders in multimodal transportation management is to offer, manage and develop multimodal transportation services (Ngamvichaikit, 2017). This skill is important for customer service to have in providing goods delivery services, including providing services for processing licensing documents for sending customer goods during the customs process (Lee & Song, 2018; Purwoko & Maulina, 2019). Freight forwarding management skills directly influence the company's operational performance, due to the ability of customer service to choose and order the right mode of transportation, negotiate prices and services, and organize the loading and unloading process at the port (Petrová, M., Krügerová, M. and Koziel, 2021; Schramm, 2012; Shang & Lu, 2012). Operational performance will increase, especially those related to improving service quality, effective on-time delivery, short order waiting times, and rapid response to changes in market demand (Bae, 2017; Fiorello et al., 2023; Gu et al., 2023; Nanyam & Jha, 2022; Uddin, 2022)

### **The influence of customer service management skills competency on company performance**

Customer service management skills competency places greater emphasis on skills in communicating with customers, conducting negotiations, presenting company products and services, and managing good administrative activities (Huang et al., 2019; Knapp, 2015; Sarder, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). The results of testing H3 show that customer service management skills competency has a positive and significant effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.272, the CR value was 5.211, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between customer service management skills competency and company performance. These results are in accordance with research conducted by (Huang et al., 2019) dan Melovic *et al.* (2015). However, the communication, negotiation and administrative skills possessed by a freight forwarding customer service are not strong enough to explain their influence on company performance. This

is due to activities that do not have direct contact with customers, where operational processes are mostly carried out by the operations department. Marketing personnel are even more active in communicating directly with customers to offer the company's freight forwarding products and services.

### **The influence of stakeholder management skills competency on company performance**

A good customer service work system must be related to the organization's core business and its stakeholders. Customer service must be able to establish good relationships and manage all stakeholders directly related to the company, both internal and external, (Hinson et al, 2020; Miles, 2012; Ricardianto et al, 2022). The results of testing H4 show that competence in stakeholder management skills has a positive and significant effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.568, the CR value was 8.451, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between the competency skills of managing a company's stakeholders and company performance. These results are in accordance with the results of research conducted (Hinson et al., 2020a; McGahan, 2021; Miles, 2012).

Every freight forwarding customer service has an annual target, so it is very important to know who the stakeholders are and how to manage them in order to achieve the goals set for customer service. Even though other parties outside customer service are external and internal groups, sections or organizations, what is managed by customer service is more about individuals or personnel within the group who are directly related to customer service (Gizaw et al., 2021; Hinson et al., 2020a; Kivits, 2015; McGahan, 2021). This performance directly impacts company performance, where company performance is built on individual employee performance and holistic company management performance (Beigi et al., 2023; Intarapanich & Limpsurapong, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2019).

### **The influence of customer service transaction elements on company performance**

The customer service transaction element is a customer service activity. This transaction element consists of the pre-transaction stage, carried out before the transaction takes place, the transaction stage which is related to the physical distribution function, and the post-transaction stage, in the form of activities after the product transaction (Christopher, 2011; Gizaw et al, 2021; Kułyk et al, 2017; Schramm, 2012). The results of the H5 test show that the customer service transaction element has a positive and significant effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.160, the CR value was 2.465, and the significance was 0.014 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between customer service transaction elements and the performance of freight forwarding companies. These results are in accordance with the results of research conducted by (Melović et al., 2015), Christopher (Christopher, 2011), Gizaw *et al.* (Gizaw et al., 2021), Kułyk *et al.* (Kułyk et al., 2017), dan Schramm (Schramm, 2012).

Customer service transaction elements are closely related to operational activities, which include managing order cycles and availability, product guarantees and service quality, as well as handling customer complaints which have an impact on the company's operational performance. The pre-transaction stage determines delivery procedures or goods storage procedures after the order is received, goods return procedures, and delivery methods so that consumers know the service they will receive. The pre-transaction stage also includes the service policy mechanisms implemented and communication channels based on the organizational structure. Elements during

the transaction process regulate the delivery of goods to consumers, regulate inventory levels, and prepare transportation facilities. Post-transaction elements protect consumers from defective products, provide returns, guarantee return acceptance, provide guarantees, and handle consumer complaints (Christopher, 2011; Kulek et al., 2017; Schramm, 2012). Company performance is assessed by service quality, on-time delivery and fast response including short waiting times when unloading/transporting cargo at the port.

### **The influence of customer understanding skills competency on customer service transaction elements**

The results of testing H6 show that customer understanding skill competency has a positive and significant effect on customer service transaction elements. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.271, the CR value was 4.333, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a positive and significant influence between customer understanding skills competency and customer service transaction elements. There is also significant change or variability in customer understanding skills competency which is related to significant change or variability in customer service transaction elements. These results are in accordance with the results of research conducted by (Hinson et al., 2020b), Christopher (Christopher, 2011), dan Wright *et al* (Wright et al., 2021). One element in pre-transaction is understanding customer desires and translating them into service actions. Therefore, listening to customers, being friendly and empathetic in serving is the key to success in carrying out customer service transaction elements. This element also includes a delivery system that can be adapted to suit customer needs, stock availability and product location identification after the transaction process, (Hinson et al., 2020; Purwoko, 2019; Katuse, 2020).

