

Exploring the Challenges and Factors Impeding Effective Public Service Delivery at a Municipality in Namibia

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Abstract: This study explored the challenges and factors impeding effective public service delivery in Namibia, using a municipality in the Otjozondjupa Region as a case representative. The study sought further to devise strategies that can be used to improve customer satisfaction. The study was grounded in the interpretivism philosophy, utilised a case study design, and a mono-qualitative approach. The study used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct one-on-one interviews with eight (8) key municipal employees to collect the data. The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis in which occurring themes and patterns in information gathered were identified using ATLAS.ti software. The study found a lack of funds due to poor revenue collection mechanisms, poor municipal planning, poor infrastructure, poor community engagement, lack of serviced land, and inadequate employees as the key challenging factors of effective public service delivery. The causative aspects of these challenges include customers who fail or delay paying their municipal bills, insufficient allocation of funds from the government, and the inability of the management of the municipality to make sound decisions for enhancing public service delivery. The findings show that these challenges can be addressed through constant customer satisfaction surveys, frequent employee training, community involvement, fundraising activities, and sound budgeting. Lastly, the study recommends that the municipality frequently utilise the gap analysis model to identify areas where they fall behind and devise strategies for enhancing effective service delivery.

Keywords: Public service in Namibia; Service quality; Challenges of effective public service delivery; Customer satisfaction.

1. Introduction

International Organizations have stated that the financial and economic crisis has hampered the ability of governments at all levels to continue delivering public services. In fact, the unsustainable tendency of all levels of government to spend more than they collect has resulted in large economic growth disparities across levels of government and regions (Subires et al., 2019). Hence, measuring customer satisfaction in public service delivery is crucial towards the service quality provided to the public. A measure of customer satisfaction is a result of anticipated service compared to actual service delivery; hence, the concept of customer satisfaction has its roots in the 1980s (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Corporative image and communication often impact attitudes and drive behaviors of consumers (Sun et al. 2022), often resulting in satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is a psychological characteristic

that plays a key function in grabbing customers' attention and improving the entire operation of the organisation to achieve maximum performance (Geoffrey and Kemboi, 2014; Yadav and Rai, 2015). According to Nautwima and Asa (2022), achieving high levels of customer satisfaction is essential for maintaining existing customers, fostering brand loyalty, and enhancing organisational effectiveness. As a result, companies who wish to outperform their rivals employ it to satisfy both their internal and external business customers (Jain et al., 2013). In this regard, they can accomplish customer satisfaction by catering to clients' requirements and keeping an eye out for emerging trends and the dynamics of the competitive environment to provide efficient and high-quality service (Hailu and Shifare, 2019; Asa et al., 2022). Service quality and customer satisfaction aspects are also essential in the online environment (Biswas et al., 2019; Amin et al., 2018).

The provision of public service is especially vital for marginalised people, as the use of public services in this contemporary day may be their only chance of making it through (Faguet, 2014). As a result, it is of the utmost importance to guarantee that public services are adequately addressed. In this context, local municipal authorities' role in facilitating community development and ensuring the supply of critical services is of the utmost importance. On the other hand, in recent years, particularly in African countries, municipalities have come under heavy criticism for inadequate service delivery, with the criticism coming from both the communities and the central government (Kalonda and Govender, 2021). Ibok (2014) states that poor service delivery is caused by weak leadership, inadequate governance systems, abuse of council finances, corruption, and poor execution of recruiting regulations. All of these factors have contributed to the development of terrible local government. According to Mantzaris (2014), weak financial discipline, poor planning, and inept financial management contribute to inadequate service delivery by local governments. Customers are driven to protest against the concerned public institution when the quality of the public service they receive is subpar since this compels them to feel that the organisation is not living up to the requirements and requirements of the community (Masegare and Ngoepe, 2018). International Organizations have stated that the financial and economic crisis has hampered the ability of governments at all levels to continue delivering public services. In fact, the unsustainable tendency of all levels of government to spend more than they collect has resulted in large economic growth disparities across levels of government and regions.

