Measuring the governance of local government from the perspective of community in Malaysia

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Abstract

Questions of community participation have raising recently as a government perceived that community should cooperate with local government to bridge the demands from society and government. This is because the goals of sustainable development emphasise on the bottom-up approach behind traditional approaches that are just top-down. In this context, the local government at grassroot level is responsible for the welfare and well-being of the community through quality services. Thus, this study was design to measure community perception on local government governance. This quantitative design study involved 7 local governments in Malaysia. This study discusses the findings of the community perception survey (n = 831) on the quality of local government governance in carrying out responsibilities to the community. Six variables have been set for this study in determining the effectiveness of local government in Malaysia in the context of governance including the quality of staff work, community programs, services, infrastruture provided, council member accountability to the community and local government governance today. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that today local government governance in Malaysia from the community perspective is at moderate level. Financial issues are the main factors that cause people to receive the modest service quality of their view. Hence, efforts to improve the quality of local government governance must be continued through collaboration effort between the federal, state and local governments.

Keywords: Governance; Local Government; Local Community; Malaysia

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1. Introduction

The complexity of issues surrounding the life of the world community today requires a process of planning and implementation of development programs in line with the goals of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a global initiative to ensure a sustainable community life. It requires the commitment of various stakeholders involved in the process of development. Sustainable development has a good balance between economic activities that generate economic growth, improving the social infrastructure and human capital required to improve the quality of life of the community (Hadi et al., 2008) as well as a win-win strategy that reduces poverty and conservation of the environment (Siwar, 2001).

Sustainable development planning uses distinctive methods rather than traditional methods to balance economic, community and environmental factors in the design of development and service strategies, involving the full interest groups, especially consumers in the development of service strategies that meet their needs and establish a continuous service strategy by focusing on the basis of problems and take into account long-term obstacles and trends (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, 1996). One of the dimensions that should be emphasised in this endeavor is the government's governance. A more dynamic governance is necessary to enable all stakeholders to provide their respective roles and responsibilities (Hadi et al., 2008).

The local governments of Malaysia face the challenges to embark upon sustainable development's issues (Chung and Lo, 2007; Mohamed et al., 2014). In recent years increasingly seen in the demand for better services are in the rise. Chung and Lo, (2007) stressed that the local government is often perceived as an institution that provides services to its local communities; Horne and Hayles, (2008) supported where the responsibilities of the local government seen in exercising great influence over the social and economic well-being of local communities (Mohamed et al., 2014). This indicates where a local community is served by a government that is local and near to the community.

In the context of the Malaysian community, the closest government is the local government. The government is also a well-informed and knowledgeable part of the local socio-economic, geographic and cultural aspects of their respective areas. These factors make it an advantage to them to act and to interact better with the community. Today's community is also increasingly sensitive in demanding the right to achieve the quality of life they want in line with the progress of modernity. As taxpayer, community hope that their demand, particularly on public services and infrastructural will be heard and responded by the government. However, in Malaysia the local governments' effort towards achieving better performance in community development is hampered by the country's growing population that possibly will cause a set of issues (Vadeveloo and Singaravelloo, 2013). Vadeveloo and Singaravelloo (2013, p.55) further asserts the '*growing population would demands higher expenditure for education, housing, food and health.*'

In other words, community involvement in the planning and development process is one of the important aspects of the advanced society today. Being one of the closest government to the public, local government has to identify strategies and possibilities to fulfil the demands towards helping the government to attain sustainable economic growth (Vadeveloo and Singaravelloo, 2013). This is because the general public knows more about their residential area than what is happening in other areas. This is because local area

development will have a direct impact on them (Zan, 2012). Therefore, it is vital to be aware and address key issues if the local government could not afford to fulfil all the demands, as this would arise with much more difficulties in getting public involvement and participation in community development.

Hence, this article discusses on the current governance of local governments according to community perceptions that examines on dimension of general perspectives on the quality of staff work, community programs, services, infrastructure provided, council member accountability of the community and local government governance nowadays.

2. Literature review: Governance local government

In order to achieve the required form of development, key actors are played by the local government because of their large responsibilities in the development process at the local level will further ensure the success of sustainable development at regional, national and global levels. To take on this challenge, local governments must be able to provide the necessary services effectively. Efficient, effective, proactive and responsive service machinery to current demands can meet the needs of today's diverse society. For that purpose, local government governance should be effective which includes several matters relating to community relationships, the quality of staff work and human resources, the quality of services provided, the effective enforcement and the accountability aspects.

