Employee Perceptions of Sub-Branch Banking as a Strategy for Rural Customer Outreach: Evidence from Pubali Bank PLC, Rangpur Region

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the perceptions of employees regarding the sub-branches of Pubali Bank located in the Rangpur region of Bangladesh, with a particular emphasis on their contribution to enhancing rural financial inclusion. Although there has been notable progress in alleviating poverty on a national scale, rural areas such as Rangpur continue to encounter ongoing challenges associated with agricultural reliance and restricted access to formal banking services. Sub-branches have surfaced as a cost-efficient solution to deliver vital financial services to underserved rural communities. Pubali Bank, leveraging its extensive network of branches and sub-branches, has strategically expanded its presence in Rangpur to tackle these deficiencies. Utilizing a descriptive research design that includes surveys conducted with 98 purposively selected employees from 30 sub-branches, this study investigates the operational realities, effectiveness of customer service, and the challenges encountered by staff. The findings indicate a workforce that is predominantly male and experienced, primarily consisting of mid-level officers. Employee responses reveal a high level of customer satisfaction, especially regarding deposit schemes, ATM services, and financial literacy programs, underscoring the essential role of sub-branches in promoting financial inclusion. Nevertheless, there are ongoing concerns regarding pricing competitiveness, adequacy of staffing, regional support, and the low level of financial literacy among rural clients. Reliability analyses affirm the strength of the measurement scales utilized, thereby validating the findings of the study. In summary, the research highlights the necessity of adequately equipping sub-branches with qualified personnel and advanced technology to improve service quality. Addressing the identified gaps will enhance customer trust and engagement, ultimately fostering sustainable growth in rural banking. These findings provide important insights for policymakers and banking institutions striving to close the financial gap between rural and urban areas in Bangladesh and to achieve inclusive development objectives.

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh's banking sector, financial inclusion remains a major challenge, especially in rural areas where about 80% of the country's poor live. Although poverty levels have dropped significantly—from 52.3% in 2000 to 26.7% in 2016—there are still notable regional gaps. For instance, the Rangpur division in the north lags behind in progress due to its heavy dependence on agriculture, which accounts for 54% of household income, and its vulnerability to climate-related shocks. Rangpur shows lower financial inclusion scores, like in Kurigram where the index was 0.438 in 2014 compared to the national average of 0.697. This reflects limited access to credit and banking services within an economy largely based on farming. To tackle these issues, sub-branch banking has become a promising approach. These smaller branches let banks reach underserved rural customers without the cost of fully fledged bank branches, improving service coverage at a lower cost. Bangladesh Bank introduced this model alongside agent banking and mobile financial services (MFS), which have grown increasingly important in areas like Rangpur. In fact, around

28% of people there now rely on MFS for their transactions. Pubali Bank Limited, one of the oldest and biggest private banks in Bangladesh, with over 500 branches and 230 sub-branches including in Rangpur, is actively using sub-branches to help close the rural-urban financial gap. Their goal is to support rural farmers and small business owners by providing easier access to loans and savings. However, the success of these efforts depends a lot on how the staff working in these sub-branches perceive their roles. Employees in rural areas often appreciate that their earnings go further due to lower living costs, but they also face challenges such as limited opportunities for promotion and fewer resources compared to their urban colleagues. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of branchless banking models, with factors like trust and users' confidence playing key roles in rural uptake. This study looks at how Pubali Bank's sub-branch staff in Rangpur view their work and the effectiveness of these operations in expanding rural financial access. By highlighting what's working well and what barriers remain, it aims to offer insights that can improve policies and help Bangladesh move closer to its broader development goals and vision for inclusive growth.

Objective of the research
To analyze the attitudes of employees at Pubali Bank's sub-branches in Rangpur concerning the success of reaching rural clients.

Background of the Study
The banking industry in Bangladesh has experienced significant changes aimed at enhancing financial inclusion and minimizing inequalities in access to banking services. Despite substantial advancements through reforms, the adoption of technology, and the expansion of networks, rural populations still encounter obstacles such as geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and socioeconomic challenges, which hinder their engagement with formal financial systems. In response to these issues, banks have established sub-branches as a more economical alternative to traditional branches. These sub-branches operate under the oversight of a main branch and offer vital services—including deposits, withdrawals, remittances, and loans—while lowering operational expenses. This approach has been effective in broadening banking access to underserved populations. Pubali Bank Limited has taken the lead in adopting this strategy, especially in the Rangpur Region, where it has notably increased rural banking outreach. However, there is a scarcity of research regarding the operational dynamics of sub-branches, their effectiveness in service delivery, and the experiences of the employees who manage them. The insights of employees are essential, as they engage directly with rural clients and can provide valuable information on both the opportunities and challenges associated with this model. Therefore, this study intends to explore the operational practices, customer feedback, and service-related challenges of sub-branches, with a particular emphasis on Pubali Bank's rural expansion efforts in the Rangpur Region.

