PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: INITIAL FINDINGS

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Abstract *: There is a growing consensus to view the gap between the service provider and service recipients over the standard of public service delivery by local government authorities (LGAs). In Malaysia, comparing the perception of these two parties is crucial as the government aspires to develop a meaningful mechanism aiming at improving LGAs accountability and performance. The objective of this paper is to identify the perception gap between the service provider and service recipients of the standard of LGAs service delivery. The perception of both parties was measured based on their satisfaction on service delivery provided by LGAs. In total, 347 service recipients (the public) and 105 service providers (the LGAs' staffs) in three selected LGAs in Kedah have participated in this survey. The findings of this study indicated that there are gaps in perception between the community respondents and the LGAs staff with regards to the delivery of services provided by LGAs. This study contributes to the initial understanding of expectation differences in local service delivery between the service provider and service recipients.*

Keywords*: Public Service Delivery, Local Government (LG), Local Government Authorities (LGAs), Local Government Staff, Public, Perception.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental raison d'être of local governments is the delivery of services to its people. The concept of public service delivery varies in the context of space, time, and level of government across nations. Within the context of local government, public service delivery is regarded as a mechanism or platform through which various types of public services such as sewage and trash disposal, street cleaning, public education, and health services, security, licensing, defense, water, street lighting, electricity or any types of public essential are delivered to the public (Humphreys, 1998; IGI Global Publisher, 2020). Types of services delivered by different levels of governments are different, subject to the constitution, rules, and regulations of a country. In Malaysia services that fall under the jurisdiction of local government include (i) housing and town planning, (ii) transport (roads, transport, urban roads, and rails & ports), (iii) environment and public sanitation (refuse collection and disposal, cemeteries and crematoria, slaughterhouses, environmental protection); (iv) culture, leisure and sports (theater, parks and open spaces, sports and leisure, religious facilities). All public services are operated, delivered, and governed by a body called local government authorities (LGAs).

LGAs are working hard to provide better service despite facing constant challenges, including financial, technical capacity, and lack of staff, and other constraints related to law and regulations (Yusup, Ishak, Arshad & Abdullah, 2016; Chen, Li & Wang, 2010; Phang, 2008). These challenges impacted the standard of delivery services provided by LGAs. However, these situations are not really understood by the public, who continue to demand better services. Derived from this, the gap of perceptions between the public and service providers about the standard of service delivery is emerging. This situation is described as a gap in perception (Phang, 2008). In detail, Phang (2008) elaborates, 'the government appears to be anxious to bridge the perception gap between the demands coming from the community and what local authorities are currently delivering'. In the long term, this gap will affect LGAs' institutional performance.

Past research in local government service delivery was focusing on LGA's performance in general (see Chen, Li, & Wang; 2010; Abdul Manaf, Mad Zan & Sakthi Ananthan, 2017; Abdul Manaf & Sakthi Ananthan; Jusoh & Ahmad, 2009; Abdul Manaf, Mohamed, & Lawton, 2016). Least was discussed about the perception gap between the service provider and service recipients. To address the dearth of this issue, there are calls to carry out research to understand the expectation differences between these two groups (Mmutle, & Shonhe, 2017; Ramseook-Munhurrun & Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010). The government of Malaysia also shows its commitment to this issue by outlining their effort and plan to improve the LGA's performance in service delivery in the 11th Malaysian Plan (2016-2020) (Prime Minister Office, 2020). The effort was started through the planning of a ranking system for LGAs, which takes into consideration community and LGAs perception of public service delivered by the agency (Malaysia Economic Planning Unit, 2015, pg. 22-23). This ranking system helps the government to identify realistic performance among LGAs and to show the real issues happening in the LGAs setting. Therefore, this study aims to identify the perception of local government service delivery. The main focus is to investigate whether public expectations align with staff perceptions.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MALAYSIA

Local government in Malaysia is a type of government that existed within the Malaysian federalism framework. The local government is placed as the third or the lowest level of government after the federal and the state government. The items four and five of the Ninth Schedule of the Federal Constitution specifies that local governments other than those in the Federal Territories (Kuala Lumpur, Labuan, and Putrajaya) are placed directly under the state government jurisdiction (Penang Institute, 2014). Yet, in certain areas and circumstances, the operation of local government is subjected to the federal government (Phang, 2008).

