

The Impact of Public Participation and Service Quality on the Performance of Abu Dhabi's Municipalities

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Abstract

Municipalities in Abu Dhabi are facing many hindrances in providing service quality to the public. Among the critical factor noted is poor public participation in local government decision-making process. Therefore, this study evaluates the degree of public participation in the decision-making process in local government in Abu Dhabi. The impact of public participation on the perception of service quality in local government was also examined. In addition, this study also compares the differences in the perception of service quality between customers and local government officials. The target population consisted of local management who were working as administrative officials, and customers who received the services of the local government. More than 600 questionnaires were collected from both customers and officials of over three municipalities in Abu Dhabi. To analyses the data by using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS. The results showed that the degree of decision-making participation occurred at a high level in a goal setting process. There was a significant positive impact between public participation and the perception of service quality of the local government officials. In addition, it showed that the gap in the perception of service quality was higher for the customer group compared to that of the local government officials. Moreover, this study revealed that there were significant differences in customers' perception of service quality between the types of municipality and the locations of the municipality. As such, in order to increase service quality, it is recommended for all types of municipalities to increase efforts to enhance public participation in their decision-making process.

Keywords: *Public Participation, Service Quality, Abu Dhabi, Public Sector.*

Introduction

In many developing countries, including Abu Dhabi, the public organization is poorly managed and lacks the ability to provide quality public services. In addition, it cannot meet customers' satisfaction because of the weak motivation for government officials to deliver services efficiently (OECD, 2014). While the public sector has been confronted by many external factors, for example, changes in the economic, social and political systems, and also changes in information and communication technology, the government has focused on a basic theme about governance which emphasizes the roles and responsibilities of the public service to respond to citizens or customers' needs. According to Paarlberg (2007), organizational achievement depends on its capacities to constantly gather data of customers' needs and requirements in order to increase organizational performance and establish better value for customers. Thus, public organizations are moving toward a more customer-oriented management approach to cope with current and future challenges and changes.

In addition, in the public sector reform, the role of the citizen has become a very high importance in the involvement of decision-making. Public participation, and more recently, citizen engagement in policy improvement, has been featured importantly in public sector reform (Davidson, 2009; Sarker, 2007; Sarker & Al-Naqbi, 2015). Public participation is a component to create stakeholders' networking and good relationships with the government. There are large benefits to be gained from increasing public participation. Al-Khoury (2013) noted that quality participations are positively associated with expectations about the agency's responsiveness and performance. Thus, good public participation in the service delivery can help government obtain more accountability, responsibility, and good performance, especially service quality improvement.

Discussing the Issue

This study tries to determine the degree of public participation and examines how the perceptions of service quality are affected by public participation. In 2017, participatory governance by adopting the concept of Good Governance was considered by the Abu Dhabi government's Policy Agenda in order to reform the public sector to obtain high performance and improve service quality in the federal and local governments of Abu Dhabi. Participatory governance means organizing the public management system, structure, and attitudes to provide opportunities for public participation in decision-making processes (Jreisat, 2001; National Media Council, 2014). Participatory governance attempts to replace the top-down development to bottom-up development with the local governments and local community's participation in order to increase the efficiency of service delivery.

The public sector reform initiatives model created by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014) was considered in order to reform the public sector. It presents the relationship between the importance of public participation and service quality. In addition, the government is transforming the role of public officials and their relationship with citizens to renew the government's commitment to achieve a better performance and service quality. Developing a new mind-set and work culture is one of the objectives of public sector reform. To sum up, the main targets of public sector reform in Abu Dhabi are: to improve public service quality; to promote public participation; and to increase the capabilities of public officials.

