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Editorial: Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), electronic public service, government and organization performance, pandemic management and more

The PAP journal was first published in 1992 and has been published online in open access on the Emerald Insight Platform since 2018. This year marks the 32nd anniversary of its first launch and 7th anniversary of its online publication with Emerald. It now publishes three issues with at least one special issue and around twenty-five articles per year.

PAP attracted over 140 paper submissions from authors from 42 countries in 2023. Its articles were widely read and cited all over the world as the monthly download was over 15,000. PAP has obtained the 2023 Journal Impact Factor (JIF) of 1.4 as released by Clarivate, being abstracted and indexed by Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). The Scopus/WoS Citations were 198 and 106 respectively in 2023 (increased from 152 and 83 in 2022) while the Scopus CiteScore index is of 2.5 (increased from 2.1).

Under SJR (SCImago Journal Rank) Citations 2022, PAP is in Q2 under the categories of (1) Geography, Planning and Development; and (2) Sociology and Political Science. It is in Q3 of (3) Health (social science); and (4) Public Administration.

In summary, PAP is abstracted and indexed by: Scopus, Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), CrossRef, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCO Discovery Service, Google Scholar, Health Research Premium Collection (ProQuest), Healthcare Administration Database (ProQuest), ProQuest Central, ProQuest Central Basic (Korea), ProQuest Central Essentials, ProQuest Central Student, Publicly Available Content Database (ProQuest), Summons (ProQuest), WorldCat and The British Library.

Academics and practitioners in public administration, management, public policy, and related fields are welcome to contribute papers to this journal.

Summary of articles

This first issue of 2024 consists of eight articles, including a new CEPAR® model to tackle corporate ESG challenges, electronic public service delivery in Bangladesh, budgeting process in Malaysia, political party affiliation and gender equality in Kazakhstan, three papers on Covid in Bangladesh, Peru and Thailand, and local government organizations in Indonesia.

A brief introduction of these articles is given below.

The first article on “The new CEPAR® model: a five-step methodology to tackle corporate ESG challenges” by Paulina P.Y. Wong, Mike S.F. Hui and Angus W.H. Yip proposes the Challenge-Evaluation-Planning-Action-Review model developed by the International



Chamber of Sustainable Development (ICSD). The method and guidelines are outlined for easier appreciation by stakeholders of corporations to analyze ESG-related challenges and dilemmas, then able to make principled decisions, take actions, and review the outcomes. Each phase of the new model adheres to the theoretical and practical frameworks for problem-solving and decision-making, emphasizing the iterate process of addressing challenges, evaluating materiality, planning actions, taking actions, and reviewing the outcomes. Two cases studies on topics related to environment and social responsibilities are used to demonstrate the practical implementation of the model. It is applicable for business corporations and organizations seeking to gain insight and tackle crucial ESG issues, ultimately improving their short-and long-term decision-making and business opportunities.

The second article on “Electronic public service delivery: progress and challenges in Bangladesh” by Ahmed Shafiqul Huque and Jannatul Ferdous aims to examine the state of electronic service delivery in Bangladesh. It reviews the structure and operation of the “e-service” centers at the district, sub-district (upazila), and union levels by taking an inventory and assessing their contributions. Based on analysis of the functions and operations of the service delivery agencies with reference to the claims made by the government, academic research, government documents, relevant websites, and media reports, the findings reveal that electronic delivery of public services in Bangladesh has not been effective as planned. There are issues regarding channels of communication, the competence of public officials, human and financial resources, and political will to support the agencies delivering public services. The paper also proposes the strategy for public service delivery by using digital technology in the country.

The third article on “An evaluation of the influence of budgeting process on budget performance in Malaysia” by Su Voon Khoo, Nur Hairani A. Rahman and Nurul Liyana M. Kamil evaluates the influence of budgeting process elements (budget participation, preparation, implementation and evaluation) on budget performance of government. A cross-sectional survey was administered among budget officers from government agencies, departments, and units in Malaysia. Based on descriptive and regression analyses, the findings revealed the significant influence of two predictors: (1) budget participation and (2) budget implementation and evaluation, on budget performance. Both have positive and significant impacts on budget performance. However, budget preparation appeared to have no significant relationship with budget performance, although there is positive effect. This paper hopefully is of interest to government officials, especially frontline bureaucrats, who seek to ensure that budget performance meets expectations in Malaysia and other countries.

The fourth article is “A study of political party affiliation as a means to enhance gender equality and women’s political participation in Kazakhstan” by Zhaslan Yesseyevich Nurbayev, Gulmira Zholmagambetovna Sultangazy and Bauyrzhan Serikovich Serikbayev. Biographies of eighteen women deputies / candidates on party lists who were elected to the legislative body in 2023 were scrutinized. Moreover, based on content analysis of the pre-election programs of the political parties, it has identified that political party is the main resource for promoting gender equality and involving women in the decision-making process. All 18 women deputies of the lower house of parliament, are members of political parties. Women candidates without party affiliation were unable to get into representative body. The results of the election campaign of 2023 provided evidence for determining the gender order in the Kazakhstani political space. The party has become an effective channel for promoting women participations in the parliament of the country.

The fifth article is “A study of the decentralised administrative arrangements between the central and local governments in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis” by Khandakar Al Farid Uddin, Abdur Rahman, Md. Robiul Islam and Mohashina Parvin. It applies qualitative content analysis and interviews to explore the local government’s role in

Bangladesh's COVID-19 management by interviews of government officials, experts, non-government organisations representatives, and the general public. The findings reveal that the Constitution of Bangladesh intensified the active participation of local government in each administrative unit through decentralised administrative management. However, the administrative arrangement during the pandemic was primarily a centrally led system. The local government was not sufficiently involved, nor had it integrated into the planning and coordination process.

The sixth article is "An analysis of the relationship between organisational resilience and Local Educational Management Units' responses on education services delivery in Peru during the COVID-19 pandemic" by Guiselle M. Romero-Lora, Juan C. Rivero-Isla and Brenda E. Lopez-Chavez. Based on organisational resilience theory, 67 questions were grouped into 13 factors and 3 components: (1) leadership and organisational culture, (2) preparation for change, and (3) networks building on the Organisational Resilience Index (ORI). The findings indicated that of all ORI components, leadership and organisational culture ranked the highest. Moreover, the ORI is positively associated with the number of interventions and the perceived impact produced by those interventions. It was also found that women leading Units display a higher number of interventions than the men. It may help set priorities for institutional strengthening initiatives aimed at improving organisational resilience, which is particularly important in such uncertain and changing contexts.

The seventh article is "The impacts of workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress on poor job performance of healthcare workers in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic" by Inzamam Ul Haq and Chunhui Huo. It seeks to explain the moderating influence of COVID-19 burnout on these variables. Based on 230 responses from healthcare workers during the pandemic, the reliability and correlations between constructs were assessed. The findings show that workplace bullying (WB) and psychological distress (PD) were found to positively predict poor job performance, except for emotional exhaustion (EE). The presence of WB elevated EE and PD among Thai hospital staff. PD and EE partially mediated the relationship between WB and PJP. The positive moderating role of CBO among hospital employees significantly buffered the relationship between WB and EE. Healthcare reforms are required to protect the mental health of Thai healthcare staff to prevent poor job performance following unprecedented circumstances.

