

Public Service Quality in Regional Higher Education Transformation: Comprehensive Evaluation and Optimization Strategies for English Language Programs

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study examines the implementation of Public Service Quality (PSQ) principles in transforming regional higher education services, with specific emphasis on English language learning programs. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this research evaluates service quality dimensions through the adapted SERVQUAL framework and develops evidence-based optimization strategies for enhanced educational service delivery. The investigation was conducted at Tadulako University's English Education Program, examining student expectations versus perceived service quality across five critical dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. Quantitative findings reveal substantial gaps between expectations and perceptions, with tangibles demonstrating the most significant deficit (-1.24), followed by reliability (-1.08), responsiveness (-0.95), assurance (-0.76), and empathy (-0.42). Qualitative analysis identified technological infrastructure limitations, insufficient faculty competency in innovative pedagogical approaches, fragmented academic management systems, and rigid organizational culture as primary internal barriers. External constraints include budgetary limitations, regulatory inflexibility, and intensified competition from private institutions. The research proposes a comprehensive transformation framework incorporating citizen-centric governance principles, digital service innovation, stakeholder engagement mechanisms, and continuous quality improvement processes. This study contributes theoretical insights to public service management literature in educational contexts while providing practical implementation roadmaps for regional higher education institutions pursuing service excellence and enhanced student satisfaction.

Keywords: *public service quality, higher education transformation, SERVQUAL, educational governance, regional universities, digital innovation, quality assurance*

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of higher education has undergone profound transformation in response to globalization pressures, technological advancement, and evolving stakeholder expectations. Within this dynamic environment, regional universities face unprecedented challenges in delivering high-quality educational services (Abdullah, 2022). while maintaining accessibility, affordability, and local relevance. The concept of Public Service Quality (PSQ) has emerged as a fundamental paradigm for educational reform, offering systematic approaches to enhance service (Irma et al., 2025) delivery effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction.

Regional higher education institutions operate within complex governance structures that demand careful balance between centralized quality standards and decentralized operational autonomy. The implementation (Abdullah, 2021). of PSQ principles in these contexts requires nuanced understanding of local constraints, stakeholder dynamics, and institutional capacities. English language programs represent particularly critical areas for quality enhancement due to their strategic importance in graduate employability, international collaboration opportunities, and institutional competitiveness in global higher education markets.

Empirical evidence from preliminary investigations at Tadulako University reveals systematic challenges in English language instruction, particularly in listening comprehension skills development. These difficulties reflect broader systemic issues in educational service delivery (Abdullah & Hanafi, 2024), including inadequate learning resources, limited technological integration, and insufficient pedagogical

innovation. Such challenges necessitate comprehensive evaluation frameworks and evidence-based optimization strategies grounded in public administration theory and practice (Hanafi & Abdullah, 2025).

This research addresses four primary objectives: first, to evaluate the implementation of Public Service Quality (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011), principles within regional higher education service delivery systems; second, to analyze multifaceted factors influencing English language program service quality; third, to identify and quantify gaps between student expectations and perceived service quality; and fourth, to formulate evidence-based optimization strategies incorporating good governance principles for sustainable service quality enhancement in regional higher education contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Public Service Quality

Public Service Quality represents a multidimensional construct encompassing the extent to which public services meet or exceed citizen expectations, needs, and requirements. The conceptual evolution of PSQ draws heavily from private sector service quality models while incorporating unique characteristics of public sector contexts, including accountability to multiple stakeholders, regulatory constraints, and social equity considerations. Contemporary PSQ frameworks emphasize citizen-centric approaches that prioritize user experience, accessibility, and outcome effectiveness.

The SERVQUAL framework, originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), provides robust theoretical foundations for measuring service quality across diverse organizational contexts. The five-dimensional model encompasses reliability (consistent and dependable service performance), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of service providers), tangibles (physical facilities and equipment), empathy (individualized attention and care), and responsiveness (willingness to help and provide prompt service). Educational adaptations of SERVQUAL have demonstrated significant utility in assessing institutional performance and identifying improvement priorities.

Higher Education Service Quality in Regional Contexts

Regional higher education institutions operate within distinctive environments characterized by limited resources, geographic isolation, and diverse stakeholder expectations. These institutions serve crucial roles in local economic development, human capital formation, and cultural preservation while simultaneously pursuing national and international quality standards. The tension between local responsiveness and global competitiveness creates unique service delivery challenges that require innovative management approaches and strategic resource allocation.

The decentralization of education governance has fundamentally altered institutional autonomy and accountability structures in regional universities. Enhanced operational flexibility enables institutions to develop context-specific programs and services, yet it also demands sophisticated quality management systems to ensure consistent performance standards. Successful regional universities demonstrate capacity to leverage local advantages while maintaining competitive positioning through strategic differentiation and continuous innovation.