2.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES (LGAs)

Local government authorities (LGAs) are the bodies, or authorities, or the administrative agency that are granted legal authority to govern and to deliver public service on behalf of the local government (INTAN, 2006; MAMPU, 2013). According to the Local Government Department (*Jabatan Kerajaan Tempatan*) - a department under the Malaysia Ministry of Housing and Local Government, LGA in Malaysia is interpreted based on the following laws:

1. Section 2 Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) of the Act provides that "local authority" means any City Council, Municipal Council or District Council, as the case may be, and in relation to the Federal Territory means the commissioner of the City of Kuala Lumpur appointed under Section 3 of the Federal Capital Act 1960,
2. Local Government Ordinance 1961 (Sarawak No. 11 of 1996) - Local Government in Sarawak "Local Authority" means:
   - a City Administration named in Part I of the First Schedule
   - a Municipal Council named in Part II of the First Schedule
   - a District Council named in Part III of the First Schedule

   **Bintulu Development Authority (BDA) is also included in the above-mentioned sub-section(b).

3. Local Authorities Ordinance 1996 (Chapter 20) - Local Government in Sabah "Authority" means any District Council, Town Board or Municipal Council established under the provisions of Section 3.

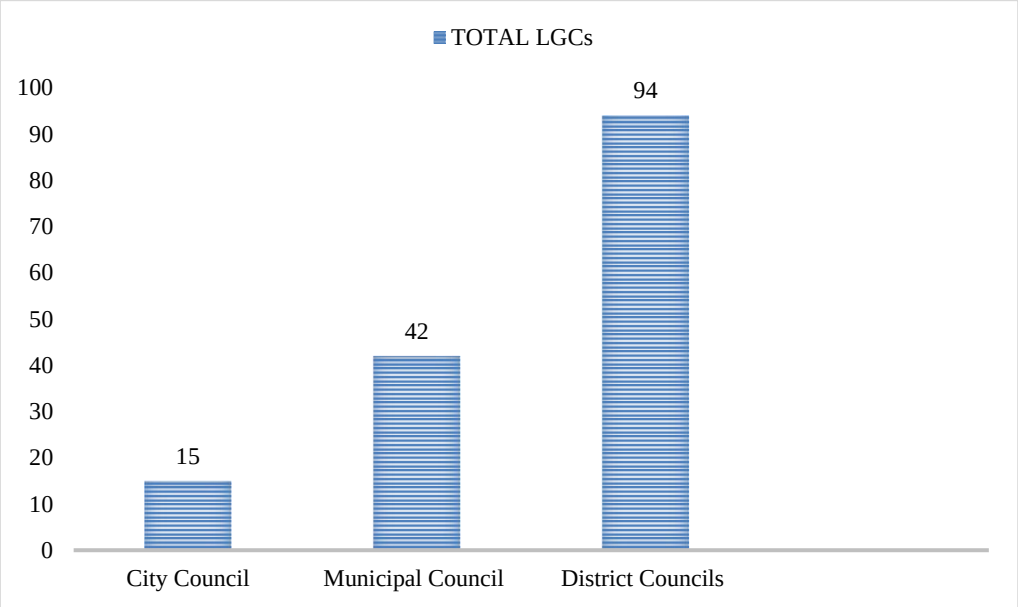


Figure 1. Type of LGAs in Malaysia
Source: Malaysia Local Government Department (2020)

Based on the Malaysia Local Government Department (2020) record, there are 151 LGAs operate in Malaysia, as shown in Figure 1. Despite these LGAs, there are also four authorities given LGAs status known as the Modified LGAs. The four LGAs are Taman Perindustrian Hi-Tech Kulim, Lembaga Pembangunan Tioman, Perbadanan Putrajaya, and Perbadanan Labuan.