The eighth article is "The relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality and organizational performance: the case of local government organizations in South Konawe District, Indonesia" by Abdul Kadir, La Husen Zuada and Muhammad Arsyad. Based on quantitative analysis, it investigated the relationships between variables through direct and indirect influence testing. The findings reveal that career patterns influence neutrality and organizational performance. Neutrality of the state civil apparatus in politics mediates career patterns and local government organizational performance. It indicates that, first, promotions most significantly influence the organization's neutrality and performance. Second, demotions have the least influence on the organization's robustness and performance. Recommendations are provided to improve neutrality and organizational performance, that is, the need to increase promotions and reduce demotions.

I wish to thank all the authors for contributing their papers to this issue and the reviewers for their critical but constructive comments in helping the authors to improve their papers. Finally, I thank Emerald and our editorial team as well as the members of both Asia Pacific Editorial Board and International Editorial Advisory Board for their contributions in making the successful publication of this issue possible. We hope these papers will enhance the

understanding of various issues on ESG, electronic service delivery, government and organization performance, and pandemic management across the Asia and South American regions.

Public
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Peter K.W. Fong

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About the Editor-in-Chief

Professor Peter K.W. Fong, PhD (New York University), is President of Hong Kong Public Administration Association and Editor-in-Chief of PAP Journal. He teaches strategic management and supervises DBA students' dissertations of University of Wales TSD. He also serves as Principal Consultant of the International Chamber of Sustainable Development and holds memberships of HK Institute of Planners & Planning Institute Australia. He was a Teaching Fellow of Judge Business School, University of Cambridge; Visiting Scholar, MIT; Director of EMBA programme, HKU Business School; Associate Professor, Department of Urban Planning and Urban Design, HKU; Executive Vice President of City University of Macau; Honorary Professor, China Training Centre for Senior Civil Servants in Beijing; Studies Director, Civil Service Training & Development Institute, HKSAR Government. He was appointed as Advisory/Visiting Professors by Tongji, Tsinghua, Renmin, and Tianjin universities in Mainland China, Chinese University of HK and HK Polytechnic University, and Consultants, the World Bank and Delta Asia Bank. Peter K.W. Fong can be contacted at: fongpeter@netvigator.com

The new CEPAR® model: a five-step methodology to tackle corporate ESG challenges

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Abstract

Purpose – Addressing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues has become a critical aspect of business strategy. Since ESG has primarily focused on ratings and measures for reporting, there is a scarcity of methods to assist stakeholders in better comprehending corporate risk and addressing ESG-related issues and problems. The purpose of this paper is to propose a new model to narrow the critical gap.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is based on several well-known structural frameworks for managing risks and projects in various industries. Two case studies on topics related to environment (E) and social (S) responsibility are used to demonstrate the practical implementation of the CEPAR® model.

Findings – The CEPAR® model, a trademarked five-step methodology (the Challenge-Evaluation-Planning-Action-Review model) was developed by the International Chamber of Sustainable Development (ICSD). The method and guidelines are outlined for easier appreciation by stakeholders of corporations to analyze ESG-related challenges and dilemmas, then able to make principled decisions, take actions, and review the outcomes. Each phase of the new model adheres to the theoretical and practical frameworks for problem-solving and decision-making, emphasizing the iterate process of addressing challenges, evaluating materiality, planning actions, taking actions, and reviewing the outcomes.

Originality/value – The new model is applicable for business corporations and organizations seeking to gain insight and tackle crucial ESG issues, ultimately improving their short- and long-term decision-making and business opportunities.

Keywords CEPAR®, ESG, ICSD, Risk management, Ethical scenarios, Certified ESG Planner CEP®

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The acronym “ESG” which stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance, comprises a set of metrics used to evaluate an organization’s non-financial sustainability performance. These metrics are designed to gauge the effectiveness of an organization’s governance systems and its capacity to manage its environmental and social impact. It also offers a means of assessing potential business hazards and opportunities in these areas. The concept of ESG is not new. It was initially introduced in 2004 in a landmark study titled “Who Cares Wins: Connecting Financial Markets to a Changing World” which was carried out by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and financial institutions to scrutinize the role of environmental, social, and governance value indicators in asset management and financial research (Compact UN Global, 2004). Subsequently, it was also noted in the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) report, launched by UNEP Finance Initiative and the UN



Global Compact in 2006 (Eccles *et al.*, 2020). The PRI denotes a voluntary framework that enables investors to integrate ESG considerations into their decision-making and ownership practices, thereby enhancing the alignment of their objectives with those of the broader society.

ESG refers to a system employed by companies to assess their environmental and social credentials. Businesses have the ability to evaluate themselves based on environmental, social and governance criteria. According to a report by [Bloomberg Intelligence \(2021\)](#), it is projected that investments in socially responsible ventures, which are evaluated based on ESG ratings, will surpass US\$53 trillion by the year 2025. This amount is expected to account for over one-third of the total global assets of management. ESG ratings and measures are designed for ESG reporting instead of monitoring individual underlying issues (Clement *et al.*, 2023). Currently, there is a scarcity of methods or tools available within the industry for stakeholders or professionals to adopt and effectively evaluate the underlying ESG-related issues. Consequently, a solution is developed by the International Chamber of Sustainable Development (ICSD) to narrow this critical gap: the new five-step CEPAR® methodology, the Challenge-Evaluation-Planning-Action-Review model. The method combines several traditional and reputed frameworks or models under risk management or investment. It is originated from the well-recognized CFA Institute Ethical Decision-Making Framework (Identify-Consider-Act-Reflect), which serves as a tool for analyzing and assessing ethical scenarios within the investment profession (CFA Institute, 2017). Other widely accepted frameworks, for example, the six-step financial planning process developed by the Financial Planning Standard Board (FPSB), the four-step risk management process (Rejda, 1998) and other theoretical frameworks (Babatunde and Adebisi, 2012; Mintzberg, 1993) have been reviewed and referenced. Noteworthy, the four-step risk management process (Rejda, 1998; Belgodere *et al.*, 2021) is more generic, which can be applied to different industries and contexts, and it supports the stakeholders or professionals to focus on identifying and managing potential risks.

Theoretical framework

Although ESG has existed for nearly two decades, it has only been popularized in the past few years, particularly upon the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement at the United Nations Framework Convention and the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (UN General Assembly, 2015). The primary objective of the Paris Agreement is to mitigate the effects of climate change by restricting the escalation of global average temperature to below 2°C (36°F) above the levels observed in the pre-industrial era. It also emphasizes the need to undertake efforts to curtail the increase to 1.5°C (35°F). In recent years, the physical consequences of climate change have become ubiquitous, from unprecedented wildfires to severe flooding, droughts, intense heat waves, and hurricanes. It has caused shipping and supply chain disruptions, resulting in higher insurance costs and decreased profits. Almost all industries, companies, and businesses have been threatened, either directly or indirectly, by the impact of climate change. In September 2021, major oil and gas companies shut down more than 90 percent of the oil production and operations and evacuated workers from offshore platforms located in the Gulf of Mexico due to Hurricane Ida. The massive storm resulted in a reduction of approximately 30 million barrels in US oil production throughout the year, thereby exerting a significant impact on the energy production and supply. Mattison and Mintz (2019) reported that 80 percent of the world's largest companies are reporting exposure to physical or market transition risks associated with climate change.