Over the course of several years, researchers (Namupala, 2019; Sikabongo, 2019) researched the impact of service delivery in Namibia from various areas of the economic sector, such as NamPower and the Roads Authority of Namibia respectively. Their findings are presented below. In addition, several studies (Shangadi, 2019; Silumbu, 2019; Tobias, 2019) evaluated the efficiency of the Performance Appraisal and Management System in public sectors in Namibia. In general, these investigations came to the conclusion that consumer satisfaction is still a relevant modern social concern. Since Kalonda and Govender (2021) concentrated on the Zambezi region, this study aimed to investigate the obstacles that stand in the way of efficient service delivery at a municipality located in the Otjozondjupa region.

The public sector delivers essential services to the country's citizens through numerous public institutions. In that regard, compromised public services could result in frustration among the residents (Hailu and Shifare, 2019). Against that, service delivery from the public sector does not satisfy the customers, which is common in developing nations (David et al., 2021). For example, in Namibia, while various studies (Kabuku and Nyambe, 2018; Limbo, 2019; Mubwandarikwa, 2013) acknowledged the role of public entities in accelerating Namibia's development process, Kuhanga (2018) asserts that Namibian citizens have lost trust in public entities owing to ineffective service delivery. Thus, the Namibian government expresses worry about its capacity to provide high-quality services as a necessity for fast development, job creation, and poverty eradication, as detailed in the Harambee Prosperity Plan and the 5th

National Development Plan (Tjirera, 2018). In that light, this study explores the challenges and factors that impede public entities from delivering the desired service to the citizens and the possible solutions for addressing such challenges using a case study of a municipality in the Otjozodjupa region.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study adhered to the gap analysis model's guiding principles. Teshome et al. (2020) state that Parasuraman et al. (1985) built the gaps model based on empirical evidence that indicated five organisational gaps in the service design and delivery process, which result in quality defects and unsatisfied customers. The gap analysis model displays the quality, which is the gap between the perceived service and the customer's expectation (Kurtz and Clow, 2014). Utilizing the gap analysis is essential because it enables organisations to identify areas in which they lag behind and prevent them from reaching their organisational objectives (Lorman, 2021). In general, the purpose of the gap analysis model in an organisation is to identify the difference or the 'gap' between the status quo and the intended goal, which must be closed for the organisation to achieve success (Teshome et al., 2020). This model was utilised to identify the obstacles that prevent public entities in the Otjozodjupa region from delivering the necessary municipal services. The gap analysis supports the organisation in developing strategic plans to fill the gaps in order to provide effective service (Kenton, 2020).

2.2. Empirical literature

The public service is an executive branch of government charged with assisting in the formulation and implementation of government policy (Osawe, 2015). Public service organisations are not for profit, but rather exist to assist individuals with essential services (Osawe, 2015). Service delivery has a direct impact on human development if essential services are provided to individuals (Essien, 2017). Thus, the need to maintain efficient public service delivery. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have now been superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Kalonda and Govender (2021), effective service delivery plays a crucial role in accomplishing these goals (United Nations Summit, 2015). However, public service delivery in emerging nations is inefficient, expensive, cumbersome, bureaucratic, and opaque (Kalonda and Govender, 2021). Thus, the failure of the first and second generations of reforms in emerging nations was attributable to a disregard for public service delivery (Akalu, 2015). Due to the strain of crises and structural changes, the fundamental shortcoming of the first-generation reform of the 1980s and 1990s was to focus solely on organisational improvements instead of public service delivery (Teshome et al., 2020). Based on the lessons learnt from previous reforms, the third generation of reforms centred on delivering public services. In other developing nations, such as Nigeria, poor service delivery is caused by officials' corruption, institutional capacity constraints regarding limited required skills and personnel, lack of transparency, poorly functioning ward committees, lack of accountability by council officials, lack of public consultation in governance issues, failure to comply with municipal laws and other legislation, failure to prioritise community needs, and misaligned prioritisation (Majekodunmi, 2012). Drawing lessons from the literature review, this study investigated the challenges and factors that impede effective public service delivery in Namibia.

2.3 Challenges and factors impeding the effective public service delivery

The provision of essential services to citizens falls within the responsibility of public entities. Due to various obstacles and factors, however, only a portion of the demands are given effectively and to the client's satisfaction (Kalonda and Govender, 2021). In essence, Lindvall and Ronnerstrand (2022) employed a clustering technique to determine the obstacles associated with the delivery of public services in Sweden, and their findings reveal that the

majority of these challenges are mostly related to political orientation. In Eastern European and Central Asian nations, the primary cause of inadequate public service delivery is a large volume of public service utilisation, a high incidence of unofficial payments, and underdeveloped channels for grievance redress (Diagne et al., 2012).