Statement of the Problem
Although sub-branches have surfaced as a strategic means to broaden banking outreach in rural Bangladesh, a significant gap persists in empirical research regarding employees' perceptions of their efficiency, impact, and challenges. Employees hold a crucial role in the operation of sub-branches, as they are directly involved in providing financial services, engaging with rural customers, and managing the unique operational constraints of these units. Their practical experiences yield valuable insights into the effectiveness of sub-branches in achieving the larger goal of financial inclusion. Additionally, employees' viewpoints are critical in evaluating whether sub-branches genuinely satisfy the financial needs of underserved populations or merely function as limited-service extensions restricted by structural and resource limitations. By investigating employees' perspectives, researchers can better assess the sustainability and overall contribution of the sub-branch model to rural financial development, thereby informing future strategies for inclusive banking in Bangladesh.

Scope of the Study
This research is limited to exploring the operational realities and employee perceptions regarding the sub-branch model of Pubali Bank PLC in the Rangpur Region of Bangladesh. As one of the largest private commercial banks in the nation, Pubali Bank has made considerable strides in expanding its rural network, having established 236 sub-branches across the country in addition to 509 full-fledged branches. Significantly, the Rangpur Region has seen the most extensive growth, with 30 sub-branches inaugurated between 2020 and 2024 across seven districts: Rangpur, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, and Kurigram. These sub-branches are strategically positioned mainly at the upazila and union levels, with only a limited number located in urban areas that are geographically distant from their respective controlling branches in district towns. According to the branch gradation policy set by Bangladesh Bank, of these 30 sub-branches, 25 are classified as rural and 5 as urban. Through this expansion, Pubali Bank has increased its footprint to 25 new upazilas within the region, thereby enhancing access to formal financial services in underserved locales. The current study aims to understand how employees at these sub-branches perceive the efficiency, challenges, and impact of the model in fostering financial inclusion. Given their direct engagement with rural customers and their participation in daily operational tasks, the insights of employees are crucial for assessing whether sub-branches are effectively serving marginalized communities or if they are operating under inherent structural constraints. Therefore, the focus of this study is narrowed to analyzing employee experiences in 30 sub-branches of Pubali Bank in the Rangpur Region, providing valuable insights into their role in addressing the rural financial inclusion gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Iqbal et al. (2020) investigate the impact of expanding banking outreach on poverty levels in Bangladesh. Through a difference-in-differences analysis conducted across 544 upazilas from 2010 to 2015, they discover that enhanced banking services lead to a significant reduction in poverty, primarily through the deposit channel rather than credit. In essence, an increase in deposit accounts within rural sub-districts correlates strongly with a decrease in poverty. This finding emphasizes that accessible savings options – even if they do not provide immediate credit – can substantially enhance welfare. The research underscores the critical role of basic banking access in rural regions, indicating that the expansion of branches or kiosks for deposits can serve as an effective strategy for alleviating poverty.

Khan et al. (2024) evaluates the quality of technology-enabled services in Bangladeshi commercial banks during the COVID-19 pandemic. By surveying bank customers, they find that specific dimensions of e-service – particularly reliability and assurance – positively and significantly influence e-banking satisfaction, while responsiveness and empathy exhibit negative correlations under pandemic conditions. In other words, customers prioritize reliable and competent digital services over personalized or prompt human interaction when in-person banking options are restricted. The authors conclude that for sub-branch outlets that depend on digital channels, prioritizing robust and dependable technology services is more crucial than concentrating on staff responsiveness or empathy during crisis situations.

Bashir et al. (2023) examine the influence of overall service quality and user experience on e-banking satisfaction in Bangladesh. Through the analysis of survey data, they reveal that both enhanced perceived service quality and improved customer experiences significantly elevate satisfaction levels with e-banking. Their structural model indicates a robust positive correlation between quality/experience factors and satisfaction. Practically, this suggests that rural sub-branches providing digital services must prioritize the creation of smooth, secure, and user-friendly platforms; even when customers engage remotely, enhancing the usability and reliability of online banking will lead to increased customer satisfaction and greater adoption of e-banking.

