

Achieving Quality Service Delivery: A Selected study in Perak Local Government

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Abstract

The quality of government service delivery has been questioned lately. Issues regarding bureaucratic red tape, inefficiency, delay, unresponsive, lack of empathy, and arrogance are some of the complaints received by the Public Complaint Bureau. Based upon this background, this paper attempts to examine the quality of service delivery in some selected local governments in Perak. The study utilizes a quantitative approach in which questionnaire surveys were distributed to local government staff and clients. A total of 500 customers and 150 staff participated in the survey. Using descriptive analysis, the findings demonstrate that the overall quality service delivery is satisfactory. Both citizens and staff feel that the local government involved in the study are able to deliver their services based on the needs of the clients. However, respondents also raise some serious concerns regarding certain issues such as lack of facilities (park and cleanliness of public toilet), improper maintenance (drainage are clogged, recreational facilities are not maintained), and the availability of facilities and program for disable (OKU) group. The study postulates that the different level of satisfaction among the five selected local governments is due to the demographic characteristics of the government. To be specific, the more urban the government, the more it can generate the revenues, thus giving it more flexibility to provide quality service delivery to the customers. On the other hand, with adequate staff training and greater citizen empowerment, local government can always strive to ensure that services delivered are always effective and efficient.

Keywords: Service delivery; Local government; Perak.



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1. Introduction

Local government is the 'grass root' government or the third tier government, closest to the citizen. Local government is developing itself to prepare for the future challenges in today's global world. Most of their resources were devoted for providing services and facilities to the local community. There is a prominent trend in many countries worldwide to embrace local government reform that is intended at improving service delivery besides economic efficiency and government accountability (Dzurllkanian *et al.*, 2008). In Malaysia, the Local Government Act 1976 play a vital role in governing local authorities especially in providing public goods and services to the communities under their authority. However, the local authorities continue to face criticism and are viewed as inefficient and lacking accountability. With increasing public awareness, global activities and demands of good governance, the need for local authorities to address and overcome this issue is crucial.

In Malaysia local governments context are still plagued with many problems in implementing government policies (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2008) causes the function and its role expose to public scrutiny. Among the problems are, not transparent in decisions making; irresponsible, bureaucratic red tape delay of action (Kaliannan *et al.*, 2009), inefficient and many more. These problems not only affect the quality of service delivery, but also tarnish the third government reputation. Despite government efforts to improve service delivery of public agencies through a variety of changes and innovations, the local governments still overwhelmed with a range of issues and shortcomings.

Furthermore, local government operates within a centralized political system that does little to encourage autonomy or public participation at the local level. While the federal government exhorts application of the principles of good governance such as transparency, accountability and participation, local government's subordinate position to the federal and state government hierarchy limit its ability to engage freely with the community. Local government faces constant criticisms over delays, poor attitude, weak enforcement and displaying arrogance (Phang, 2011). Local government is one of those public organizations that have been heavily criticized by the Malaysian public. The increased education level of the citizen has led to a more vocal and more discerning citizenry that expects better services and accountability from their local authorities (Siti-Nabiha, 2010). This is indicative that for a nation to deliver services efficiently and effectively, an effective governance accountability framework which involves demands by upward and downward at the local level is essential. Therefore, the study aims to investigate the quality of service delivery in Perak local government and provide suggestion that will improve the public service delivery system effectively and timely.

2. Literature Review

Citizens will always have fully support on the local government if they get the high-level of service delivery especially on basic services. Effective delivery provide by the local government makes them closest to the people. However, the local government is large organization that has wide range of clients including public citizens, business communities and private sector. Rapid industrialization, urbanization and increased of education makes the citizen expects better services and has created a challenging environment for the local government. Phang (2008) mentioned that the common weakness face by the local government are sources of finance, service delivery and community participation.

