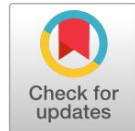


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Digital Governance Capacity and the Quality of Digital Public Services in Education Examining Institutional Readiness and Citizen Participation in Local Government

Bambang Arwanto¹ , Musmuliadi²

¹Universitas Kutai Kartanegara, Tenggarong, Indonesia

²Universitas Kutai Kartanegara, Tenggarong, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Background. The quality of digital public services in education is influenced by local governments' capacity to implement digital governance, institutional readiness to adopt digital systems, and citizen participation in public service delivery. Therefore, examining these factors is relevant to understanding how digital governance can support the improvement of education services at the local government level.

Purpose. This quantitative study aimed to examine the relationship between digital governance capacity and the quality of digital public services in education. Specifically, it investigated the roles of institutional readiness and citizen participation in supporting the delivery of digital public services within local government.

Method. The study involved citizens, parents, education service users, and relevant stakeholders who had experience accessing digital education services provided by local government. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among digital governance capacity, institutional readiness, citizen participation, and digital public service quality.

Results. The findings indicate that digital governance capacity is associated with the quality of digital public services in education. Institutional readiness contributes to the implementation of digital public services by supporting organizational preparedness, technological adoption, and service delivery processes. Citizen participation is also associated with the quality of digital education services through community involvement, feedback, and interaction with local government service providers.

Conclusion. This study concludes that the quality of digital public services in education is related to the capacity of local government to implement digital governance, organizational readiness, and citizen participation. The findings contribute to public administration research by highlighting education as a sector in which digital governance can be examined through institutional and participatory dimensions.

KEYWORDS

Citizen Participation, Digital Governance Capacity, Digital Public Services, Institutional Readiness, Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become an increasingly influential component of public-sector reform, changing how local governments organize administrative processes, communicate with citizens, and deliver public services. The development of digital platforms, integrated information systems, online applications, and electronic

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Correspondence:

Bambang Arwanto
bambangarwanto@unikarta.ac.id

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administrative procedures has created opportunities for governments to provide services that are more accessible, responsive, transparent, and efficient. However, digitalization does not automatically generate improvements in public-service quality. Recent research on Indonesia's digital transformation indicates that technological development continues to be accompanied by challenges related to infrastructure, cybersecurity, digital inequality, human-resource competence, and differences in citizens' access to digital services (Abdurrahman et al., 2025). Consequently, the effectiveness of digital public services depends not only on whether digital technologies are available but also on the capacity of public institutions to manage and transform those technologies into sustainable and citizen-oriented services.

Digital transformation has become increasingly important in the education sector because education is a public service involving continuous interaction among local governments, schools, teachers, students, parents, and communities. Digitalization can improve data management, information dissemination, administration, reporting, communication, complaints, and access to government-supported educational services. However, the availability of digital platforms does not automatically guarantee integrated and high-quality services. Ali et al. (2026), for example, found that digital transformation of educational administrative services in Buru Regency can reduce administrative barriers in an archipelagic region, but its effectiveness depends on governance and leadership, service-process transformation, infrastructure, human-resource competence, work culture, and system and data integration. This indicates that digital educational services should be understood as an institutional governance issue rather than merely a technological innovation.

In this context, digital governance capacity represents an important organizational capability. It refers to the ability of government institutions to formulate digital strategies, mobilize resources, coordinate stakeholders, develop digital competencies, integrate information systems, manage data, and continuously adapt public services. In Indonesian local governments, digital transformation affects organizational routines, employee responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, and government–citizen interactions. Hernawan and Idris (2026) show that local-government digital transformation involves organizational change and continues to face challenges related to organizational resistance, uneven digital skills, infrastructure, system integration, coordination, and citizens' digital capabilities. Similarly, Rijal et al. (2026) found that local-government capacity to implement digital transformation differs across regions because institutional conditions influence the development of digital public services. These findings suggest that technological investment can produce different outcomes depending on organizational and institutional capacity.