Islam et al. (2013) utilize the SERVQUAL framework to assess Bangladeshi bank customers and pinpoint essential drivers of satisfaction. They find that customers give the highest ratings to product quality, efficient service procedures, fair charges, and employee performance, while their opinions on interest rates and the physical environment are more neutral. In summary, customers prioritize the actions of the bank (the quality of products and processes, as well as the competence of the staff) significantly more than the appeal of flashy branches or competitive loan rates. For small rural branches, this indicates that enhancing service processes and staff competence can improve satisfaction, even if the branch facilities are basic and pricing is determined by the market.

Yusuf et al. (2024) also employ a SERVQUAL framework in Bangladeshi banks, discovering that reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance significantly enhance customer satisfaction, while the tangibles dimension (physical facilities) exhibits a minor negative correlation. This implies that customers prioritize trustworthiness and attentive service over the appearance of the branch. For lean sub-branches, prioritizing staff training and consistent service delivery results in greater satisfaction than investing in elaborate infrastructure. These results emphasize that competent and trustworthy service is more vital than tangibles in rural banking environments.

Uddin et al. (2015) investigate the customers of Jamuna Bank and affirm that service quality—across all five SERVQUAL dimensions—is a crucial precursor to satisfaction. Through a modified SERVQUAL survey, they demonstrate that increased perceived reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles are each linked to higher satisfaction levels. This suggests that even remote sub-branches need to focus on all facets of service quality: being reliable and responsive, demonstrating empathy, building trust, and ensuring acceptable facilities. The authors recommend a balanced focus on all dimensions to significantly enhance customer experience, highlighting that service quality is a comprehensive factor contributing to satisfaction.

Hossain et al. (2021) assess the impact of agent banking on financial inclusion in Bangladesh by utilizing panel data from 19 banks. Their findings indicate that higher volumes of deposits and credits managed by agent outlets, along with inward remittances and the opening of new accounts through agents, significantly increase the number of accounts per adult, which serves as a proxy for inclusion. In summary, agent networks substantially enhance inclusion in underserved regions. By bringing banking services closer to unbanked communities, agents facilitate savings mobilization and extend lending opportunities in areas where formal branches are limited. The findings underscore the pivotal role of agents in promoting inclusion, particularly in impoverished and sparsely populated sub-districts.

Hossain & Rahman (2022) investigate the adoption of mobile banking in Bangladesh, concentrating on technology, trust, and risk factors. Their research reveals that perceived usefulness, which refers to the advantages of mobile banking, and service quality are significant motivators for users to adopt mobile banking. Conversely, perceived risks, such as concerns regarding security or performance, hinder adoption. Additionally, their study highlights that the most inclusive effects are observed in routine transactions and basic savings, indicating that digital channels primarily assist individuals in managing their daily financial requirements. These findings suggest that ensuring mobile banking is both useful and secure is essential, particularly if rural agents or sub-branches integrate mobile platforms into their offerings.

Saha & Jahan (2024) analyze whether activity in agent banking enhances overall bank performance. By examining panel data from various banks, they find a positive correlation between higher agent transaction volumes and bank returns (ROA/ROE) as well as

operating efficiency. In simpler terms, banks with active agent networks generally exhibit better financial performance, likely due to agents facilitating low-cost transactions. This reinforces the perspective that agency banking represents a feasible cost-to-serve model: by delegating rural transactions to agents, banks can boost profitability and broaden their outreach without the need for costly branches.

Islam, Hosen, & Shishir (2023) examine customer satisfaction with agent and mobile banking amid the COVID-19 pandemic. They indicate that elements such as service quality, security, trust, and convenience are significant predictors of satisfaction with branchless banking, whereas transaction costs have minimal influence. This indicates that customers appreciated having a secure, reliable, and user-friendly alternative to visiting physical branches during lockdowns. Maintaining high levels of security and dependability in agent/mobile channels was crucial for ensuring customer satisfaction when traditional access was limited.