There are some problems faced by local governments in implementing a good service delivery system to citizens and one of it is inadequate public participation as highlighted by Gwayi (2010). This issue might cause by their lack of awareness on the administration of local government as mention by Almarshad (2011) and the citizens responsiveness on public service delivery by their local government are determine by their level of awareness. The lack of public participation is link with the seriousness of the local government to enlighten their citizens as some of the local government have no adequate information channel to the citizens Bello *et al.* (2017). More than 61 percent of respondents in Manjung and Kerian District stated that they did not participate in any plans or improvements in service delivery by local government and they are not aware on their right to contribute in making decision om planning and development programs.

While stated that inefficiencies urban management can contribute to the failure of development projects and low performance of service delivery by local government. This is including local governments fail to meet the expectations of their customers, fail to keep promise, incompetence, delay, failed to inform on any changes and lack of flexibility. In the survey that been asked to councils in UK local government, they listed six major problems facing by the local government that are cost and budget constraints, information sharing management, joining-up services, legacy system integration, lack of skills and resources and change management.

Bovaird and Loffler (2009) stated that in the early 1980s, local governments start to find initiatives in overcoming their budget deficits. This is due to rising in demands for municipal services while tax incomes remain the same or unstable. This means that, besides having the problem of governance, local governments are also facing financial problems in order to maintain their service. As the largest percentage of local government revenues is from the taxes, so the non-compliance of the citizens in paying taxes brings problems to the local government (Glaser and Hildreth, 1999). Lack of financial resources lead to another problem to local authority such as proper and timely maintenance of the public facilities. According to Adnan *et al.* (2012) the maintenance of public facilities often delays due to insufficient budget although the plan and preparation has been made earlier. Among the main issues in practicing good Facilities Management in local authority in Malaysia is the problems in managing and controlling the financial cost (Rahmat and Nawawi, 2017).

Attempts at improving service delivery in Local Authorities have been introduced in tandem with the New Public Management (NPM) reforms in the Malaysian public sector which began as early as the 1980s (Siddiquee, 2010). Several elements based on the NPM reforms have been implemented by local governments in an effort to improve the quality of services offered. One of the popular reforms targeting to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery in local governments is system and procedural change. This type of reform including the usage of more simple form, elimination of trifling and overlapping procedures, condensed certain parts or activities and a shorter approval period.

In an ideal setting, local governments carry the dual functions of ensuring top-down and bottom-up accountability. Specifically, to deliberate on policies and implementation through public financial management and service delivery, thus performing the oversight function for both federal and state governments. Similarly, they are assumed to be representing citizens—by giving voice to individual citizens, civil society organizations, and business groups—and by representing the needs of local constituents in policy-making. This assumption leads to public accountability measures that aim to strengthen local government oversight so that local leaders oversee local government operations on behalf of local citizens. Strengthening the political dimension of local accountability requires some modifications in local governments and local council oversight. On the demand side, political accountability measures allow for citizen-initiated legislation (petitions), referendums, or recalls of elected public officials. They include procedures for public petitions to adopt, amend, or repeal an act, law, or executive order.

They also empower citizens to demand public hearings on policy decisions and action and to appeal to citizen ombudsman offices in local governments.

In creating liveable and desire city, there is a need in improving the effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. Therefore, the transformation and reform of local authorities have been central to the political programs of the UK government by committed in making their local government more dynamic, entrepreneurial, efficient, effective and close to their citizens. They proposed customer relationship management (CRM) that has been used by private sector to help them understand their citizens better.

In term of increasing the local governance revenue, [Glaser and Hildreth \(1999\)](#) found that citizens who think that their local government is performing adequately are more willing to pay for taxes. The citizens agree with the increase in tax rates if the local government made a greater effort in fulfilling their needs and spend their money wisely. Suggested that local government should working on a mechanism to informed the citizen what they are getting for in tax they invested. Local governments should be more focus in ensuring their services are always competent in serving the people rather than thinking of new ways to generate income. Furthermore, maintaining the quality of existing services is easier than applying something new into the administration.