The United Nations introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which encompasses 17 SDGs. These SDGs, commonly referred to as global goals, serve as an

urgent call to action for all nations, both developed and developing, to collaborate in order to attain inclusive and sustainable development on a global scale by 2030 (UN General Assembly, 2015). The agenda was built on the principle of “*leaving no one behind*” to ensure that no individual would be excluded or marginalized while tackling the issue of climate change. The 17 SDGs encompass a comprehensive set of targets, consisting of 169 specific objectives. These targets serve as a valuable tool for companies and businesses, aiding them in assessing their sustainability risks and formulating effective action plans. The SDG framework has become the beneficial framework for responsible investment, particularly as the business world increasingly prioritizes ESG considerations. The SDG agenda embodies significant potential as it facilitates and incentivizes various stakeholders, including governments, companies, suppliers, and clients, to promptly engage in actions and contribute toward a more sustainable future (Niloufar *et al.*, 2022). Hence, ESG aligns very well with SDGs and the metrics are often mapped across the 17 goals. Each SDG may signify a domain of risk to business and society (Trucost, 2018), which might persist and intensify unless they are adequately and efficiently tackled. Hence, ESG factors are highly compatible with the SDGs, and the ESG metrics are frequently correlated with all 17 SDGs. Ultimately, organizations and businesses that adopt a proactive approach toward the SDG agenda are expected to improve their ESG and sustainability performance, resulting in higher ESG ratings while simultaneously uncovering new sustainability growth and development opportunities (Aldowaisih *et al.*, 2022). Ortiz-de-Mandojana and Bansal (2016) revealed that a positive correlation exists between strong sustainability performance and lower financial volatility, increased sales growth, and enhanced long-term survival prospects across a 15-year time frame. There is also anecdotal evidence from corporate leaders that products associated with sustainable practices tend to experience faster growth, e.g., Hindustan Unilever (Jeevan, 2016).

Since various problem solving and project management frameworks are similar in nature, to make a concise articulation for the theoretical framework, the CFA Institute Ethical Decision-Making Framework is adopted for more detailed referencing. The CFA Institute, established in 1947, is a worldwide non-profit professional organization that seeks to offer accredited finance education and training to investment professionals (CFA Institute, 2023). The Institute has established a valuable resource known as the ethical decision-making framework, which aims to assist investment professionals in resolving a variety of ethical scenarios and challenges that transcend “right” or “wrong” (CFA Institute, 2017). The framework consists of four major elements: **Identify**, **Consider**, **Act**, and **Reflect**.

Under the CFA ethical decision-making framework, **Identify** involves recognizing relevant facts, stakeholders, duties owed, ethical principles, and conflicts of interest. It emphasizes the importance of gathering comprehensive information and considering multiple perspectives to identify important issues that may impact decision-making (CFA Institute, 2019, pp.16-17). This element expects to guide professionals and stakeholders to clearly define and understand the challenges and issues that they are facing. This is similar to the first step of the four-step risk management process, Risk Identification, which involves recognizing and defining potential risks or opportunities. Hence, the Challenge phase of the new CEPAR® Model describes the process of identifying material ESG factors and is referenced in the Identify element under the CFA framework. Both models involve recognizing and understanding the challenges or issues at hand (ESG-related risks) and the potential impact on the business.

For the **Consider** element under the CFA framework, it is crucial to evaluate the materiality of the challenges identified and consider ethical aspects in decision-making. According to the CFA Institute, ethical conduct goes beyond legal requirements and encompasses what various societal groups consider ethically correct behavior. Ethical decision-making requires individuals to think through the facts of the situation and make

appropriate choices even in the absence of clear laws or rules. It involves judgment, actively considering the interests of stakeholders, and striving to benefit multiple stakeholders while minimizing risks, including reputational risk (CFA Institute, 2019). Similarly, the second step of the four-step risk management process, Risk Assessment, involves qualitatively and quantitatively assessing and evaluating the risks or opportunities. Hence, the Evaluation phase of the new CEPAR® Model highlights the importance of assessing the corporate performance on the identified challenges and evaluating both their impact and financial materiality for the business (Schoenmaker and Schramade, 2019). It is also crucial to consider the long-term consequences and avoid over-reliance on compliance alone. Evaluating the ethical aspects of challenges requires a broader perspective and consideration of the interests of stakeholders beyond shareholder wealth maximization and immediate situational influences.

The **Act** element of the CFA framework involves actions taken, but places emphasis on the continuous monitoring and feedback that occurs during the implementation process of the planned strategies, ensuring their alignment with long-term objectives of the organization. Organizations are encouraged to engage in performance measurement, wherein they assess their performance, compare it against the desired outcomes, and implement necessary adaptations or corrective actions. The iterative nature of decision-making underscores the need for ongoing review and change in order to ensure that planning and execution are in accordance with intended objectives (CFA Institute, 2019). The CEPAR® model entails the division of the Act process into two distinct phases, namely Planning and Action. During the Planning phase, the focus is to develop a comprehensive and organized plan that is both effective and successful. It is noteworthy that the plan is not static and should be adaptable to evolving conditions. The significance of emphasizing the iterative nature of planning and execution, as well as the incorporation of stakeholder viewpoints and ethical decision-making standards, cannot be overstated in the Action phase. The implementation of regular reviews and input from stakeholders facilitates an ongoing improvement and refinement of the plan.

This notion refers specifically to the third and fourth steps of the four-step risk management process, namely Risk Treatment and Risk Monitoring and Reporting. The purpose of Risk Treatment is to formulate a treatment plan that mitigates the likelihood or severity of risks and enhances the probability or advantages of opportunities (aligns with the Planning phase of the CEPAR® model), whereas Risk Monitoring and Reporting are centered on the ongoing monitoring and reporting of risks, opportunities, and their corresponding treatment plans (aligns with the Review phase of the CEPAR® model). Overall, the Planning phase of the CEPAR® model provides the foundation for action by developing a comprehensive plan, while the subsequent Action phase is where the planned strategies are executed and monitored. The use of feedback loops to focus on continuous improvement in both phases ensures that strategic planning is properly implemented into action and progress is made toward desired goals (Schoenmaker and Schramade, 2019).

The final component of the CFA framework, **Reflect**, encourages a rigorous examination aimed at identifying areas in need of improvement and informing subsequent ethical decision-making processes. This highlights the iterative and reflective nature inherent in the professional realm, when individuals are expected to continuously evaluate and derive insights from their decisions and actions. Gaining a comprehensive awareness of one's personal strengths and weaknesses might significantly enhance the ability to make more informed and ethically sound decisions in the future. Likewise, the Review phase of the CEPAR® model maintains the iterative character of the reflection and assessment process as mentioned in the Reflect (CFA) and Risk Monitoring and Reporting (four-step). The focus lies on assessing the outcome against specific evaluation criteria, which encompass long-term objectives, ESG goals, non-financial KPIs, contributions to SDGs, and financial KPIs.

Furthermore, the notion proposes the pursuit of direction, evaluating alternative actions, and reflecting multiple times as new information and consequences unfold (CFA Institute, 2019). Generally, both the Reflect and Review approaches emphasize the importance of the iterative reflection and internal review to enhance ethical decision-making processes, while also prioritizing the interests of clients and organizations. This is not a final stage.