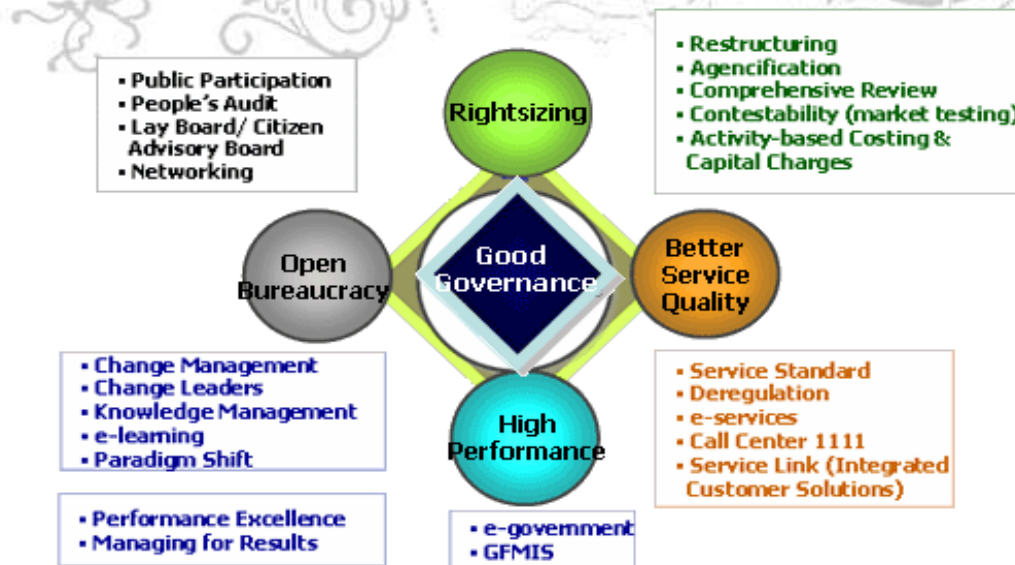


Figure 1: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014)

In 2008, the Abu Dhabi 2030 Economic Vision encouraged and supported government agencies to improve the quality and effectiveness of their services through delegation of decision-making authority in order to better facilitate the public interests and needs. However, the lack of capacity in establishing the full participation of civil society in policy-making processes is important for developing countries to gather public needs and requirements (Al Athmay, 2013). Al-Khoury, (2012) noted that one of the most serious problems which Abu Dhabi faces is the enhancing public participation. They also approved that implementing effective public participation in Abu Dhabi is not an easy task. They found that there is little existing knowledge or understanding of the value of public participation in local government. Thus, limited government knowledge in conducting participation becomes a barrier for enhancing public involvement.

The Necessity of Research

This study addresses the importance of local government to the clients. Public participation in Abu Dhabi local government was performed in order to involve all stakeholders and interested participants in the decisions (Halima, 2008; Khalid, Tipu, & Sarker, 2015; Mansour, 2008; Sarker, 2007). Public participation is through the mechanism of local government which, in a way, filters and consolidates the claims and the interests of all individuals in a particular locality (Al-Khoury, 2013). Therefore, the local government is the primary target to be improved. Local government was selected as the target of this study because it is closer to the customers or citizens than federal or state government. In addition, local government provides a multiplicity of services to respond to the citizens' needs, and it is more easily perceived and measured.

Research Purposes

This study tries to examine the degree of public participation in local government in order to understand the degree of public participation that consists of public participation mechanisms, and public participation in decision-making processes (National Media Council, 2014; Sarker & Al-Naqbi, 2015). A specific interest of this study is to investigate the impact of public participation on the perceptions of service quality. Meanwhile, it is important that local management evaluate how they present their services to the people. In addition, it is also important to evaluate service quality from the viewpoint of customers. A great deal of interaction does take place between officials and customers as the key factors of customer satisfaction in the term of service delivery. Thus, this study tries to examine how customers and local management perceive service quality and find the perception gaps of service quality between them in order to enhance quality of services and meet the customer satisfaction of the local government. In addition, the differences in customers' perception of service quality were examined according to the types and the locations of the municipality.

- H1: Identifying the differences in the perception of service quality between customers and government management?
- H2: Identifying the differences in customers' perception of service quality between the types of municipality?
- H3: Identifying the differences in customers' perception of service quality between the locations of the municipality?
- H4: Identifying the impact of public participation on the perception of service quality of government management?

Theoretical Model

Theoretical model is considered a starting point for conducting research so that it determines the considered variables defined in the research. In other words, one can claim that the theoretical model is the very conceptual or mental model as a tool to analyse a strategy in order to begin and carrying out the research as expected, it can initially identify the relevant factors and then prioritize them in order of importance.

