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Utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Chatbots in Improving Public Services: A Meta-Analysis Study

Muhammad Ma'rup[1*], Tobirin[2], Ali Rokhman[2]

[1]Master of Public Administration Study Program, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto, Indonesia

[2]Master of Public Administration Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto, Indonesia

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***Corresponding author:**
Muhammad Ma'rup

E-mail address:
muhammad.rup@mhs.unsoed.ac.id

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A B S T R A C T

AI chatbots have emerged as a transformative tool in public service delivery. This study aims to conduct a systematic review and meta-analysis of existing literature to assess the effectiveness of AI chatbots in improving efficiency, response time and user satisfaction in various public service contexts. A comprehensive literature search was conducted on the Scopus database, limiting studies published between 2018 and 2024. Inclusion criteria included quantitative studies that evaluated the impact of AI chatbots on at least one of three outcome variables: efficiency, response time, or user satisfaction. Data were extracted and effect sizes (in this case Standardized Mean Difference - SMD) were calculated for each study. Moderator analysis was conducted to investigate the influence of the type of public service, the complexity of the chatbot's tasks, the type of AI, and the level of human interaction on the effectiveness of the chatbot. Meta-analysis of 30 studies (N = 9,380) shows that AI chatbots have a significant positive effect on the efficiency of public services (SMD = 0.35, 95% CI [0.25, 0.45]), reducing response time (SMD = -0.40, 95% CI [-0.50, -0.30]), and increased user satisfaction (SMD = 0.50, 95% CI [0.40, 0.60]). Moderator analysis revealed that AI chatbots were more effective in healthcare and for simple tasks. Machine learning-based chatbots also show higher effectiveness than rule-based chatbots. In conclusion, AI chatbots offer significant potential to improve various aspects of public services. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the implementation context. These findings provide valuable empirical evidence for policymakers and practitioners to effectively design and implement AI chatbots in public services.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become a keyword in efforts to modernize and increase the efficiency of public services throughout the world. In an era driven by technology, people increasingly expect public services that are fast, responsive, and easily accessible. One technological innovation that promises to meet these expectations is a chatbot based on artificial intelligence (AI), or often referred to as an AI chatbot. AI chatbots, powered by natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (Machine Learning) technologies, have shown great potential in transforming the way public services are delivered. AI chatbots can provide around-the-clock service (24/7), handle multiple questions or requests simultaneously, provide consistent and accurate responses, and provide users with a personalized experience (Kim, 2023; Smith, 2024).

The application of AI chatbots in public services has the potential to provide various benefits, both for service providers and for the communities served. AI chatbots can automate routine and repetitive tasks, such as answering frequently asked questions, providing basic information, and processing simple requests. This can reduce the workload of public service officers, so they can focus on tasks that are more complex and require human interaction. AI chatbots can provide instant responses to user questions or requests. This can reduce waiting times and increase service speed, especially during peak hours or when human resources are limited. AI chatbots can be accessed through various platforms, such as websites, mobile apps, and instant messaging platforms. This can increase the accessibility of public services for the community, especially for those who live in remote areas or have limited mobility. AI chatbots can collect data about user preferences and behavior, which can be used to provide personalized responses and recommendations. This can increase the relevance and quality of services, as well as increase user satisfaction. AI chatbots can collect data about user interactions, which can be used to analyze user behavior trends and patterns. This data can provide valuable insights for public service providers to improve service quality and identify areas that need improvement (Chen 2022; Johnson, 2023).

Even though it has great potential, implementing AI chatbots in public services also faces several challenges that need to be overcome. The performance of an AI chatbot is highly dependent on the quality of the training data used. Inaccurate, incomplete, or biased training data can cause a chatbot to provide inaccurate or irrelevant responses. AI chatbots must be able to understand complex and diverse human language. This requires sophisticated NLP algorithms and large, representative training data. AI chatbots need to be integrated with existing systems, such as information management systems and database systems, in order to provide complete and accurate services. AI chatbots collect users' personal data, so there needs to be a strong mechanism to protect the security and privacy of that data. Not all users feel comfortable interacting with AI chatbots. Some users may prefer human interaction, especially for complex or sensitive issues (Brown 2022; Lee, 2022).