Other than improving their services and informing citizens on the budget, local authority also might reduce their financial burden by collaborating with the private developers in doing maintenance job on public facilities. In granting their approval on development, local authority might negotiate for private developer's engagement to provide such on-site requirements such as road improvements ([Salleh and Khalid, 2011](#)).

3. Methodology

This study adopted quantitative approaches of data collection and descriptive analysis has been used to answer the research objectives. A questionnaires survey has been distributed to the local residents that dealing with particular local governments. The research involved five (5) local authorities in Perak consist of local government 1 (MDPH), local government 2 (MDTM), local government 3 (MDK), local government 4 (MPTI) and local government 5 (MBI). These 5 local governments were selected to represent city hall, municipalities and district council. The selection on these five local authorities were based on several characteristics such as types of local authorities, locations and geographical area and nature of the local authorities itself, for example close to other state, close to industry, isolated area and other consideration.

Functions of LA has been divided to eights (8) as belows:

- i. Availability of public facilities
- ii. Maintenance of public facilities
- iii. Management of Refuse and Recycle Waste
- iv. Licensing and Development Approval
- v. Town Planning
- vi. Counter Service
- vii. Enforcement
- viii. Governance

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are based on the data collected to demonstrate the comprehensive information generated from this research. Demography of the Respondents

Table-1. Demography of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	297	59.4
Female	203	40.6
Total	500	100.0
Race	Frequency	Percentage
Malay	322	64.4
Chinese	119	23.8
Indian	59	11.8
Total	500	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percentage
21 – 30 years old	187	37.4
31 – 40 years old	135	27.0
41 – 50 years old	97	19.4
51 – 60 years old	58	11.6
61 – 70 years old	23	4.6
Total	500	100.0
Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Not Schooling	1	0.2
Primary School	42	8.4
Secondary School	302	60.4

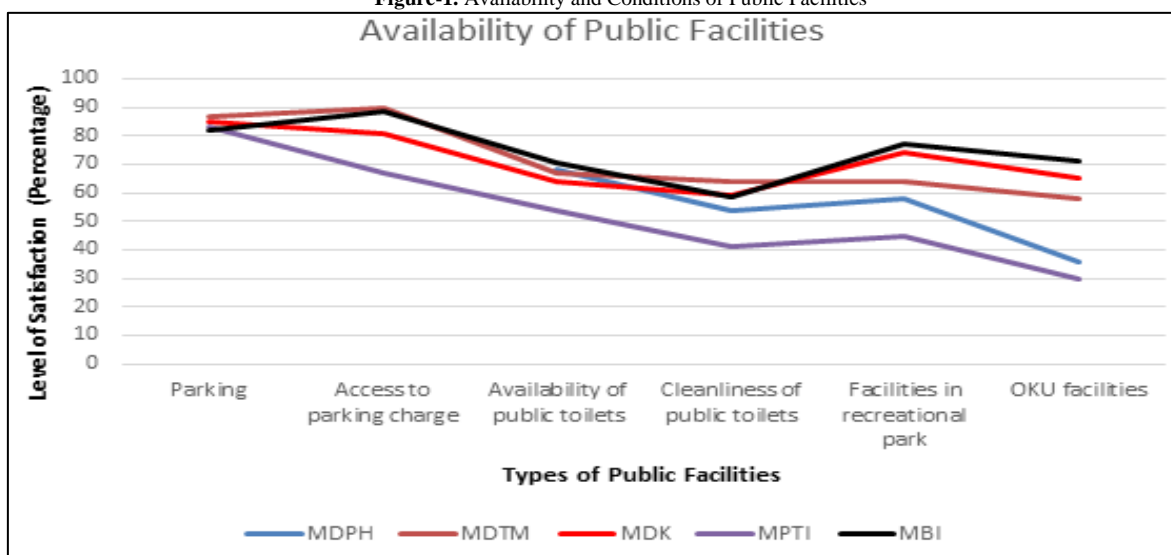
Tertiary	155	31.0
Total	500	100.0
Frequency of Dealing with Local Authority (yearly)	Frequency	Percent
1 – 5 times	431	86.2
6 – 10 times	50	10.0
11 – 15 times	16	3.2
16 – 20 times	3	0.6
Total	500	100.0

