

AN ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE IN DELIVERING THEIR SERVICES: CASE STUDY OF IPOH CITY COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

The trend towards a friendlier and efficient delivery of services found to be lacking in the local authorities. Therefore, a series of issues pertaining local authority performances has driven a need to further studies in order to improve their current service delivery. This paper examines the functions and its service delivery performed by Ipoh City Council in the state of Perak. Indeed, exploring the factors influencing the local authorities' performances in its practice is relevant in assessing the quality of services given by the local authorities. The local authorities deal with the general public level directly and their performances are important in giving positive public perception to the overall government structure. Local government plays an important role to promote economic growth and creating job opportunities locally. In most developing countries, improving the quality of government delivery system is quite challenging, but effective government delivery systems are crucial in achieving the people's satisfaction level. This study derives from the literature review, and issues affecting the levels of customer satisfaction towards the services rendered by the local authority highlighted. A total of 250 respondents randomly selected to participate in the Ipoh City Council questionnaires survey. The survey was to assess the level of effectiveness and efficiency service delivery performed by Local Authorities in Ipoh. Issue identified were the lack of transparency, delays in services, lack of customer service courtesy and unaccountable practices that obstructs governmental effectiveness and creates numerous complaints among public and respondents. Hence several recommendations proposed in providing improvement in local authority delivery services.

Keywords: Efficient delivery, Local Authority performances, Customer satisfaction, Quality of Services

INTRODUCTION

Local Authority in Malaysia (LA) is a Malaysian government third-tier administrative system at the local level. LA performance

represents as catalyst of economic development, political and social stability (Azman, 2009). A dramatic rise in population density in urban areas is responsible for many environmental and social changes in the urban environment (Faizah, 2008). Local authority is established in representing a wide range of functions. LAs performs the various urban services; the authorized parties in the formulation of local and structural plan; catalyst for social and economic development; caretaker of urban environment protection and cleanliness; and tax and revenue collectors (Ahmad,1999). However, the issues on weakness of the LAs performance have been arising many time and again by interested and effected parties (Hamdan, 2010).

Thus, the study intends to investigate to what extend the condition of LA performance nowadays. It is needed in light to these circumstances of greater understanding for local authority performance identified by public satisfaction. By having this, it is hoped that local authority would upgraded their service and new dimension of managing LAs would be achieved in the current environment.

Research Problems

Among of the issue has arisen acknowledged by The Chief Secretary to the Government, in the Annual Working Meeting of Local Government Authorities in 1998, reiterated on the importance of LAs to improve their service to the people through a strong communication and feedback system. In addition, the other issue arise are an effective enforcement; high integrity and transparency; prudent financial management system; enhancing people participation in their programs; and continuous efforts in inculcating quality culture in their organizations (Lee, 2006a, 2006b; Ambrin, 2006).

Indeed, it is supported by Phang (2008) which asserted that Local government faces constant criticisms over delays, poor attitude, weak enforcement and displaying arrogance. When the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) conducted a weekly survey on how to improve the public service delivery system, it received nearly 700 emails of criticisms and suggestions from the public (The Sun, 2007). As far back as 2000, the Complaints Bureau of the Prime Minister's Department had received complaints regarding

weaknesses in government administration including slow and ill-mannered public counter services (New Straits Times, August and September, 2000).

In response to such problems, the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 highlighted the urgency of improving the local government delivery system. The Government commits to improve the quality of public services as it is a fundamental prerequisite toward achieving the National Mission. Towards this end, the Government will continue to reduce bureaucratic red tape, especially at the local authority and district levels (Malaysia, 2006).

Research Background

According to Mohamed (1999), there is need to call for re-examination of the LAs in various areas including the organizational structure; the scheme of services; the competency building program; and the new dimension of managing LAs in the current changing environment. The study intends to investigate to what extent the condition of LA performance nowadays. It is needed in light to these circumstances of greater understanding for local authority performance identified by public satisfaction. By having this, it is hoped that local authority would upgraded their service and new dimension of managing LAs would be achieved in the current environment.