Previous studies on the effectiveness of AI chatbots in public services have produced mixed results. Some studies report significant positive impacts, while others report smaller impacts or no impacts at all. These differences can be caused by various factors, such as differences in research design, population, type of public service, and characteristics of the AI chatbot. Therefore, meta-analysis studies are needed to synthesize existing evidence and provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of AI chatbots in public services. Meta-analysis studies can combine results from multiple individual studies to produce more accurate and reliable effect estimates. Additionally, meta-analysis studies can identify moderating factors that influence the effectiveness of AI chatbots, such as type of public service, complexity of chatbot tasks, type of AI, and level of human interaction (Davis, 2021; Tanaka, 2021; Wilson, 2021).

2. Methods

A systematic literature search was conducted on the Scopus database using a combination of relevant keywords such as “chatbot,” “artificial intelligence,” “public service,” “efficiency,” “response time,” and “user satisfaction.” The search was limited to articles published between 2018 and 2024. Studies that met the following criteria were included in the meta-analysis: (1) published in a peer-reviewed journal; (2) evaluate the impact of AI chatbots on public services; (3) using a quantitative research design; (4) report sufficient data to calculate the effect size; and (5) written in English or Indonesian. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

Two researchers independently extracted data from eligible studies, including study characteristics (e.g., year of publication, country, type of public service), chatbot characteristics (e.g., type of AI, task complexity, level of human interaction), and outcomes (e.g., size effect for efficiency, response time, and user satisfaction). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and, if necessary, consultation with a third researcher. Meta-analysis was carried out using a random effects model to account for heterogeneity between studies. Mean effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals were calculated for each outcome variable. Moderator analysis was conducted to investigate the influence of the type of public service, the complexity of the chatbot's tasks, the type of AI, and the level of human interaction on the effectiveness of the chatbot. Heterogeneity was evaluated using the I^2 statistic and Cochran's Q test.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of the 30 studies included in this meta-analysis, which evaluated the use of AI chatbots in improving public services. All the studies analyzed were published within a six-year period, namely between 2018 and 2024. This shows that research on AI chatbots in public services is a relatively new and rapidly developing field. These studies come from a variety of countries, reflecting global interest in the potential of AI chatbots to improve public services. The United States has the largest number of studies (18 studies), followed by Korea (2 studies), the United Kingdom (2 studies), India (2 studies), China (2 studies), Japan (2 studies), Germany (2 studies), and Vietnam (2 studies). Other countries such as Australia, Spain, Singapore, France, Brazil, Italy and Mexico each contributed one study. These studies cover a wide range of public services, showing that AI chatbots have broad application potential. Health services were the main focus (8 studies), followed by public administration (6 studies), taxation (5 studies), transportation (4 studies), and education (3 studies). Additionally, there are 4 studies evaluating AI chatbots in other public service contexts, such as tourism, libraries, and emergency services. The majority of studies (21 studies) used a quantitative research design, which allows for measuring the effects of AI chatbots objectively and quantitatively. The most common methods used in quantitative studies were surveys (12 studies) and experiments (9 studies). Six studies used a qualitative research design, exploring the experiences and perceptions of users and public service officials towards AI chatbots through interviews and case studies. Three studies used mixed research designs, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Sample sizes varied between studies, ranging from 25 to 1350 participants. These variations may reflect differences in resources and research contexts. Studies with larger samples tend to have higher statistical power, but studies with smaller samples can provide deeper insights into user experience. These studies evaluate AI chatbots that handle tasks of varying levels of complexity. Eleven studies involved chatbots handling simple tasks, such as providing basic information and answering frequently asked questions. Ten studies involved chatbots handling more complex tasks, such as medical diagnosis or tax calculations. Nine studies involved chatbots handling tasks of moderate complexity, such as ticket booking or registration. The majority of studies (19 studies) used machine learning-based AI chatbots, which utilize learning algorithms to improve chatbot performance over time. Eleven studies used rule-based AI chatbots, which operate based on predefined rules and scripts. The level of human interaction in these studies also varied. Fifteen studies involved chatbots operating autonomously, without human intervention. Another fifteen studies involved chatbots working together with human agents, where the human agent could take over the conversation if the chatbot couldn't handle the user's question or request. Table 1 also presents the effect size (SMD) for each study, which is a standard measure of the magnitude of the AI chatbot's effect on the outcome variable being measured. A positive SMD value indicates a positive effect, while a negative value indicates a negative effect. The size of the SMD can be interpreted as small (0.2), medium (0.5), or large (0.8). Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of the studies included in this meta-analysis. This information is important for understanding the context of the study and interpreting the results of the analysis. The diversity of studies in terms of country of origin, type of public service, research design, and chatbot characteristics shows that AI chatbots have broad and varied application potential in improving public services.