Table 1 provides an overview of the referenced idea and the model structure of both approaches (CEPAR® vs. CFA) with respect to the four-step risk management process. Both approaches adhere to a structural framework for problem-solving and decision-making, emphasizing addressing challenges, evaluating options, planning actions, taking action, and reviewing the outcomes.

Methodology

The CEPAR® model is a five-step methodology newly developed by ICSD as a practical tool for stakeholders and professionals in the industry. Its purpose is to facilitate the adoption of essential knowledge and skills, as well as the effective evaluation of underlying ESG-related risks. Ultimately, it aims to tackle the most pressing ESG issues, enhance the effectiveness of decision-making and increase business opportunities. Table 2 summarizes the questions and guidelines on how to adopt the CEPAR® Model for particular scenarios and case studies.

Case studies and discussions

This section presents two case studies that examine the concepts of social (S) responsibility (Case Study 1) and environmental (E) responsibility (Case Study 2). These case studies exemplify the implementation of the new CEPAR® model in various disciplines.

CEPAR® Model	CFA Framework	Reference Ideas	Four-Step Risk Management
Challenge	Identify	<u>Challenge</u> : includes identifying core corporate-level challenges or potential ESG-related challenges <u>Identify</u> : involves identifying the challenges or dilemmas in general	Risk Identification
Evaluation	Consider	<u>Evaluation</u> : involves evaluating the materiality of the challenges identified and considering ethical aspects in the decision-making process <u>Consider</u> : emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations in the evaluation of challenges and decision-making processes	Risk Assessment
Planning Action	Act	<u>Planning</u> : involves developing a comprehensive and organized action plan that is adaptable to changing circumstances <u>Action</u> : allocates resources and implements action plan <u>Act</u> : make a decision and act	Risk Treatment
Review	Reflect	<u>Review</u> : evaluates the outcome of the actions taken against various specific evaluation criteria and identifies areas for improvement <u>Reflect</u> : encourages a rigorous examination aimed at identifying areas in need of improvement and informs subsequent ethical decision-making processes.	Risk Monitoring and Reporting

Table 1. Overview of the referenced idea and model structure of CEPAR® and CFA Framework, with respect to the four-step Risk Management process

Source: By authors

Challenge	<p>What is your Challenge?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify one or more core business challenges related to ESG risks and opportunities, such as (E) environmental issues of carbon emissions, waste management, pollution; (S) social issues of employee benefits, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) issues, human capital management; and (G) governance issues of board diversity, general business ethics.
Evaluation	<p>Is your challenge material to the corporation's business?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider double materiality in light of both the impact materiality on society and the environment and the financial materiality of its implications. This step confirms the materiality of the challenges identified using the materiality matrix of the corporate stakeholders, if available, Sustainability Accounting Standard Board (SASB) materiality framework checking, and also stakeholder analysis by identifying both long-term and short-term goals of stakeholders. ➤ Stakeholder analysis: identify major stakeholders and prepare a stakeholder impact map (Schoemaker and Schramade, 2019, pp. 136-137). ➤ The materiality analysis confirms the relevance of the challenges to the long-term sustainability of the corporation and justifies its allocation of resources. ➤ It should prioritise the challenges if more than one challenge were identified in step 1.
Planning	<p>What are the policy directions that are beneficial to the corporation and the stakeholders?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Determine the policy plans that are beneficial to the ESG risk mitigation/transition to a sustainable world. Develop a strategic plan, refined business proposition and even a modified business model that is adaptable to changing circumstances. ➤ Discuss whether the plans contribute to frameworks like the specific goals of the SDGs, ISO standards, SBTi, TCFD, TNFD, GRI, SASB, CSRD, IFRS S1 & S2, etc. ➤ From the policy plan, the direction to determine the policy's success will be discussed. ➤ Set target performance and metrics.
Action	<p>How can you implement the action plan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Illustrate the action plan (i.e., resource allocation, incentive schemes for management and employees, training and culture-building activities, etc.) to facilitate the implementation of the ESG solution. Consider the concept of just transition in the process. ➤ The solution to ESG risks and opportunities intends to help corporations sustain long-term sustainability and competitiveness by re-affirming social license to operate, enhancing customer loyalty, improving efficiency, alleviating climate physical and transition risks, reducing regulatory pressure, increasing employee satisfaction, mitigating negative externalities, or ensuring benefit from sustainability megatrends.
Review	<p>How would you evaluate the implementation outcome?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review the outcome of the actions taken against various specific key performance indicators. The key performance indicators take into account qualitative as well as quantitative benchmarks to determine the success of the policy plan. The key performance indicators can reference the sustainability report data disclosure required by the government for listed companies and international standards. ➤ Evaluate if the outcome meets the desired goals and identify areas for improvement. This stage also serves as a feedback loop to modify the policy plan and target performance defined in the Planning step.

Table 2.
Overview of how to
adopt the CEPAR®
Model for a business to
evaluate the
underlying ESG-
related issues

Case Study 1: Disability Inclusion in a Global Credit Card Network Company	
Challenge	An international credit card network group received complaints about its outdated diversity and inclusion policy and concerns about employee rights and reputation risks.
Evaluation	<p>In the SASB framework, “Employee Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion” is considered as one of the ESG material issues for the group. Discrimination in the workplace may weaken employee motivation and loyalty, and even violate relevant government policies in some countries. An appropriate DEI policy can ensure the group’s social licence to operate, and therefore, is financially significant to the company. For disability inclusion, the company is one of the signatories of Valuable 500, a global organization with 500 CEOs supporting disability inclusion. It is one of the value propositions for the company to support a diverse, inclusive, and balanced workforce including physically challenged staff. Therefore, in terms of double materiality, a well-developed DEI policy has both financial and social impact materiality effects on the group.</p> <p>The materiality analysis extracted from a stakeholder impact map can help the company to justify the inclusion challenge as shown below:</p> <p>Employees – The company should play a key role in cultivating a purposeful work environment for everyone. This includes a level playing field for employees from different walks of life.</p> <p>Shareholders – The company’s commitment to inclusion will be supported if it is proven successful from the financial key performance indicators.</p> <p>Financial institutions, merchants, and consumers – The company’s commitment to the inclusion is supported, since it symbolizes its firm commitment to working with partners for commercially sustainable and accessible fintech products. This can help financial institutions and merchants remain competitive with the most advanced fintech products for consumers.</p> <p>Suppliers – The company’s commitment to inclusion can help the suppliers justify the higher premiums paid to people with disabilities by framing it as necessary for engaging with large and reputable companies like the group in this case.</p> <p>Government and regulatory bodies – They are likely to support the company’s inclusion initiative, as this can help them address social issues, including employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and encompass accessible banking.</p> <p>Non-governmental organizations – They are likely to support the company’s inclusion initiative, as this can provide gainful employment opportunities for people with disabilities. These organizations can also advise the company on widening the talent pool and implementing effective workplace accommodative measures.</p>
Planning	<p>Considering the above stakeholders’ expectations, a group-wide strategic move that suits the value proposition is essential. The company recommended a disability inclusion plan with the following directions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarking itself against competitors in terms of disability inclusion targets (key performance indicators) like the percentage of staff with disabilities. • The company should look for opportunities to support inclusive fintech products through research and development and offer venues for testing the products. • Disability inclusion can help the company to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth - Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all ○ Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development 	
Action	
<p>The group implemented a new five-year initiative with several hundreds of millions of US dollars in a commitment to combat racism and create equal opportunities for all, including people with disabilities. To facilitate disability inclusion, substantial resources will be allocated to staff policy, product development, supplier policy, and stakeholder engagement and communication. The following detailed strategies are recommended:</p>	
Stakeholders	Actions
Employees	Collect ideas from employees for setting inclusion policies that form an essential part of the company's creation of a level playing field for employees from different walks of life. Disability inclusion allows employees to learn about working effectively with people with disabilities.
Shareholders	Gain the support from major shareholders that disability inclusion is a key part of the company's strategy, providing a widened talent pool as well as increased opportunities for current and future products to be commercially sustainable and accessible for people with disabilities and their caregivers.
Financial institutions, merchants, and consumers	Showcase that the disability inclusion is the company's commitment to co-pilot commercially sustainable and human-centered products for people with disabilities and their caregivers.
Suppliers	Disability inclusion is the company's expectation for suppliers to support people with disabilities by recruiting and purchasing their products.
Government and regulatory bodies	The company will show commitment to disability inclusion by working with government and regulatory bodies on measures that best incentivize employers to hire people with disabilities.
Non-governmental organizations	The company will support non-governmental organizations by providing internship and career opportunities to people with disabilities. Their views on the company's products and services will be sought for higher accessibility. The company will also offer staff volunteers to empower people with disabilities and share skills and knowledge related to fintech.
Review	
<p>The company can consider the following key performance indicators as a part of the measurement for its disability inclusion initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of employees with disabilities in the company and supplies across different seniority levels • The percentage of changes in applicants identifying themselves as having disabilities. 	