Institutional readiness is therefore an important dimension in explaining the relationship between digital governance capacity and digital public-service quality. Institutional readiness refers to an organization's preparedness to adopt, implement, coordinate, and sustain digital transformation through adequate resources, leadership, human resources, organizational culture, strategic planning, innovation capacity, and inter-organizational coordination. Orbawati et al. (2025) identified organizational and administrative barriers to e-government implementation in Magelang City, demonstrating that technological infrastructure alone is insufficient for effective digital government. Roziqin et al. (2026) further found that organizational readiness is a prerequisite for digital transformation and innovation, with challenges involving innovation readiness, resource readiness, strategic readiness, and participatory-collaborative capacity. Thus, institutional readiness can function as an important mechanism through which digital governance capacity contributes to the quality and sustainability of digital public services.

The quality of digital public services should also be examined from the perspective of citizens, who are the primary users and evaluators of public services. Digital platforms can provide

opportunities for citizens to submit complaints, provide feedback, access information, communicate with government institutions, participate in consultations, and evaluate services. Firdiyani et al. (2025) found that the Tangerang Live application functions not only as a service-delivery platform but also as a channel for public aspirations, consultation, transparency, and participation. In Gowa Regency, Ansar and Chowdhury (2025) found that perceptions of digital public services were associated with citizen trust and participatory behaviour, while trust was an important predictor of participation. Rukayat et al. (2025) similarly emphasized citizen engagement, co-creation, transparency, and public accountability in smart-governance transformation in West Java. These findings indicate that effective digital governance requires meaningful interaction between government institutions and citizens.

Despite these developments, several research gaps remain. First, studies of digital public services in Indonesia have frequently focused on general administrative services, smart-city programs, population administration, or municipal applications rather than specifically examining digital public services in education. Second, previous studies have often investigated digital governance, institutional readiness, service quality, or citizen participation separately. Al-Muttaqin and Nugroho (2025), for instance, found that digital public-service innovation can improve service delivery but remains constrained by technical limitations, digital-literacy disparities, and the need for sustained administrative support. Zulkarnain and Amsianisa (2025) also identified challenges involving institutional integration, technological infrastructure, and the alignment between digital-service design and community needs. These findings demonstrate that digital platforms may remain fragmented when institutional coordination and user-oriented design are inadequate.

Furthermore, Puangrimaggalatung et al. (2026) found that institutional capacity, administrative competence, technological utilization, transparency, and citizen participation are interconnected with public-service quality in rural Indonesia. However, limited empirical research has integrated digital governance capacity, institutional readiness, and citizen participation within a single framework to explain the quality of digital public services in education at the local-government level.

Based on this gap, the present study, entitled “Digital Governance Capacity and the Quality of Digital Public Services in Education: Examining Institutional Readiness and Citizen Participation in Local Government,” examines the relationship between digital governance capacity and the quality of digital public services in education while considering institutional readiness and citizen participation as important explanatory dimensions. The study contributes to the literature by integrating organizational and citizen-centred perspectives of digital governance within the specific context of local educational services. Rather than viewing digital transformation simply as technological adoption, the study conceptualizes digital public-service quality as an outcome shaped by institutional preparedness, organizational capability, and meaningful citizen engagement. This framework is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local governments can develop educational digital services that are accessible, responsive, reliable, participatory, and aligned with citizens’ needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative explanatory cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between digital governance capacity and the quality of digital public services in education, with institutional readiness and citizen participation incorporated into the analytical model. The study was conducted in selected local-government institutions responsible for educational public services in Indonesia. The target population comprised government officials

involved in digital education-service administration and citizens who had used or interacted with local-government digital education services. Because the study focused on respondents with direct experience of digital public services, purposive sampling was applied. Eligible respondents were adults who had either administered, implemented, accessed, or evaluated digital educational public services during the study period. Survey methodology requires careful attention to sampling design and potential non-sampling errors to ensure the quality and interpretability of empirical results (Rao & Lohr, 2025).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered during the research period. The instrument consisted of four constructs: digital governance capacity (DGC), institutional readiness (IR), citizen participation (CP), and digital public-service quality (DPSQ). Each construct was operationalized through multiple reflective indicators derived from established theoretical dimensions and adapted to the context of local-government educational services. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Questionnaire items were reviewed for clarity, contextual relevance, and consistency before distribution. A pilot assessment was conducted with respondents who met the inclusion criteria but were not included in the final dataset. This procedure followed recent methodological guidance emphasizing literature-based item development, clear wording, cultural appropriateness, pilot testing, validity, reliability, and ethical protection of participants (Plengkham et al., 2025).