Kardos (2012, p.1168) illustrated "*to shape the type of government that is a prerequisite for, and probably also a product of, steps towards sustainable development*" is known as integrating good governance with sustainable development. Kardos (2012, p.1168) further explained that the traditional models of governance are not well equipped to carry out the development syntheses required by sustainable development "*given the increasingly complex nature and global breadth of today's sustainability challenges*". This emphasised that the responsibility of governance in promoting development that leads to sustainable, be it local or otherwise has to cope with the earlier identified struggle at the individual level (making those who governs capable enough to face the challenge) and at the societal level (extending the action capacity outwards)(Bello and Dola, 2014).

In the context of local government relations with the community, the development of global democratic practices has led to further public involvement in the development process (Dietz and Stern, 2008). The increase in public involvement will also improve the transparency, effectiveness and accountability of the government in the decision-making process and will ultimately assist the objective of sustainable development (Irwin, 2002) and is to create a situation of power over the people (Arnstein, 1969).

Public participation is an important process in order for a development that is being implemented to meet the needs and wants of the people they want. This can be done through good communication and communication between the authorities and the public. Public participation in planning statistics will produce a healthy and balanced cycle of processes between policy makers and target groups to create better quality of life (Ngah, 2005). Public voices are important in providing useful inputs to planners and implementers in the development process as they better understand the benefits and impacts that will come from a decision on development. People's voices, suggestions, support and protests in the development

planning process prove that this is happening. The existing co-operation with administrators, non-governmental organizations as well as private parties is an important link in development. Rogers et al. (2008) states that public participation is one of the major factors affecting the success of sustainable development.

Particularly in Malaysia, public are having cohesive relationships that promotes the willingness to participate and involve in community development within the system established by local government. Communities in Malaysia have strong support and sense of commitment in all the initiatives carried out by local government to cultivate better local democracy by building a strong community development. The local government has to demonstrate positive working ethics towards working effectively with community may be considered to be a better path in the policy formulations and greater acceptance.

Certain channels can be used as a more comprehensive participation platform from the public. It includes meetings for formal and informal face-to-face discussions such as meetings, advisory counters, day-to-day meetings and more. Additionally, the advancement of today's information technology and social media enables the two-way relationship between the public and the local government more easily. Electronic participation (e-participation) can occur through computer applications, tablets and mobile phones such as websites, facebook, twitter and the like. The Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government also launched a mobile complaint application, Cakna, to enable the public to respond quickly and easily.

In addition, effective local government governance is also supported by the quality of staff work and its human resources. The serious attention given to the aspect of human resource development is in line with human resource management philosophy that human resources are assets rather than burden on the organisation. Among the key programs in human resource development is training. Training programs for civil servants include various aspects of the training, such as training to improve the professionalism of civil servants, training in information technology, language training, training on Public Administration Development Circular and attachment training in private companies (Hamid, 1996).

Professionalism, the level of competence, accountability and responsibility is an important thing to be entrenched to employees and is closely linked to loyalty and commitment and positive behavior. Professionalism is an important element in mobilising the management of public and private sector services in Malaysia (Al-Qudsy et al., 2009). This is because professionalism has characteristic of excellent work culture that is high commitment and always willing to carry out the task; Responsible and persistent in every job done within the prescribed time period while ensuring quality; Have the skills, the wisdom and the ability to carry out the task entrusted; Integrity in terms of objective, unbiased and unassigned; And has creative, innovative, motivated, cultured and accountability (Al-Qudsy, 2008).

Service quality is based on three aspects; i. Civil servants are able to provide customers with a full service, timely and sensitive to the will of the people; ii. The quality of the process in which the provision of services is well-regulated and the rules used must be reasonable, efficient and not burdensome; iii. The quality of manpower that the civil servants themselves should be knowledgeable and competent in their respective fields as well as having high professionalism (Andersen et al., 2012).

Quality management encompasses excellent, comprehensive, continuous, customer-oriented management systems and maximises the use of human resources within an organisation including local authorities (Yaacob, 2008). In general, excellent practices and management can help organisations have the advantage of competing in quality and meet customer satisfaction (Gotzami and Tsiotras, 2002), international images (Vincent and Kleiner, 2001), and improve the performance of an organisation (Andersenet al., 2012).

Another important concept in governance is accountability. This aspect is important before, during and after the authorities process their services to the public (Ackerman, 2004). Accountability is defined as the openness, transparency, information, and the required responsibilities by providing explanations of actions or decisions taken. Executing officers are responsible for complying with the law and not abusing the power and serving the public interest in an efficient, effective and fair manner (Malena et al., 2004).