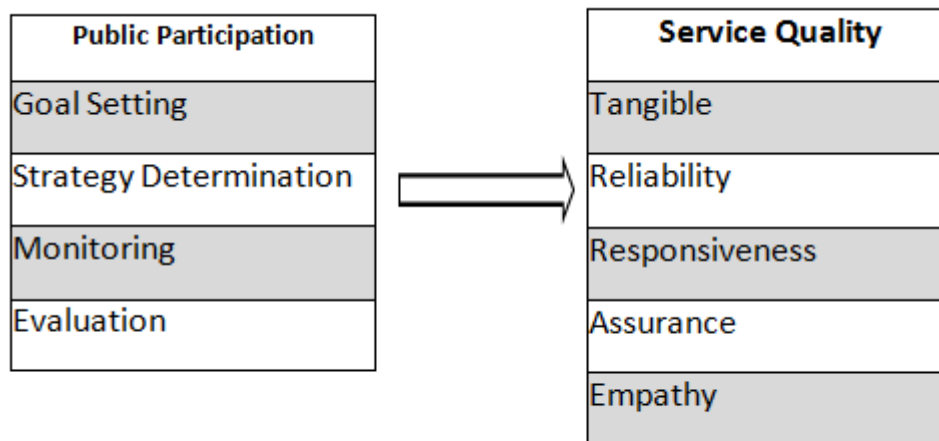


Fig.1. the research framework

Basic components of Public Participation Conceptual Thinking

Government has focused on public participation or citizen involvement and its effects on public service delivery (Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (FAHR), 2008; Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (FAHR), 2011b). According to Paarlberg (2007), public service delivery is found as a co-creation process in which employees' performance depends on the active participation in empirical and transformative processes. Ribori (2005) studied the effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance. The research focused on participation on citizen advisory board and their effectiveness in local governance by using quantitative data collection techniques to assess citizen advisory board effectiveness in local governance. This study indicated that members of citizen advisory boards engaged in their use of civic skills more than non-board member.

However, Wang & Wart (2007) divided public participation into two types: 1) the political participation; and 2) the administrative or operational participation. The political participation occurs during the political procedures such as voting, campaigning, and selecting political representatives in order to express the requirements for important policies of the national, state, and local government. It peaks during election seasons. On the other hand, the administrative participation is the direct or indirect participation in administrative process and decision-making processes to assess administrative objectives, service delivery process, administrative strategy, and organizational performances. They concluded that the administrative participation is realized at the executive level.

Lowndes & Prachett (2002) studied the locality effect and focused on local political participation which refers to the action taken by citizens in seeking to influence decision taken by government officials and elected representatives at the local level. Kluvers & Pillay (2009) examined the possibility of citizen involvement and citizen consultation in the budgetary processes in local government. They suggested that participation in the budgetary processes is available. According to Giddens (2000), the policy processes should be involved by local communities and voluntary groups. Funnell (2003) also noted that service delivery has been transformed from a political activity to a technical matter, for example, performance measurement, accounting, and budgeting. Bishop & Davis (2002) studied the characteristics of participation that were a measurement of citizen involvement. As a result, the customer's participation in the delivery of service becomes very important to the quality of service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

In summary, there have been encouraging governments' actions to fulfil their obligation in democracy and to seek their interest in finding new ways to listen to public needs. Government should give the opportunities for public participation through stakeholders and individual citizen participation.

Organizational Performance Measurement in Public Sector

Organizational performance measurement and TQM are two management approaches that are improving efficiency and effectiveness within private and public organizations. Organizational performance measurement is probably the most used as the dependent variable in many organizational researches (OECD, 2014; Sarker, 2007). These researches describe the variety of measurements used for organizational performance. Organizational performance measurement comes in a variety of forms, for example, an organization's processes and outcomes, cost-benefit analysis, quality of products and services, and efficiency and effectiveness. Kaplan & Norton (1996) have created the strategic performance indicators around a variety of stakeholders at the individual level. A balanced scorecard approach which is used extensively in business and industry, nonprofit organizations, and the public sectors entails identifying the four perspectives of organizational performance: financial, internal process, learning and growth, and customer (Caiden, 1988; Menifield, 2010). From the previous studies, organizations focused on a financial measurement because it was easy to assess and also organizations are rewarded and motivated based upon this measurement.