Hossain, Uddin, & Hasan (2023) combine SERVQUAL dimensions with relationship quality in the context of retail banking. Their findings reveal that reliability and responsiveness exert the most substantial influence on both customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Practically, this implies that banks should prioritize consistent and prompt service when designing sub-branch offerings to foster robust customer relationships. The research highlights that strong relationship quality, stemming from service reliability, is vital for encouraging customers to remain loyal to a bank or to utilize additional services.

Al-Mamun, Rahman, & Islam (2024) investigate the use of online banking in Islamic banks within Bangladesh. They discover that performance expectancy (the belief in the usefulness and effectiveness of online banking), effort expectancy (the ease of use), and trust are pivotal factors driving customers' intentions to adopt online banking. This suggests that enhancing the perceived advantages and usability of digital platforms, along with fostering trust in these services, will motivate users. These insights indicate that well-structured, secure digital services can assist Islamic banks in reaching rural customers through the digital channels of their sub-branches.

Bashir, Chowdhury, & Uddin (2023) conduct a review of the existing literature regarding mobile and agent banking satisfaction in Bangladesh. They determine that the primary factors promoting adoption are perceived usefulness and reliability, while privacy and security concerns represent the main obstacles in rural regions. In essence, customers are likely to adopt mobile or agent services if they perceive them as advantageous and trustworthy, but they may hesitate due to fears of fraud or data breaches. This highlights the necessity for agents and banks to establish trust through transparency and security measures, as well as to emphasize the tangible benefits of their services to users in rural areas.

Islam et al. (2022) investigate the impact of empowering bank employees—by granting them autonomy—and their emotional intelligence on performance. Their findings indicate that increased employee empowerment and job satisfaction are significant predictors of enhanced bank performance. For rural branches, this suggests that granting sub-branch staff greater decision-making authority and ensuring their job satisfaction can lead to improved branch outcomes. In summary, when employees feel appreciated and competent, they are better equipped to serve customers and enhance overall performance.

Gupta et al. (2024) identifies the factors influencing job satisfaction among bank employees in Bangladesh. Their survey reveals that a positive work environment, equitable rewards, and effective leadership play a crucial role in shaping satisfaction levels. For remote sub-branches, this indicates that management should focus on these elements to retain talent: a supportive supervisor, clear recognition or incentives, and a culture of respect can significantly increase employees' willingness to remain and perform effectively in isolated environments.

Allen et al. (2016) presents global insights into the factors influencing account ownership. The study indicates that high account fees and significant distances to banking institutions pose substantial obstacles: enhanced financial inclusion correlates with reduced account costs and increased proximity to branches. Furthermore, the research reveals that robust legal rights and advanced technological infrastructure (such as digital payment systems) facilitate inclusion. This supports the notion that sub-branches and digital agents should aim to lower costs and eliminate distance barriers to effectively serve rural communities. Policies aimed at decreasing fees or documentation requirements while broadening access to digital platforms are regarded as the most effective measures.

Beck et al. (2007) conducts a comparative analysis of banking access across various countries, discovering that the penetration of branches and ATMs, along with the level of banking competition, significantly influences usage patterns. Specifically, a higher density of branches and increased competition result in more extensive service utilization. They contend that alleviating geographic barriers – for instance, by ensuring that even rural regions have access to banking facilities – is essential for enhancing financial access. This reinforces the approach of integrating sparse branch networks with alternative access methods (such as agents, kiosks, and mobile banking) to bridge the gaps in rural access.

Sarma & Pais (2011) examine macro-level data concerning financial inclusion and development. Their findings suggest that nations with greater overall financial inclusion typically experience improved human development outcomes (in areas such as education and health). They highlight that targeted access channels in rural areas (like local branches or agents) play a crucial role in enhancing inclusion and, consequently, overall development. The conclusion drawn is that extending banking services to rural areas is not merely a financial objective but also a developmental imperative.

Suri & Jack (2016) investigate the effects of mobile money (M-Pesa) in Kenya and conclude that it has significantly alleviated poverty. They estimate that access to M-Pesa has lifted approximately 2% of Kenyan households out of extreme poverty by facilitating improved labor market participation and remittances. This illustrates the welfare benefits of affordable and widespread financial access. In the context of Bangladesh, it implies that similarly low-cost access points (such as banks with extensive agent networks or mobile services) can exert substantial poverty-reduction impacts by economically empowering rural households.