Table 1 indicates that in term of gender, male and female respondents are about equal. Male respondents are 59.4% while female respondents are 40.6% from the total numbers of respondents who participated in this study. The table above display respondent’s race which Malay dominated the survey. It shows that Malay respondents are 64.4%, followed by the Chinese with 23.8% and the Indian are only 11.8% from the total. The table also illustrates 37.4% of the respondents are in the range age of 21 until 30 years old, followed by 27% in the range age of 31 until 40 years old, 19.4% of the respondents are in the range age of 41 until 50 years old, 11.6% of them are from 51 until 60 years old and the rest are from 61 until 70 years old with only 4.6%. Further, the table shows that majority of the respondents with 60.4% of them have secondary school level of education follow by tertiary level with 31%, primary school level with 8.4% and only 0.2% is not having any level of education. While, majority of the respondents has experience dealing with local government in between 1 to 5 times every year.

5. Quality of Service Delivery

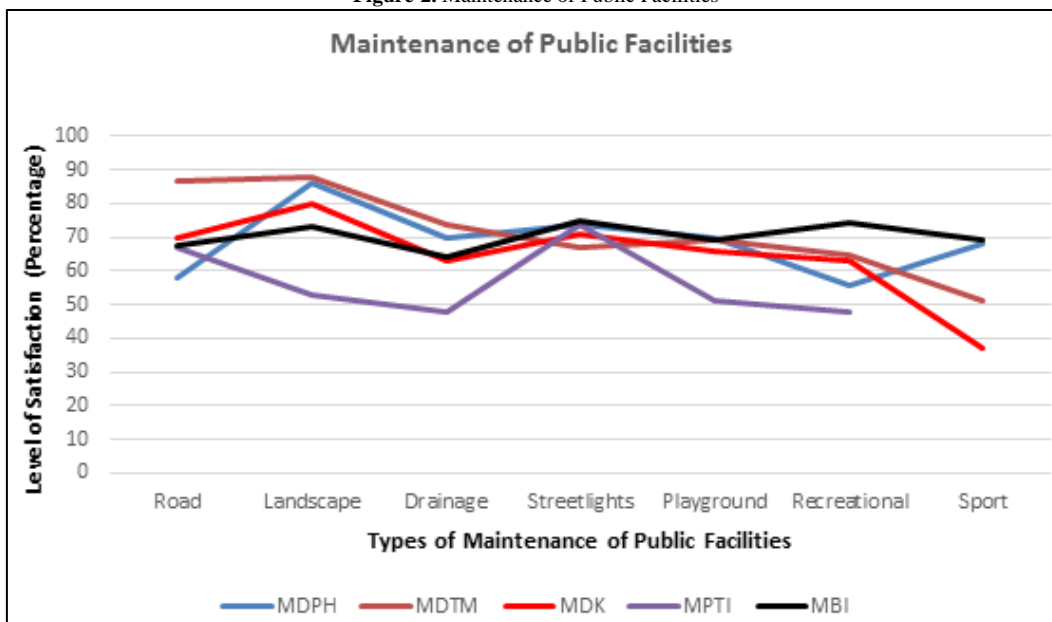
The quality of service delivery is measure based on basic services provided by local governments and also services commonly received by majority resident at administered area.