However, in public sector organization, financial measurements such as profitability did not necessarily measure the organization's performance. Financial measures are inappropriate to the public sector. The development of organizational performance measurement for monitoring, controlling, and improving public services has been emphasized in the 1980s. In the 1990s, performance measurement has been a management tool for the public sector especially in service delivery. Its attention has shifted to quality and consumer satisfaction. Various efforts in the private and public organizations have been revealed to increase service quality from the customers and employees' perspective. In order to improve service quality, government officials have to adopt a customer-oriented approach for their work to respond to their customers.

Concepts of Service Quality

Service quality has been an important performance measurement in the public sector since 1990s. The concept of service quality has enhanced the area of service marketing during the 1970s. The focus was on how to raise customer satisfaction in the private sector for profit seeking by increasing quality of service. Since TQM has gained in popularity, the context of service quality was considered and focused on quality from the perspective of the consumer. Service quality becomes the main output of public organization in order to improve quality of public service. The concept of service quality improvement in public sector has based on the efforts to improve quality with the private sector. Public organization is established to service people and provide quality service to gain people's satisfaction. Thus, service quality will be the key to improve organizational performance and competency for the public sector. It is very important to measure service quality in the public service and find out how public participation affects service quality.

Measuring of service quality is an important matter to service providers especially in the public sector. In the public sector, there is no profit to serve as measurement of organizational effectiveness. Citizens or clients or customers get the advantage of the public services and, at the same time, they are interactive with the government by influencing and supporting through ballots and taxes (Al- Khouri, 2012; Hamid, 2013). According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), the customer's participation in the delivery of the services becomes very important to the quality of service performance. Thus, customers' involvement in the service delivery affects customer satisfaction.

The citizens in the public sector expect to be treated like a customer by their government. The customer in the public sector is anyone who receives or uses what a government produces and anyone whose success or satisfaction depends on its actions (Carr et al., 1995). Kettl (1998) noted that the public sector customers were defined as four perspectives. Firstly, citizens want a good quality service delivery, fast, and low cost. Secondly, citizens are partners in the provision of services. Thirdly, citizens monitor government performance and expect accountability for actions and problem solving. Fourthly, citizens are taxpayers,

owners, and bill payers, and want efficient and honest government. Thus, the customers in the public sector would be the clients of the organization. This is particularly defined in the case of clients who are beneficiaries of the government and also as customers of public sector organizations. Customers' involvement and their expectations are influencing satisfaction with public services.

Municipality Structure

The municipalities consist of communities, towns, and cities, depending on the population. A municipality is a form of local government which citizens elect their representatives to make decisions. The weakness of the municipality is about its authority and ability to transfer state dominance to local decisions in local public affairs. The municipal authorities are autonomous, but municipal government is an administrative control of the central government and provincial authorities.

Research Method and Data Analysis

The paradigm of research is based on the positivism which concerns with principles, empirical knowledge, cause effect, and generalizability, and interpretivism which relates to what the respondents think about, their ideas, and the meanings that are important to them. Quantitative method is the main method of this study. It is appropriate in seeking the details of data collection and analysis. It provides instruments for assessing concepts, research design steps, and for manipulating with population and sampling matters. In addition, a quantitative method approach utilizes a deductive model in examining the relationship between variables. It is useful in providing evidence for or against pre-specific hypotheses.

Population and Sample

In this study, the target population are local management who were working as administrative officials in three municipalities (Abu Dhabi City Municipality, Al Ain City Municipality, Al Gharbia Municipality) in Abu Dhabi. The second population are customers who were using services of municipality in Abu Dhabi.

The sampling technique is based on the Proportional Stratified Random Sampling by the location and type of municipality. Thus, the sample size was determined by proportional stratified sampling of the target population. The proportional stratified sample is the composite of the samples taken from each group. Elements for the stratified sample are selected by simple random sampling of the three groups.

