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TABLE OF CONTENT

Comparison of Customers' Perception On Service Quality Between Conventional and Islamic Bank

Mohd Radzi Mohd Khir,
Mohamed Samsudeen
Sajahan

Vokal Schwa Dalam Kata Pinjaman Bahasa Arab

Ahmad Fauzi Yahaya,
Syahirah Almuddin,
Mohd Zulkhari Abd Hamid

Survey on the Satisfaction of Municipal Services

Zaherawati Zakaria

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and the Career Success among Academician in Malaysian Universities

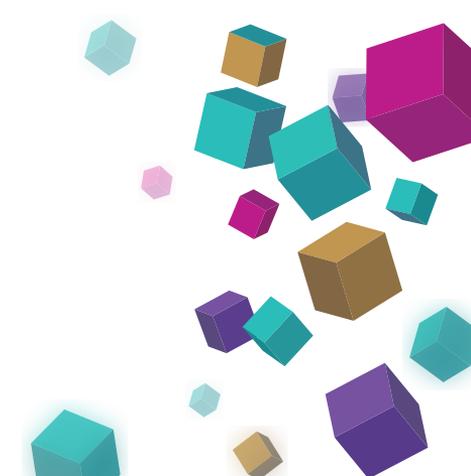
Siti Meriam Ali,
Mohd Rizaimy Shaharudin

Working Sector and Participation Relationship: Rukun Tetangga Activities In Northern State of Malaysia

Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani
Ahmad Sabri Ahmad,
Noor Afifah Mohammad,
Roziya Abu

Kitchen Electrical Appliances Design: Does it influence to the Consumer Lifestyle?

Mohd Hamidi Adha Mohd
Amin,
Mohamad Hariri Abdullah



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Survey on the Satisfaction of Municipal Services

Zaherawati Zakaria

Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies

Universiti Teknologi MARA, P. O Box 187, 08400 Merbok, Kedah Malaysia

Tel: +604- 4562547 Email: zaherawati@kedah.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

In Malaysia, there has been growing media attention and discussion on cases of poor service quality given by public sector including local government agencies. The agencies involved have been pushed to improve the quality of public service delivery. Realizing that some actions has taken place in responding to the public complaint, thus, this study tries to determine to what extent residents of Majlis Perbandaran Sungai Petani (MPSPK) satisfy with municipal services, such as, waste management, cleanliness, culverts and drainage in Sungai Petani. The findings in this study are derived from quantitative method and shows that households has a positive association with municipal services offered by the council. The results prove that the respondents were proud to be a Sungai Petani's citizen. The findings also indicated that, overall, the households were satisfied with services offered even though got some department that create dissatisfaction to them. For the policy recommendations, the genuine service improvement is sought. In future research, the engagement between all parties should be concerned on local government, private and voluntary sectors, service providers and private citizens in enhancing the levels of customer's satisfaction.

Keywords: *Customer, Satisfaction, Local Government, Municipal Services, Service Quality.*

1.0 Introduction

In order to have citizens trust in public institutions, official behaviour and their way of dealing could play an important role (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Public institutions should be in the right track in giving a service to the citizens due to stewardship concept as government servant. Citizens always pushed their demands and necessity to be fulfilled by the government agencies and if they satisfied with their local official's performance, they may express greater support for the system. However, if local institutions are unable to satisfy their needs, citizens will express their dissatisfaction towards local governments until the grass-root.

Stakeholders such as households, interest and pressure groups, the media, business community, community leader and politicians contribute to the performance of municipal. Poor performance of municipalities is more visible and can't hide to the open public. It is because public can inquiry the local council of their closeness to the people they serve. This close relationship open up the actual extent of service delivery because people can visibly see the service rendered such as whether waste management being conducted in daily activities or not, water supplies being provided or not and electricity being connected or not (Kamarudin et al., 2001). In 2000, MHLG implemented the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) programme into four local authorities which were Majlis Perbandaran Kuantan (MPK), Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya (MPPJ), Majlis Perbandaran Miri (MPM) and Majlis Daerah Kerian (MDK) in a way to collaborate between stakeholders in promoting the greater local services. Started from that, many local authorities including MPSPK tried to follow as what been achieved by those local authorities but sometime failed to provide well due to some constraints on manpower and finance. An uncollected assessment rate in 2009 was RM18 million and this became a serious problem in MPSPK. This amount should be pumped on the municipal services of garbage management, cleanliness, lamppost and street maintenance but failed to collect due to tax avoidance among tax payers (MPSPK, 2010). These pressures come on the form of new demands and challenges to increase and improve service delivery of local government of their roles at local, national and abroad. In MPSPK scenario, they have to bear with the burden of having to pay for some of the privatized services especially the privatisation of solid waste disposal and related cleaning services. The private organizations which undertake the provision of the solid waste disposal and urban cleaning services are paid by the MPSPK but still have to face the lack of funds to pay to the organizations due to the higher cost of services. Thus, in December 2009, E-Idaman Company was appointed by Federal Government through NSWMD to manage waste disposal, cleanliness and drainage matters in four states in northern region (MPSPK, 2010). Thus this study conducted in order to determine to what extent satisfaction among the households on municipal services in Sungai Petani.

