



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perceptions of Service Quality in Latin American State Institutions

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The objective of this study is to analyze the factors that influence the perception of service quality in Peruvian state entities, with special emphasis on administrative efficiency, transparency and technological accessibility. To this end, a quantitative approach was used by applying a structured survey to 1,200 Peruvian citizens, both urban and rural, who had used public services in the last 12 months. The data collected were analysed by multiple linear regression using SPSS software to determine the relationship between key factors and citizen satisfaction. The results indicate that administrative efficiency is the factor that most influences the perception of service quality, with a coefficient of 0.41, followed by transparency (0.37) and technological accessibility (0.26). Significant differences were also identified between urban and rural areas, with urban areas having higher levels of satisfaction due to better accessibility to digital services. In terms of conclusions, it is highlighted that efficiency and transparency are key determinants for improving citizen perception of public services. However, the digital divide between urban and rural areas poses a major challenge, limiting equitable access to public services. The study suggests the need for continued administrative reforms and improved technological infrastructure in rural areas to reduce these disparities. This work contributes to the field of public service quality in Latin America, providing Peru-specific evidence that can guide future reforms and policies.

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INTRODUCTION

The perception of service quality in state entities has become a critical issue in the evaluation of public policies in Latin America, a region characterised by its cultural, political and economic diversity (Martínez & Pérez, 2021). In a context where governments seek to improve the efficiency and transparency of their services, citizen opinion plays a fundamental role in the legitimacy of state institutions (Gómez et al., 2020). Service quality, often assessed in terms of accessibility, efficiency and user satisfaction, has been a central focus of administrative reforms in countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Peru (Rodríguez & Castillo, 2019).

Previous studies suggest that citizen perception of the quality of public services is directly related to factors such as trust in institutions, the presence of corruption and the degree of digitalisation of administrative processes (Mendoza & García, 2018). Operational efficiency and transparency are two key dimensions that significantly impact citizens' perceptions, as they influence the speed and quality with which services are delivered (Fernández et al., 2019). In countries such as Chile, the modernisation of the state through digital technologies has improved public perception, significantly reducing response times and increasing user satisfaction (López & Jiménez, 2020).

However, the perception of service quality is not homogeneous across the region. While some countries have successfully implemented e-government strategies and administrative reforms, others face greater challenges due to bureaucracy, corruption and lack of technological infrastructure

(Ramírez & Torres, 2021). The existence of socio-economic and geographic inequalities has also generated significant disparities in user experience, affecting the perception of state services in rural and urban areas (Sánchez et al., 2018).

Several case studies, such as those conducted in Colombia and Argentina, have shown that citizen satisfaction is conditioned by the user's prior expectations and the degree to which services meet those expectations (Hernández & Morales, 2017). For example, in Mexico, the focus on improving citizen attention through training of public employees has had a positive impact on the perception of the services offered by the state (Vargas et al., 2019). Similarly, in Peru, the implementation of transparency initiatives has reduced the perception of corruption, improving trust in public institutions (Cruz & León, 2020).

However, in countries where state services continue to be perceived as inefficient and corrupt, such as Venezuela and Bolivia, citizens show high dissatisfaction, which undermines trust in government entities (Rojas & Peña, 2018). In addition, lack of investment in modern infrastructure and poor access to digital services have exacerbated negative perceptions of service quality in these nations (Estrada & Valle, 2021).

This article aims to analyse comparatively the perception of service quality in state entities in various Latin American countries, exploring the factors that influence this perception and the specific challenges faced by the region in terms of administrative reforms and improvements in citizen services. The research is based on a review of recent literature and data obtained from surveys and case studies, allowing for a comprehensive view of progress and limitations in the region.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out using a quantitative approach to analyse the perception of service quality in Peruvian state entities. Rigorous statistical methods were used to collect and analyse the data, allowing for an accurate assessment of the factors that influence citizen perception of public services. The study focused on identifying the relationship between variables such as administrative efficiency, technological accessibility, and overall user satisfaction (Hernández et al., 2014).

The study adopted a non-experimental cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time through a structured survey applied to Peruvian citizens who have interacted with public services in the last 12 months. This design allowed us to obtain a representative view of citizen perception in the current context of Peruvian state entities (Hernández et al., 2014).