Figure-1. Availability and Conditions of Public Facilities



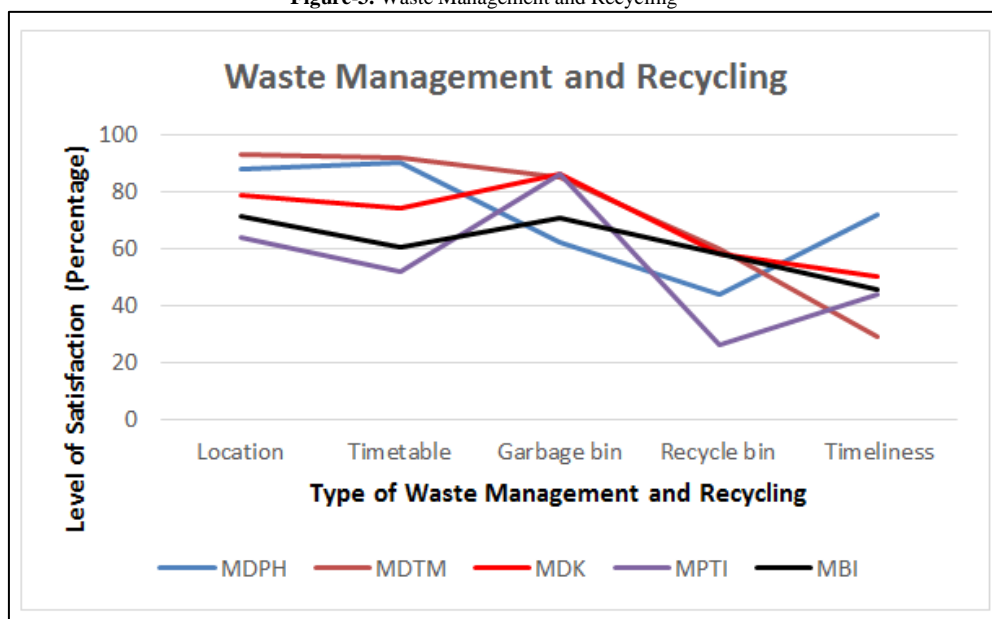
The findings indicate that local government 1 (MPTI) score the lowest in term of availability of public facilities especially on the cleanliness of the toilet. However, cleanliness of the public toilets scores the least satisfied by others local government’s respondents as well. However, the figures indicate that most of the respondents are satisfy with parking and access to parking charge. Thus , the study propose that local government 1 should perform at least twice a week checking on public toilets available in their administrative area. Further, for disable (OKU) facilities, there is no residents perceive satisfy score more than 80% with this local government service. It means that each local governments are need to increase their commitment to improve OKU’s facilities.

Figure-2. Maintenance of Public Facilities



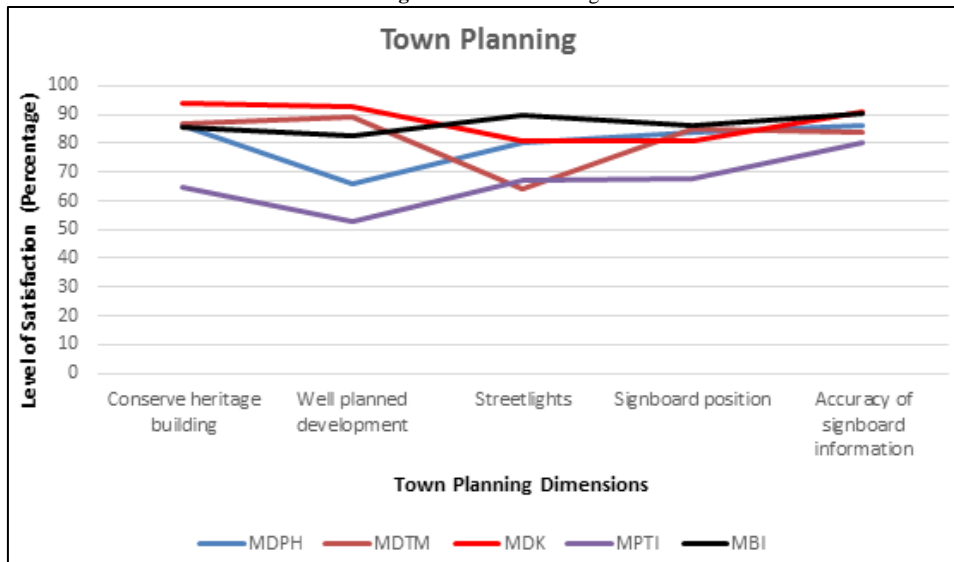
The finding on maintenance of public facilities demonstrate that local government 1 (MDPH)’s customers feel more dissatisfied in most of the category especially in term of maintenance of landscape, drainage, playground and recreational facilities. This result might be because of the lack of income faced by local government 1. In addition, local government 1 also did not outsource their maintenance on public facilities to third party. Compare to other local governments, local government 1 perform drainage cleaning and grass cutting only once a month even though the population is more than 120,000. This is the main obstacle facing by local government 1 which needs to serve for huge area of administration and large population with limited budget allocation for maintenance services.