Research Tool

SPSS Version 22.0 was used for statistical analysis of the data gathered from the respondents. In this study, the data analysis used both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, for example, percentage, frequency, minimum, maximum, mean variance, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. Inferential statistics, for example, correlation, and regression analysis were used to test and estimate the relationship between variables. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to test the validity and reliability of instrument scales (Hair *et al.*, 2010)

The customers' data were gathered from questionnaires administered by research assistants. The survey questionnaires were self-completed by the respondents, with assistances available if required. A representative sample of target municipalities was selected to fill up the questionnaires. Eventually, during the third and fourth weeks of June 2018, a sample size of around 384 was achieved.

The customers were asked about the perception of service quality received from the municipalities by adopting an SERVQUAL measurement in order to compare with the perception of service quality in the view of administrative officials and to answer the second research question.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is the degree of consistency that the same researcher assigns similar observations and interpretations at different points in time, and validity is the extent to which quality findings accurately represent the phenomena being examined (Hair et al., 2006). Validity consists of the scopes of the two results: 1) exactly represents the collected data, and 2) can be generalized to other contexts. This study used external peer review to assess reliability and validity of the accurate questionnaire.

Research Findings

The customers were asked about the perception of service quality which consists of the expectation scores and the perception scores received from the municipal service delivery. Table 1 presents the demographic data of customers. The results in Table 1 illustrate the demographic distribution of the respondents based on gender, age, education, religion, and type and location of municipality.

The descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the respondents' profiles. The findings of the study show that the majority of the respondents are male (53%) while 47% are female. The majority of the respondents are under 30 years old (44%), while 30% of the respondents are between the age of 30 and 40 years old. Descriptive statistics also show that the majority of respondents had a bachelor degree (49%). This part presents descriptive statistics of variables of this study including means, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, and variance. All measurements have been tapped on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (Strongly disagree) to five (Strongly agree). In Table 1, the results show that the mean values of the three variables are high. The mean values of public participation dimensions ranged from (3.77) to (3.83) and (3.81) for overall. The mean values of service quality dimensions ranged from (-0.64) to (-0.81), and (-0.71) for overall. The mean values indicate that on average the respondents agree on public participation in decision-making processes, and service quality. The standard deviations for public participation (0.70), and for service quality (0.67) are little small.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD.	Variance
Public Participation	304	1.44	5.00	3.81	0.70	0.48
Goal Setting	304	1.50	5.00	3.88	0.81	0.58
Strategy Determination	304	1.33	5.00	3.79	0.74	0.55
Monitoring	304	1.50	5.00	3.77	0.76	0.54
Evaluation	304	1.50	5.00	3.83	0.78	0.56
Service Quality	304	-3.91	0.45	-0.71	0.67	0.45
Tangibles	304	-3.75	1.25	-0.81	0.83	0.70
Reliability	304	-4.00	0.80	-0.72	0.77	0.59
Responsibility	304	-4.00	1.00	-0.70	0.76	0.58
Assurance	304	-4.00	0.75	-0.73	0.78	0.61
Empathy	304	-4.00	0.80	-0.64	0.74	0.54

Service quality was tested via Independent sample t-test in order to test the hypothesis H1 that there are differences in the perception of service quality between officials and customers. Table 2 shows the differences in service quality gap scores or the perception of service quality between government management and customers.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Officials and Customers in the Perception of Service Quality (Gap Scores)

Service Quality		N	M	SD.	Min	Max	t-value
Tangibles	Officials	304	-0.81	.83	-3.75	1.25	-16.99*
	Customers	348	-1.13	.82	-3.50	0.75	-25.65*
Reliability	Officials	304	-0.72	.77	-4.00	0.80	-16.21*
	Customers	348	-1.21	.80	-3.80	1.40	-28.30*
Responsiveness	Officials	304	-0.70	.76	-4.00	1.00	-16.01*
	Customers	348	-1.23	.87	-3.50	1.00	-26.44*
Assurance	Officials	304	-0.73	.78	-4.00	0.75	-16.31*
	Customers	348	-1.23	.89	-3.50	1.00	-25.91*
Empathy	Officials	304	-0.64	.74	-4.00	0.80	-14.99*
	Customers	348	-1.24	.89	-3.20	0.80	-25.86*
SQ	Officials	304	-0.71	.67	-3.91	0.45	-18.71*
	Customers	348	-1.21	.76	-3.35	0.57	-29.45*