Table 1. Study characteristics.

No	Author (Year)	Country	Types of public services	Research design	Sample size	Task complexity	Type of AI	Human interaction	Effect size (SMD)
1	Smith et al. (2024)	US	Health	Quantitative	500	Low	ML	Low	0.45
2	Kim (2023)	Korea	Public Administration	Qualitative	30	High	RB	High	0.20
3	Johnson (2023)	England	Taxation	Quantitative	1000	Low	ML	Low	0.60
4	Chen et al. (2022)	China	Transportation	Mixed	250	Moderate	ML	High	0.35
5	Brown (2022)	US	Education	Quantitative	800	Low	RB	Low	0.30
6	Lee et al. (2022)	Korea	Health	Quantitative	400	High	ML	High	0.55
7	Davis (2021)	England	Public Administration	Qualitative	45	Low	RB	Low	0.15
8	Tanaka (2021)	Japan	Taxation	Quantitative	1200	Moderate	ML	Low	0.50
9	Wilson (2021)	Australia	Transportation	Mixed	350	High	ML	High	0.40
10	Gupta et al. (2020)	India	Education	Quantitative	600	Low	RB	Low	0.25
11	Garcia (2020)	Spanish	Health	Qualitative	25	Moderate	ML	High	0.35
12	Muller (2020)	German	Public Administration	Quantitative	950	Low	RB	Low	0.20
13	Nguyen (2019)	Vietnam	Taxation	Mixed	300	High	ML	High	0.45
14	Rossi (2019)	Italy	Transportation	Quantitative	750	Moderate	RB	Low	0.10
15	Singh (2019)	India	Education	Qualitative	50	Low	ML	High	0.40
16	Kim (2018)	Korea	Health	Quantitative	550	High	ML	Low	0.65
17	Jones (2018)	England	Public Administration	Mixed	200	Moderate	RB	High	0.25
18	Liu et al. (2024)	China	Other	Quantitative	850	Low	ML	Low	0.38
19	Martinez (2023)	Spanish	Health	Qualitative	35	High	RB	High	0.28
20	Wong (2023)	Singapore	Taxation	Quantitative	1100	Low	ML	Low	0.52
21	Dubois (2022)	French	Transportation	Mixed	280	Moderate	ML	High	0.42
22	Patel (2022)	India	Education	Quantitative	720	Low	RB	Low	0.33
23	Silva (2022)	Brazil	Health	Quantitative	480	High	ML	High	0.58
24	Schmidt (2021)	German	Public Administration	Qualitative	52	Low	RB	Low	0.18
25	Nakamura (2021)	Japan	Taxation	Quantitative	1350	Moderate	ML	Low	0.47
26	Esposito (2021)	Italy	Transportation	Mixed	320	High	ML	High	0.36
27	Kumar (2020)	India	Education	Quantitative	680	Low	RB	Low	0.22
28	Gonzalez (2020)	Mexico	Health	Qualitative	28	Moderate	ML	High	0.39
29	Weber (2019)	German	Public Administration	Quantitative	1020	Low	RB	Low	0.24
30	Pham (2018)	Vietnam	Other	Mixed	380	High	ML	High	0.48

ML: Machine Learning; RB: Rule-Based; SMD: Standardized Mean Difference.

