

Assessment of the Quality of Public Services in the Period of the Forth Industrial Revolution: The case in Binh Duong Province

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Abstract The strong transformation of the country in the context of socialist-oriented market economy development and international economic integration poses new needs and challenges. Therefore, the renewal of roles and responsibilities of the State administrative apparatus in the management and operation of state administrative agencies in order to improve the quality of public service delivery to meet the increasing requirements of the country is an important task that needs to be focused and addressed. Binh Duong is a pioneer province in the process of applying digital transformation to public service delivery with many advantages in 2022 and is evaluated at a high rank on the PAPI and SIPAS indexes. The article focuses on clarifying the current state of public service delivery in Binh Duong and proposes recommendations to improve service quality through the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman et al [1].

Keywords: public service, quality of public service delivery, SERVQUAL

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1. Introduction

Public services and assessing the quality of public service delivery are becoming increasingly important in the modern era. Public services play an important role in creating a direct interface between government and citizens. In addition, public service is a channel for citizens to access public services, meet their needs and solve important problems in daily life. At the same time, efficient and high-quality public services play an important role in building trust and transparency between government and citizens and promoting citizen participation. In fact, citizens receive good public service and meet their needs, they feel valued and support policies from the government. This creates a positive interaction and promotes citizen participation in policy decisions and public management, contributing to the sustainable development of society. Therefore, ensuring public services are provided in the best way and are able to meet the needs and desires of citizens, ensuring transparency and trust, contributing to the motivation for government to improve responsibility and strengthen quality management. Evaluating the quality of public service delivery is an important tool for measuring and improving the effectiveness of the public management process. It empowers government to change, innovate and enhance the performance of public agencies and organizations, thereby improving management processes and improving the quality of public services.

In the context of developing a market economy and opening up to international integration, Vietnam needs to further promote the reform of state administration, contributing to building and perfecting the rule of law. The contents of administrative reform are aimed at building a democratic, clean, strong administration, gradually modernizing in order to better serve basic and essential needs, ensure rights and obligations, basic services of the people. In particular, the renewal of roles and responsibilities of the Government and the state administrative apparatus in the management and organization of public service provision is really an important task to focus. That reflects that the role of public services is necessary to meet the needs of social development.

One of the goals of the master program on the State Administrative Reform for the 2021-2030 period is determined to be to strengthen the application of information technology, digital transformation and the application of scientific and technological advances to promote the development of e-government and digital government, contributing to innovating working methods, improving productivity and operational efficiency of state administrative agencies at all levels capable of operating the platform of the digital economy and digital society, and to meet the requirements of socio-economic development, national defense, security and international integration. It also improves the quality of public service provision for people and organizations. It is with these views that Vietnam has created a legal framework for localities to implement improving the quality of public service delivery, applying digital transformation to

administrative reform. In which, Binh Duong province is assigned to pioneer in the application of digital transformation in public service delivery.

Binh Duong is a locality located in the southern key economic region of Vietnam. The locality has achieved some achievements in socio-economic development and has become the locality with the highest average income in the country. Binh Duong has also achieved many achievements in attracting foreign direct investment, thereby creating advantages for economic development and digital transformation in the province.

2. Theoretical Basis of Public Services and Quality of Public Service

2.1. Public Service Overview

According to Cohen, Elie and Claude Henry [2], and [3], public service has a very broad connotation, to refer to pressing social demands or to territorial planning purposes (public mandates); the nature of an activity (public service in the field of electricity); an ethical point of view (the concept of public service implies service); a form of ownership (public enterprise); a statute (the phrase public service includes public activity). [4] indicates that public services play an important role in providing essential services and facilities to citizens, businesses and communities. Efficient and high-quality public services can make a positive contribution to economic and social development [5]. Public services are mixed and combined business elements and providing basic services to the community. The quality of public services depends on the effectiveness of management and organization, as well as the service spirit of public employees [6]. In addition, public services need to be enhanced in creating value and satisfaction for users. To achieve this, countries should focus on improving user experience, increasing engagement and meeting customer needs through effective information technologies and management processes [7].

Electronic public services (e-government) can bring many benefits to both governments and citizens, including saving time, increasing convenience and transparency, providing information and interacting effectively. between the government and the people [8]. Further, effective public service requires active participation and interaction from the community. Building a partnership between government and citizens is an important factor in improving the quality of public services [9].

Regarding public service quality assessment theory, Aurel Mihail Titu and Anca Ioana Vlad [10] indicated that it is possible to evaluate the public administrative service quality index through a set of indicators built into 5 groups. Those are (1) Quality of personnel; (2) Professionalism of cooperation with citizens; (3) Quality of cooperation between departments; (4) Concordance

between the organization's objectives and service quality; (5) Reduced response time to needs.