*significant at $p < 0.05$

The results show that there are significant differences at significance level of 0.05 in the perception of service quality among government management and customers in tangibles ($t = 4.870, p < .05$), reliability ($t = 8.034, p < .05$), responsiveness ($t = 8.260, p < .05$), assurance ($t = 7.750, p < .05$), empathy ($t = 9.386, p < .05$), and overall service quality ($t = 8.773, p < .05$). Thus, the results confirmed that there are differences in the perception of service quality between government management and customers. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) was supported.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Customers' Perception of Service Quality (Gap Score) between the Types of Municipality (N=348)

Service Quality	Types of the Municipality	N	Mean	SD.
Tangibles	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-0.91	0.88
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.24	0.77
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.12	0.83
Reliability	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-0.92	0.82
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.34	0.74
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.22	0.81
Responsiveness	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-1.06	0.85
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.37	0.86
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.19	0.86
Assurance	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-1.00	0.94
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.38	0.86
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.21	0.88
Empathy	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-0.93	0.90
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.36	0.89
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.24	0.87
SQ	Abu Dhabi City Municipality	52	-0.97	0.80
	Al Ain City Municipality	108	-1.34	0.73
	Al Gharbia Municipality	188	-1.20	0.76

One-way ANOVA was conducted to test the second hypothesis (H2) that there are differences in customers' perception of service quality between the types of municipality. Table 3 shows that there are significant differences in customers' perception of service quality (SQ) between three types of municipality

($F = 4.254, p < .05$). In addition, the results show the differences in customers' perception of service quality dimensions in reliability ($F = 2.783, p < .05$), assurance ($F = 3.194, p < .05$), and empathy ($F = 4.267, p < .05$). The perception of service quality that customers received services from different types of municipality differs from each other. Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) was supported.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Customers' Perception of Service Quality (Gap Score) among the Locations of the Municipality (N=348)

Service Quality	Location	N	Means	SD.
Tangibles	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.16	0.78
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.36	0.80
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-0.90	0.81
Reliability	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.25	0.78
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.41	0.81
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-1.00	0.77
Responsiveness	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.19	0.86
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.46	0.82
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-1.07	0.87
Assurance	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.24	0.87
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.43	0.81
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-1.06	0.93
Empathy	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.27	0.86
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.38	0.85
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-1.07	0.94
SQ	East of Abu Dhabi	129	-1.22	0.73
	West of Abu Dhabi	101	-1.41	0.77
	South of Abu Dhabi	118	-1.02	0.76

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the hypothesis H3 that there are differences in customers' perception of service quality between the locations of the municipality. The results presented in Table 4 show significant differences in customers' perception of service quality between the municipalities located in the East of Abu Dhabi, the West of Abu Dhabi, and the South of Abu Dhabi in terms of tangibles ($F = 9.388, p < .01$), reliability ($F = 7.483, p < .01$), responsiveness ($F = 5.874, p < .01$), assurance ($F = 4.750, p < .01$), empathy ($F = 3.708, p < .05$), and SQ ($F = 7.357, p < .01$). The findings show that the customers received services from different locations of the municipality differ from each other in the perception of service quality. Thus, hypothesis H3 was supported.

The Impact of Public Participation on the Perception of Service Quality of Local Government Officials

The Pearson Correlation was used to determine the strength of the relationship of variables. Two steps of the correlation are designed to test the relationship between the variables. Firstly, Pearson correlation was used to investigate the correlation between all four dimensions of public participation and also overall of public participation, and the perception of service quality. Secondly, linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis H4 that public participation has a positive impact on the perception of service quality of local government officials.

Bivariate Analysis

The correlations can show the bivariate relationship among all the dimensions. The correlation matrix is shown in Table 5. These results show all four dimensions of public participation are significantly correlated

with the perception of service quality. Cohen (1988) provided guidelines for determining whether a value of r represents a small, medium, or large effect in psychological research. He indicated that $r = .10$ can be considered a small correlation, $r = .30$ can be considered a medium correlation and $r = .50$ can be considered a large correlation. Among public participation dimensions, the strengths of the positive relationship or the Pearson correlation coefficients range from $r = 0.192$ to $r = 0.250$. The highest correlation is presented between strategy determination dimension and the perception of service quality and the lowest correlation is presented between goal setting dimension and the perception of service quality.