Figure-3. Waste Management and Recycling



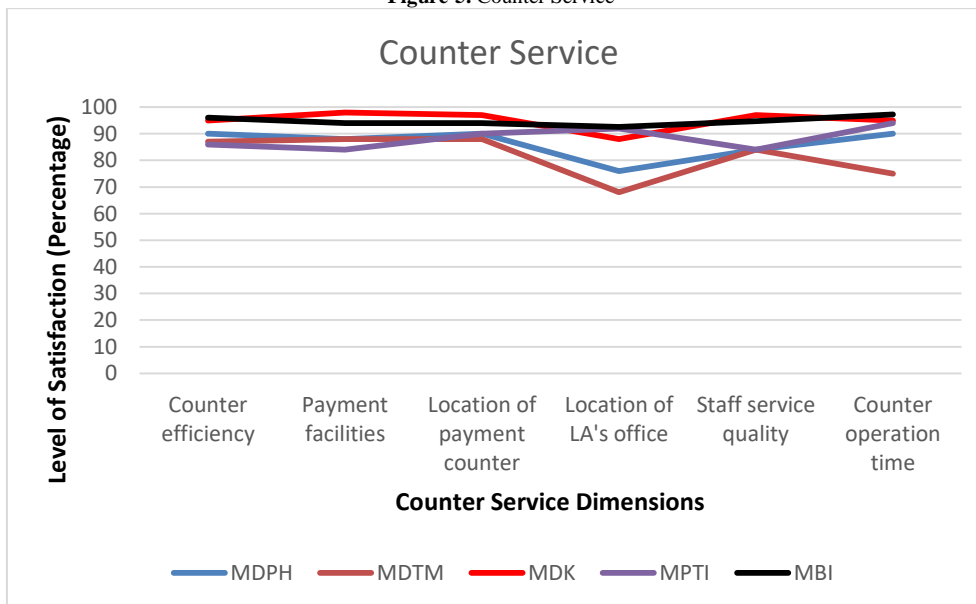
The finding demonstrates that among five items asked on waste management and recycling to customers in five local governments, local government 1’ customers are the least satisfied with the location, timetable and recycle bin. Meanwhile, all other local governments also score low satisfaction level in availability of recycle bin in their areas. Therefore, the study highlight the immediate actions should to take on provide recycling bin. For example, try to make engagement with corporate companies on corporate social responsibilities (CSR) to get sponsored on recycling bin, educate the citizen on recycling matter. Many countries such as Indonesia has design a law for companies to provide donation through CSR law in order to increase basic facilities and wellbeing for local residents.