The data-collection procedure consisted of four stages: instrument development, pilot testing, main survey distribution, and data screening. Respondents received an explanation of the study objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of aggregated data for academic purposes before providing informed consent. Incomplete responses, duplicate submissions, and responses that failed the predefined screening criteria were excluded before analysis. Procedural safeguards were also applied to reduce potential common method bias, including anonymous responses, clear separation of construct descriptions, and neutral wording of questionnaire items. Such precautions are important because self-reported surveys can produce systematic method-related variance that may influence relationships among measured constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) because the research examines several latent constructs and their simultaneous relationships in a predictive explanatory framework. PLS-SEM enables researchers to evaluate measurement and structural models within a single analytical procedure and is suitable for models involving complex relationships and potentially non-normal data (Miraz et al., 2025). The measurement model was assessed through indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. Indicators with loadings of approximately ≥ 0.70 were retained where theoretically appropriate, while $AVE \geq 0.50$ and reliability coefficients ≥ 0.70 were used as general adequacy criteria. Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

The structural model was evaluated using variance inflation factor (VIF), path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance where appropriate. Hypotheses were tested using 5,000 bootstrap resamples, with statistical significance determined using two-tailed tests at $p < .05$ and 95% confidence intervals. Where institutional readiness and/or citizen participation were specified as indirect mechanisms, their indirect effects were assessed through bootstrapping rather than relying solely on the significance of individual component paths. Recent methodological research emphasizes careful specification and interpretation of mediation and conditional models in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2026).

The methodology is limited by its cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and reliance on self-reported perceptions. Therefore, the findings primarily represent associations among the constructs within the sampled population and should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of longitudinal causality or automatically generalized to all Indonesian local governments. These limitations were considered when interpreting the statistical results and their implications for digital educational-service governance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Governance Capacity and the Availability of Digital Educational Services

The findings indicate that digital governance capacity is reflected in the extent to which local-government institutions are able to plan, manage, coordinate, and sustain digital educational services. Based on the survey responses and interview findings, respondents generally perceived that digitalization had improved the availability of educational information and administrative services. Digital platforms enabled users to obtain information without having to visit government offices repeatedly. This was particularly relevant for services involving administrative information, reporting, announcements, and communication between government institutions and educational stakeholders.

The interview findings further indicated that digital service implementation was not determined solely by the availability of applications or online platforms. Informants emphasized the importance of leadership direction, coordination between units, staff competence, and the consistency of information provided through digital channels. In practice, differences in digital capacity among organizational units could affect the speed and consistency of service delivery.

The quantitative analysis was subsequently used to examine the relationship between digital governance capacity and digital public-service quality. The PLS-SEM procedure assessed the measurement model before testing the structural relationships. Indicators that met the predetermined validity and reliability criteria were retained, while indicators that did not meet the criteria were evaluated based on their statistical contribution and theoretical relevance. The resulting structural model was used to determine whether digital governance capacity was associated with the quality of digital educational services.

Institutional Readiness in Supporting Digital Transformation

The second finding concerns institutional readiness. The results show that institutional readiness was associated with the availability of organizational resources, leadership support, employee competence, strategic planning, organizational culture, and coordination mechanisms. Respondents indicated that digital transformation was easier to implement when employees understood the objectives of digitalization and when organizational procedures supported the use of digital systems.

Interview findings revealed several practical conditions affecting institutional readiness. Informants described the importance of continuous staff training, technical assistance, clear division of responsibilities, and organizational support when new digital systems were introduced. The findings also indicated that differences in employees' digital competencies could influence the consistency of service implementation.

The PLS-SEM analysis was used to assess the position of institutional readiness within the proposed model. The analysis examined its relationship with digital governance capacity and digital public-service quality. Where the model specified an indirect relationship, the bootstrapping

procedure was used to assess whether institutional readiness contributed to the transmission of the effect of digital governance capacity toward service quality.