From a continental perspective, Osawe (2015) used a qualitative approach to understand the ecological factors that impede the delivery of public services in Nigeria. The author identified favouritism, partisanship, corruption, tribalism, and nepotism, among other fundamental factors, as the most significant obstacles. In Kenya, Korir et al. (2015) cite extensive regulations and controls, frequent political involvement, poor leadership, blatant mismanagement, bloated staff establishments, and non-performing employees as obstacles to the successful delivery of public services. Similarly, Beyers (2016) investigated the problematic features of public service delivery in South Africa, utilising a qualitative approach and data gathered from 30 participants through interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Using coding analysis to examine the data, the study found that political influence in the administration of towns is one of the greatest obstacles to providing services. Using a cross-sectional field survey, Teshome et al. (2020) conducted a study in Ethiopia to identify the obstacles to public service delivery. The results reveal a number of challenges, including a small employee capacity, poor planning and management, inconsistent follow-up and monitoring, a lack of regular consultation with customers and stakeholders, the prevalence of corruption, insufficient funding, a lack of motivation and service mentality, ineffective automation, a lack of timely rule and regulation revision, and a lack of cooperation and integration.

From a national perspective, Marenga (2020) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the issues of public service delivery in Namibia. The findings highlight inadequate accountability systems, the financial burden on the state, procurement irregularities, and the growth of corruption. In addition, Kalonda and Govender (2021) focused on the Katima Mulilo municipal government in the Zambezi region. They noted insufficient community participation, a lack of leadership, insufficient service delivery skills, budgetary challenges, corruption, and inefficient strategic management. The subject of this investigation was a municipality in the Otjozondjupa region (Kenton, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

This study was grounded in the interpretivism philosophy that enables a well-understanding of the meaning of experiences and views for the people (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophical approach is closely associated with the qualitative approach (Ngulube, 2021; Saunders et al., 2019); thus, the study adopted a purely qualitative research approach. Moreover, the study employed a case study design using a municipality in central Namibia as a single case representative. To source the data, the study used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct one-on-one interviews to gain in-depth information from eight (8) management employees of a municipality in Namibia who were deemed to have an adequate understanding of the challenges and factors impeding effective public service delivery in the municipal area. In addition, the participants were purposively sampled to enhance the accuracy of the results (Saunders et al., 2019). Finally, to analyse the data, the study applied a reflexive thematic analysis to identify, analyse, describe, and interpret the themes without twisting the initial meanings of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2017), using ATLAS.ti software.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Demographic analysis of the participants

The study targeted eight (8) key municipality employees in the Otjozondjupa region of Namibia to explore the challenges and factors that impede effective public service delivery, the causes of such challenges, and the possible solutions for addressing them. As illustrated in Table 1, the participants comprised 3 females and 5 males. In that view, the gap in terms of gender representation in the study expresses that the case representative municipality has more male employees than males. Moreover, while females had lower representation, they were more experienced than male representatives, which gives confidence that the results are not gender biased.

Table 1: Demographic data of the participants

Participants	Gender	Experience
Participant 1	Male	6 years
Participant 2	Male	3 years
Participant 3	Female	9 years
Participant 4	Male	4 years
Participant 5	Female	9 years
Participant 6	Female	11 years
Participant 7	Male	7 years
Participant 8	Male	7 years

Source: Authors' compilation (2022)