Table 5: correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Goal setting	1				
2. Strategy Determination	.812**	1			
3. Monitoring	.698**	.817**	1		
4. Evaluation	.675**	.735**	.803**	1	
5. SQ	.192**	.250**	.231**	.215**	1

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

	PP	SQ
PP	1	.247**
SQ	.247**	1

From the above results, the fourth hypothesis H4 that public participation has a positive impact on the perception of service quality of government management presented in chapter two was tested. It is confirmed that there is a significant positive impact between public participation on the perception of service quality of government management with a high level of significance ($p < .01$). However, the value indicates a small correlation with $r = .247$. This study concludes that H4 was supported.

Table 7: Linear regression of PP with SQ

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
.247	.061	.058	.64921	1.937

Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Differences in the Perception of Service Quality between Customers and government management (H1)

The descriptive statistics and a paired t-test showed that the gap scores of all service quality dimensions of the customers and the officials, and also in the overall service quality was negative. It indicated that there is a scarcity in meeting the expectations. The results showed that the expectations of service of customers and officials were greater than their perceptions of actual service. Service quality levels are higher when the gap between perceptions of service and required expectations is small. Thus, the findings of this study confirmed that both types of respondents were not satisfied with municipalities' services, and service quality was evaluated as low.

Independent t-test results confirmed that there is a significant difference at $p < 0.05$ in the perceptions of service quality (SQ) and all service quality dimensions between the customers and the local government officials, and this supports the first hypothesis (H1). The findings also showed that the officials did not meet customers' requirements and were unable to respond to the expectations as well since the gaps still

existed. In addition, the perceptions of service quality of customers were higher than the officials' perceptions in all of the five dimensions. The result implied that the customer dissatisfaction is occurred. However, the officials are more satisfied than customers with the service delivery. The findings are regular in the differences between service providers and service receivers' vision. Since the officials' self-assessments tends to be higher, the perception of service quality would have been expected quite the opposite.

The results of the study showed that the majority of the officials emphasized in the tangibles dimension, on the other hand, customers stressed on the empathy dimension due to the biggest gap scores. It is possible to observe that the officials were not satisfied with the general appearance of the service setting and comfort such as modern-looking tools, equipment, and materials, and appealing personnel's appearance. On the other hand, the customers focused on this dimension at the lowest level. The customers emphasized in the empathy dimension which is related to caring, individualized attention, and efforts in understanding the customers' needs, while, the officials focused on this dimension at the lowest attention. The results confirmed that customers' attention which occurred in empathy dimension is the most important of customers' requirements.

Hypothesis 3: Differences in Customers' Perception of Service Quality between Types of Municipality (H2)

The customers' perception of service quality was analyzed according to the types of municipality where they received the services. The municipalities consist of three types: 1) Abu Dhabi City Municipality 2) Al Ain City Municipality 3) Al Gharbia Municipality. The negative gap scores of the descriptive statistics showed that the majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the service quality from the three types of municipalities. The lowest gap score of all service quality dimensions and also of the overall service quality (SQ) occurred with customers who received services from *Al Ain City* Municipality. One-way ANOVA results showed that all service quality dimensions differed significantly according to the types of the municipality except the tangibles and responsiveness dimensions. The results also confirmed that there are significant differences in customers' perception of service quality (SQ) between three types of municipality, thus, hypothesis H2 was supported. The findings confirmed that when the type of municipality differs among the customers, their perception of service quality will be affected. These results also concluded that when there are differences in types of municipalities, customers' perception of service quality will also differ.

The study showed that customers in *Al Ain City* Municipality are more satisfied with service quality than other types of municipalities. This implied that the *Al Ain City* Municipality have more potential service delivery and provide more prompt service to customers than the other municipalities. The service quality is enhanced due to the capacity of the municipalities such as the revenues, and funding sources to support local activities. In addition, the competence, knowledge, and skills of the officials have been increased to respond to public needs effectively.