Objectives

- To study the functions of local authority.
- To identify the factors influencing the local authority performance in adopting its practice.
- To identify the level of customer satisfaction towards the services rendered by local authority in Ipoh.
- To come out with recommendations in order to improve the service deliveries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of terms

There are many terms that been used regarding the research topic. Table below shows the significant terms and the definitions.

Terms	Definitions
Local government	The local government can be defined as being the territorial district unit system with a specific boundary, approved identity, have a structured institution, powers and tasks which are enacted, and have a financial autonomy as well as other autonomy (Diyliis M.Hill as cited by Phang, 2008).
Local authority	Local authority as City Council, Municipal or District Council, as the case may be under the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, mayor appointed under the Section 3 of the Act Federal Capital of 1960 (Local Government Act 1976, Act 171).
Good performance	The accomplishment of a given task measured against preset known standard of accuracy, completeness, cost, and speed. Thus, this definition can be referred to local authority as an indicator in achieving good performance of local authority (Business Dictionary, 2013). Good performance is referring to individual performance. It asserted that the observable behaviours and actions which explain how the job is to be done, plus the results that are expected for satisfactory job performance. They tell the employee what a good job looks like. The purpose of performance standards is to communicate expectations (Indiana University, 2004).

Table 3: Terms and the definition

Function of local government in Malaysia

Royal Investigation Commission report (1972) which is a body for restricting proposal of Malaysian local government has described the concept of local government as:

- A government which is responsible for delivering the duties for the local community that is transferred by the higher level of government either by local government via unitary system or state government via federation system.
- An enclosed, limited autonomy power conveyed by a central government which usually is in a financial and administration field.
- An independent body which have powers to arraign or to be arraigned, tender a contract and own properties, and

- Having adequate resource to provide facilities and services to the local community.

However, the practice is differs in Malaysia as there are integrate the plan at the local and regional level for the development and future requirements of their area; take measures to protect their area from natural and other hazards and to mitigate the effects of such hazards; promote their areas and to provide an attractive climate and locations for the development of business, commerce, industry and tourism; and establish or support organizations or programs that benefit people in their areas or local government (Hans, 2008).

Functions of local authority

Based on Local Government Act (1976, p. 63), functions of local authority are:

- Protection - the control of public health and safety. This includes the protection of individuals from a variety of hazards that can be associated with public health property, or cleaning services;
- Public (communal) - the function is beneficial to all. These include the environment, namely the creation of a balanced ecological conditions such as optimal land use planning and landscape in providing good conditions and recreational areas which provide social facilities sufficient to enable residents undertake recreational activities;
- Individual - the function which involves the provision of services direct aid to individuals such as welfare;
- Finance - that involve activities of revenue to local authorities and the local economy accelerate. Notwithstanding this, depreciated quite limited and only authority really incapable of power venture into finance.

Customer satisfaction

The position of local authority in Malaysia as the lowest of the three levels in the government which is engaged to the public. Public want to make a positive difference to people's lives which is what motivates them to get involved with local government in the first place. Individuals, families and communities share this aspiration. They want local councils to spend time and resources

on the things that will have the greatest positive influence on their lives (National Mental Health Development Unit, 2010). Thus, customer satisfaction is much related to local authority performance. In fact, Local Government Act is designed to give an opportunity for public or citizens to take a part in any management or related matter within their area.

There is evident that any company included local authority has been trying to measure customer satisfaction ever since the 70's. During that period of time, much of the works were based on theories, which among others stated that increasing customer satisfaction would help them to prosper (Coyles and Gokey, 2002). In the 80s, witnessed the issue of service quality, performance monitoring and resource allocation being added to customer satisfaction (Bolton, 1998). In the 1990's however, organizations and researchers have become increasingly concerned about the financial implications brought about by customer satisfaction (Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Bolton, 1998). Both citizens and local governments valued the citizen review as an important mechanism for improving interactions between citizens and local decision makers (McNeil, 2009). They also recognized the potential of the exercise to serve as an effective management tool for service providers in guiding them toward making much-needed service delivery improvements (McNeil, Andre, and Sladjana, 2009).