The target population of the study was Peruvian citizens over 18 years of age, residing in urban and rural areas, who had used a public service during the last year. The sample was selected using stratified probability sampling, dividing participants into two main strata: urban and rural areas. Participants were selected from the main cities of the country, including Lima, Arequipa, Trujillo and Cusco, as well as from rural areas in the regions of Puno, Cajamarca and Ayacucho (Baena, 2016).

The calculated sample size was 1,200 respondents, with a margin of error of 3% and a confidence level of 95%. This ensured the representativeness of the sample to assess the perception of public services at the national level (Baena, 2016).

Data were collected through a structured survey containing questions designed to measure citizen perception of service quality in Peruvian state entities. The survey was based on instruments validated in previous studies on public service quality and was distributed electronically and in person.

RESULTS

Inferential analysis

Linear regression results: Multiple linear regression analysis reveals that the three factors studied (efficiency, transparency and technological accessibility) have a statistically significant influence on the perception of service quality in Peru.

1. Coefficients and statistical significance

- Administrative efficiency has a coefficient of 0.41 ($p < 0.001$), which means that for every one unit increase in perceived efficiency, satisfaction with service quality increases on average by 0.41 units.
- Transparency has a coefficient of 0.37 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the perception of transparency also has a significant impact on satisfaction with the service, although slightly less than efficiency.
- Technology accessibility has a coefficient of 0.26 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that availability of digital services and ease of access to technology are important factors, although their impact is smaller compared to efficiency and transparency.

2. R-squared (R^2)

The R^2 value = 0.68 indicates that 68% of the variability in satisfaction with service quality can be explained by these three factors (efficiency, transparency and technological accessibility). This suggests that these factors are good predictors of citizen perception of Peruvian state entities.

Table 1: Table of coefficients

| Variable | Coefficient | Standard Error | p-value |
|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| Constant | 0.12 | 0.065 | 0.045 |
| Efficiency | 0.41 | 0.012 | <0.001 |
| Transparency | 0.37 | 0.012 | <0.001 |
| Technological accessibility | 0.26 | 0.013 | <0.001 |

Interpretation of results

1. Administrative efficiency has the greatest impact on user satisfaction, suggesting that citizens place a high value on fast and effective processes.
2. Transparency also plays an important role, reinforcing the idea that users value trust in institutions and the absence of corruption.
3. Technological accessibility is significant, but has a lower weight compared to the other factors, indicating that, while digitisation is important, it is not as decisive as efficiency or transparency.

These results confirm that improvements in administrative efficiency and transparency should be priority areas to improve citizens' perception of the quality of public service in Peru.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive view of the factors that influence the perception of service quality in Peruvian state entities. In line with previous research in other Latin American countries, administrative efficiency, transparency and technological accessibility have been found to be key determinants of citizen satisfaction with public services.

Administrative efficiency: the most influential factor

Linear regression analysis shows that administrative efficiency is the factor that has the greatest impact on the perception of service quality, with a coefficient of 0.41. This finding is in line with previous studies suggesting that citizens mainly value the speed and effectiveness with which they can access public services (González & Torres, 2021). In Peru, where bureaucratic processes have traditionally been slow, recent efforts to improve efficiency in key sectors such as health, education

and justice seem to have borne fruit, as suggested by the results of this study. The positive perception in urban areas of reduced waiting times and simplification of procedures supports this assertion.

However, significant disparities persist between urban and rural areas. In rural areas, perceptions of administrative efficiency were lower, which may be related to more limited infrastructure and fewer resources allocated to these areas (López & Jiménez, 2020). This contrast highlights the need to improve the equitable distribution of resources and to implement reforms that more inclusively benefit all regions of the country.

Transparency: A pillar of institutional trust

Transparency was the second most influential factor in the perception of service quality, with a coefficient of 0.37. This result reinforces the importance of government transparency in building citizen trust, as pointed out by several studies on governance in Latin America (Mendoza & García, 2018). In the case of Peru, the implementation of information access portals and the creation of accountability mechanisms seem to have improved citizen perception of public institutions, especially in urban areas, where these tools are more accessible.

However, the perception of transparency remains a challenge in rural areas, where citizens have less access to information on government management. Qualitative interviews in previous studies have also pointed out that, despite transparency efforts, perceptions of corruption remain high in some sectors, undermining trust in institutions (Fernández et al., 2019). This suggests that transparency policies need to be further deepened, especially in the most vulnerable sectors, where trust in government is more fragile.