Figure-4. Town Planning



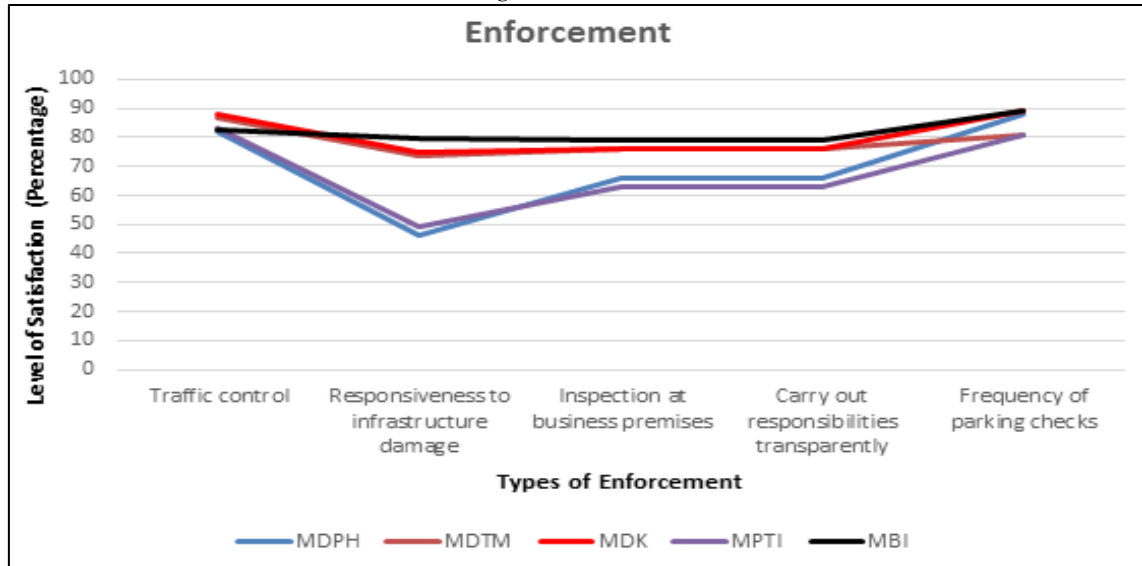
The respondents in the study are given a feedback that local government 1 (MPTI) score the lowest satisfaction for town planning. The respondents feel less satisfied with well planned development as it scores below than 60% satisfaction. In particular, for signboard position, local government 1 score only 68% level of satisfaction compare to other local governments with more than 80%. Although, nowadays people are family with latest technology that can help them to find specific location very fast. However, in order to attract people to visit and part of the promotion efforts on interesting place at that area still signboard play major role in this particular scenario. Thus, the suggestion for this local government 1 is to provide more signboards as this area also have such interesting place and monument to visit but lack of signboard around that area. Add more signboard especially few kilometers before reaching one particular place.

