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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT: EVIDENCE FROM NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how residents evaluate community development initiatives implemented by local authorities and assesses perceived effectiveness in public service delivery. Although such programs are intended to address local needs and improve living conditions, their design and implementation often rely on standardized policy models that may not reflect current community priorities. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through simple random sampling across seven local authorities in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The analysis reveals a statistically significant gap between residents' expectations and their assessment of actual service performance in community development efforts. Based on these findings, the study proposes a practical framework to assist local governments in formulating and implementing more adaptive and citizen-centered development strategies, particularly within the context of developing countries.

KEYWORD: Local Government; Community Development; Community Development Programs; Participation; Residents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local authorities and community participation remain central in enhancing local development outcomes. Recent studies highlight that government policies that align with local needs and include participatory mechanisms significantly improve the effectiveness of community development programs and empower residents, rather than imposing top-down approaches that limit sustainability and ownership of projects (Astuti & Hanina, 2025). Furthermore, evidence shows that community participation positively affects sustainable development outcomes by strengthening residents' capability to contribute to decision-making, improving social cohesion and ecological sustainability, and fostering inclusive growth (Marzo et.al, 2023). Local authorities operate as multifaceted organizations within dynamic and often unpredictable environments (Worrall et al., 1998). Within this context, a central responsibility of local government is to determine the key drivers that encourage citizen engagement in community development initiatives (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004), while simultaneously fostering the growth and sustainability of local economic institutions (Fadhil et al., 2021).

Community participation is essential for the progress of local area, as it regulates the success of a CDP runs properly (Marpaung & Damanik, 2021) and improves the potential of people to adapt to the outside impact of sustainable aid and development measures (Ochieng, Onyango & Kinari, 2020). Furthermore, policymakers, government officials, and community development experts are also required to formulate context-based strategies to encourage people's participation (Nigussie, 2020) in the implementation of community development programs. Although measurable progress has been made in promoting citizen participation and developing mechanisms to include community members in development-related decision-making (Mutanguha & Kamuhanda, 2021), local authorities continue to report limited active engagement from residents in responding to community challenges. When public expectations and meaningful participation are not adequately prioritized, the overall livability of the community may be adversely affected (Kunjuraman, 2021). Accordingly, this study also examines the expectations placed on local governments in facilitating inclusive participation within community development initiatives. From a practical perspective, the research contributes insights into how local authorities can enhance

program effectiveness not only through efficient service delivery systems but also by establishing strategic directions that support sustainable future development.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

At present the studies of Putnam (1993a; 1993b), Bourdieu (1993; 1986) and Coleman (1990), are prominently the foundation of majority of the considerations regarding social capital. Social capital is a foundation of community development (Halstead, Deller & Leyden, 2021; Caliskan & Ezilmez, 2021; Sohnrey & Hegemann, 2021). There are visible similarities in the development of social capital and community development. Robert Putnam is the person responsible for extending the concept beyond the academic genres (Jochum, 2003; Boateng & Bawole, 2021). Social capital continues to be validated as a strong predictor of community development success in contemporary contexts, where trust, networks, and shared values play a significant role in residents' engagement and outcomes of local programs (Dulkiah & Saeful 2025). Recent research in Bali tourism villages shows that robust social capital supports government initiatives, community empowerment, and local resource mobilization, reinforcing the theoretical foundation your study applies (Wolor et al., 2023). Additionally, current studies further confirm that social capital directly influences participation and community development, showing positive effects of trust and network relationships on residents' participation rates and empowerment. This study incorporates social capital theory as a key conceptual dimension in constructing the research framework. The theory has been widely utilized in prior scholarship examining communities, community development processes, and local governance structures (Mubashar Riaz Sheikh et al., 2009; Brunetto & Wharton, 2008; Silverman, 2002).

In addition, the research draws upon the SERVQUAL model as an analytical tool for assessing perceived service quality. Originally introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988) to evaluate consumers' evaluations of service performance, the model has since been extended to various public-sector contexts. Although initially associated with organizational performance and service delivery assessment, SERVQUAL is also applicable to community development settings. Given its extensive application as a framework for measuring service quality dimensions (Yong et al., 2003), it provides a relevant theoretical foundation for the present study. SERVQUAL and related service

quality frameworks remain relevant in public program evaluation. While some implementations focus on service quality in e-government and digital public services, the core idea of comparing community expectations against delivery quality as SERVQUAL emphasizes continues to provide useful insights for assessing responsiveness and satisfaction in public services (PMC, 2025).