Indicator of local authority performance

MS ISO 9000 is a system that sets the standards and lists of elements that are needed in the quality system of an organisation to ensure that services provided meet customer requirements. MS ISO 9000 standards require organizations to identify their customers' needs, and planning and control processes that should be implemented to fulfill the requirements, providing appropriate and adequate training for personnel involved in quality systems and conducting audits to ensure the effectiveness of the processes in the system in achieving quality objectives (ISO 9001 : 2000 Quality Management Systems Requirements, 2010).

According to Soeb, David and Wan (2011), it has been introduced to further improve the ability of government agencies at federal, state or local government in providing quality services to their customers. The implementation of these programs also

provides a basis for forming a system of quality management in the public service. In addition, a Star Rating System (SSR-PBT) has been established in local authorities who were conceived by the former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi. SSR-PBT is designed to enhance the delivery and improvement of government system providing services to citizens. The purpose of this system is to evaluate the performance of local authority services, putting local authorities at the appropriate position in the rankings so that local authorities can improve their competitiveness, and to keep and maintain the level of efficiency and effectiveness of high performing local authorities.

Factors Influencing the Local Authority Performance

There are lacking of financial and human resources and often times, due to poor management and incompetence and not to mention sheer arrogance, services are fraught with problems (Lee, 2006a, 2006b; Ambrin, 2006). “Public organizations are identified as rigid bureaucratic cultures which are shaped by their own internal interests, and are therefore not responsive to the needs or preferences of those who receive public services: ordinary citizens” (Minogue, 1998). In fact, it has been reported that local government involved in several issues such as administrative negligence among local authorities; inefficient state administration practices among local authorities; the occurrence of many cases of irregularities in local government; and there are political motives that prompted the government to restructure the institution (Instan, 2007).

In contrast, many scholars give another view in obstructing organization practice, such as Bass (1988; 1990), Bass and Avolio (1993), Hartog, Muijen and Koopman (1997), asserted that organizational leadership styles enables effecting organizational effectiveness. Besides, a thorough review of such relationships reveals that the effect of transformational leadership characteristics on service quality is indirectly affected by empowerment (Bartram & Casimir, 2007; Klidas, van den Berg & Wilderom, 2007). Empowerment is often seen as a proactive and strategic management practice that exists in an organization (Menon, 2001; Spreitzer, 1995).

METHODOLOGY

The first step is to review the understanding of the local authority in relation to its role, function, and public perception in order to achieve the study objectives. The second stage is literature review. The review is referred to particular material such as books, journals, report, seminar presentations, and articles from newspapers. Data were collected through questionnaire survey. The questionnaire contains two sections and has both open ended and close ended questions. For the open ended questions, the questions mainly ask for the respondent background and demography. Meanwhile, for the close ended questions, they are divided into 5 levels of score data. The details of questionnaire are listed below:

Section A (Dependent Variables)		Section B (Independent Variables)	
i.	Satisfaction towards solid waste management	i.	Socio Economic Profiling
ii.	Satisfaction towards license enforcement	ii.	Age
iii.	Satisfaction towards town planning and planning control	iii.	Gender
iv.	Satisfaction towards counter management	iv.	Types of Employment
v.	Satisfaction towards public facilities	v.	Household Income
vi.	Satisfaction towards local authority service	vi.	Level of Education
vii.	Satisfaction towards local authority staff		
viii.	Satisfaction towards customer service		

Table 4: Dependent and independent variables

The data collection must conduct in the particular case study. It enables to discover the current condition. The case study provided data in the form of comparison and discussion. In addition, it will give more specific and actual scope for the researcher in attains aim and scope of the study. The case study also helps to notice out the main problem or issues regarding local authority performance. The case study on this research is Ipoh City Council.