2.0 Literature Review

The value created in local settings is directly affected by the quality of local service delivery. If government fails to provide the basic needs, the functions of government itself are totally weak and open up for terror. A very important measurement of this value is citizen satisfaction, and one of the reasons is being the strong relationship between quality and satisfaction. Recent research indicates that these concepts are quite distinct (Nikmatul Adha, 2010). She explains that the level of public participation in local affairs is depending on the roles of councillors and development of social capital in its area. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from experiencing a service quality encounter and comparing that encounter with what was expected (Oliver, 1980).

Moreover, satisfaction assessments require customer experience while quality does not (Bolton and Drew 1991; Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 2000; Oliver 1980; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Value is seen to be more individualistic and personal than quality and involves both a get and a give component (Zeithaml, 1988). The empowerment of citizens through engagement in the design and delivery of services through such mechanisms as citizens' juries, community ownership of assets, and the ability to hold service providers to account will all provide impetus to improve the service quality and citizen satisfaction. However, there has been a little modelling of satisfaction with local government services that links evaluations of administrative and common services with the overall satisfaction judgments that people formed on the performance of their local governments (Van Ryzin, 2004).

When the service provider understands how services are perceived by citizens, it will be possible to identify ways of managing these evaluations and influencing them in the desired direction. The relationship between the service concept, the service offered to citizens, and citizen benefits have to be clarified (Grönroos 2007). Individual public services will also have different elements which they need to cover, but these five factors should be applicable to all. Performance in multidimensional concept which is included the measurement depending on its variety of factors (Fitzgerald & Moon, 1996). Other authors such as Macpherson (2001) and Mwita (2000) stated that performance should be determined as the outcomes of works process and must be in lined with goal and objective. It is providing the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the institution, customer satisfaction and economic contributions for entire (Peppers & Rogers, 2004). Wider factors could influence performance level in municipalities even differs each other because a compressive system performance measurement and models such as Balanced Score Card and Service Quality (SERVQUAL) can be implemented (Palmer, 1993 & Parasuraman et al 1988).

A methodology for evaluating local government performance in municipal services, based on quality and satisfaction dimensions, is presented clearly. A few models such as Balanced Score Card and SERVQUAL always explain the significant between quality dimensions and satisfaction in respect of improving the relationship between public administration agencies and citizens. Research conducted with citizens are the basis for the series of public policy actions that are aimed at improving administration service quality, which, ultimately should lead directly to better citizen satisfaction (De Bujin, 2002).

3.0 Research Methodology

The findings presented in this study are derived from quantitative methods used in this study. The quantitative findings are based on the survey on 310 households. The respondents were representing three zones of MPSPK (C, G and H). Strata sampling

method was used in order to gain balanced representation among four social-class clusters and the types of houses they live in. The fieldwork for data collection in this study was carried out in MPSPK between April and July 2012. During this four-month period, the researcher monitored the selected zones in MPSPK. The researcher also visited the Division of Local Government of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in order to collect secondary data. In general, the fieldwork of this study involved a number of phases. They are elaborated in the following sections. Fieldwork for this study was carried out by four enumerators and delivered questionnaires to each household and collected them after census date. The enumerators checked all the dwellings within their assigned enumeration zones consisting of C, G and H. Based on this, they drafted a list of households according to the list of housing areas in MPSPK zones in the survey and a map of their enumeration zones, and delivered a questionnaire to each selected households.