3. KEDAH LGAS AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Officially, the Kedah state has 11 LGAs. One LGA is granted with the city council status while four LGAs with municipal status and other LGAs operate as district councils. In addition to that, there is a public agency, Kulim Hi-Technology is granted with municipal council status. So, in total, there are 12 LGAs in Kedah.

1. Majlis Bandaraya Alor Setar (MBAS)
2. Majlis Perbandaran Sungai PetanI (MPSP)
3. Majlis Perbandaran Langkawi Bandaraya Pelancongan (MPLBP)
4. Majlis Perbandaran KuliM (MPK)
5. Majlis Perbandaran Kubang Pasu (MPKP)
6. Majlis Daerah Baling (MDB)
7. Majlis Daerah Pendang (MDP)
8. Majlis Daerah Padang Terap (MDPT)
9. Majlis Daerah Sik (MDS)
10. Majlis Daerah Bandar Baharu (MDBB)
11. Majlis Daerah Yan (MDY)
12. PBT Taman Perindustrian Hi-Tech Kulim (KULIM HITECH)

The Kedah state government has taken serious effort in ensuring a high standard of public service delivery. This is reflected by a number of policy documents published by the government, including the Kedah State Structure Plan (2002-2020), Kedah Darul Aman State Secretary's Office Strategic Plan (2019-2023), and the Draft of Local Plan 2035 (for Kubang Pasu and Kulim district). These

documents emphasized the roles of LGAs in delivering high-quality public services. These can be seen through the engagement of Kedah LGAs in a various number of public service transformation agenda. Among the engagements is digitalization of services (such as e-licensing and other service digitalized), performance rating system (such as the star rating system and Malaysian Urban-Rural National Indicators Network on Sustainable Development (MURNInets), service privatization, installation of governance and accountability measures, and public and NGOs participation.
Such efforts have significant results in improving LGA's service delivery in Kedah. For instance, Table 1 shows star rating results for Malaysia's LGAs. The results show that the Kedah LGAs were given a good rating for their performance.

Table 1 2017 and 2018 LGAs Star Rating Results by State

STATES	NMBER OF LGAs	STAR RATING									
		5		4		3		2		1	
		2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018
Johor	15	9	11	5	3	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kedah	**11**	**2**	**5**	**6**	**6**	**3**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Kelantan	12	1	2	2	7	6	3	3	0	0	0
Melaka	4	1	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Negeri Sembilan	8	3	5	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Pahang	11	2	7	8	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
Perak	15	8	11	5	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
Perlis	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pulau Pinang	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sabah*	24	1	1	8	8	7	7	4	4	4	4
Sarawak*	26	5	5	9	9	12	12	0	0	0	0
Selangor	12	10	12	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Terengganu	7	1	3	2	4	2	0	2	0	0	0
Wilayah Persekutuan	3	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	**151**	**47**	**71**	**55**	**48**	**36**	**24**	**9**	**4**	**4**	**4**

Source: Kementerian Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan (2019)
Notes: 5 Stars (score 90-100); 4 Stars (score 75-89); 3 Stars (score 60-74); 2 Stars (score 46-59); 1 Stars (score 45 and below)

Despite this achievement, Kedah LGAs are still grappling with various public service issues. The capability of LGAs in enforcing rules and regulations, managing diverse services related to digitalization service (ie e-licensing), drainage, poverty, transportation, housing, landscape, youth agenda, pollution, waste management, business premises, parking space, and sewerage are being questioned by the public (Laporan Pemerhatian Audit Bilangan 10/2016 MBAS, 2016; Jabatan Perancangan Bandar & Desa, Kedah, 2019). Also, the public perceives that LGAs provide an irrelevant and slow response in resolving those issues (Laporan Pemerhatian Audit Bilangan 10/2016 MBAS, 2016).