The respondents are consisting of the household or visitors of Ipoh province jurisdiction. A total of 150 questionnaires were chosen by convenience sampling method in order to conduct this research. As for the research procedure is used, a set of questionnaire was distributed through a survey conducted in the site study. 100% is returned to the researchers. 150 copies were

properly completed and used. Sampling size is calculated based on the Yamane (1967) as reference. Sample size can be determined through calculation as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= N \\ \frac{1 + N (e)^2}{n} &= 621\,100 / 1 + 621\,100 \\ &(0.096)^2 \\ n &= 108.48 \\ &= \text{about 108 respondents} \end{aligned}$$

Source: Yamane (1967)

Based on the Ipoh Local Plan, the population under Ipoh City Council is 621 100. Therefore, the population size, N is 621 100 meanwhile confidence level that had been considered is 95 percent. Applying this formula it is calculated that sample size is 108. However, the calculated sample size has been rounded up to 150 as to increase the accuracy data. According to Housdon (2006), the larger of sample size, the result is more accurate.

The collected data will be analyzed after the data entry. In this study, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is the tool used to analyze the data collected in the study. Mean Differences Analysis was used to test of mean calculation, the service score will be times with score (0, 1, 2, 3, and 4) to calculate the average mean of each subservice and service categories. 0 represents not relation, 1 for very poor, 2 to for poor, 3 for good, and 4 for very good. As a result, it will be presented the average satisfaction chose by the respondents. In addition, the mean of subservice was arranged in accordance of respondent satisfaction. Anova was used to compare differences between groups of dependent variables mean. It is to acknowledge the significance differences in customer satisfaction regarding to local authority delivery services.

FINDINGS

Socio-economic Profile

In this research, personnel characteristic of respondents have very significant role to play in expressing and giving the response regarding to scope of this study. It may be due to different personal demographic background tended to have a different

perception regarding of their background, environment, and the sensitivity of the subject (Wolff et al, 2000). Due to that, a set of personal characteristic namely age, gender, races, type of employment, income, and level of education would be taking a consideration. Those personal characteristics represent independent variables into this research. It is important to identify the characteristic of the respondents as well describing the whole population under Ipoh City Council supervision.

Based on data from the questionnaire survey on 150 respondents, the largest numbers who participated to answer the survey was covering about 35.3 percent. It was from the group of 21 to 30 years old. Meanwhile, the lowest group who answered 49 the survey were between respondents who less than 20 years old. It translated into only 7.3 percent. Basically, the respondents who get contributed with the survey were about 29.4 years in average. Indeed the 30 years people entitled as the median of the ages in between of all the parties involved. In addition, the different age pointed out the different way of thinking. It included the thought of how local authority was played a role in delivering services to customers. Thus, the different age of the group would be presenting the difference of perception which can be a reliable into this research.

Based on the data, the male gender responded more to the field survey rather than female. The result obtained showed that 78 male (52 percent) were male while 72 person (48 percent) were female. There was only a slight difference between male and female due to their cooperation into this survey. The result described that male involved more than female. It could be compared by the preferences of male gender which mostly used to visit local authority rather than female. Thus, male were eager to participate rather than female. Perhaps, male experienced more on dealing with local authority as reconcile for household matters or responsible for works demand.

The majority races in the study area were Malay which was 70 respondents (39 percent). It was following by Chinese as 59 respondents (47 percent), and Indian 20 respondents (39 percent). Whereas, there is only 1 percent for other races who contributed to this survey. The representative of each race is essential in order to present the sampling of the whole population into this study.

Referring to the respondent in the study area, the classification of their employment was categorized into 5 categories as. The most contributing employees who participated in the survey were from private agencies which were 67 percent (100 respondents). The lowest group of employee derived from self-employed parties which were only 2 percent (3 respondents). The type of respondent employment was significant to verify the influences of their employment in involving the local authorities matter.