Citizen Participation in Digital Educational Services

The third finding concerns citizen participation. The results indicate that participation was expressed through access to information, use of digital services, submission of complaints or suggestions, communication with service providers, and responses to service evaluations. Respondents generally regarded digital channels as providing greater opportunities to communicate with government institutions than conventional procedures.

However, the interview findings suggested that access to a digital platform did not automatically result in active participation. Some users primarily used digital platforms to obtain information or complete administrative procedures, while fewer users actively submitted feedback or participated in service evaluation. This finding indicates that participation has both an access dimension and an engagement dimension.

The quantitative model was therefore used to examine whether citizen participation was significantly related to digital public-service quality. The analysis considered the statistical relationship between participation and service quality while controlling for the other constructs included in the proposed model. The findings were interpreted according to the estimated path coefficients, confidence intervals, and significance levels obtained from the bootstrapping procedure.

Quality of Digital Public Services in Education

The fourth finding concerns the quality of digital public services. The results indicate that service quality was primarily reflected in accessibility, responsiveness, reliability, clarity of information, efficiency, and users' ability to obtain services through digital channels. Respondents perceived digital services as particularly useful when information was available consistently and administrative procedures could be completed without unnecessary physical visits.

The interviews also identified several conditions that affected users' experiences. Service quality could decline when information was not updated promptly, when technical problems interrupted access, or when users did not receive adequate responses to their complaints. Consequently, the quality of digital educational services was not determined only by whether a platform existed but also by how consistently the platform was managed.

The PLS-SEM results were used to evaluate the proposed relationships among digital governance capacity, institutional readiness, citizen participation, and digital public-service quality. The measurement model established the adequacy of the constructs, while the structural model provided evidence concerning the hypothesized relationships. The values of R^2 , effect size, and predictive relevance were considered to determine the explanatory and predictive contribution of the proposed model.

Integrated Relationship among Digital Governance Capacity, Institutional Readiness, Citizen Participation, and Service Quality

The fifth finding concerns the integrated model. The analysis demonstrates that digital public-service quality should be understood through the interaction of organizational capacity and citizen-oriented mechanisms. Digital governance capacity provides the organizational foundation for developing and managing digital services, while institutional readiness determines the extent to which organizations are prepared to implement and sustain those services.

At the same time, citizen participation provides an important feedback mechanism. Interview findings suggest that digital services become more responsive when citizens can communicate problems, provide suggestions, and receive follow-up responses. Therefore, the implementation of digital educational services involves a continuous process in which organizational capacity, institutional preparedness, technological implementation, and citizen interaction influence service delivery.

The final structural model should be reported using the actual statistical values obtained from the analysis, including path coefficients, *t*-statistics, *p*-values, confidence intervals, R^2 , and relevant indirect effects. These values should be inserted into the final manuscript rather than estimated or generated without empirical evidence.

The findings indicate that digital governance capacity constitutes an important organizational foundation for improving digital public services in education. The result is consistent with Ali et al. (2026), who demonstrated that digital transformation in educational administration requires more than digital channels because governance, leadership, human-resource competence, infrastructure, work culture, and system integration influence implementation. The present findings extend this perspective by placing digital governance capacity within an integrated model that also considers institutional readiness and citizen participation.

The finding is also consistent with Hernawan and Idris (2026), who found that digital transformation in local government represents an organizational change process involving service procedures, employee responsibilities, coordination, and interactions with citizens. Their findings concerning organizational resistance, uneven digital skills, infrastructure limitations, and coordination problems provide an explanation for why digitalization does not automatically produce uniform improvements in service quality.

Institutional readiness appears particularly important because digital transformation requires organizational preparedness in addition to technological resources. Orbawati et al. (2025) identified institutional and administrative barriers to e-government implementation in Magelang City, demonstrating that the availability of technology alone does not ensure effective digital governance. Similarly, Roziqin et al. (2026) found that organizational readiness is a prerequisite for local-government digital transformation, while innovation, resource, strategic, participatory, and collaborative readiness may remain uneven.