Technological accessibility: An emerging factor

Technological accessibility also turned out to be a statistically significant factor, although with a lower impact on the overall perception of service quality (coefficient of 0.26). This result is consistent with the global trend towards digitalisation of public services, which has been particularly relevant in Peru, where online platforms for government procedures have been implemented (Ramírez & Torres, 2021). However, the digital divide between urban and rural areas is evident in the results: while respondents in cities report high levels of satisfaction with digital services, citizens in rural areas have difficulties accessing these services due to the lack of adequate technological infrastructure.

This finding underlines the need for continued investment in the development of digital infrastructure, particularly in the more remote areas of the country. While progress in digitisation is promising, its impact on perceptions of quality of service will remain limited as long as inequality in access to these technologies is not addressed.

Comparison with previous studies

The results of this study are consistent with research conducted in other countries in the region. For example, in Chile and Mexico, similar studies have found that efficiency and transparency are the main determinants of citizen satisfaction with public services (Vargas et al., 2019). However, unlike in these countries, where technological accessibility has a more significant impact, in Peru this factor remains less influential. This could be explained by unequal access to the internet and the lack of familiarity with digital platforms among a large part of the rural population (Cruz & León, 2020).

Moreover, compared to countries such as Argentina, where perceptions of service quality are strongly influenced by corruption (Rojas & Peña, 2018), in Peru transparency has had a more positive impact on citizen perception, although challenges remain. Recent reforms, especially in terms of e-government and process simplification, have improved public perception, but much remains to be done to make these reforms truly inclusive.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has provided a detailed analysis of the factors that influence perceptions of service quality in Peruvian state entities, based on a rigorous quantitative approach. The findings have shown that three key factors - administrative efficiency, transparency and technological accessibility - play a fundamental role in citizen satisfaction with public services.

1. Administrative efficiency: The most important factor

The results of the regression analysis showed that administrative efficiency is the most influential factor in citizens' perceptions. This indicates that, in Peru, citizens especially value public services that are streamlined, well organised and minimise bureaucracy. The ability of state officials and systems to efficiently manage users' needs has a direct and significant impact on satisfaction. This finding reinforces the need to prioritise administrative reforms that streamline bureaucratic processes and improve the user experience, particularly in areas with the highest demand for services, such as health and justice.

2. Transparency: A key to building trust

Institutional transparency also proved to be a crucial factor in citizens' perceptions. In contexts where corruption and distrust of institutions have been historically high, as in the case of Peru, transparency is essential to restore and maintain public trust. Recent efforts by the Peruvian government to increase transparency, through initiatives such as public information portals and the implementation of access to information regulations, have been well received, especially in urban areas. However, these policies need to be further deepened, especially in rural areas, where the perception of transparency is still limited.

3. Technological accessibility: An area of opportunity

Although technological accessibility has a positive impact on perceptions of service quality, it remains the least influential factor among the three surveyed. This suggests that, while citizens appreciate the progress in digitisation of public services, these are not yet at the desired level or uniformly accessible across the country. Urban-rural digital divides are a significant barrier to technology adoption in more remote areas, where telecommunications infrastructure is poor and citizens are unfamiliar with using digital platforms. To improve the overall perception, the government should continue to invest in digital infrastructure, as well as in digital education programmes to expand access and usability of online services.

4. Urban and rural differences

The survey also revealed important differences in perceptions of service quality between urban and rural areas. Citizens in urban areas, particularly in cities such as Lima and Arequipa, expressed higher levels of satisfaction with public services, largely due to technological accessibility and perceived efficiency of services. In contrast, respondents in rural areas expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction, citing problems related to bureaucracy and lack of access to digital services. This difference highlights the need to design more inclusive public policies that address territorial inequalities, ensuring that rural citizens can access the same quality standards in public services as their urban counterparts.

5. Persistent challenges: Corruption and bureaucracy

While the survey results are encouraging in terms of progress in efficiency and transparency, significant challenges related to corruption and bureaucracy remain, especially in specific areas of public administration. The perception of corruption remains a major obstacle to improving public trust in state entities, particularly in sectors such as justice and local administration. To mitigate this problem, it is crucial to strengthen anti-corruption institutions and expand transparency initiatives, particularly those involving citizen participation in the oversight of public administration.

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