### **The influence of freight forwarding management skills competency on customer service transaction elements**

The results of the H7 test show that freight forwarding management skills competency has a positive and significant effect on customer service transaction elements. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.362, the CR value was 5.612, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between the competency of freight forwarding management skills and customer service transaction elements. These results are in accordance with research conducted by Shang & Lu (Shang & Lu, 2012), Bowersox *et al*. (Bowersox et al., 2020), Huang *et al* (Huang et al., 2019), Schramm (Schramm, 2012), dan Zhang *et al*. (Zhang et al., 2021).

The competency of customer service's freight forwarding management skills greatly influences the level of effectiveness in implementing customer service transaction elements to customers. This is related to its ability to handle transportation via the chosen mode of transportation, customs handling, as well as export and import permits in the country of origin and destination country. The ability to control the activity of moving goods from one point to another from delivery to one or several locations at once has an impact on the effectiveness of customer service transaction elements (Petrová, M., Krügerová, M. and Kozieł, 2021; Purwoko & Maulina, 2019). Due to the large number of export and import shipping documents, freight forwarding customer service is required to understand the applicable government and international regulations. This regulation relates to the customer's industry, international trade system, choice of transportation mode, customs process, and Incoterms system, in order to communicate with customers. All these forms of ability are among the competencies that must be possessed by a

customer service person, especially those working in the freight forwarding industry sector (Huang et al, 2019; Rodrigue, 2020; Anggorowati, 2018).

### **The influence of customer service management skills competency on customer service transaction elements**

The results of H8 testing show that customer service management skills competency has a positive and significant effect on customer service transaction elements. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.326, the CR value was 4.816, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between the competency of a company's customer service management skills and the customer service transaction elements. These results are in accordance with research conducted by Shang & Lu (Shang & Lu, 2012) dan Huang *et al.* (Huang et al., 2019).

Understanding and carrying out customer service management is one of the competencies that customer service must have, especially in the freight forwarding sector. Apart from that, skills in communication, negotiation, presentation and administrative management are also required. Freight forwarding services are very competitive and easily replaced by other logistics service providers, so customer service plays a very important role in maintaining interactions with customers (Huang et al., 2019; Knapp, 2015; Zhang et al., 2021). The quality of implementing customer service transaction elements is greatly influenced by the competency of customer service management skills. The three elements of a transaction are determined by a customer service's ability to communicate, negotiate, present and manage good administration. A customer service person must be able to establish relationships with customers, especially regarding the activities of sending and receiving and unloading goods at the sending port until they reach the recipient.

### **The influence of stakeholder management skills competency on customer service transaction elements**

The results of the H9 test show that competency in stakeholder management skills has a positive and significant effect on customer service transaction elements. The standard coefficient value obtained was 0.486, the CR value was 7.263, and the significance was 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, there is a significant relationship or influence between the competency skills for managing a company's stakeholders and the customer service transaction elements. These results are in accordance with research conducted by Oshri *et al.* (2015), Hinson *et al.* (Hinson et al., 2020b), dan Ricardianto *et al.* (2022). In carrying out the three elements of logistics transactions, customer service communicates with all parties, both external and internal. Therefore, customer service needs to have the skills to manage all parties or stakeholders well, especially related to company business (Ricardianto et al, 2022; Freeman, 2015; Gizaw et al, 2021). The competency of stakeholder management skills possessed by a customer service person has a direct impact on the effectiveness of implementing the three transaction elements. Understanding the management of interests and establishing good relationships with stakeholders (management, employees, shareholders, suppliers and customers) has an impact on the effectiveness of implementing the three transaction elements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this dissertation research get determinants that can affect the performance of freight forwarding sector companies. Competence in customer understanding skills has a significant effect on company performance. Increased work

productivity through improved service quality such as on-time delivery and fast response is preferred by customers. This encourages customers to continue using the products and services offered. Customer service of freight forwarding companies is encouraged to interact more actively with their customers to better understand customers. The competence of freight forwarding management skills has a significant effect on company performance. This is due to an increase in the company's operational performance, especially related to improving service quality, the effectiveness of on-time delivery, and rapid response to changes in market demand. From the background of the respondents, generally those with previous operational experience will better understand the freight forwarding work process. The competence of customer service management skills has a significant effect on company performance. Compared to customer service, marketing personnel are more active in communicating directly with customers to offer freight forwarding products and services. The competency of stakeholder management skills has a significant effect on company performance, where this performance directly impacts the holistic company performance built on the performance of individual employees. Customer service techniques and skills need to be continuously provided in the form of training and mentoring from superiors. The competence of skills to manage stakeholders has a significant effect on company performance. Customer service is required to be able to interact with stakeholders in their scope of work, both internal and external, so that customer service can provide good performance for achieving company targets. The side that affects company performance, but indirectly strengthens the main factors above is the implementation of customer service transaction elements. These customer service transaction elements have a significant effect on the performance of freight forwarding companies. The competence of skills to understand customers has a significant effect on the implementation of the three elements of customer service transactions. Likewise, the competence of freight forwarding management skills helps customer service in carrying out freight forwarding operational activities effectively. The competence of customer service management skills and stakeholder management also has an impact on the effectiveness of customer service performance in carrying out the three elements of customer service transactions for freight forwarding services.

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