The foundation of this study are these two theories that act as guidance to explain interdependency of variables of this research to rationalize the decision of selecting local authority effectiveness for community development measures. Moreover, the key value of this study lies within the investigation of community development programs effectiveness under the governance of the local authorities and gaps between expectations and delivery of community development programs. social capital theory (Putnam, 1993a) and SERVQUAL method (Parasuraman et al. 1988) are the basis of this study as stated previously because these theories are essential in establishing the

approaching connection among variables, namely, access to information, participation, responsiveness, and community development programs.

With a purpose of examining community development programs performance under the local authorities, this paper emphasizes on the independent variables that is effectiveness with different dimensions. Participation, access to information, community development programs and responsiveness are selected as dependent variables to understand the how people perceive the on performance of the local government regarding their undertaking of community development programs. The study investigates interrelated variables like delivery and expectations to understand the ability of fulfilling the expected outcomes of people and the extent to which the government meet the demand of people. A study model called Local Government Effectiveness Model (LGEM) is established (Fig. 1) based on the discussed theories because the purpose is to capitalize on prior theoretical observations on community development as mentioned earlier.

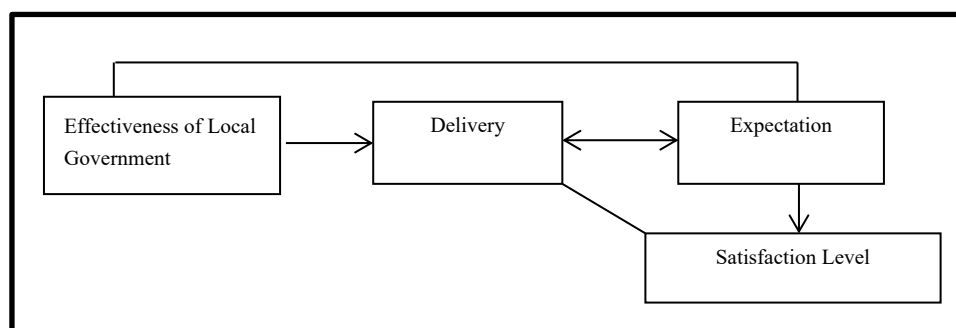


Figure 1: Local Government Effectiveness Model.

Source: Derived from study

Figure 1 presents the proposed research framework, which outlines the sequence of processes carried out by different tiers of local government officials. These processes are guided by established policies and procedural standards aimed at identifying community priorities and implementing development initiatives accordingly. The framework further emphasizes the objective of ensuring that program outcomes align with residents' expectations and satisfaction levels. Possibility of gap occurs in the space of expectation and delivery of service if the expectation exceeds the delivery resulting the government's failure in meeting people's expectation, marking it ineffective. SERVQUAL indicate to the parting of community expectations and the community development programs effectiveness. It demonstrate a higher level of effectiveness of service quality in the case of effectiveness exceeding the expectations. Common goals are ought to be set by people with reasonable expectations and common

interests. Hence, collaborative action and planning are instrumental to secure desired satisfaction level as social capital theory capitalize on harmonization of groups where members collectively share one or more factors for mutual interests.

3. METHOD

A quantitative approach guides the methodology of this study. Recent methodological studies on participatory governance highlight the importance of baseline assessments for participation metrics in local government councils, noting that while structures exist for civic involvement, the quality and substance of actual participation often vary widely by context and require comprehensive survey designs similar to what your methodology follows (Velasco, Medina-Guce & Rey, 2025). Moreover, observations of digital transformation in public services suggest that enhanced communication tools significantly affect

trust and perceived participation, indicating that survey instruments should consider modern channels of engagement as part of effectiveness evaluation (Nurlinah, Chaeroel & Chowdhury, 2025).

Data were obtained from residents across seven local authorities in Negeri Sembilan, comprising two Municipal Councils and five District Councils. The study employed a structured survey instrument to gather empirical evidence from individuals who had participated in community development initiatives. Based on sampling guidelines suggested by Sekaran (2013), 369 respondents were selected to assess the determinants influencing public satisfaction with local government performance in delivering community development programs. The questionnaire contained 64 measurement items and was administered in person to participants within the respective councils. Each survey package included a cover letter outlining the objectives and scope of the research. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 378 returns. After excluding nine incomplete responses, 369 usable questionnaires were retained for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 62 percent, exceeding the commonly recommended minimum threshold for survey research.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Contemporary analysis in public governance research continues to use gap models connecting expectations and delivery performance to assess