4.0 Material of Findings

4.1 Households Information profile

Descriptive statistics and frequencies were run to better understanding the sample. The sample for the study comprised of 310 respondents of households which male were the highest respondents with 156 (50.3%) respondents followed by female 154 (49.7%) and Malay ethnicity comprises the majority of respondents with 99(31.9%) percent followed by Chinese 94 (30.3%), Indian 75(24.2%) and Others 42(13.6%). Respondent's ages ranged from 40 to 49 years, with a mean of 2.965 (S.D =1.08). Majority of respondents never had any formal education (59.4%) followed by primary education (26.1%), post graduate (14.2%) and only 0.3 percent respondent STPM holder. 44.5% respondents in the sample reported to work as general office administrator, followed by professional, top management & administration (43.9%) and only 11.6 percent working as semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker. Majority of the respondents came from moderate category (59.7%), followed by elite group (29.7%) and only 10.6 percent respondents from low category. Most of respondents came from Zone C (40%), followed Zone G (35.8%) and 24.2 percent from Zone H.

The respondents are reported to be in the private limited firm sector (44.5%), followed by governments sector (43.9%) and only 0.3 percent respondents working in multinational company and 11.3% others sector. Most of respondents are married and followed by single (49.4%) and most of them were stayed 2 – 5 years (55.5%), followed less than a year (43.9%) and only 0.6 percent respondents in this study were stay 6-15 years. 67.4 % respondents in the sample reported have owned house and only 32.6 percent rented the house. The respondents living in double terrace type (48.1%) followed by single terrace (30.3) and only 21.6 percent living in bungalow type. This indicates that most of respondents were middle income society.

4.2 Extent of Satisfaction: Awareness of Being Citizen

To gauge the extent of customer satisfaction in municipal services, the respondents were asked their preferable and feeling, either MPSPK’s respondents or customers, and whether they proud to be as a citizen. This finding gives an overall picture on the resident’s preferable and feeling, either MPSPK’s residents or customers, on municipal services. The result concluded that the majority of household respondents, have highly proud with MPSPK’s as develop local authority due to highest mean value = 2.34 and followed by feeling as MPSPK’s residents (mean=2.2) and lastly choices being MPSPK’s residents or customer (mean=1.06). This finding supported by work done by Corcoran (2002) which stated that the public are generally more positive about local services than about services nationally, more likely to feel that they can have a say in how local services operate, and more likely to feel good about their area if they feel able to affect its decision making . Corcoran further added that this positive feeling usually lead to satisfaction towards government services (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Preferable and feeling either MPSPK’s residents or customers

Items	Household			
	N	Min	Max	Mean
feeling as MPSPK's resident	310	2	3	2.2
choices being MPSPK's resident or customer	310	1	2	1.06
Proud with MPSPK's as develop local authority	310	2	3	2.34

Source: Field study, 2012

The result explains in the Table 4.2 shows that the majority of household respondents satisfy with the service provided in all departments because “mean” was around 3 and only legal department dissatisfied with service provided with lowest mean=2.391. The finding shows that there is a relative between households maybe due to services received meet their expectation as customers. The findings corresponds to work of Lowndes et al. (2006) which says if genuine service improvement is sought alongside perceived satisfaction something more is required: a real, public commitment to improvement and clear signalling of what the terms of engagement are between all parties concerned (i.e. central and/or local government, private and voluntary sectors, service providers, private citizens) so that the co-creation is real and no one feels disappointed or duped.

Table 4.2 Services based on department

Items	Household			
	N	Min	Max	Mean
building department	241	1	5	3.274
engineering department	247	1	5	3.247
health department	250	1	5	3.16
town planning department	236	1	5	3.157
treasury department	218	1	5	3.225
secretariat department	241	1	5	3.141
information technology department	213	1	5	3.324
legal department	248	1	5	2.391

Source: Field study, 2012

4.3 Understanding who satisfies and who does not

The research question is inspired from the work of previous researchers (Norton and Kaplan, 1992, Parasuraman et al., 1988) who attempt to see not just in theory, but in practice, how a devolved government and empowered citizenry would deliver better services than they enjoy today by focusing on key drivers of satisfaction.

Table 4.3 showed a statistic of household's satisfaction base on category, i.e. elite group, moderate group, low cost and also traditional group. Result for first variable, which is "frequent of dealing", stated that moderate group lead the category by 71% while elite group achieved 69%. When asked about the level of efficiency under "service received" variables, only traditional group claimed 100% very efficient while majority of elite and moderate group only stated that the service received was efficient (69% and 71%). Even though traditional group claimed that the service received was very efficient, but when asked further regarding "time waiting in dealing", 63% of them claimed that they have to spend more than 1 to 2 hours waiting before can settle their transaction. Majority of respondents from elite group, moderate and low cost group need to wait around 30 minutes to 1 hour when dealing with MPSPK. Lastly when asked regarding the satisfaction given by MPSPK, elite and low cost group stated that they "satisfied" while moderate group claimed that they "very satisfied" with MPSPK. Traditional group has come out with 50% claimed "satisfied" while another 50% stated that they "very satisfied".