4.2. Challenges of effective public service delivery

In attaining customer satisfaction, organisations strive to create a culture of value that offers the best quality of services and renders such services in response to the customers' needs. However, they face various challenges, and public service providers are no exception. In that essence, several studies (Hailu and Shifare, 2019; Namupala, 2019; Singh, 2013) underscore the existence of contemporary social issues, leading to a search for answers to why various public entities fail to deliver effective services to their customers. In that light, this study sought to explore the challenges and factors that impede effective public service delivery, using a municipality in the Otjozondjupa region as a case representative and using the reflexive thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti software to analyse the data, the results reveal a lack of funds, poor planning, and poor infrastructure as the major challenges for the municipality in pursuit of effective public service delivery in Namibia, as portrayed in Figure 1. Due to a lack of funds, it becomes challenging for the municipality to provide proper physical infrastructures, such as roads, sewer pipes, and streetlights, inter alia, as soft infrastructures, such as information and communication technology, internet connectivity, and others. This leads to poor engagement of the customers with the municipality. Other causative aspects of poor infrastructure challenges are poor management planning, prioritising the available resources, and a lack of affordable serviced land for housing. Lastly, poor management planning is associated with inadequate employees. Furthermore, it deters the municipality from availing serviced land and providing an atmosphere that enables the involvement of customers by raising their concerns and giving suggestions for improved service delivery at the municipality.

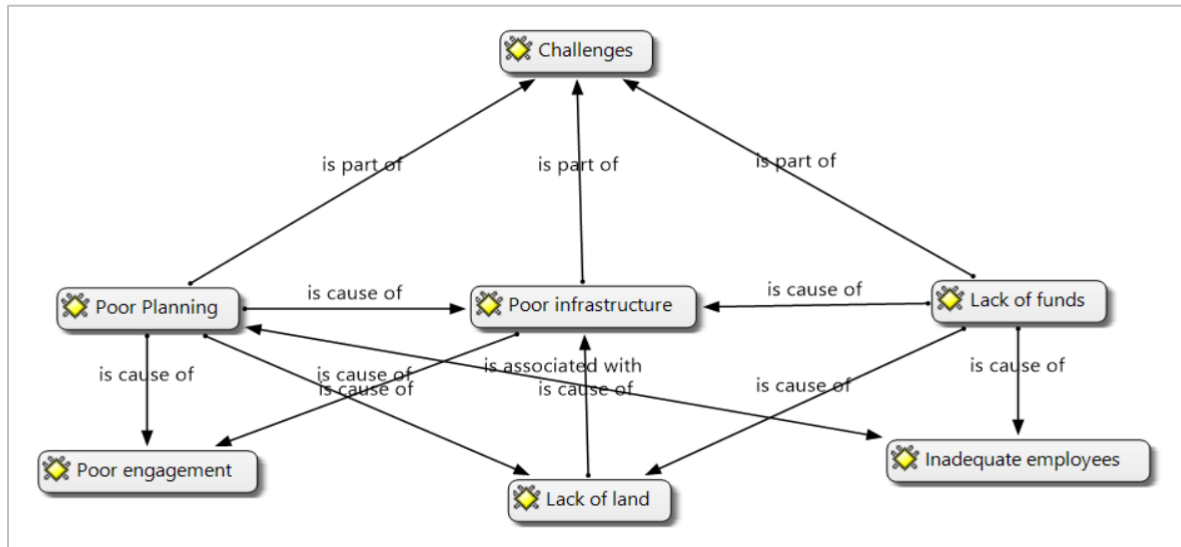


Figure 1: Challenges of effective public service delivery
Source: Authors' extraction from the analysis (2022)

4.3. Causes of the challenges to deliver effective public service

After identifying the challenges to effective public service delivery, the study sought to delve deeper into the causes of such challenges. In so doing, the study applied coding analysis in ATLAS.ti software to analyse the data. As displayed in Figure 2, the results show that the customers, the management of the municipality, and the government are the key causative aspects of the challenges to effective public service delivery in a municipality. Often, customers fail or delay paying their bills while the government that funds the municipality needs to allocate sufficient funds. This limits the financial resources of the municipality for project execution intended to enhance service delivery and consequently improve customer satisfaction in the local area. In addition, the management of the municipality has a direct influence on the engagement of the public the municipality serve, infrastructure development, availability of serviced land, and ensuring employee capacity to serve the locals adequately. Thus, effective management leads to effective service delivery.