Figure-5. Counter Service



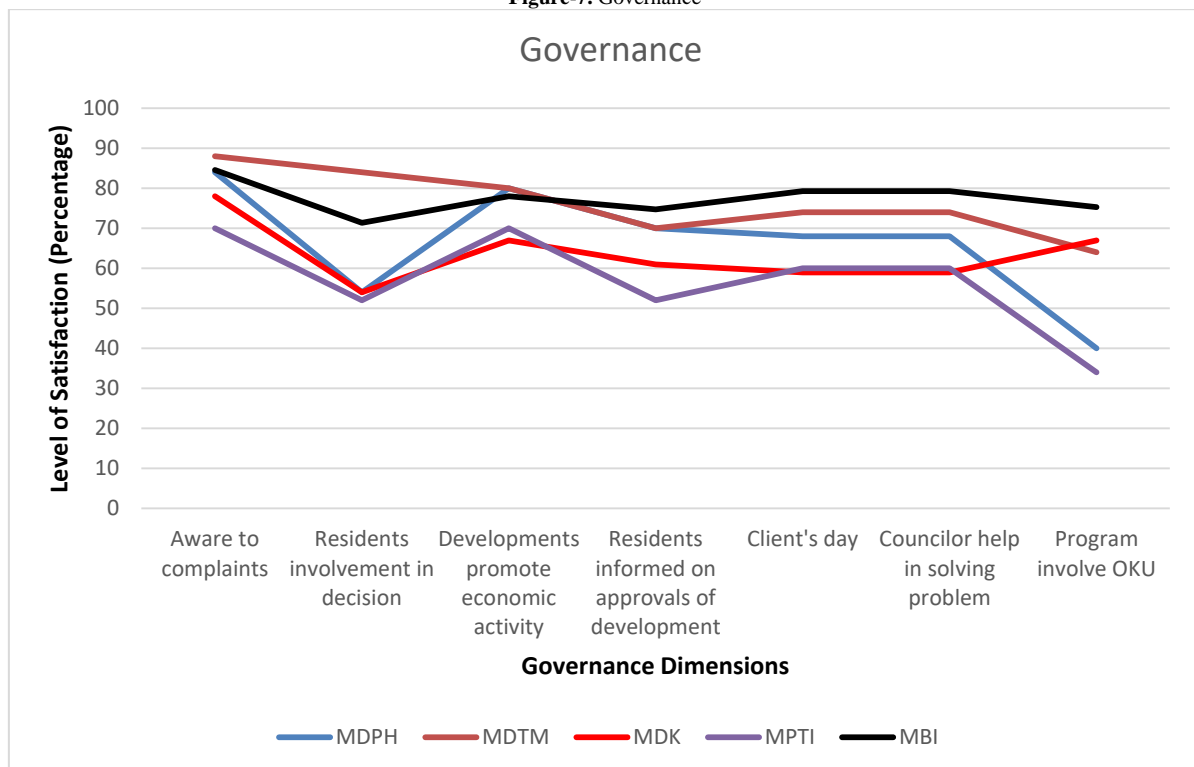
The findings of the study indicate majority of the customers in each local government are feel satisfied with counter efficiency and facilities. It means that, public services reforms have been launched by government especially on giving best services to customers and meet the client charters principle are meet by counter services provided in the local governments. However, still there are local government 2 (MDTM) and local government 3 (MDPH) customers score among the least satisfied on the location of the local governments office. The issue of local government office locates separate from other agencies maybe the land reserved is belongs to private that government cannot easily pursue with their own project such as build government buildings. Therefore, local governments are suggested to improve and upgrade their online application and inquiry efficiency to ensure customer's needs are met without they have to be physically go to the local governments office.

Figure-6. Enforcement



The figure 6 reveals that local government 1 (MDPH) and local government 4 (MPTI) score the lowest satisfaction level in term of the responsiveness of their local governments to infrastructure damage. The findings indicate that society are aware about their right and really hope for the immediate acknowledgement on complaints has been made. Therefore, the study is proposing that to ensure availability of staff in each local governments to do regular checking on infrastructure at least once a month. Meanwhile, local governments officer also needs to acknowledge of receive the complaints and what will happen next.

Figure-7. Governance



The respondents in the study highlighted that are only local government 2 (MDTM) have customers more 80% feel satisfied with residents' involvement in decision making while local government 4 (MPTI), local government 3 (MDK) and local government 1 (MDPH) are among the least satisfied. More than 50% customers in local government 4 and local government 1 feel dissatisfied with disable (OKU) involvement in local government's programs. This shows that there are local governments are less emphasizing on residents' involvement. The suggestion propose by the study is all decision and program have to be posted online to ensure public aware of the decision made concerning them. Local governments are need to be more creative in improvising mediums use to engage with public.

6. Conclusion

Overall local governments in the study are demonstrate similar patterns of problems on services delivery but the degree of the problem seems different that reflect level of local government and geographical location. Despite that, each of local government have different degree of an issue mainly because of their capability in financial, human resource and limited economic development projects at that particular areas. The main problems identified are maintenance of the drainage, provision of the recycle bin, cleanliness of public toilets and availability of disability (OKU) facilities. In this regards, local governments must creatively structure or restructure their revenues and expenditures to be in line with current needs especially in taxation rate, types of expenditure and rightsizing of the local government. However, most of the local government in the study is demonstrate effective service delivery especially in the core functions of their existence. The weaknesses of the delivery system in local government in Malaysia is governance issues. This relate to public participation or resident involvement in decision making of local government. Therefore, for future research may be can examine further service delivery in rural and urban state, then it can help government to identify specific mechanism in helping less performance of service delivery in local governments.

Acknowledgement:

The Research Grant Funded By Institut Darul Ridzuan (IDR) Perak (S/O code: 13692)

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