Table 4.3 Statistics of household's satisfaction base on category

Variables		Category				Total
		Elite	Moderate	low cost	Traditional	
Frequent of dealing	strongly less	29	29	4	0	62
		32%	16%	80%	0%	20%
	Frequent	63	131	1	0	□□□
		69%	□1%	20%	0%	6□%
	□ery frequent	0	2□	0	28	□□
		0%	14%	0%	100%	□□%
	Total	□2	□□□	□	2□	□□0
		□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%
□er□i□e re□ei□ed	□ess effi□ient	29	29	4	0	62
		32%	16%	80%	0%	20%
	□ffi□ient	63	131	1	0	□□□
		69%	□1%	20%	0%	6□%
	□ery effi□ient	0	2□	0	28	□□
		0%	14%	0%	100%	□□%
	Total	□2	□□□	□	2□	□□0
		□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%
□ie □aiting in dealing	□ess t□an 30 □inutes	80	□0	10	0	□□0
		4□%	48%	4□%	0%	□□%
	□ore t□an 30 □inute to 1 □our	□0	40	□	□	□20
		41%	38%	23%	38%	□□%
	□ore t□an 1 □our to 2 □ours	20	1□	□	8	□0
		12%	14%	32%	63%	□6%
	Total	□□0	□0□	22	□□	□□0
		□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%
□atisfa□tion gi□en	□atisfied	□9	86	□	14	□6□
		64%	4□%	100%	□0%	□□%
	□ery satisfied	33	99	0	14	□□6
		36%	□4%	0%	□0%	□□%
	Total	□2	□□□	□	2□	□□0
		□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%	□00%

Source: Field study, 2012

5.0 Discussion and Recommendation

The study aims to understand the factors that influence the level of customer satisfaction and the issues that arise when satisfaction process takes place. An analysis on the study reveals that, overall, the household respondents satisfied with

their municipal services even though still have some department, such as Legal Department that create dissatisfaction among the respondent. The results proved that the respondents were proud to be Sungai Petani's citizen. There are some possible explanations why some respondents received different level of satisfaction, such as the education background of respondents, their social class, the frequencies of dealing with service provider, the knowledge on procedures need to comply before getting the service and many more. That's why the satisfaction level differs according to the category of respondents.

5.1 Policy Implications and recommendations

5.1.1 Empower the public with municipal services knowledge

Knowledge and understanding about the daily operations of MPSPK's services such as waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culverts affairs system is needed in order to encourage the public to more satisfy. In this light, the councillors, community leaders as well as MPSPK's manpower have a role in guiding the public in understanding municipal services and public complaints effectively. Abroad practice on handling greater municipal services like in Australia and United Kingdom (Nikmatul, 2010) should be refer as best practice in local affairs.

5.1.2 Seek participation from a broad range of participations

Public should not be treated as one single entity as there a different kinds of people who received satisfaction differently. Some may dissatisfied on certain services and some may satisfied others, but normally those who talk the loudest will get the attention as well as who actively complaints on services. The respective parties should also take into account the existence of organized and unorganized public and whose interest do they represent. The disputes and dissatisfaction can be avoided if only the participation process is made open to all.

5.1.3 Enhancing the role of councillors and community leaders

Councillors and community leaders share a basic task which is to help people to be able to understand what goes on in their locality. It is also important for the community representatives to well known in order to avoid confusion among themselves and among the constituents.

5.2 Scope for further research

More efforts should be directed towards understanding the focus groups including households and business communities. In terms of evaluation, future studies should also directed on examining the intangibles variables to measure the

quality of satisfaction. At present, many studies are concerned on looking at the numbers for example, number of public complaints against total population, number of people who file dissatisfies. More studies should be done to examine variables such as representation of local association and community leaders.

6.0 Conclusion

The results in this study concerned on to what extent people satisfied with the services given by MPSPK.. Investigating on the level of awareness of the residents is important in analyzing satisfaction as the knowledge of what is going on, and who turn to when things goes wrong are important information to enable the success of customer satisfaction. The public must be aware of the inward and outward avenues available and they must have adequate information before they can satisfy. However, there are some rooms for improvements in future research by collaborating with state government and other parties in local affairs to have greater performance in municipal services. Therefore, apart from focusing on improving customer satisfaction process, future policies should be directed on local services to be more effective and efficient for the benefits of both parties, i.e.; public and the government.

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