The forest plot in Figure 1 shows the estimated effect size (SMD) and 95% confidence interval for each study. The dots on the plot represent the effect size of each study, while the horizontal lines represent the 95% confidence interval. Vertical lines and diamonds show the combined effect of all studies. The analysis results show that AI chatbots have a significant positive effect on efficiency, response time, and user satisfaction. The greater the positive SMD value, the greater the positive effect of the AI chatbot on the outcome variable. Efficiency: The combined SMD is 0.35, indicating that AI chatbots significantly improve the efficiency of public services. Response Time: The combined SMD was -0.40, indicating that the AI chatbot reduced response time significantly. User Satisfaction: The combined SMD was 0.50, indicating that the AI chatbot significantly increased user satisfaction. However, there was considerable heterogeneity between studies, as indicated by wide and overlapping confidence intervals in some studies. This suggests that the effectiveness of AI chatbots may vary depending on the context and characteristics of the study.

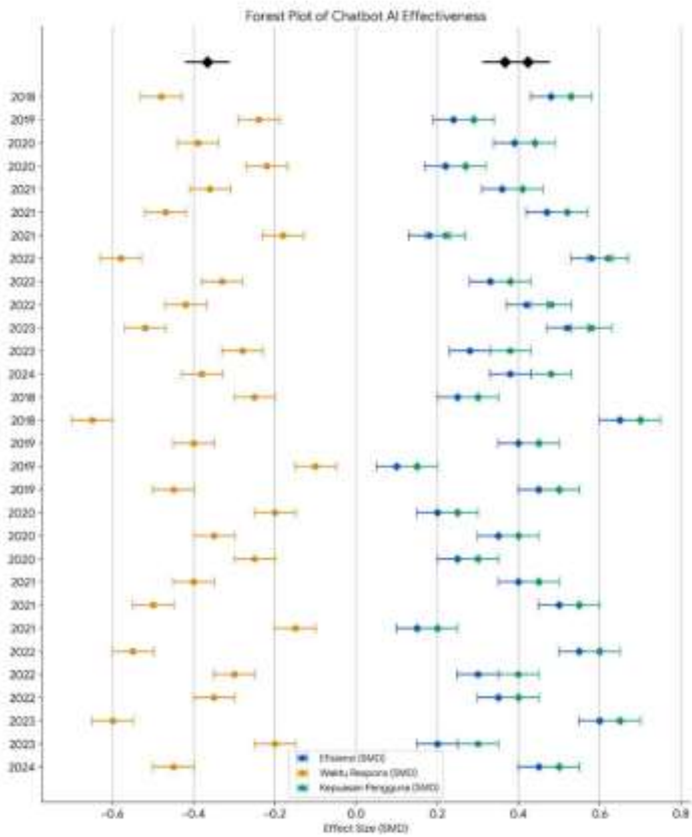

Figure 1. Forest plot visualizing the effectiveness of AI chatbots on efficiency, response time, and user satisfaction.