The household income data is necessary to show the living standards of residents who lives within the area of Ipoh Municipal Council. In overall, most of the residents obtained the income in the range of below than RM 2000 (85 respondents). It followed by income of RM 2001-RM 4000 (48 respondents). Meanwhile, 11 respondents hired with the income of more than RM4000 which represent the smallest number in a group of household income. In fact, there was 6 questionnaires has gotten no answer by the respondent which probably refused to share an income data to the enumerator. Referring to the data above, it can be seen that the respondents reached a peak in the category of middle income group (<RM2000). Entitled as the capital city, there would be hard for the most of respondents who earned as the lower income group. It is for sure financial distress among wage earners in the urban centres (Mohamed, 2008).

The result showed that most of the respondents attained their education until secondary school. Surprisingly, the number of secondary schools respondents was as 81 respondents (54 percent). It followed by diploma level for 35 respondents (23.3 percent). While, the lowest level of education respondents is a primary school but only 2 percent (3 respondents). Level of education is important to consider in judging their perception towards local authority performance. Role of education can play in transforming lives and the well-being of the continent as a whole (Lauren, 2013). Therefore, it may be influenced the way of their own interpretation for service delivery based on their education. Hence, the analysis conducted probably would be derived in a various way of interpretation.

Level of Satisfaction for overall of service categories (Mean Differences)

In acknowledge the particular level satisfaction towards of 8 categories offers, the mean differences analysis has used. Table 5 showed the result of service satisfaction in accordance of ranking.

Service Categories	Data Score	Mean	Ranking
Customer service	Poor	2.75	1
Solid waste management	Poor	2.65	2
Local authority staff	Poor	2.60	3
Local authority services	Poor	2.50	4
Public facilities	Poor	2.40	5
Counter management	Poor	2.25	6
License enforcement	Very poor	1.47	7
Town planning and planning control	Very poor	1.16	8

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013

Table 5: Level of Satisfaction for overall of service

Table 5 illustrates that most of the respondents chose customer service as the most satisfied service (mean=2.75). It presented that the level of the score was stand in between poor of (score=2) and good (score=3). However, the result still showed that the service was a poor score. Moreover, the six services of customer services, solid waste management, local authority staff, local authority services, public facilities and counter management resulted as within the range of 2 to 3 which was still in the medium average of poor service. In fact, they were taken apart only in a smaller gap of mean. It presented that those services were presumed as similar satisfaction based on respondent perception.

However, the services of license enforcement; town and planning control were striking to the most unsatisfied level of services where the mean was only emerged to 1.47 licenses and 1.16 for town planning control. Meanwhile, this service or sectors are important because it is money generated division in local authority as so long for Ipoh City Council. Based on the interview with the Director of Town Planning asserted that Ipoh City Council is the 2nd received the most of planning application in Malaysia on 2012 (Zulkarnain,2013).

Satisfaction Level vs Education (Anova)

H0: there is no significant difference in the mean of the variables socio economic profiling

H1: there is significant difference in the mean of satisfaction level of various parameters

In summarize, out of all eight categories of services, 3 of them derived that there had a significant mean differences in the subservice offered while testing with independent variables. There were the categories of solid waste management, public facilities and customer service. However, there is only a certain question resulted as significant mean within these categories. Even so, it can be said that, these 3 services had greater service delivery compare to other services. Meanwhile the other services such as local authority staff, local authority services; counter management; license enforcement; town planning and planning control were not getting any significant mean differences in comparison with education level. In summarize, it can be referred to table below.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Reject H0
Education level	Solid waste management	Grass cutting services 2 times per month in the main routes Cleaning the leaves and twigs of trees by the roadside made within 24-48 hours
	Public facilities	Adequacy of public toilet library parking space public hall recreational park and sports complex
	Customer service	Overall service rendered by local authority
Fail to reject		
	Local authority staff	
	Local authority services	
	Counter management	
	License enforcement	
	Town planning and planning control	

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013

Table 6: Summary of Education with Services Categories Group

Satisfaction Level vs Age (Anova)

H0: There is no significant differences mean between age and overall service rendered by local authority

H1: There is significant differences mean between age and overall service rendered by local authority

Respondent satisfaction		Mean square	Sig
Customer service			
Q49. Overall service rendered by local authority	Between group	0.760	0.599
	Within group	1.098	

*significance value on the sig.< 0.05

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013

Table 7: Age vs Overall Service Rendered by Local Authority

There had no significant differences in the mean on age and overall service rendered by local authority. Therefore, null hypothesis for age with overall service rendered by local authority was failed to reject.