George A. Boyne [11] demonstrated that there are five approaches to improve the quality of public administrative services. Those are (1) Resources; (2) Administrative regulations; (3) Market structure; (4) Organization; (5) Management mode. Those are also five groups of factors affecting the quality of public administrative services.

Nguyen Huu Hai and Le Viet Hoa [12] further indicated that the system of criteria to evaluate the quality of public administrative services must reflect the following factors: (1) Objectives; (2) Input; (3) Process; (4) Outputs and outputs. Another possibility, Le Dan [13], factors affecting the quality of public administrative services include service accessibility; An easy-to-understand administrative system; Flexible and fast delivery capabilities; Transparency; Professional capacity of cadres and civil servants; Polite and enthusiastic attitude of civil servants; Credibility in service delivery.

2.2. The Model of SERVQUAL

SERVQUAL model is very famous with 5 elements constituting service quality: (1) Reliability; (2) Responsiveness; (3) Competence to serve or warrant; (4) Empathy and (5) The tangible aspect. Specifically, SERVQUAL model with 22 factors for 5 service quality components has been applied to assess service quality and customer satisfaction in many different fields. SERVQUAL is like a tool for analysis, it allows managers to systematically identify service quality gaps between a range of factors affecting quality of delivery. The model also helps managers identify relevant service quality factors from the customer's perspective. However, the limitation of SERVQUAL can be discussed that it does not explain clear measurement sequences for measuring distances at different levels.

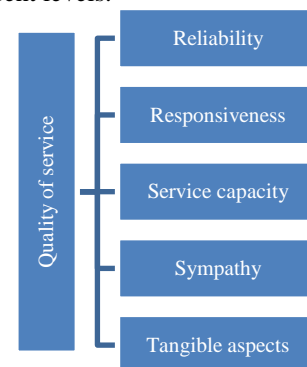


Figure 1. SERVQUAL model Source: Parasuraman et al. (1988)

It can be seen that the evaluation criteria of the SERVQUAL model are quite similar to the criteria according to the SIPAS index of the Ministry of Home Affairs [14] with 05 basic elements of the process of providing public administrative services, including 22 criteria, applied used to measure the satisfaction of people and organizations.

Table 1. Comparisons between SERVQUAL and SIPAS

Model of SERVQUAL	SIPAS
1. Reliability: This is the ability of an agency or organization to provide public services reliably, on time, and to meet its commitments.	1. Access to public administrative services of state administrative agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are enough seats at the waiting place at the administrative procedure-handling agency/Department to receive and return results; - Equipment to serve people and organizations at the agency handling administrative procedures/Department to receive and return results; - Modern equipment to serve people and organizations at the administrative procedure handling agency/Department for receiving and returning results; - Easy-to-use equipment for people and organizations at the administrative procedure handling agency/Department for receiving and returning results;
2. Responsiveness: measures the attitude and ability of civil servants to respond quickly in solving queries and requests of service users.	2. Administrative procedures (administrative procedures): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administrative procedures are fully publicized; - Administrative procedures are correctly listed publicly; - The composition of the dossier that people and organizations must submit is in accordance with regulations; - Fees/fees that people and organizations must pay are in accordance with regulations; - The time limit for settlement (from the date the application is received to the date the result is received) is in accordance with regulations.
3. Service capacity: measuring the ability of civil servants to understand and meet the needs and desires of public service users.	3. Regarding civil servants directly handling jobs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil servants have polite communication attitude; - Public servants pay attention to listen to the opinions of the people/representatives of the organization; - Officials answer and fully answer the opinions of the people/representatives of the organization; - Officials guide the declaration of dossiers enthusiastically and thoughtfully; - Civil servants guide documents easy to understand; - Civil servants strictly comply with regulations in dealing with work.
4. Sympathy: refers to the professionalism, knowledge and ability of public officials to solve problems and provide support to service users.	4. Regarding the results of providing public administrative services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The results are in accordance with regulations; - Results with complete information; - Results have accurate information.
5. Tangible aspects: measures the convenience, safety and preparedness of the physical environment where public services are provided.	5. Regarding the receipt and settlement of comments, reflections and recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The agency dealing with administrative procedures/The department for receiving and returning results shall arrange a form to receive comments, feedbacks and recommendations; - People and organizations make comments, reflections and recommendations easily; - The agency handling administrative procedures/Department receiving and returning results receives and handles positive comments, reflections and recommendations; - The agency dealing with administrative procedures/Department receiving and returning results shall notify the results of handling comments, complaints and recommendations in a timely manner.