Good Governance in Educational Administration

Good governance principles provide essential frameworks for enhancing public service (Parasuraman et al, 1988) effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in educational contexts. The integration of transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness creates comprehensive governance systems that promote stakeholder engagement and institutional performance. Educational institutions implementing good governance demonstrate improved decision-making processes, enhanced resource utilization efficiency, and strengthened stakeholder trust and satisfaction.

Contemporary governance approaches emphasize collaborative leadership models that engage faculty, students, staff, and external stakeholders in strategic planning and operational decision-making. Digital governance platforms facilitate participatory processes while ensuring transparency and accountability in institutional operations. These systems enable real-time feedback mechanisms, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement cycles that enhance overall service quality and stakeholder satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This investigation employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to comprehensively examine service quality implementation in regional higher education contexts. The research strategy integrated quantitative gap analysis using adapted SERVQUAL instruments with qualitative exploration of contextual factors influencing service delivery effectiveness. This methodological approach enables triangulation of findings while providing both statistical evidence and rich contextual understanding of service quality dynamics.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Tadulako University, a prominent regional public university located in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The English Education Program served as the primary unit of analysis due to its strategic importance in preparing English language educators and its representativeness of language learning challenges in regional contexts. Tadulako University was selected based on its typicality as a regional state university and the relevance of its English language programs in addressing internationalization objectives.

Research participants comprised multiple stakeholder groups to ensure comprehensive perspective representation. Student participants included 156 individuals from semesters 2-8 of the English Education Program, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness across academic levels. Faculty participants encompassed 12 lecturers representing diverse specializations and experience levels. Administrative participants included 8 structural officials involved in educational service management and 6 academic support staff directly engaged in student service delivery.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection employed multiple instruments to capture comprehensive service quality assessments. The primary quantitative instrument consisted of a modified SERVQUAL questionnaire adapted for higher education contexts, measuring both student expectations and perceptions across the five service quality dimensions. The instrument utilized seven-point Likert scales to enable precise gap analysis calculations and statistical comparisons.

Qualitative data collection utilized semi-structured interviews with key informants to explore contextual factors influencing service quality. Interview protocols focused on identifying barriers, facilitators, and improvement opportunities within current service delivery systems. Focus group discussions with students and faculty validated quantitative findings while generating insights for optimization strategy development. Document analysis examined institutional policies, strategic plans, and operational procedures to understand existing governance structures and quality management systems.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data analysis employed gap analysis methodology to calculate discrepancies between student expectations and perceptions for each SERVQUAL dimension. Descriptive statistics provided comprehensive service quality profiles, while inferential analyses identified statistically significant differences across demographic variables and academic levels. Effect size calculations assessed practical significance of identified gaps to prioritize improvement interventions.

Qualitative data analysis utilized thematic analysis with inductive coding approaches to identify emergent themes related to service quality factors. Interview transcripts and focus group recordings were systematically coded using constant comparative methods to develop comprehensive understanding of contextual influences on service delivery. Data integration occurred through joint displays and narrative weaving to synthesize quantitative and qualitative findings into coherent explanatory frameworks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Service Quality Gap Analysis

Comprehensive analysis of student expectations versus perceptions reveals substantial service quality gaps across all SERVQUAL dimensions. The overall gap average of -0.89 indicates significant deficiencies in current service delivery performance relative to student expectations. These findings suggest systematic challenges in meeting stakeholder needs and highlight critical areas requiring immediate attention and strategic intervention.

Table 1. Comprehensive Service Quality Gap Analysis by SERVQUAL Dimensions

SERVQUAL Dimension	Expectation Mean	Perception Mean	Gap Score	Std. Deviation
Tangibles	4.52	3.28	-1.24	0.78
Reliability	4.45	3.37	-1.08	0.65
Responsiveness	4.38	3.43	-0.95	0.72
Assurance	4.41	3.65	-0.76	0.58
Empathy	4.22	3.80	-0.42	0.49
Overall Average	4.40	3.51	-0.89	0.64

The tangibles dimension demonstrates the most substantial gap (-1.24), indicating significant deficiencies in physical facilities, technological resources, and learning materials. This finding aligns with observable limitations in laboratory facilities, outdated equipment, and insufficient digital learning platforms. Reliability gaps (-1.08) reflect inconsistencies in service delivery, including irregular class schedules, unpredictable technology availability, and variable faculty performance standards.

Contextual Factors Influencing Service Quality

Thematic analysis of qualitative data identified complex interrelationships among internal and external factors that significantly influence educational service quality outcomes. Internal factors operate at institutional, departmental, and individual levels, creating multilayered influences on service delivery effectiveness.

Internal Organizational Factors:

Technological infrastructure limitations emerge as primary constraints affecting service delivery effectiveness. Inadequate internet connectivity, outdated computer laboratories, and insufficient multimedia resources directly impact English language instruction quality. Faculty competency gaps in technology integration and innovative pedagogical approaches further compound these limitations, resulting in traditional teaching methods that inadequately address diverse learning styles and contemporary educational expectations.