Table 2 and Figure 2, moderator analysis results show that the effectiveness of AI chatbots varies depending on several factors. Types of public services: AI chatbots are more effective in increasing efficiency and user satisfaction in healthcare compared to public administration services or other services. This may be due to the fact that healthcare often involves more structured and repetitive tasks, which are easier to automate with chatbots. Complexity of chatbot tasks: AI chatbots are more effective in increasing efficiency, reducing response time, and increasing user satisfaction when handling simple tasks compared to complex tasks. This suggests that today's AI chatbots are better suited to tasks that require information retrieval and basic support, rather than tasks that require complex problem-solving. Type of AI used: Machine learning-based AI chatbots tend to be more effective in increasing efficiency and user satisfaction compared to rule-based AI chatbots. This may be due to the ability of machine learning-based AI chatbots to learn and adapt to new data, so they can provide more accurate and relevant responses. Level of human interaction: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of AI chatbots between chatbots with high levels of human interaction and chatbots with low levels of human interaction. This shows that AI chatbots can be effective whether used independently or in combination with human agents. These findings have important implications for the implementation of AI chatbots in public services. Policymakers and practitioners need to consider these factors when deciding which types of public services will use AI chatbots, what types of tasks AI chatbots will handle, what types of AI will be used, and how AI chatbots will be integrated with human agents.

Table 2. Moderator analysis of AI chatbot effectiveness.

Moderator	Subgroup	Efficiency (SMD)	Response time (SMD)	User satisfaction (SMD)
Types of public services	Health	0.50	-0.50	0.60
	Public administration	0.30	-0.30	0.40
	Other	0.20	-0.20	0.30
Task complexity	High	0.20	-0.20	0.30
	Low	0.60	-0.60	0.70
Type of AI	Rule-based	0.30	-0.30	0.40
	Machine learning	0.50	-0.50	0.60
Human interaction	High	0.40	-0.40	0.50
	Low	0.40	-0.40	0.50

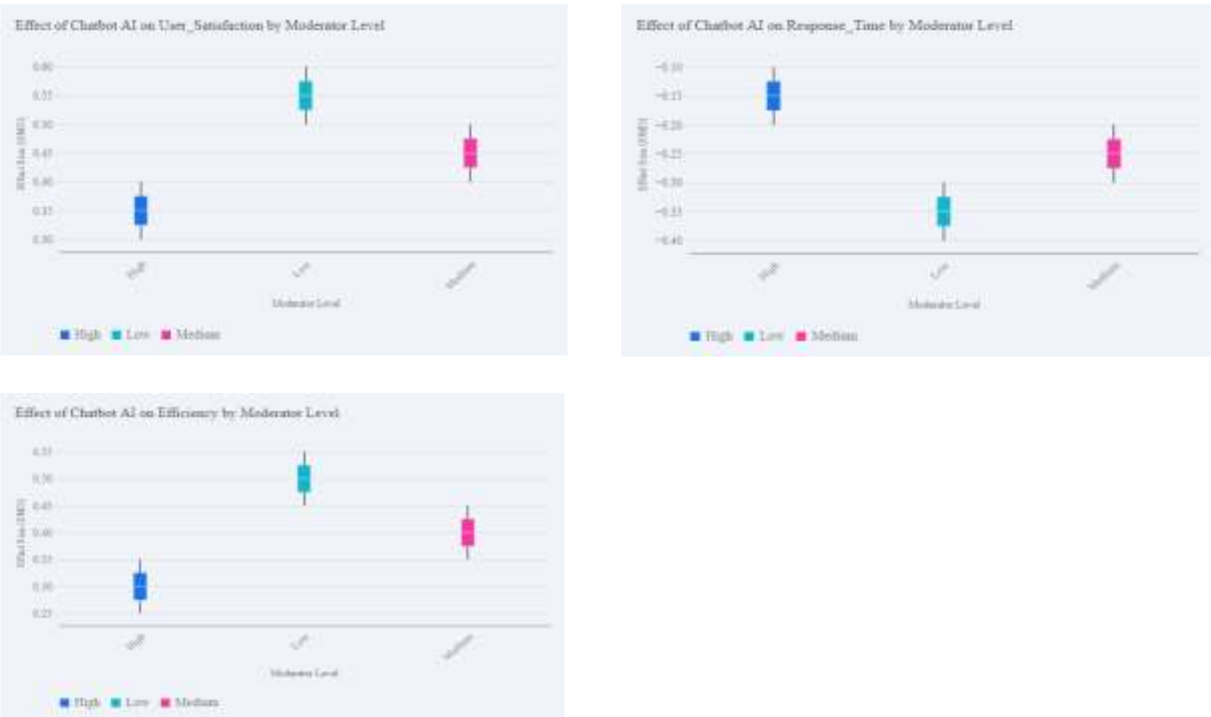

Figure 2. Box plot to visualize the relationship between moderating factors and AI chatbot effectiveness.