Rifat, Iqbal, & Nisha (2025) explore the adoption of agent banking from the clients' viewpoints in Bangladesh. They discover that high perceived risks and concerns regarding service quality hinder potential users, while establishing trust is vital for adoption. This indicates that merely deploying agents is insufficient: it is essential to ensure that agents are well-trained and reliable, and to publicly reinforce the safety of the system to persuade rural customers to embrace agent banking.

Barua et al. (2025) analyzes the role of agent banking in enhancing financial inclusion in Bangladesh. They similarly identify factors such as consumer trust, risk perception, and awareness as significant determinants of adoption. The authors recommend policies aimed at strengthening agent capabilities (through training and monitoring) and increasing public awareness about agent banking. In essence, equipping agents with knowledge and promoting consumer education can alleviate perceived risks and capitalize on the opportunities that agents present for financial inclusion.

Zhang & Wang (2021) examine the factors influencing digital inclusion in both urban and rural regions of China. Their findings indicate that local industrial growth and government involvement are significant drivers of inclusion overall, while in rural settings, the level of secondary education is particularly crucial. By extension, this suggests that in Bangladesh, providing training and education to both agents and rural clients can improve the adoption of digital banking. It underscores the importance of human capital and supportive policies, in addition to infrastructure, in promoting financial inclusion in rural areas.

Khan, Nayeem, & Islam (2024) investigate the impact of employee well-being on service quality within the banking sector. Their research demonstrates that reduced stress levels and increased job satisfaction among employees correlate with enhanced service quality as perceived by customers. For rural sub-branches that are often understaffed, it is vital to support employees through means such as training, manageable workloads, or emotional support: content and less-stressed employees are more inclined to provide the high-quality service necessary for customer satisfaction and retention.

Shaw & Alam (2018) explore the factors that drive the adoption of retail e-banking in Bangladesh through the lens of technology acceptance models. They discover that customers' willingness to engage with technology and their trust in digital platforms are predictive of e-banking adoption. This implies that for sub-branches, investing in dependable digital infrastructure (such as mobile applications or internet banking) and building customer trust can greatly enhance the branch's reach. Ultimately, integrating physical sub-branches with supportive digital frameworks can extend services to a larger number of rural customers than relying on branches alone.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design

This investigation utilized a descriptive research framework that incorporated both primary and secondary data. A survey was conducted to assess employee perceptions regarding sub-branch banking's effectiveness in reaching rural customers and to identify significant operational challenges faced by Pubali Bank PLC in the Rangpur Region.

Sources of Data

The research depended on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected from employees at various sub-branches of Pubali Bank located in the Rangpur region. A structured questionnaire created using Google Forms was employed to gather their feedback. Secondary data was sourced from internal reports and financial statements of Pubali Bank PLC, publications from Bangladesh Bank, as well as the websites of Pubali Bank, Bangladesh Bank, and other commercial banks. Furthermore, previous academic research related to financial inclusion and rural banking was examined to offer a wider context and comparative insights.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through an online structured questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: basic information about respondents, performance of sub-branches in reaching rural customers, operational challenges, and employee insights or recommendations. Core banking services such as deposits, loans, digital banking, utility bill payments, and remittance pickups were highlighted as focal points. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to gauge employees' perceptions and levels of agreement on various matters, facilitating both quantitative and qualitative analysis of their opinions.

Sampling Design

The population for this study comprised 131 employees from 30 sub-branches of Pubali Bank located in the Rangpur region. To guarantee statistical reliability, the sample size was determined using the finite population formula, which factored in a 95% confidence level and a ±5% margin of error. Consequently, the necessary sample size was calculated to be 98 respondents. The

formula utilized took into account elements such as population size, z-value corresponding to the confidence level, sample proportion, and permissible error, thereby ensuring a suitable representation of the population.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling approach was employed, focusing on employees who are directly engaged in rural banking operations. Given that the primary aim of the study was to evaluate the performance and challenges faced by sub-branches in serving rural customers, the selection of respondents was deliberate. Employees from these sub-branches were considered the most appropriate participants due to their direct knowledge, experiences, and interactions with rural clients.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data gathered via Google Form were compiled using Google Sheets and subsequently transferred to Microsoft Excel for further analysis. The responses were organized into frequency tables and charts to facilitate clear visualization. The weighted average method was applied to assess the Likert-scale responses, enabling the measurement of the strength of perceptions. Each response level was multiplied by the number of respondents to derive total scores, which were then averaged across the sample size. In addition to weighted averages, percentage distributions were calculated for each item to emphasize varying levels of agreement. A comprehensive weighted average summary was created to offer comparative insights across different themes.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Analysis

Age Distribution of the Respondent: The age distribution among respondents indicates that the largest segment (42.9%) is within the 30–35 years age bracket, followed by those aged 30–40 years at 30.6%. A mere 10.2% are under 30 years old, while 16.3% exceed 40 years, reflecting a workforce predominantly in their early to mid-career phases.