On the other hand, the highest gap scores of service quality occurred with customers who received services from Al Gharbia Municipality. In addition, the highest gap score was shown in the assurance dimension (-1.38). Thus, the results mentioned that the customers of Al Gharbia Municipality were not satisfied with their service delivery especially in assurance dimension which related to knowledge, competence and courtesy of the officials. The results also confirmed the problem of service delivery of Al Gharbia Municipality which led to customers' dissatisfaction that might affect the development of service delivery management and the officials' skills.

Therefore, the Al Gharbia Municipality should improve their service providing managements and some required officials' skills, knowledge, personalities such as politeness, respectfulness, tolerance, friendliness, trustworthiness, and honesty in order to increase customers' satisfaction. Thus, the municipalities would reduce the gaps in service quality by understanding customers' preferences of service quality dimensions

and improve their service delivery management. Yoo & Park (2007) concluded that employees, as an important part of the service process, are essential elements in increasing perceived service quality.

Hypothesis 3: Differences in Customers' Perception of Service Quality between the Locations of the Municipality (H3)

The customers' perception of service quality was analyzed according to the locations of the municipality where they received the services. The locations of the municipality include three areas: 1) Abu Dhabi City Municipality 2) Al Ain City Municipality 3) Al Gharbia Municipality. The descriptive statistics show that there are negative gap scores from customers' perception of service quality which means that the customers have high expectations regarding service quality. In addition, their working style remained the same in providing good service due to inadequate funding. Thus, the municipality administration also requires skilled staffs, equipment and financial resources.

The results also revealed that among the five dimensions, the highest gap score occurred in responsiveness (-1.46) which is related to the willingness of officials to help customers and provide them with prompt service, for example, resolving problems quickly, allowing customers to book an appointment for help, and making convenient operating hours. This dimension has emerged as the most important dimension of perceived service quality from the municipalities located in Abu Dhabi. The municipalities should improve the service delivery strategies in order to enhance service quality. In addition, the municipalities' managements should focus on reducing service quality gaps and increase customers satisfaction.

The results also confirmed that there were significant differences in customers' perception of service quality (SQ) between three locations of the municipality. The findings indicated that when the location of the municipalities differs among the customers, their perception of service quality will be affected. In addition, Paul & Alain (1996) found significant differences existed among customers in border areas of Mexico and America in relation to five dimensions of service quality.

Hypothesis 4: The Impact of Public Participation on the Perception of Service Quality of government management (H4)

The results presented in the previous chapter showed a correlation between public participation in decision-making processes and the perception of service quality of government management. Pearson correlation was used to test the correlation. The findings of overall public participation and the perception of service quality were significantly and positively impacted with a small correlation ($r = .247$). The results also showed all of the four public participation dimensions were significantly correlated with the perception of service quality with the strength of the positive relationship ranging from $r = 0.192$ to $r = 0.250$. The correlations between public participation dimensions and the perception of service quality were quite small. In addition, the results of linear regression analysis confirmed that the officials' perception of service quality was significantly related to public participation ($\beta = .237$, $t = 4.431$, $p < .01$). This result also supports hypothesis H4.

Therefore, the findings of this study also showed that there were views on the extent to which the results of public participation have an impact on the perception of service quality. However, a local government may not get more benefits from public participation if the organization and the receivers of the service are not ready to cooperate and exchange information actively. Kauzya (2003) studied local governance capacity building for the full range participation in African countries. He noted that participation is not only a subject of structural arrangements but also an aspect of will and ability. Thus, local governments in Abu Dhabi have to promote a variety of participation mechanisms with high capacity in order to gather the customers' needs. In addition, public participation also showed that there was a good relationship between local governments and their customers.

Conclusion

The findings revealed the degree of public participation used in local governments. In previous studies by Walters *et al.* (2000), participation occurs in decision-making processes such as goal setting, strategy determination, implementation, and evaluation, and it is called genuine participation (Sanoff, 2000). Wang & Wart (2007) studied the frequency in using participation mechanisms and found that public participation in the early step of decision-making processes was widely used. This study contributes to the knowledge of the participation mechanisms used in local governments in Abu Dhabi. The findings indicated that the public participation mechanisms used in local governments in Abu Dhabi are different from the results of previous studies. In addition, the findings revealed that the degree of public participation in decision-making processes was viewed differently in each step. Thus, the differences in organizational type and location will affect the degree of public participation.

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