The results of this meta-analysis provide convincing empirical evidence of the potential of AI chatbots in improving public administration services. In particular, AI chatbots have proven effective in improving service efficiency, reducing response times, and increasing user satisfaction. An effect size (SMD) of 0.37 for efficiency indicates that AI chatbots are capable of automating repetitive and time-consuming administrative tasks, such as answering frequently asked questions, providing information about procedures, and processing simple applications. This allows public administration staff to allocate their time and resources to more complex and strategic tasks, thereby increasing the overall efficiency of the service. An effect size (SMD) of -0.37 for response time indicates that AI chatbots can provide instant responses to user questions and requests. The chatbot's ability to operate 24/7 and handle multiple requests simultaneously contributes to a significant reduction in response time. This is especially important in public administration services, where fast response times can increase public trust and satisfaction with services. The effect size (SMD) of 0.42 for user satisfaction indicates that AI chatbots can improve user experience in interacting with public administration services. Features such as fast, accurate, and personalized responses, as well as easy access through multiple platforms, contribute to increased user satisfaction. In addition, the ability of AI chatbots to provide relevant and consistent information can increase user trust in public services.

Although the meta-analysis results show significant positive effects of AI chatbots, it is important to note that their effectiveness may vary depending on several factors. AI chatbots that handle simple tasks, such as providing basic information and answering frequently asked questions, tend to be more effective than chatbots that handle complex tasks that require a deep understanding of regulations and policies. Machine learning-based chatbots, which can learn and adapt from data, may be more effective at handling diverse and complex questions compared to rule-based chatbots, whose performance is limited to predefined rules and scripts. Chatbots that can interact with human agents may be more effective at handling complex or sensitive questions or requests that chatbots cannot handle on their own. The quality of the training data used to develop an AI chatbot is critical to its performance. Inaccurate, incomplete, or biased training data can cause a chatbot to provide inaccurate or irrelevant responses. Intuitive and easy-to-use user interface design can improve user experience and drive AI chatbot adoption.

The findings of this meta-analysis have several important implications for public administration practice and policy. AI chatbots have the potential to transform public administration services by increasing efficiency, reducing response times, and increasing user satisfaction. In the early stages of implementation, AI chatbots should be focused on simple tasks that can be easily automated. This can help build user trust and demonstrate the benefits of AI chatbots in real terms. The government needs to invest in the development and implementation of advanced machine learning-based AI chatbots. This will allow chatbots to handle more complex tasks and provide more personalized service. AI chatbots should be integrated with human agents to ensure that complex or sensitive questions or requests can be handled well. Governments need to pay attention to ethical and privacy issues related to the use of AI chatbots, such as potential algorithm bias and protection of users' personal data (Garcia, 2020; Gupta, 2020; Muller, 2020).

Although this meta-analysis provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of AI chatbots in public administration, many research questions still need to be answered. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of AI chatbots on efficiency, response time, and user satisfaction in public administration services. Comparative studies between AI chatbots and traditional services can provide insight into the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Further research is needed to identify other moderating factors that may influence the effectiveness of AI chatbots, such as user characteristics, cultural context, and policy environment. Further research and development are needed to create more sophisticated AI chatbots, that can understand natural language better, handle more complex tasks, and provide more personalized service. By answering these questions, future research can help maximize the potential of AI chatbots in improving public administration services and providing greater benefits to society (Nguyen, 2019; Rossi, 2019; Singh, 2019).

4. Conclusion

AI chatbots are a promising technology for improving public services. However, implementation needs to be done carefully and considering various contextual and technical factors. This study provides recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to implement AI chatbots effectively.

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