Satisfaction Level vs Gender (Anova)

H0: There is no significant differences mean between gender and overall service rendered by local authority

H1: There is significant differences mean between gender and overall service rendered by local authority

Respondent satisfaction		Mean square	Sig
Customer service			
Q49. Overall service rendered by local authority	Between group	0.362	0.566
	Within group	1.094	

*significance value on the sig.< 0.05

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013

Table 7: Age vs Overall Service Rendered by Local Authority

There had no significant differences in the mean on gender and overall service rendered by local authority. Therefore, null hypothesis for gender with overall service rendered by local authority was failed to reject.

Satisfaction Level vs Type of Employment (Anova)

H0: There is no significant differences mean between type of employment and overall service rendered by local authority

H1: There is significant differences mean between Type of Employment and overall service rendered by local authority

Respondent satisfaction	Mean square		Sig
Customer service			
Q49. Overall service rendered by local authority	Between group	0.289	0.903
	Within group	1.111	

*significance value on the sig.< 0.05

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2013

Table 8: Type of Employment vs Overall Service Rendered by Local Authority

There had no significant differences in the mean on type of employment and overall service rendered by local authority. Therefore, null hypothesis for type of employment with overall service rendered by local authority was failed to reject.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the problems have arisen before, the government has come with several programmes in improving delivery service in Malaysia. However, the study shows the programmes is not in par with government aim. Thus, it needs long term improvement to be able achieved very good score delivery services. Hence, the recommendations are still in the current programme. However, there is needed for any parties related to follow and review the programme to be succeeded.

Client chartered

Provide excellent services through planning, formulation and implementation of policies pertaining to human resource management quality characteristics. There are must quickly in all actions; in decision making; friendly customer service; timeliness; fair and impartial in judgment; ensure that services and information easily available and reliable; and compliance with laws, policies and regulations.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Quality public administration has to increase customer satisfaction with public services. It has to be done through transparent processes and accountability by use of democratic dialogue. It could be done through enriching conventional

business concepts of quality by a democratic concept of quality which perceives public agencies as catalysts of civic society and citizens as part of a responsible and active civic society.

Quality indicators should not only focus on measuring service quality as provided by an individual organization but also on the service system, and the overall quality of life in a specific jurisdiction.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Recommend performance-based work using key performance indicators (KPIs) that are applied in the civil service to enhance the quality of service delivery. In relation to that, local authority needs to measure the performance of the services provided to ensure that all services are delivered to customers well.

Improve the quality of service of such individual and organizational performance measurement through annual work targets, measurement efficiency through the implementation of the Quality Management System ISO 9000 and Total Quality Management (TQM) and benchmarking best practices through the implementation of the Public Service Quality Award.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is delicately shows that the study has achieved its objectives in evaluating the local authority performance. The three objectives outlined are already answered. Hence, the need to improvise local authority is important due to the role of local authority as the vehicle of central government and socio economic. Also, local authority performance with the case study of Ipoh City Hall revealed the real picture of current service delivery. It is based on the findings that showed that 6 categories offered were gotten a poor score in average. Meanwhile, 2 of the services had gotten the very poor services. Besides, the tests used by various methods also showed the negative results. In other words, local authority is not achieved the good performance which was asserted in the literature review as an accomplishment of given task measured against preset known standard accuracy, completeness, cost and speed. Whereas, the result found that the local authority given task is not well achieving the standard accuracy, completeness, cost and speed. Thus, the evidence from

the study suggests that the improvement and innovation idea need to boost up in order to achieve very good service to customers in future.

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