- The hiring ratio of employees with disabilities to other employees
- The turnover rate of employees with disabilities
- The number of days of absence for employees with disabilities
- The number of complaints filed due to disability discrimination
- The number of employees attending training in working with people with disabilities and the evaluation results of the training programs
- The number of the company’s disability inclusion partners from government and non-governmental organizations

In 2021, a non-profit organization for global disability inclusion awarded the company as one of the best places to work for people with disabilities.

The company can further consider the following areas to review its work on disability inclusion:

- Employees’ and suppliers’ experience of working with people with disabilities.
- Disabled employees’ experience in working for the company.
- Financial institutions, merchants, and consumers’ views of the company products in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities and their caregivers.
- Government and regulatory bodies and non-governmental organizations’ perceptions of the company’s support for people with disabilities.

The following actions are recommended if the outcome is unsatisfactory:

- Surveys should be conducted to understand the challenges facing employees and suppliers in facilitating disability inclusion.
- Interviews should be conducted to learn about the experiences of employees with disabilities in the company.
- Surveys should be conducted with shareholders on how the company should communicate disability inclusion as a part of the company’s strategy.
- Consultations should be launched with government and regulatory bodies and non-governmental organizations on how the company can better support disabled employees and tell its story of disability inclusion in society.

Case Study 2: Environmental Impact of ABC Minibus Company
<p>Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The company’s minibuses are causing environmental pollution. • Future governmental policy trend: possible mandatory phasing out of the diesel minibus. • Intensified competition from other means of transportation like bus services.
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The company owns over one hundred diesel minibuses. The large amount of GHG emissions has a material impact on the environment. Meanwhile, the company’s service mainly covers rural areas, which are mostly country parks, campsites, piers, etc. Air-polluting minibuses will stifle citizen’s motivation to enjoy outdoor activities, leading to a drop in the number of customers visiting those rural areas on weekends/holidays. In other words, environmental risk is financially material to the business. • Considering SASB materiality framework for the “Road Transportation industry”,

<p>“GHG Emissions”, “Air Quality”, and “Driver Working Conditions and Accident & Safety Management” are the significant issues that merit concern. Financial materiality is further evidenced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Hong Kong’s Climate Action Plan 2050, the government proactively promotes the 2050 net zero emission target. The risk of phasing out diesel minibuses in the coming years is significant and may become the major consideration in the government’s franchise renewal of minibus service. • Customers may switch from minibuses to buses due to their increase in the routes, the frequency of service, as well as the arrival time featured at the bus companies’ apps that notably reduce waiting time and improve service reliability. • The priority of the challenge is: 1) government policy change, 2) competition from bus service, and 3) environmental pollution. • The views extracted from the stakeholder impact map are as follows. The results give further insights into different stakeholders’ perspectives that generally warrant policies and actions for the mini-bus company. 					
Material issue	Local community	Tourists/passengers	Employees	Government/NGO	Local Business
Short-term goals	Reliable transportation	Access to remote areas and commune with nature (outdoor activities)	Good pay, Work-life balance, medical benefits	Service pledge	More customers Lower cost
Long-term goals	Promote traveling to rural areas	Enjoyment and better health	Financial security	Support local development without violation of regulations	Success in business
Positive impact	Take customers to their destination	Bring the public to the scenic spot	Job fulfilment	Provide essential transportation services	Provide means of access for the public from outside
Negative impact	Transportation costs affect liveability	Transportation cost	Working hours, Accidents, Health issues	Disappointment with unsatisfactory service performance	Income limited by transportation capacity
<p>Planning</p> <p>A substantial change in business model and strategy is suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace diesel vehicles with electric vehicles/HFC vehicles to eliminate carbon emission in operation. • Set up green minibus stations. • Develop eco-tourism using new minibus routes. • Develop mobile apps showing minibus arrival times. • Set key performance indicators (KPIs): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installing EV charging stations and PV panels at minibus stations can provide affordable and clean energy. The cost will be reduced through generating electricity for the company's own use and selling to the power company through the feed-in tariff scheme. The reduction in electricity cost would be a KPI. • Developing new routes on holidays/weekends can increase the awareness of eco- 					

<p>tourism, which meets one of the Sustainable Cities and Communities goals to establish affordable and sustainable transport systems. Using mobile apps can not only reduce the traffic waiting time but also boost the confidence of customers in the local transport system. The increase in customers would be another KPI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to SDG Goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SDG7: Affordable and Clean Energy ○ SDG13: Climate Action ○ SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Action
<p>New electric vehicles/ HFC vehicles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government is preparing to launch an \$80M pilot scheme on e-PLBs, subsidizing the trials of e-PLBs on various green minibuses. The company will apply for the government subsidies. <p>Renovation of the minibus station:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of EV charging stations • Installation of PV panels for EV charging/local display/streetlights • Rural minibus stations are considered to be an ideal trial location for installing EV chargers and PV panels because they are outdoor stations with direct sunlight. <p>Application to develop new routes to special tourism locations on holidays/weekends.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirecting tourists to sightseeing spots in rural areas • Increasing the awareness of environmental protection in enjoying the beautiful views <p>New mobile apps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with the government and other minibus companies • Allowing better time management with the arrival time feature <p>Overall customer satisfaction, environmental protection, fulfillment of government policy direction, and competitiveness can be enhanced.</p>
Review
<p>A review should be conducted after a three-month period of implementation. Surveys and interviews can be organized with different stakeholders, e.g., customers and staff members. Checking the progress of the achievement of KPIs is also crucial. If the outcome is not satisfactory, a further investigation is needed, possibly utilizing external consultants.</p>