The present findings also provide support for interpreting digital service quality as an institutional and organizational outcome rather than merely a technological outcome. Al-Muttaqin and Nugroho (2025) found that digital public-service innovation can improve service delivery, including shorter processing times and better data integration, but technical limitations and differences in digital literacy remain challenges. This corresponds with the present finding that the existence of digital educational services does not necessarily guarantee consistent accessibility, responsiveness, and reliability.

The role of citizen participation further strengthens the citizen-centred interpretation of digital governance. Firdiyani et al. (2025), studying Tangerang Live, found that digital services can provide channels for information access, aspirations and complaints, consultation, follow-up, and participation in decision-making. Their findings are relevant to the present study because educational digital services similarly require mechanisms through which users can communicate their experiences and needs to service providers.

The relationship between digital transformation and participation is also supported by Nurlinah, Ansar, and Chowdhury (2025). Their study of Gowa Regency found relationships among perceptions of digital transformation, government trust, and citizen participation, while also

showing that positive perceptions of digital services do not necessarily translate into high levels of participation. This provides an important interpretation of the present findings: providing digital access is a necessary condition for participation, but it does not by itself ensure sustained citizen engagement.

The findings are further consistent with Rukayat et al. (2025), who conceptualized smart governance through citizen engagement, co-creation, transparency, and public accountability rather than technical efficiency alone. Their mixed-methods evidence emphasizes the importance of citizen-centred values in digital public-service transformation. The present study similarly positions citizen participation as part of the broader mechanism through which digital services can become more responsive to users (Ahmad et al., 2026).

The institutional dimension is also evident in Zulkarnain and Amsianisa (2025), whose analysis of Depok Single Window identified problems involving institutional integration, technological infrastructure, and alignment between platform design and community needs. Their findings provide an alternative explanation for weaknesses in digital service quality: problems may originate not only from user capabilities but also from fragmented institutional arrangements and insufficient integration between systems (Khoiruman, & Putrayasa (2025).

The integrated interpretation is consistent with Patmasari, Najeminur, and Herlina (2026), who found that institutional capacity, administrative competence, digital technology utilization, transparency, and citizen participation jointly shape citizen-centred public-service quality. Their findings are particularly relevant because they demonstrate that technology functions as an enabling mechanism, while institutional capacity and participation contribute to sustained service quality.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital educational public services should be developed as an integrated governance system. Digital governance capacity provides the organizational capability, institutional readiness supports implementation, and citizen participation creates a feedback mechanism for improving responsiveness. This interpretation does not imply that digitalization alone causes improvements in service quality; rather, the evidence supports a more conditional understanding in which organizational and citizen-related factors shape the implementation and experience of digital services. The study therefore contributes by connecting institutional and citizen-centred dimensions within the specific context of educational public services (Khoiruman, & Irawan (2026).

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the methodological limitations of the study. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish temporal causality, while purposive sampling limits statistical generalization beyond the study population. In addition, self-reported questionnaire data may be influenced by respondents' perceptions and experiences. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, probability sampling, comparative studies across local governments, and mixed-method approaches to examine how digital governance capacity and institutional readiness develop over time and how citizen participation influences subsequent improvements in digital educational services.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the quality of digital public services in education is closely related to the capacity of local governments to manage digital transformation through adequate organizational capabilities, institutional readiness, and meaningful citizen participation. The findings indicate that digital governance should not be understood merely as the provision of technological platforms, but as an integrated process involving leadership, human-resource competence, organizational preparedness, system integration, service responsiveness, and

interaction with citizens. Institutional readiness provides an important foundation for implementing and sustaining digital services, while citizen participation provides feedback that can support more responsive and user-oriented service delivery. The study therefore contributes an integrated perspective on digital educational public services by connecting organizational and citizen-centred dimensions of local digital governance. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and reliance on self-reported data. Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal, comparative, or mixed-method designs involving broader populations to examine the development and sustainability of digital educational services across different local-government contexts.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Gemini AI in order to assist in improving writing quality, refining language expression, and supporting the organization of academic ideas during the manuscript preparation process. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Investigation; Data curation; Project administration; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review and editing; Supervision.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Investigation; Data curation; Resources; Formal analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review and editing; Project administration.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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