citizen satisfaction with public programs. For example, studies on sense of belonging and service satisfaction show that discrepancies between expectations and actual services provided by local governments strongly predict community well-being and retention, echoing your SERVQUAL-inspired findings (Marquez & Holdsworth, 2025). Additionally, research from the sustainable development domain emphasizes that active community engagement plays a critical role in improving service delivery outcomes and that negative gaps often result from insufficient participatory mechanisms or inadequate communication frameworks (Ara et. Al., 2024). The discrepancy between residents' expectations and the actual level of service provision was examined using a gap analysis approach. This technique originates from the SERVQUAL model of service quality assessment developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and has been widely adopted in prior studies to compare perceived performance with anticipated standards (Comm & Mathaisel, 2000). Rather than relying solely on the original SERVQUAL dimensions, the present study applies the underlying gap measurement principle to evaluate differences between expected and experienced service outcomes. Within this framework, a positive gap score reflects satisfaction with service delivery, whereas a negative gap suggests that performance falls short of expectations.

Table 1: Summary of t-test performed on a variable group.

Statement	Expectations		Delivery		Gap	p-value
	Mean	Std Dev.	Mean	Std Dev.		
LA performance in CDP	3.38	.839	3.32	.700	-0.06	.278
LA is there to serve	3.40	.872	3.31	.778	-0.09	.018*
Fulfill people needs	3.44	.911	3.30	.804	-0.14	.000*
Enough programs	3.49	.856	3.32	.825	-0.16	.000*
View is encouraged	3.56	.828	3.35	.863	-0.21	.000*
CDP under LA is useful	3.58	.861	3.38	.905	-0.20	.000*
Different participation	3.57	.862	3.36	.863	-0.21	.000*
CDP are effective	3.57	.915	3.34	.895	-0.23	.000*
Cooperation	3.56	.928	3.35	.875	-0.21	.000*
Residential associations	3.54	.911	3.34	.876	-0.20	.000*
Complete freedom	3.58	.937	3.39	.915	-0.19	.000*
Access to information	3.52	.958	3.37	.912	-0.15	.000*
CDP are organized often	3.56	.944	3.38	.897	-0.18	.000*
Adequate training	3.59	.913	3.42	.869	-0.17	.000*
Working together	3.61	.968	3.46	.893	-0.16	.000*
LA explains the purpose	3.39	.857	3.39	.741	-0.01	.886
Two-way communication	3.37	.875	3.35	.761	-0.01	.666
Emphasis on productivity	3.50	.921	3.41	.851	-0.10	.022*
LG monitors the work	3.48	.935	3.43	.880	-0.05	.123
Assigns group members	3.51	.972	3.43	.913	-0.08	.041*
LG doing enough on key local issues	3.53	.967	3.40	.916	-0.12	.006*
Work is well coordinated	3.55	.950	3.38	.847	-0.16	.000*
Opportunities for CD under the LA	3.56	.936	3.40	.849	-0.16	.000*
Knowledge and understanding on CD	3.64	.933	3.48	.912	-0.16	.000*
Overall mean		3.52		3.38		.000*

Note: * t-test (2-tailed Sig.), p-value < 0.05

Table 1 presents the summary of t-tests (paired sample) in a variable group for expectations and delivery. Analysis indicated a statistically significant gap between the expected and actual delivery of community development services, as the p-value was below 0.05. This discrepancy suggests that, overall, the services provided are effective, supporting the robustness of the SERVQUAL methodology. The findings further demonstrate that local councils are strongly committed to implementing well-designed community development programs, though improvements in staff competencies remain necessary. These insights were derived from respondents' evaluations of local government performance, alongside supplementary data obtained from official council reports. Respondents generally perceived that local governments were successful in executing diverse community development initiatives, thereby enhancing operational effectiveness and efficiency at the local level.

5. CONCLUSION

Recent sustainability and community development research reinforces the need for

continuous review and adaptive planning in local government programs, as changing socio-economic conditions may affect community expectations, participation rates, and service delivery effectiveness (Marzo et al., 2023). Studies also accentuate the significance of linking social capital and participatory processes to long-term sustainable development outcomes, suggesting that iterative refinement of community development programs can help ensure alignment between local expectations and program efficacy (Wolor et al., 2023).

In the context of rapid technological advancements and economic shifts, promoting improved living standards and opportunities, particularly in rural communities, has become a critical priority. To achieve this, community development programs must be continuously evaluated to ensure they align with the actual needs and priorities of residents. Persistent research and practical interventions are key to enabling communities to adapt effectively and pursue sustainable development over the long term.

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