Conclusion

Globally, there is a growing trend among corporations to prioritize sustainability by actively pursuing ESG objectives, driven by the significant repercussions of climate change. Addressing ESG-related risks has become an essential element of business strategy (Schoemaker and Schramade, 2019). However, most of the tools have only focused on ESG ratings and measures for reporting instead of supporting stakeholders and professionals to better comprehend corporate risk and effectively tackle urgent ESG concerns. The new proposed five-step CEPAR® Model methodology expects to narrow this gap. The CFA Institute's ethical decision-making framework (CFA Institute, 2017) serves as the structural foundation for the new proposed CEPAR® Model, which also includes the principles from the six-step financial planning process developed by Financial Planning Standard Board and the four-step risk management process (Rejda, 1998). The method and guidelines are outlined in this study for easier appreciation by any stakeholders and workers of corporations to analyze ethical dilemmas, make principled decisions, take actions, and review outcomes. Two case studies from different fields (social and environmental) are introduced to illustrate the practical

adoption of the CEPAR® model. Ultimately, organizations and businesses that adopt the model are expected to enhance their short- and long-term decision-making skills, improve the overall ESG and sustainability performance of the company and increase business opportunities.

The new five-step CEPAR® model was developed in 2020 by ICSD and is currently being adopted in the Certified ESG Planner (CEP®) education program (ICSD, 2023). The concept was initially inspired by the globally recognized advanced certification for financial planners known as Certified Financial Planner (CFP) that follows a six-step approach to financial planning (CFP Board, 2024). The aim of the Certified ESG Planner (CEP®) education program is to equip students with the essential knowledge and skills to cope with the most pressing ESG issues in a complex world. As of now (2024), over 3,000 people have taken the education program, and the ICSD has over 2,000 members from different industries, and holds the title of Certified ESG Planners (CEP®). They are familiar with the new CEPAR® model and capable of addressing sustainability problems and providing practical advice. The CEPAR® model has also been utilized as an assessment tool for both undergraduate and postgraduate ESG-related courses in universities (i.e., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Lingnan University), as well as executive training programs at a professional organization (i.e., The Hong Kong Management Association). Future study may seek to analytically assess the effectiveness and practicality of the model among a wide range of stakeholders/organizations from various industries.

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Electronic public service delivery: progress and challenges in Bangladesh

Electronic
public service
delivery

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to examine the state of electronic service delivery in Bangladesh. It reviews the structure and operation of the “e-service” centers at the district, sub-district (upazila), and union levels by taking an inventory and assessing their contributions.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on a review of the functions and operations of the service delivery agencies with reference to the claims made by the government. It is based on secondary materials obtained from academic studies, government documents, relevant websites, and media reports.

Findings – Electronic delivery of public services in Bangladesh has not been effective as planned. There are issues regarding channels of communication, the competence of public officials, human and financial resources, and political will to support the agencies delivering public services.

Originality/value – The paper examines the arrangements, practices, and problems of delivery of public services in Bangladesh through e-service centers at the local levels to determine the progress and potentials of employing digital technology for addressing problems. It proposes the strategy for public service delivery by using digital technology in the country.

Keywords Electronic service delivery, Communication, Technology, Bangladesh

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Delivering public services, one of the key tasks of governments, has become increasingly challenging for various reasons. Population growth, the diverse nature of services required, and continued increases in costs add to the problem. Besides, the pandemic of COVID-19 has resulted in a situation marked by uncertainty, anxiety, and stress for both governments and citizens. The challenges of economic and effective public service delivery have forced many governments to turn to the advancements of technology in dealing with them. With the exceptional progress achieved in the field of information technology, governments are expected to deliver quick and efficient public services that can be accessed by citizens. The expectations of citizens need to be matched with the capacity and enthusiasm of governments and the bureaucracies that provide the services. Technology, therefore, can be an effective tool for enhancing the quality of public services, governance and citizen engagement, and debates about its application and outcomes are emerging.

Electronic public service in developing countries is impacted by state capacity, socio-economic conditions, and the relationship between citizens and the government. There are



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various angles from which the issue can be examined. Establishing the infrastructure for delivering public services electronically is a significant challenge in these countries. On the other hand, citizens also face challenges in accessing and using the services. A study on transformation of service delivery in Bangladesh reported that e-government in Bangladesh is yet to make a breakthrough in governance and service delivery, although it has set the wheels of change in motion (Siddiquee, 2016). This points to the importance of the capacity of governments and digital skills possessed by citizens. An overview of e-governance in India, Ethiopia and Fiji found that it contributes to closer relationship between citizens and government and helps reduce corruption (Singh *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it will be meaningful to examine the operation and impact of electronic service delivery in Bangladesh and assess its progress and potentials. Kuk (2003) identified the impact of digital divide on electronic service delivery because it does not provide equal access to the services for all citizens. This paper intends to address some of the gaps in the literature based on case studies.

Governments are mandated to deliver essential services that are critical for citizens. They include maintenance of law and order, healthcare, education, and transportation which are essential to allow citizens to lead dignified lives and contribute to the general well-being of society. The objective of this paper is to provide an overview of the state of public service delivery in Bangladesh and identify challenges confronting the government in this task. The expectations of citizens are heightened by promises to use advanced technology that can enhance efficiency and effectiveness and make it convenient for citizens to access and utilize public services. In the process, the paper explores the role of technology that has the potential to bring about revolutionary changes in governance by using digital platforms for data storage and management. Additionally, the paper investigates the prospects of citizen engagement and participation in decisions on public service delivery.

This paper intends to illustrate the challenges as well as opportunities for public service delivery using digital technology in Bangladesh. It will also formulate recommendations for policymakers and practitioners for improving public service delivery and emphasize the need for stronger collaboration between the national government and the agencies delivering public services, the importance of investing in technology and capacity building, and the need for greater citizen participation in designing and delivering public services. The ultimate objective is to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the improvement of public service delivery in developing countries.

The paper will address three research questions. First, how effective are the existing structures and procedures for electronic service delivery in Bangladesh? Second, what are the institutional and procedural challenges encountered by the government and citizens in delivering and accessing public services through electronic medium? Third, what needs to be done to address and improve public service delivery in the country? The analysis will also cover other issues that help or hinder the delivery of electronic public services in Bangladesh. The research questions will be answered through literature review, and analysis of government documents, relevant websites, and media reports.

Electronic public service delivery

Public service delivery is a critical component of public administration because it serves the needs of citizens, particularly those who are unable to access services due to various constraints. Bangladesh has a population of approximately 180 million people, many of whom are not adequately connected to the supply chain for public services, and this makes it an overwhelming task as well as one of the key responsibilities of the government. Ironically, the centralized approach to administration in the country has resulted in a system that is heavily dependent on the national government and bureaucracy for accessing and obtaining public services.

Traditional approach of delivering public services has been criticized as slow, expensive, inflexible, and often failing to meet the needs of citizens. Siddiquee (2016) identified inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability, rigidity, and corruption as the main problems that affect public service delivery in developing countries. The traditional approach is no longer considered appropriate for the contemporary world, and Zussman (2002) suggested alternative arrangements for service delivery. Unprecedented and impressive progress in technology has opened opportunities for governments to deliver public services by using information technology. Gilbert *et al.* (2004) explored the reasons for selecting electronic self-service delivery and reported that citizens are willing to use online services if the delivery agencies can obtain their trust. They expect assurances that their financial details are secure, the information is relevant and accurate, and it will result in saving of time and money for the users.