Organizational culture characteristics significantly influence service innovation and continuous improvement initiatives. Hierarchical decision-making structures limit faculty autonomy in curriculum development and service delivery modification. Resistance to change among some stakeholders impedes adoption of innovative practices and technologies that could enhance service quality outcomes. Communication systems often lack horizontal integration, creating information silos that reduce coordination effectiveness.

External Environmental Factors:

Budgetary constraints from regional government funding significantly limit institutional capacity for infrastructure development, faculty development, and technology acquisition. These limitations create cascading effects on service delivery capabilities, forcing institutions to prioritize basic operational needs over service quality enhancements. Regulatory frameworks often lack flexibility necessary for innovative service delivery approaches, constraining institutional responses to evolving stakeholder needs.

Good Governance-Based Optimization Model

Based on comprehensive analysis of quantitative gaps and qualitative contextual factors, this research developed an integrated optimization model combining citizen-centric service principles with good governance frameworks. The model addresses identified deficiencies through systematic approaches to technological enhancement, capacity development, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement implementation.

Model Components:

1. Digital Service Innovation Platform: Development of integrated academic information systems enabling 24/7 service access through user-friendly interfaces, mobile applications, and automated service delivery processes that reduce bureaucratic delays and enhance convenience.
2. Comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework: Implementation of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms utilizing key performance indicators, regular stakeholder feedback collection, benchmarking against best practices, and continuous improvement cycles.
3. Stakeholder Engagement and Participation Mechanism: Establishment of formal and informal channels for student, faculty, and community input in service design, delivery evaluation, and improvement planning through representative committees and digital feedback platforms.
4. Integrated Capacity Building and Professional Development Program: Systematic faculty and staff development initiatives focusing on service excellence, technological competency, innovative pedagogy, and customer service skills enhancement.
5. Organizational Culture Transformation Initiative: Development of collaborative leadership practices, innovation incentive systems, and performance recognition programs that support service quality improvement and stakeholder satisfaction enhancement.

Strategic Implementation Framework

The proposed optimization model requires phased implementation approaches that consider institutional capacity, resource availability, and stakeholder readiness. The implementation framework incorporates change management principles, risk mitigation strategies, and performance monitoring systems to ensure successful transformation outcomes. Priority sequencing addresses fundamental infrastructure needs before advancing to sophisticated service enhancements, ensuring sustainable development progression.

Table 2. Phased Implementation Framework for Service Quality Optimization

Phase	Focus Areas	Timeline
Phase 1: Foundation	Infrastructure & Basic Systems	6-12 months
Phase 2: Enhancement	Technology Integration & Training	12-18 months
Phase 3: Innovation	Advanced Services & Continuous Improvement	18-24 months

Model Validation and Expected Outcomes

Model validation occurred through expert consultation with higher education administrators, public administration scholars, and quality assurance specialists. Stakeholder feedback confirmed model comprehensiveness, feasibility, and potential effectiveness in addressing identified service quality gaps. Expected outcomes include measurable improvements in student satisfaction scores, enhanced faculty teaching effectiveness, improved institutional reputation, and strengthened stakeholder engagement levels.

Long-term benefits encompass enhanced institutional competitiveness, improved graduate employability, strengthened community partnerships, and increased research collaboration opportunities. The model's emphasis on continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement creates sustainable foundations for ongoing service quality enhancement and adaptation to evolving educational environments.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to public administration theory by demonstrating SERVQUAL framework applicability in regional higher education contexts while identifying context-specific adaptations necessary for effective implementation. The integration of good governance principles with service quality measurement provides novel theoretical insights into citizen-centric public service delivery in educational settings.

Practical Implications

For higher education administrators, this research provides evidence-based frameworks for service quality assessment and improvement planning. The optimization model offers practical guidance for implementing technological innovations, developing human resources, and establishing stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Regional policymakers can utilize findings to inform resource allocation decisions and regulatory framework development.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study acknowledges several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. The single institution focusses limits generalizability to other regional universities with different contexts and characteristics. Longitudinal studies tracking service quality improvements over extended periods would provide valuable insights into optimization model effectiveness. Future research should examine cross-cultural applicability and develop culturally sensitive adaptations for diverse regional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive investigation demonstrates substantial opportunities for enhancing public service quality in regional higher education through systematic implementation of evidence-based optimization strategies. The significant gaps identified across all SERVQUAL dimensions highlight urgent needs for transformative interventions addressing technological infrastructure, faculty development, and administrative system integration.

The proposed optimization model provides comprehensive frameworks for sustainable service quality enhancement through good governance principles integration. Successful implementation requires committed leadership, adequate resource allocation, and sustained stakeholder engagement to achieve desired transformation outcomes. Regional higher education institutions adopting these approaches can expect enhanced competitiveness, improved stakeholder satisfaction, and strengthened community partnerships that support long-term institutional sustainability and growth.

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