In the context of administration, accountability is directly related to compliance with rules, regulations and procedures. Downe, Cowell, and Morgan (2016) emphasised the public's response to ethical and ethical local politicians and officials, namely, good, fair and moral. It is also a variable that coincides with the concept of justice, responsiveness and leadership because accountability is the essence of good governance (Ayittey, 1976; Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000; Cunningham and Harris, 2001). Bovens (2010) describes the concept of significant accountability in bilateral relations between implementers and recipients that relate to their integrity and mechanisms. In the context of local government and public relations, this is very important because the recipient or the public wants all the services provided to them are at the best level as a result of the integrity and effectiveness of governance. It is therefore the duty of the authorities to consider or be responsible for all their actions.

3. Method

This study is a quantitative research using questionnaires as a medium of gathering information. The population consisted of a community who are dealing with seven local authorities in Malaysia using random sampling method. A total of of 813 respondents were captured in this study. The citizens were selected randomly around the area at City Council, in which every person of the population has a chance of being selected.

Table 1. Total of Respondent

State	Frequencies
Johor	149
Perak	149
Melaka	153
Kelantan	145
Negeri Sembilan	42
Terengganu	149
Selangor	26
Total	813

The respondents of this study represent the whole area of Malaysia divided by 4 zones consist of north part is represented by Perak, east part by Kelantan and Terengganu, west part by Negeri Sembilan and south

part by Johor and Melaka. By selected respondents from these 4 zones were indicated that this study considered include views entire citizens in Malaysia.

The questions for the questionnaire were built from the study conducted by Wang and Wart (2007). The questionnaire for citizens are categorized into Parts A, B, C, D, E, F and G which contains of 47 items, covering seven (7) main part namely, demography, general perspective, program, services, infrastructure, governance and councillor. For the part A is demography instruments (6 items) consist of as gender, religion, race, academic level, age and position for community (any adhoc committee). Second part on general perspective (5 items) is related to community perception on concept of serving people whether they satisfied with the current service given by the staff and councillor in the city council. Third part is related to program (9 items) and the questions aims to know either development projects and infrastructure by City Council fulfil the needs of community, either City Council is successful or not, development of information and communications technology (ICT) facilities such as internet services and social networking sites make community easy to complaint and either City Council can be an agent of economic and social development.

Part D is related to services (8 items) to cover question about the maintenance of drainage, the waste collection system follow the collection schedule, effectiveness of counter service provided by local authority, effectiveness in solving the problems faced by the community, efficiency in service delivery, either officers often check the condition of infrastructure and either client satisfied with the service provided by City Council. Part E is on infrastructure (7 items) about basic infrastructure and facilities provided by local authority and about their responsibility for the infrastructure. The responsibility include monitoring the infrastructure provided, action taken by local authority if have any complaints from community related to infrastructure damage and the maintenance of the infrastructure.

Questions in part F is on councillors used 5 items to measures whether councillors are doing a good job within their duties and citizen were asked about the involvement of councilors to the communities. Last part is on governance (7 items) to measures the effectiveness, participation, accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, rule of law and accountability in local government.

For the purpose of obtaining data on the effectiveness of local government based on the dimensions of the present general perspectives, the implementation of programs, services, infrastructure and councilors, the unit of analysis used is based on the perception of communities. As a macro study, the data obtained were analysed in aggregate for the overall public perception of the causes and factors that influence. Data processing is performed by a computer using the Statistical Package for the Social Science or SPSS version 20.0 and presentation of the findings based on the frequency, percent and mean.

4. Result and discussion

Table 2 show demographic characteristics by 813 citizen. The result of the demographic study on community shows that the percentage of male community is greater than the female or 52.6% (n=428) as compared to 47.4% (n=385). It indicates in this study male community more involved compared with female community.

In this study, respondents were divided into four (4) religions namely Islam, Hindu, Buddha and Christian. However, based on Table 2 it is found that Islam recorded the highest number which representing 33.9% (n=276) followed by Hindu 29.8% (n=242), Christian 27.9% (n=227) and Buddha 8.4% (n=68). In term of race, respondents were divided into four (4) races namely Malay, Indian, Chinese, and Others. Of the total citizen, majority is Indian which representing 34.6% (n=281), 33.9% (n=276) representing Malay, 18.7% (n=152) representing Chinese, and 12.8% (n=104) representing others. This result shows Indian community always deal with city council compared with other races. Next, levels of education held by the respondents are categorized into five (5) levels which are SPM, Diploma, Bachelor Degree, Master Degree and PhD. In term of education level, results shows that citizen who have Diploma recorded the highest number compared to other levels, which representing 44.2% (n=359). A total of 34.6% (n=281) had SPM, 13.2% (n=107) had Bachelor Degree, 6.8% (n55) had Master Degree whilst another 1.4% (n=11) possessed a PhD.