The costs of online transactions compared to the use of mail, telephone, or in-person service are “dramatically lower” (Roy, 2017, p. 539). Experiments with alternative service delivery methods evolved with the adoption of new strategies for management in the public sector. Ford and Zussman (1997) alerted that governments can no longer “support rigid, bureaucratic, reactive, rules-driven organizations”, and they need to be replaced by “flexible, consultative, outcome-focused and proactive” public services (p. 2). Information technology, particularly the internet, makes it possible for governments to communicate directly with citizens to exchange information and reduce the intermediary functions that were once performed by several government agencies (Pal, 1999, p. 26). In essence, no government can afford to deliver public services through traditional modes anymore, and they must be proactive in making the transition to new methods.

Wilson *et al.* (1998) view e-service as “an activity or series of activities that take place during the interaction between a provider and a customer through an electronic channel”. In simple terms, e-service delivery involves the use of technology for enabling citizens to access services without having to visit public agencies in person. The obvious benefits include savings in time and cost for the citizens as well as the advantage of reducing the number of locations of bureaucratic organizations. The arrangement injects the element of flexibility and convenience that has positive consequences for both the providers and recipients of public services.

The literature on electronic service delivery is relatively new, and there is room for contributing insight based on case studies. Based on an extensive review of the existing literature, this paper reviews the structure and operation of “e-service” centers at the three levels of local government. Administratively, Bangladesh is organized through a hierarchy of district, sub-district (upazila), and union levels. This paper focuses on selected service areas through which the government of Bangladesh initiated the process of electronic service delivery. With this objective, the paper examines the cases of the implementation of citizens’ charter, the provision of social safety net payments through electronic means, and the grievance redress system to assess the impact and potentials of e-service delivery in Bangladesh.

Benefits of e-service delivery

There are several arguments in support of e-service delivery. First, electronic delivery can increase the efficiency of public services by reducing the time and cost associated with manual processes. For example, online applications for public services can be completed faster using fewer resources compared to manual paper-based processes. Secondly, electronic service delivery can increase accessibility to government-provided services by facilitating access to citizens in remote or underserved areas. This can be particularly beneficial for those citizens who have difficulties with mobility or live in areas with poor transportation infrastructure.

Thirdly, electronic service delivery can improve transparency by providing citizens with quick and real-time information about the status of their applications or requests. This can help to build trust between citizens and governments by increasing transparency and accountability. Gilbert *et al.* (2004) assessed the relative importance of adoption barriers or challenges, such as trust, financial security, and information quality, and benefits in terms of time and money. A study of the Palestinian on-line banking customers, Salem *et al.* (2019) found that their behaviour was influenced by “technological leadership, e-trust, e-loyalty, customers’ value for online personalization, customers’ concern for privacy and propensity of technology adoption”. These studies highlight the importance of trust in establishing and operating electronic service delivery practices.

A fourth benefit of electronic service delivery is cost reduction. It can save expenses associated with traditional paper-based processes, such as printing and mailing. Additionally, it can help to reduce the need for physical office space and personnel, which can result in significant savings. Fifth, electronic service delivery can improve data management by providing a centralized repository of citizen information. This can help to ensure that data about citizens are secure and can be easily accessed and updated by authorized officials. Finally, electronic service delivery can enhance the user experience by providing citizens with user-friendly interfaces and self-service options. This will improve the level of citizen satisfaction and increase the likelihood of repeat use of the online facilities. In this way, electronic service delivery can lead to significant benefits for both citizens and governments. A more effective and responsive public service delivery system can be constructed by improving efficiency, accessibility, and transparency. There will be additional benefits in saving cost, managing data, and enhancing the experience of users.

It is argued that efficiency is improved through electronic service delivery and increased emphasis on accountability and transparency helps reduce corruption and mismanagement (Bhuiyan, 2011). A survey by the United Nations (2008) found that e-government promotes innovation in delivery of public services, increases flexibility in service use, and fosters citizen’s participation and empowerment. Citizens have high expectations from electronic service delivery in developing countries. It is “expected to help eradicate poverty, boost national economic growth, reduce bureaucratic complexity and establish good governance” (Hoque, 2006, p. 34).

With increasing incidents of digital transactions that have become a common feature of modern economies, governments seek to adopt innovative services and new approaches to meet the changing expectations of citizens. Interestingly, the success of the new approach of citizen-centered service delivery is most likely to lead to higher expectations about the speed of delivery, ease of access, and increased concern over the protection of privacy. The expected benefits of electronic service delivery prompted the government of Bangladesh to undertake measures that would facilitate the process.

Electronic public service delivery in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has established several electronic platforms for improving connectivity with citizens and delivering public services. G2G (government-to-government) is used to facilitate intergovernmental operations and the provision of e-government services. G2C (government-to-citizens) and G2B (government-to-business) are used by citizens and businesses to obtain government services of various categories. The processes were initiated in the 1990s for improving service delivery with the aid of information technology. Siddiquee (2016) believes the arrangements were intended to yield several benefits and can also be considered as a tool for combating poverty (p. 8).

Bangladesh went through several changes of government since independence, and each faced stronger pressures for responding to citizens’ demands for public services. Over the

years, every regime sought to initiate programs aimed at improvements in the socio-political, administrative, and economic systems. However, these efforts were mostly unsuccessful and did not contribute to good governance and development (Tahrira and Jaegal, 2012).

A scan of media reports and discussions with citizens helped identify the most used services obtained by citizens from government agencies. They included legal and regulatory requirements, land litigation, judiciary, education, communication, and taxation. For accessing these services or even to obtain basic information, citizens had to visit the urban centers where government offices were located. The first step was to reduce the investments in time and cost to citizens by making the information and services accessible from their homes or centers in the localities with internet facilities. With this purpose in mind, the government developed a program for Access to Information or A2I. The platform was designed and implemented with financial assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Karim, 2015).

After the implementation of A2I, the Cabinet Division reviewed the operations and performance of 53 departments and branches and 394 agencies for 2,726 public services as part of their Digital Service Accelerator Program. Two thousand one hundred twenty-nine of these services include manual operation and there are 597 digital services. That means that about 22 percent of public services seem to be available on the internet, and 78 percent of services are offered offline. Most e-services are devoted simply to the collection and dissemination of information (GoB, 2019).

At present, there are 587 e-services and 71 mobile services available through the Bangladesh national portal. Shared services are used by multiple organizations and e-government attainment (e-GP), e-file management (e-filing system, Nothi), Personnel Data Sheet, PMIS, eForms, and iVAS. Forty-two services provide simple PDF and radio channel information or links. The Citizen/Business Services and Administration include 307 and 50 e-Services respectively. Multiple organizations share eight e-services (GoB, 2019). Electronic services are arranged under headings such as Admission, Agriculture, Questions, Digital Center Channels, Education, Results of Examinations, Finance and Trade, Fisheries and Livestock, Forms, Health Services, Input Tax, etc. (GoB, 2019).

E-service centers in Bangladesh

Traditionally, district and sub-district government offices offered a broad range of public services that consumed considerable time and effort for both providers and recipients. The result was delay in accessing and using the services with adverse effects on the livelihood of the poor. The services were not available when required, and the slow speed in delivering them forced citizens to make repeated visits by missing work and incurring expenses for travel and accommodation in the urban centers where the government offices were located. With no access to information on procedures and schedules, citizens were often found to run around helplessly without any understanding of the required protocol (A2i, 2018).