LGAs are aware of the problems and issues faced by the public. However, limitations in financial, staff, technical experts, and procedural issues become a constrain in providing prompt responses to the public (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar & Desa Kedah, 2019). Anwar Shah (2005) reveals that in delivering services to the public, LGAs are often facing conflicting situations. In

delivering public services, LGAs not only have to cater to demand from the public side, but they also have to deal with limited funding as well as organizational and political interference.

Such situations resulted in the differing perception of public service delivery between the public and the LGAs' staff (Phang, 2008). Proper actions should be taken to minimize differences in perceptions. If not, the public may receive services that below their expectations, and this will lead to continuous frustration among them. While, the LGAs will receive constant criticism, which may affect their institutional performance.

4. METHOD

In capturing the perceptions of public and staff, the researchers conducted surveys in three different types of LGAs, namely city hall, municipality and district council, using two different sets of questionnaires adopted from Abdul Manaf, Md. Zan and Sakthi Ananthan (2018).

Respondents were asked to state their perceptions on several public services (shown in Table 2) delivered by the LGAs. However, the public was required to state their perception as service recipients whilst the LGAs' staff were given their perceptions as a service provider. The questionnaire between service these two groups were differentiated by two components, namely public participation, and human resource, as indicated in Table 2.

Questionnaires were randomly distributed to the public and to the staff who work at the selected LGAs. In total, 347 public and 105 LGAs staff have answered the questionnaires.

Table 2 Category of Public Services in the Questionnaires.

NO	PUBLIC	STAFF
1	Counter Service	Counter Service
2	Waste Management & 3R	Waste Management & 3R
3	Town Planning	Town Planning
4	Maintenance of Facilities	Maintenance of Facilities
5	Information Management	Information Management
6	Enforcement	Enforcement
7	Governance	Governance
8	Public Facilities	Public Facilities
9	Licensing	Licensing
10	Public Participation	*Human Resource*

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Demographic Background of the Respondents

This section displays the results and discusses the study.

Table 3 Demography of the Community.

No	Demography		Frequency & Percentage (%)			
			PUBLIC		STAFF	
	Total of Respondent		347		105	
DEMOGRAPHIC CRITERIA			FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Gender	Male	205	59.1	54	51.4
		Female	138	39.8	48	45.7
		Missing	4	1.2	3	2.9
2	Age	below 20 years old	3	0.9		-
		21 - 30 years old	7	20.5	23	21.9
		31 - 40 years old	79	22.8	42	40.0

		41 - 50 years old	99	28.5	27	25.7
		51 - 60 years old	56	16.1	4	3.8
		61 - 70 years old	19	5.5		
		Above 71 years old	2	0.6		
		Missing	18	5.2	8	8.6
3	Level of Education	Primary School	3	0.9	-	0
		Secondary School	221	63.7	30	28.6
		Higher Education	120	34.6	64	62
		Missing	3	0.9	11	10.4
4	Frequency of Dealing with Local Authority	High	41	11.8		
		Moderate	91	26.2		
		Low	203	58.5		
		Never	7	2.0		
		Missing	5	1.4		
5	Localities of community	District Council	104	30		
		Municipal Council	177	51		
		City Council	66	19		