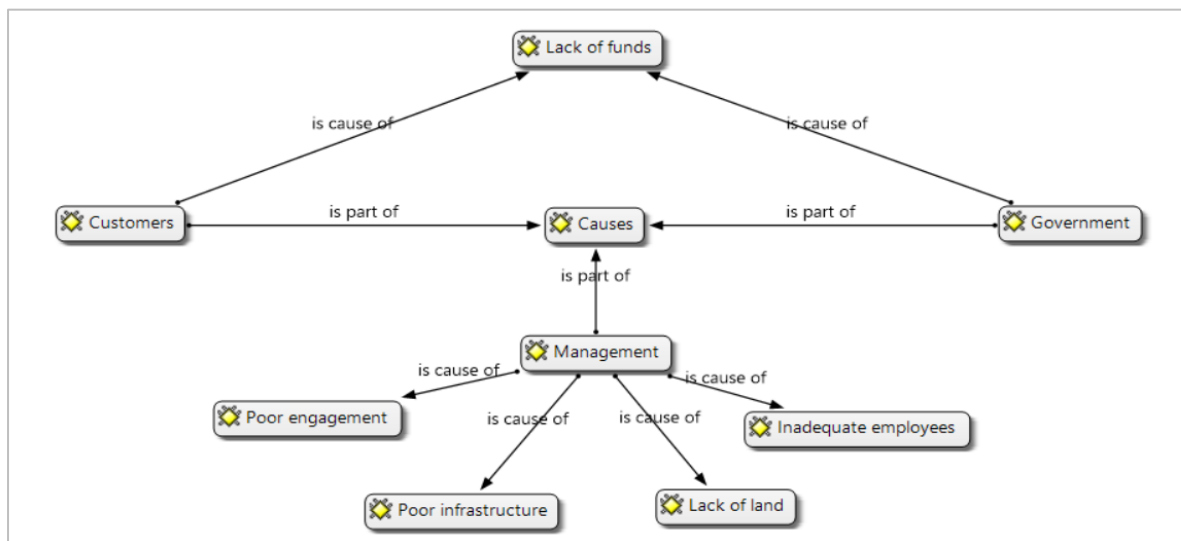


Figure 2: Causes of the challenges to effective public service delivery
Source: Authors' extraction from the analysis (2022)

4.4. Strategies to improve public service delivery

Any organisation with effective strategies may acquire a sustained competitive edge; hence, it is crucial to make the proper decisions and, when the organisational environment changes, to continually alter or optimise the options selected (Al Awadh, 2022). Strategies are essential drivers for organisations to realise their goals (Nautwima and Asa, 2021). Given the challenges and the causes, the study sought to devise strategies the municipality can adopt or adapt to improve public service delivery. As demonstrated in Figure 3, solutions to these challenges of public service delivery include fundraising activities, proper budgeting by using the funds for the intended purposes, constant research to assess customer satisfaction levels, identifying the customers' expectations, and finding effective ways to meet customers' demands; giving relevant training to the employees to upgrade their skills; and community participation. The fundraising activities and proper budgeting will enable the municipality to broaden its revenue base, recruit more employees, enhance infrastructure, and service more of the land for housing. Similarly, customer satisfaction surveys and training will help the management to make sound decisions for improved service delivery. Adding community participation to the municipality's business and running customer satisfaction surveys and training will enable the customers/public to get involved by detailing their expectations and suggestions which will improve municipal service delivery.