3. Assessment of Public Service Quality in Binh Duong Province

In 2022, Binh Duong province has achieved many positive results in the provision of public services. Specifically, according to the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) in 2022, Binh Duong achieved a total score of 47,4488 points, ranking second in the country; increased 0.27 points compared to 2021 (47,178 points). As PAPI [5], the PAPI index is a tool for people to participate in monitoring the effectiveness of the government in policy implementation at the grassroots level on 08 contents: People's participation at the grassroots level; publicity and transparency in decision making; accountability to the people; control corruption in the public sector; public administrative procedures; provision of public services; environmental management and electronic governance.

For the criterion of public service delivery, Binh Duong achieved 8.21 points, the highest among 8 criteria. This shows that the quality of public service delivery in Binh Duong is highly appreciated.

Figure 2. Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance in 2022

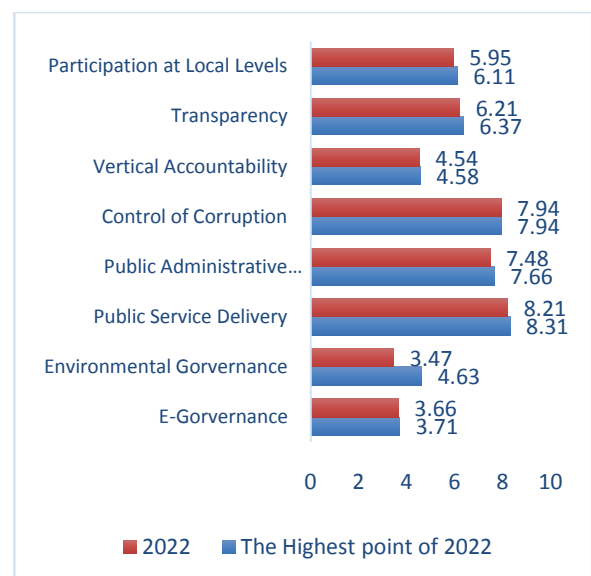


Table 2. Criteria for public service delivery in Binh Duong province – PAPI index in 2022

Dimension 6. Public Service Delivery	1-10 /points	8.21
<i>Public Healthcare</i>	<i>0.25-2.5/ points</i>	<i>1.98</i>
Share with health insurance	0%-100%	90.19 %
Quality of health insurance (5 pt scale)	0-4 pts	3.69
Quality of free medical care for kids (5 pt scale)	0-5 pts	4.20
Poor households are subsidized	0%-100%	76.13 %
Checks for children are free	0%-100%	82.49 %
Total hospital quality	1-10 pts	4.34
<i>Primary Education</i>	<i>0.25-2.5/ points</i>	<i>2.01</i>
Kilometer walk to school	Maximum - Minimum	1.00
Minutes to School	Maximum - Minimum	5.00
Rating of primary school (5 pt scale)	0-5 pts	4.41
Total school quality	0-8 pts	4.98
<i>Basic Infrastructure</i>	<i>0.25-2.5/points</i>	<i>2.22</i>
Houses with electricity	0%-100%	100.00 %
No power cut over the past 12 months	0%-100%	17.62 %
Quality of road	1-4 pts	3.62
Frequency of garbage pick-up	0-4 pts	3.16
Share drinking tapwater	0%-100%	76.98 %
Share drinking unclean water	0%-100%	0.00%
<i>Law and Order</i>	<i>0.25-2.5/points</i>	<i>1.99</i>
How safe is your locality	1-3 pts	2.42
Change in safety over time	0%-100%	12.32 %
Crime rate in locality	0%-100%	5.32
Feeling safe walking in the day time	1-3 pts	2.44
Feeling safe walking in the night time	1-3 pts	2.23

According to the Table 2, the very high percentages are in the section “The percentage of respondents with health insurance accounts for 90.19%”. And, the way to school is absolute 100%. Percentage of respondents who said that their households used electricity from the grid accounted for 99.64%. In addition, proportion of respondents who said that their household uses tap water as the main source of drinking water (%) (5= Centralized water supply station; 6=tap water to home) accounts for 92.98%. However, the criterion of security in residential areas accounts for a fairly average rate. It can be seen that Binh Duong has shown its achievements in providing public services based on sound policies and its strong economic potential in the past 30 years, especially from the policy of attracting foreign investment, and development of industrial zones.

Besides, the SIPAS and PAR Index also show that the quality of public service delivery in Binh Duong in 2022 is relatively high. The SIPAS index is an objective measure, reflecting the evaluation results of people and organizations about the service of administrative agencies through the provision of public administrative services. The PAR Index is a tool to monitor and evaluate administrative reform activities of ministries, ministerial-level agencies and People's Committees of provinces and centrally-run cities. Further, the PAR index is determined on 8 areas, including: administrative reform direction and administration; formulating and organizing the implementation of legal documents; administrative reform;

organizational reform of the State administrative apparatus; building and improving the quality of the contingent of cadres, civil servants and public employees; renovating the financial mechanism for administrative agencies and public non-business units; administrative modernization; implement the one-stop mechanism, the one-stop-shop mechanism. These criteria also partly show the quality of public service delivery in Binh Duong province in 2023.