Table 3 provides the background of two categories of respondents, the public and the LGAs staff. Female respondents outnumbered male respondents for both categories. In terms of age, the majority of the community respondents are aged between 31- 70 years old. Seven respondents aged between 21-30 years old. Only three respondents aged below 20 years old, and two respondents aged above 71 years old. While most of the LGAs staffs aged between 31-50 years old, 23 staff could be considered as the younger staff, and fours staffs are close to the retirement age (51 to 60 years old). The educational background of the community is varied. The majority of them graduated from secondary school, 120 obtained higher degrees, and three respondents have completed their basic education at the primary level. The majority of the staff obtained higher education studies, and 30 of them completed their secondary school. 11 of the staff respondents did not provide any details on this matter. The engagement of the community respondent with their LGAs recorded different patterns of engagement. In this case, more than 50% or 203 respondents recorded to have a low engagement with their respective LGAs. 91 respondents with moderate engagement, and 41 respondents have high engagement with their LGAs. Only seven respondents said they do not have any experience in dealing with LGAs. The majority of the public residing within the municipal council territory, 30 percent of community respondents reside within the district council area, and 19 percent are residing within the city council jurisdiction.

5.2 Perception of LGAs Public Service Delivery

Public and staff perception of LGAs public service delivery is analyzed based on their satisfaction with services delivered by the LGAs. Table 4 provides an overview of the differences in perception between public and LGAs staff. On the one hand, this study found that the public and staff agree that LGA scored well for counter service, waste management, and 3R and town planning. On the other hand, this study also found that there are significant gaps in the perception of service delivery between service providers and service recipients. Among the highlighted gaps are related to the standard of services in maintenance of facilities, public participation, enforcement,

governance, and the provision of public facilities. These gaps were rated as average by the public, while the LGAs staff considered those services as well delivered. The average satisfaction of the community towards the services rendered by the three Kedah LGAs is quite similar to the research conducted by Halimah et al. (2018), Halimah et al. (2017). However, it is contradicted with the study by Mariana et al. (2014), whereby the community rated inadequate for the service delivered by LGAs in their study.

Table 4 Public and Staff Different of Perception on LGAs Public Service Delivery: Rank Order Analysis According to Overall Score Mean

PUBLIC			STAFF		
Overall Mean	**Data Score**	**Types of Public Service**		**Overall Mean**	**Data Score**
3.04	High	Counter Service	Waste Management & 3R	3.00	High
2.89	High	Waste Management & 3R	Licensing	2.98	High
2.78	High	Town Planning	Counter Service	2.93	High
2.63	Average	Maintenance of Facilities	Human Resource	2.88	High
2.57	Average	Public Participation	Town Planning	2.85	High
2.57	Average	Enforcement	Governance	2.84	High
2.54	Average	Governance	Maintenance of Facilities	2.84	High
2.40	Average	Public Facilities	Enforcement	2.78	High
1.20	Poor	Licensing	Public Facilities	2.74	High
0.73	Poor	Information Management	Information Management	2.62	Average

This research also identified an extreme gap in ICT services (such as Facebook, website, Twitter, e-license, e-Perolehan, and e-PBT) and licensing service. The overall mean recorded for both services is below 1.20. This score, however, does not indicate the real perception of the public. For the public, the services were not related to their needs. Tables 5 and 6 display the perception of the community and the LGA's staff on the two services. In terms of ICT management, out of 347 public respondents, more than 50 percent of the public felt that websites and Facebook are not related to them. While more than 70% of the public mentioned that twitter, and all of the three types of LGAs e-service are all not related to them. However, this is contradicted with LGA's perceptions. More than 50% of the LGAs staff perceive that their LGAs have done well in ICT matters.

Table 5 Public and Staff Perception on LGA's ICT Management

Platform of ICT	**Type of Respondent**	**Not related**	**Unsatisfied - Strongly unsatisfied**	**Satisfied - Strongly Satisfied**
Website	Community	184 (53%)	79 (22.8%)	84.6 (24.2%)
	Staff	4 (3.8%)	39 (29.5%)	70 (66.7%)
Facebook	Community	181 (52.2%)	75 (21.7%)	91 (26.2%)
	Staff	2 (1.9%)	24 (22.9%)	79 (75.2%)
Twitter	Community	259 (74.6%)	38 (10.5%	50 (14.4%)
	Staff	2 (1.9%)	35 (33.3%)	68 (64.8%)
E-License	Community	256 (73.8%)	54 (15.6%)	37 (10.7%)
	Staff	4 (3.8%)	40 (38.1%)	71 (58.1%)
E-Perolehan	Community	267 (76.9%)	48 (13.8%)	32 (9.2%)
	Staff	3 (2.9%)	39 (37.2%)	63 (60%)
E-PBT	Community	269 (77.5%)	47 (13.5%)	31 (8.9%)
	Staff	3 (2.9%)	43 (40.9%)	50 (56.2%)