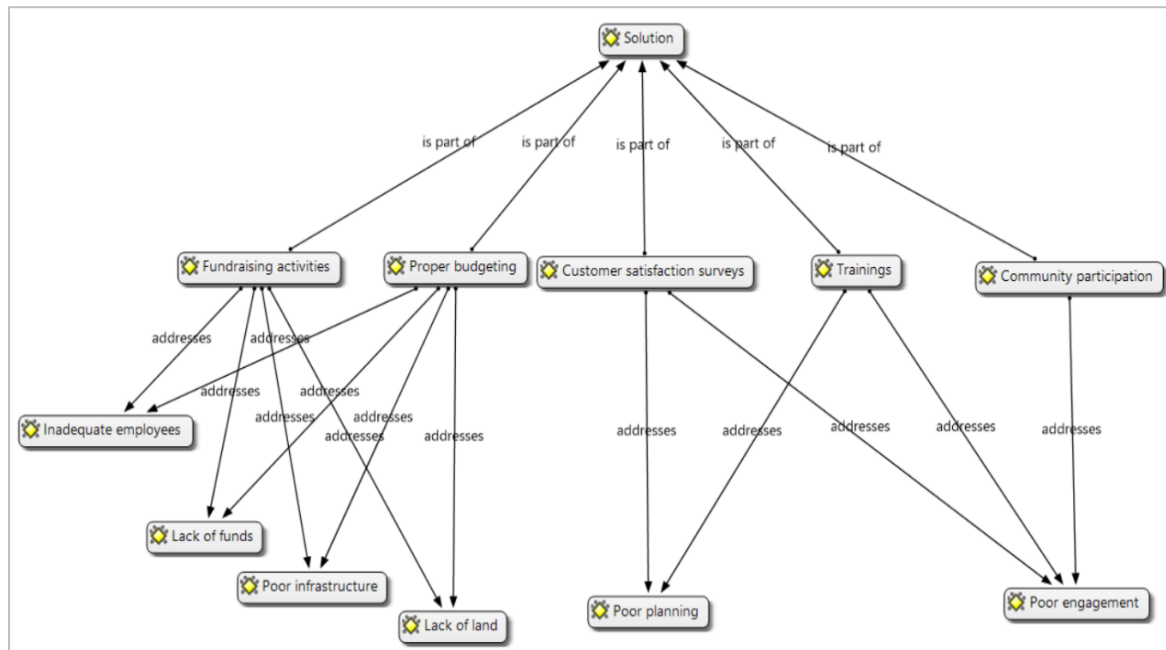


Figure 3: Solutions to the challenges of effective public service delivery

Source: Authors' extraction from the analysis (2022)

4.5. Discussion of findings

Regarding the municipality's challenges for public service delivery, evidence from this study reveals that they encompass financial constraints, poor planning, and poor infrastructure. These results are consistent with the findings of early studies (Kalonda and Govender, 2021; Teshome et al., 2020), revealing the financial challenges public organisations face in delivering quality service. Furthermore, this study's results also show that poor planning and a lack of funds lead to understaffing, while poor planning and poor infrastructure deter customer engagement. These results support the findings of Teshome et al. (2020), which found a lack of community participation and inadequate employee capacity, among others, to deter effective public service delivery. While early similar studies (Marenga, 2020; Kalonda and Govender, 2021) conducted within the Namibian context cite corruption as one of the critical,

challenging factors for effective public service delivery, it is, however, not a case with the municipality in the Otjozodjupa region. In terms of the causes of the challenges for public service delivery and possible solutions, these are unique findings of the study, which are aligned with the Gap Analysis theory, which helps organisations to identify areas in which they fall behind and use their strengths to address the drawbacks, as they pursue their desired goals. Nevertheless, conducting a customer satisfaction survey is frequently a possible solution in line with the notion of (Asa et al., 2022) that acknowledges the significance of research and development on the organisation's overall performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the challenges and factors that impede effective public service delivery at a municipality in central Namibia. The study used a sample of eight (8) key management employees at the municipality, who were interviewed to provide the data using an interview guide. The study analysed the data using the reflexive thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti. The results reveal challenges which comprise poor planning, poor infrastructure, lack of funds, poor community engagement, lack of serviced land, and understaffing. Moreover, the study also reveals that these challenges are a result of customers who do not pay or delay the payment of their municipal bills, insufficient allocation of funds from the government, and the inability of the management of the municipality to make sound decisions for enhancing public service delivery. To address these challenges, the results reveal the significance of conducting customer satisfaction surveys, constant training for the employees, involvement in the community, fundraising activities, and sound budgeting.

5.2. Recommendations

Given the findings, the study recommends that the municipality consider adopting the solutions pointed out in this study to address the challenges and factors that impede effective public service delivery. The municipality is recommended to adopt the solutions on the scaling basis. This means that the solutions that give the best results on the experimental basis should be scaled up for a wide implementation to harness the maximum benefits for the public. Furthermore, the study recommends that the municipality embrace frequent utilisation of the gap analysis model to identify areas where they fall behind and devise strategies for enhancing effective service delivery. In terms of direction for future research, this study focused only on exploring the challenges of effective public service delivery from a qualitative perspective. However, the study did not determine the extent to which public service delivery influence customer satisfaction. Therefore, the study suggests future research focus on analysing the impact of public service delivery on customer satisfaction from a quantitative perspective.

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