In term of aged, respondents are categorized into four (4) age groups which range from 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old and more than 50 years old. Majority of the clients' age are 20-29 years old which representing 46.6% (n=379), followed by 25.3% (n=206) under group of 30-39 years old, 23.0% (n=187) under group of 40-49 and 5.0% (n=41) under group of more than 50 years old.

Table 2. Community Profile

Category	Demographic	F	%
Gender	Male	428	52.6
	Female	385	47.4
Religion	Islam	276	33.9
	Buddha	68	8.4
	Hindu	242	29.8
	Christian	227	27.9
Race	Malay	276	33.9
	Chinese	152	18.7
	Indian	281	34.6
	Others	104	12.8
Education levels	SPM	281	34.6
	Diploma	359	44.2
	Degree	107	13.2
	Master	55	6.8
	PhD	11	1.4
Position	Management and Professional	420	51.7
	Support Group I	116	14.3
	Support Group II	121	14.9
	Self-employed	112	13.8
	Retiree	13	1.6
	Unemployed	31	3.8
Age	20-29 years	379	46.6
	30-39 years	206	25.3
	40-49 years	187	23.0
	50 years and above	41	5.0

In this study, descriptive statistic that includes means score were used. Each question except the personal information was measured using a Likert scale of four (4) points, in which '1' represents "Strongly Disagree" '2' represents "Disagree" '3' represents "Agree" '4' represents "Strongly Agree". Analysis for this part use the ranges of four (4) point Likert scales were categorised into equal sized, namely low, moderate and high. Re-coding portion starts from the smallest value obtained from the respondents, the first and largest value is 4. In equation form: Range = highest score - Lowest Score. The range for each interval is: 4-1 / 3 = 1.00. This means that, for this part of each interval should contain the 1:00 range. Table 1 show the scores that were classified according to a predetermined level.

Table 3. Mean Score For Each Level Variables

Score	Level
1.00 to 2.00	low
2.01 to 3.00	moderate
3.01 to 4.00	high

Table 4. Community Perceptions Against Local Government Governance in Malaysia

Variable	Level	N	%	Mean
Work Quality	Low	112	13.8	2.77
	Moderate	482	59.3	
	High	219	26.9	
Program	Low	42	5.2	2.81
	Moderate	543	66.8	
	High	228	28.0	
Services	Low	116	14.3	2.63
	Moderate	536	65.9	
	High	161	19.8	
Infrastructure	Low	53	6.5	2.83
	Moderate	516	63.5	
	High	244	30.0	
Counsilor	Low	67	8.2	2.94
	Moderate	453	55.7	
	High	292	35.1	
Governance	Low	80	9.8	2.70
	Moderate	563	69.2	
	High	169	20.0	

Table 4 shows the findings on public perceptions of the variables studied. These variables generally reflect the public's perception of local government governance. Overall, researchers found that the majority of

community perceptions for each variable were moderate between 55 percent to 69 percent. Only about 19 to 30 percent of respondents are of the opinion of quality, community relations, service, enforcement and accountability are high and the remaining of the respondeds considered that local government administrative governance rates are currently at a low level of about 5 to 13 percent.

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that today's local government governance in Malaysia from the community perspective is at moderate level. However, there are some people who believe that the current local government's governance in Malaysia is at a high level and vice versa.

5. Conclusion

The goal of good governance is the foundation of today's development has always been to demand the well-being of the public to be preserved continuously from one generation to the next. This means that the welfare and well-being of the community must be at the central focus of the government through effective governance. The study concludes that although the local government strives to provide the best service to the community, there are challenges and obstacles that can be inhibit the services. In understanding the current local government situation in Malaysia, financial issues are the major factors that cause the public to receive the modest service quality of their spectacles. This issue has been widely discussed and has always been the concern of local authorities in providing the best service. Hence, efforts to improve the quality of local government governance must be continued through close links between the federal, state and local governments. This close cooperation will improve if there is a relationship with other stakeholders such as the private sector, community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A close collaboration between stakeholders has definitely been able to find solutions to existing issues in order to meet their expectations.

Acknowledgement

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