The use of ICT for managing and conveying information is highly suggested by a number of past researches (ie Mariana et al. 2014; Osman, 2018; Dawood, Ghazali, & Samat, 2019). Nonetheless, past researches have also indicated the existence of an urban-rural digital divide whereby the use of the internet for conveying information might not be the best alternative due to poor internet connection and deep knowledge on ICT (Osman, 2018; Dawood, et al. 2019). General data derive from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2018), for instance, revealed that 70% of the Malaysian urban population has considerable access to the internet compared to only 30% of the rural population. In Kedah, the current statistic, as shown in Figure 2, shows that the majority of Kedahan or 52 percent are living in a rural area (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Kedah, 2019). These statistics highlight the possibility of the existence of an urban-rural digital gap in Kedah. A study by Dawood et al. (2019) reinforcing this assumption. In her study on the digital divide and poverty in Tanjung Dawai (rural) and Sungai Petani (urban), Kedah, Dawood (2019), and her fellow researchers found the visibility of the digital gap in those two areas. The scenarios provided suggest that LGAs must be skillful in finding sensible ways to convey messages and information to their society.

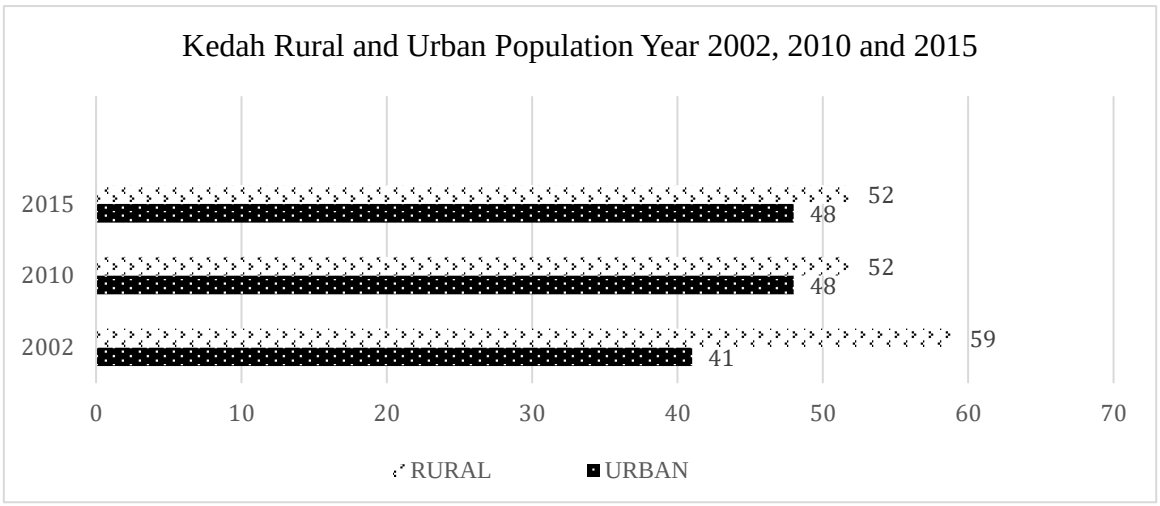


Figure 2. Total Population in Kedah for the Year 2002, 2010 and 1015
Source: Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Kedah (2019, pg. 15)