Gender Distribution of the Respondents: The gender analysis reveals a significantly male-dominated workforce, with 94.9% of employees being male and only 5.1% female. There were no respondents who identified as "other," which points to a lack of gender diversity within Pubali Bank's sub-branches in the Rangpur region.

Experiences of the Respondents: The banking experience among respondents varies, with 32.7% possessing over 10 years of experience and 27.6% having between 5–10 years, indicating a robust pool of experienced professionals. However, a considerable segment (12.2%) is relatively new, having less than a year of experience.

Service Duration of the Respondents: Regarding the duration of service in the sub-branch, 36.7% have been employed for more than two years, while 32.7% have served between 1–2 years, demonstrating a balance between stability and mobility.

Designation of the Respondents: In terms of designation, Deputy Junior Officers make up the majority of the sample (44.9%), with Principal Officers (19.4%) and Senior Officers (6.1%) also making significant contributions. This indicates that the sub-branches are primarily staffed by mid-level officers, with limited representation from higher managerial positions.

Analysis of Weighted Average

Analysis of Employee Perceptions of Sub-Branches in Serving Rural Customers

The evaluation of customer perceptions regarding the services offered by Pubali Bank's sub-branches indicates a predominantly positive response, with an overall satisfaction score of 4.35, which is the highest rating, demonstrating robust customer confidence in the operations of the branch **[Table-1, SRC1-SRC13]**. Customers place significant value on daily deposit schemes (4.19), ATM/CRM services (4.15), and financial literacy initiatives (4.13), underscoring the significance of flexible savings options, technological convenience, and awareness programs. Factors such as access to banking for the rural unbanked (4.10) and interest in mobile banking applications (4.00) further validate the role of sub-branches in fostering financial inclusion and the adoption of digital services. Moderate ratings were observed for foreign remittance onboarding (3.98), preference for small deposits (3.95), and preference for loans over NGOs/MFIs (4.01), indicating a developing yet cautious customer trust. The lowest ratings were attributed to interest rates and service charges (3.35) as well as comparisons with other financial institutions (3.44), which highlight concerns related to costs. In summary, the findings indicate a strong level of satisfaction with sub-branch services; however, there are opportunities for improvement in terms of pricing competitiveness and differentiation.

Table-1: Result of the Weighted Average Analysis

Factor No.	Factors	Weighted Average
SRC1	Banking Access for Rural Unbanked	4.10
SRC2	Customer Views: Banks vs. Insurance, Agents & Cooperatives	3.44
SRC3	Preference for Sub-branch in Small Deposits	3.95
SRC4	Perception of Interest Rates & Charges on Small Deposits	3.35
SRC5	Daily Deposit Schemes for Low-Income Clients	4.19
SRC6	Preference for Sub-branch over NGOs/MFIs for Short-Term Loans	4.01
SRC7	Satisfaction with Agricultural Loans	3.71

SRC8	Preference for Sub-branch in Utility Bill Payments	3.65
SRC9	Onboarding Foreign Remittance Customers	3.98
SRC10	Usage of ATM/CRM Services	4.15
SRC11	Interest in Mobile Banking Applications	4.00
SRC12	Improving Financial Literacy	4.13
SRC13	Overall Satisfaction with Sub-branch Services	4.35

Analysis of Employee Perceptions of Challenges in Sub-Branch Operations

The table displays the weighted average scores for different factors that affect the effectiveness of rural sub-branch services [Table-2, CSO1-CSO6]. The factor that received the highest score (4.19) relates to the adequacy of technological resources, marking it as the most prominent strength. Moreover, the convenience of the sub-branch's location (4.11) and the provision of a welcoming atmosphere through branch facilities (3.93) are recognized as significant advantages. Conversely, staffing levels (3.50) and the support from the Regional/Head Office (3.83) are relatively less satisfactory. Additionally, low financial literacy among rural customers (3.75) presents a considerable challenge. In summary, technological resources and branch location are key strengths, while staffing and financial literacy necessitate focused improvements to enhance service delivery.