According to the report of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Binh Duong province has SIPAS results in 2022 reaching 85.52%, ranking 04/63 provinces and cities across the country. Notably, SIPAS in Binh Duong province is 5.44% higher than the national SIPAS result (the national average SIPAS is 80.08%). Compared to 2021, SIPAS in 2022 in Binh Duong province decreased by 2.26% but there was an improvement in ranking results, increasing by 18 places, from 22/63 to 04/63 provinces and cities across the country. In the group of provinces in the Southeast region, Binh Duong province ranks 01/8 provinces and cities.

Regarding the administrative reform index in 2022, Binh Duong province reached 84.78/100 points, ranking 35/63 provinces and cities. Compared to 2021, Binh Duong decreased by 3.09% and decreased by 22 grades (in 2021, Binh Duong reached 87.87/100 points and ranked 13/63 provinces and cities). This shows that the administrative reform work of Binh Duong province is still limited, especially in the application of digital transformation in administrative reform, providing online public services to the people. According to the PAPI index, the criterion for e-governance is only 3.66 on average. Based on the general record of the Provincial Public Administration Center, many localities have now stepped in to support people in handling administrative procedures in the online environment, but there are also localities that are negligent and lack guidance for people doing their administrative procedures at level 3, level 4. In fact, people don't understand, they don't know who to ask. If they call the hotline, they can only give general instructions or make an appointment to record their comments and transfer them to the authorities. reply later. Many other difficulties such as how to write the forms in the declarations correctly; the scanning of submissions; there is no official sim card, all can lead to difficulties in speeding up digital transformation.

Online public service records at level 3 and level 4 arise, and are accounting for more than 50% of the total number of dossiers received and handled at the Provincial Public Administration Center, but mainly through the National Public Service Portal system and software systems of ministries and branches (Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Justice...). In addition, the records generated on the Provincial Public Service Portal are not high, accounting for only about 30%.

Currently, the non-cash online payment has a relatively low rate of arising records. Online payment is currently only available in the land sector through the National Public Service Portal, the province's payment platform through banks and e-wallets that are in the process of piloting. insignificant revenue generation. Therefore, it is necessary to have policies to encourage people and businesses to use the non-cash payment function to limit the use of cash when carrying out administrative procedures.

4. Some Suggestions for Binh Duong Province

Firstly, Suggestions for the criterion of "reliability": to have a clear, public and easy to understand listing of administrative procedures; Time limit for solving each type of work; Necessary instructions for people when coming to solve work; Arrange a guide to give people the information they want to know; Cadres and civil servants handling administrative tasks and procedures at the Center must comply with regulations and comply with the set time; and always be precise and professional when performing your duties.

Secondly, Recommendations for the criterion of "responsibility": Firstly, the government should ensure that people and businesses are provided with the necessary information in an easy-to-understand language about handling administrative tasks. It is necessary to periodically organize professional skills training courses for cadres, civil servants and public employees on behavioral skills when interacting with people, ability to perform tasks competently with modern techniques and technologies, skills to handle scientific work, and at the same time, to make a plan to send young capable staff to in-depth professional training in order to build a good team as the core of the unit. There should be regular and systematic consultation for customers to use the service. The attitude of cadres, civil servants and public employees when guiding and talking to people must be polite, considerate and gentle. Have a serious working style to create trust for people.

Thirdly, Recommendations for the criterion of "empathy": To promote training on organizational culture for cadres, civil servants and public employees. Collect comments from officials, public servants and public employees to perfect the code of conduct, rules and regulations in order to build a beautiful image of civil servants in terms of high sense of responsibility, dedication, dedication and devote to each job and action.

Fourthly, Recommendations for the criterion of "service capacity": it is necessary to clearly define the needs of the subjects that need to be trained and fostered. Based on the actual situation and the results of the assessment of the capacity of cadres, civil servants and public employees in the agency to determine training and retraining needs; renovating training programs and methods of fostering in the direction of in-depth teaching programs, setting out specific situations that take place in reality for cadres, civil servants and public employees to solve themselves in order to improve their skills. their problem solving ability;

attach training, retraining and use of cadres and civil servants. When using the right people, the right expertise not only improves work efficiency, individuals can promote their capacity, but also creates a positive mentality for the process of striving and learning for cadres and civil servants.

Finally, Recommendations for the criterion of "tangible aspect": improve the quality of facilities where people come to work; documents, instruction sheets, instructions need to be designed impressively and easily recognizable. It is necessary to promote the development of the website, always update and add the latest information to the website to ensure the provision of complete and timely information to citizens

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