In terms of licensing, 272 or 78.4 percent of community respondents stated that the licensing service is not related to them. The possible justification for this is because the majority of the community respondents of this study were not the company air shop owner. 75 community respondents recorded their perception of this service. From 75 individuals, 21 were not dissatisfied with the service, while 54 said that they were satisfied with the LGA's licensing service. An open-ended question reveals that the community demand LGA to terminate the business license to shop owners who fail to operate their business within three months to avoid any unnecessary risk to the other shop owner and to fasten license application process

For the LGA's staff, 69 out of 105 respondents perceive that their agency has provided a better licensing service, compared to 27 who perceive that this service should be upgraded.

Table 6 Community and Staff Perception of LGA's Licensing Service

	Community		**Staff**	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Not Related	272	78.4	9	8.6
Strongly Dissatisfied	2	0.6	2	1.9
Unsatisfied	19	5.5	25	23.8
Satisfied	48	13.8	63	60.0

Strongly Satisfied	6	1.7	6	5.7

Despite the descriptive statistics, the perception of the community and LGA's staff respondents is also recorded through an open-ended question provided in the questionnaire. The following table summarises the response.

Table 7 Community and Staff Response in an Open-ended Question

	COMMUNITY	STAFF
1	Street maintenance	More financial sources
2	Waste management and 3R – waste collection at *pasar malam* and flat area, 3R educational programme and activities, more garbage bin	More competent staff
3	More and clean public toilet	Less political interference
4	Maintenance and upgrade of recreational parks for socio-economic well-being and health issue	Frequency of monitoring to solve problem face by their community
5	Moe parking space	Corporate based culture – efficiency and transparency
6	Street lights – maintenance	Appointment of staff based on qualification not based on nepotism
7	Maintenance and cleanliness of the drainage system	
8	More activities for public participation	
9	Building maintenance and cleanliness	

On the one hand, most of the concerns raised by the community respondents revolve around the maintenance and cleanliness of public facilities. Amongst the public services required further upgradations in terms of maintenance and cleanliness are streets, street lights, public toilets, waste management, drainage system. More importantly, the community also demanded more public activities, such as cultural festivals, educational activities, open day programme, and health programme. This demand indicated increases of awareness on public participation among the community. In designing activities for the community, it is essential for LGA to involve the public in the decision-making process and to ensure that the programme plan to be initiated is free from any political aspirations, instead reflect the community needs (Mariana et al. 2014; The Wolrd Bank Institute, 2009).

On the other hand, LGAs are found to be highly aware of the community problem, and the issue surrounds their institution. In this regard, the staff felt that "it is important to improve the service provided by the institution, 'get more views from the community in order to understand their problem", and "always listen to the complaints of the people, and hire qualified staff'. However, as indicated by several past studies (Halimah et al. 2018; Mariana et al. 2014) financial resources found to be one of the most crucial factors that hinder LGAs from providing a better service to the community.

6. CONCLUSION

This study discusses the difference of perception between the community respondent and the LGAs staff with regards to the services rendered by three selected LGAs in Kedah. For this study, the gap in perception between the community and the staff on the LGA's service delivery is essential for several reasons. First, past studies highlighted the gap in perception between community and staff, yet little studies were conducted to explain the gap. Second, the government in the 11th Malaysia Plan aims at developing performance indicators with more significant consideration is given on the

LGA's capability. This is an essential since the perception of the LGAs is also essential to build a fairer, and more realistic performance indicators could do justice for both public and LGAs.

In presenting the findings of the study, this paper found that the community and the staff agreed that the LGAs performed well in counter service, waste management, and town planning. Further investigation found that there are significant perception gaps in terms of maintenance of facilities, public participation, enforcement, governance, and the provision of public facilities. Further, this study also identified an extreme gap in ICT services (such as Facebook, website, Twitter, e-license, e-Perolehan, and e-PBT) and licensing service. The gap, however, contributed by the factor that those services are not related to the public.

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