Table-2: Result of the Weighted Average Analysis

Factor No.	Factors	Weighted Average
CSO1	The sub-branch location is convenient for rural customers.	4.11
CSO2	The branch facilities provide a welcoming environment.	3.93
CSO3	Staffing is sufficient to manage workload and serve customers.	3.50
CSO4	The branch has adequate technological resources for service delivery.	4.19
CSO5	Low financial literacy among rural customers creates service challenges.	3.75
CSO6	Support from Regional/Head Office is sufficient to address challenges.	3.83

Reliability Analysis

The scale comprising 13 items exhibits exceptional reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.979 [Refer to Table-1], which signifies strong internal consistency. The mean score stands at 51.01, accompanied by considerable variance and standard deviation, indicating a degree of variability among respondents. The ANOVA analysis uncovers significant differences among items ($F=55.095$, $p<.001$), highlighting the diverse responses across items, thereby reinforcing the scale's multidimensional nature. In summary, the scale is not only reliable but also captures meaningful variability at the item level in respondent perceptions, establishing it as a robust instrument for measuring the intended construct. The grand mean is calculated at 3.9239, representing the average score across items.

The 6-item scale showcases high internal consistency, reflected in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.970 [Refer to Table-2], indicating strong reliability. The mean score is recorded at 23.32, with lower variance and standard deviation in comparison to the first scale, suggesting more consistent responses among participants. The ANOVA findings reveal significant differences between items ($F=45.684$, $p<.001$), indicating that respondents have varied perceptions and responses to individual items. The grand mean is noted at 3.8861, which reflects the average score for the items. Overall, this scale is reliable and demonstrates meaningful variability at the item level, making it a trustworthy measure of the intended construct.

These results underscore the psychometric robustness and differentiation present within each scale. Presenting these values in an academic setting bolsters the validity and reliability of the measurement tools, instilling confidence for further analysis or application in research or evaluation endeavors.

FINDINGS

The analysis offers a thorough examination of demographic traits, employee and customer viewpoints, and the reliability of measurement scales pertinent to Pubali Bank's sub-branches catering to rural clientele. The demographic profile indicates a predominantly male workforce (94.9%) primarily aged between 30 and 40 years, featuring a significant number of seasoned professionals and mid-level officers, which underscores workforce stability alongside moderate mobility. Customer satisfaction is remarkably high, with an overall weighted average score of 4.35, indicating strong approval for flexible deposit schemes, ATM services, financial literacy programs, and mobile banking adoption—highlighting the essential role of the sub-branches in promoting financial inclusion. However, concerns regarding pricing related to interest rates and service charges received lower ratings, indicating areas that require enhancement. The analysis of operational challenges pinpoints technological adequacy and convenient branch locations as major strengths, while staffing, regional support, and low financial literacy among customers emerge as critical issues that need addressing. The reliability analyses of two scales affirm the robustness of the measurement tools employed. The first 13-item scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.979) along with significant item-level

variability, reflecting its multidimensional nature and ability to capture diverse respondent perceptions. The second 6-item scale also displayed strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.970) with consistent responses, yet still significant differences between items, highlighting varied perceptions within the construct being assessed. Collectively, these findings validate the psychometric strength of these instruments, bolstering confidence in their application for research and evaluation of rural sub-branch service effectiveness and customer satisfaction. This comprehensive methodology facilitates targeted enhancements in service delivery and workforce management while ensuring reliable data collection for monitoring.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of employee perceptions regarding sub-branch operations at Pubali Bank Limited in the Rangpur region underscores the vital function these branches serve in broadening access to financial services for rural clientele. The results indicate that although sub-branches are typically well-equipped to offer accessible and dependable banking services, there are ongoing challenges related to staffing, technological resources, and physical infrastructure. Staff members highlight the necessity of sufficient resources and contemporary facilities to improve service efficiency and enhance customer satisfaction. Their feedback reveals both the strengths and operational deficiencies that directly affect rural financial inclusion. In summary, the research emphasizes that equipping sub-branches with adequate human resources, cutting-edge technology, and customer-oriented environments will not only improve service delivery but also foster trust and engagement among rural communities. By tackling these issues, Pubali Bank can further reinforce its position as a pivotal force in promoting inclusive banking in Bangladesh.

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