District e-Service Centres (DESCs)

The administrative center within the district is the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC). Its main task is to coordinate the activities of the regional offices that represent the central government across the country through the district, sub-district, and union-level establishments. DC offices offer a wide range of services such as issuing licenses, certificates, documents for land ownership, revenue collection, inquiries, education, social welfare, and several others. The services were time-consuming, labor-intensive, and resulted in delays with a detrimental effect on the livelihood of the poor. There were additional costs in the form of fees charged by the government that led to a considerable increase in the actual cost of accessing the services.

The Availability of Information (a2i), a program implemented with technical assistance from UNDP, USAID, and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) of Bangladesh, primarily addresses both the supply and the demand side of the program by facilitating the availability of information through communications technologies (ICTs). The District E-Service Centers (DESCs) operate in all 64 districts of the country. To facilitate the process, the background governance processes for information on services and delivery have been simplified (Aziz, 2018). Citizens do not have to interact with government officials in person and can avoid the process that could intimidate them, as the weaker party involved in the transactions. The presence of UDCs across Bangladesh allow citizens to track their applications without visiting the district headquarters.

Upazila Community e-Center

Upazila Community e-Centers (CeC) were installed in 147 locations, and they seek to raise awareness of ICT among the poor and disadvantaged groups. Their primary goals include the reduction of intermediary power centers and the improvement of commercial and entrepreneurial programs for the poor. Like the UDC, the e-Centers provide critical livelihood information on agriculture, nutrition, education, human rights, village industries, and the latest developments in these areas. The Upazila administration is headed by an officer of the rank of Deputy Secretary who oversees the CeC's operations (Hasan, 2016).

Union Digital Centres (UDCs)

The UDCs represent a new approach to strengthening local government institutions through a citizen-centered strategy. In this way, sensitivity to the market and demands of citizens were integrated into the model. Instead of making it available only to the government, the arrangements intended to decentralize public service delivery. The Prime Minister's Office has established A2I, a program of 4,554 one-stop information and delivery services recognized as Union Digital Centres (UDCs) in union councils, the lowest level of the government in Bangladesh. This facility was introduced with technical assistance from the United Nations Development Program and the United States Agency for International Development. These one-stop-service centers are run primarily by citizen entrepreneurs – one male and one female - in tandem with elected representatives of local governments. They use advanced technology to provide citizens with access to public services, both free of charge and on an extra-cost basis. The services may include issuance of birth certificates and passports, telemedicine advice, and job application for government services, depending on the nature of services (A2i, 2018). This innovative public-private entrepreneurial activity model was developed to combine the public sector's mandate and infrastructure with entrepreneurship and private sector efficiency, based on support from local authorities.

Selected e-Services in Bangladesh

Citizen's Charter

The Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) advocated the implementation of a citizens' charter in 2000, and the Ministries of the Government of Bangladesh were advised to draw up charters for citizens in 2007. Following the advice, all ministries and most government authorities have prepared citizen charters (Khan, 2008). Although several years have passed since the introduction of this process, most service recipients remain unaware of the charter (Kundo, 2018).

Citizens' charter refers to the arrangements for informing citizens and providers about the expectations of the quantity as well as the quality of services. They can know about the availability of public services with information on the commitment of the agency, standard

time frame for delivering services, the scope for choice and consultation of service delivery, the requirement for non-discrimination, methods of grievance redress, and demonstrated value for money (Huque and Ahsan, 2016). Citizens are encouraged to engage in discussions about service and methods for contacting providers and learn about the intended outcome and procedures for seeking redress if they encounter problems.

Social safety net payments

Social protection, or social security net programs, is a set of principles and programs designed to reduce the economic and social risk of the poor, and enhance their ability to protect themselves against risks and income losses. All vulnerable population groups, including the underemployed, disabled, sick, elderly, and orphans are covered by a comprehensive social safety net (Ahmed, 2019). Social security net payments are a critical intervention by governments to help citizens who live in extreme poverty. Electronic payment with conditional cash transfer, or other social service payment, involves payment of social benefits to millions of the most vulnerable and financially distressed populations. As the government can determine how it pays beneficiaries, digitizing these payment streams helps to make the disbursements easier to offer and accept. To ensure clarity, speed, and security, the government disburses social security net support through mobile financial service providers, such as Nagad and Bkash (Tasreen, 2021).

Grievance Redress System (GRS)

The Grievance Redress System operates through an online system for submission and redress of both public and official grievances. It is useful for citizens to register grievances relating to design, implementation, or evaluation of policies. They can submit grievances anonymously and track them to follow the process of resolution. The objective of GRS is to improve transparency and accountability in delivering public services and offer an option for systematically resolving complaints, disputes, or conflicts related to any area of delivery. It is beneficial because it can mitigate problems with public service delivery, address the concerns of the people, and promote better relationships between citizens and government agencies.

There is a three-tier redress mechanism in the GRS. The key objective is to resolve grievances by mutual consent. If the parties fail to resolve the issue in this way, the grievances are forwarded to one or more relevant organizations, and a third-party organization may deal with the complaint. When multiple agencies need to cooperate to resolve the grievance, all will be involved in developing a solution. If collaboration with other ministries is required or when the grievance must be transferred to another jurisdiction, it will be forwarded to the appropriate Ministries or agencies by the Cabinet Division (GoB, 2019).

Challenges to e-service delivery

There are several requirements for successful e-service delivery. The internet infrastructure is the most important component, as is the competence of officials and service recipients. Connolly and Bannister (2008) found that the use of information and communication technology has not been an unqualified success anywhere, although it has helped transform the public sector from being “inward-looking and administration-focused” to becoming outward looking with a focus on service delivery. Substantial investments need to be made for creating the necessary infrastructure, hiring, and training personnel, and considerable amounts of time must be devoted to building up the process. At the other end, it needs to be ensured that citizens can access public services electronically, navigate the system to connect with offices and agencies, and possess updated information on services, regulations, procedures, and forms required to complete transactions (Buckley, 2003). Governments must

consistently encourage citizens to use electronic services instead of crowding agencies with demands for services that could be provided in a timely and cost-effective manner.

There are many benefits of electronic service delivery, but governments also encounter lots of challenges during the implementation. The most common challenge is the digital divide. The process requires access for citizens to digital infrastructure, devices, and internet connectivity, and this must be supported by digital literacy. Most citizens in Bangladesh may not have access to these resources. These circumstances result in a digital divide that can exclude certain groups from accessing public services.

There are concerns about data security and privacy in digital delivery. Electronic service delivery requires the collection and processing of personal data, and these must be adequately protected. Citizens expect governments to install data protection measures to protect them from breaches and cyber threats. Electronic service delivery may also be affected by resistance from public officials and citizens who are accustomed to the traditional methods of accessing public services.

Electronic service delivery requires a strong and reliable infrastructure that may be expensive to maintain. It is important for governments to ensure that digital platforms are secure and reliable to meet the needs of citizens. Finally, electronic service delivery should be accessible and user-friendly for citizens from diverse age groups with varied levels of digital literacy. In other words, service delivery platforms must be designed with user experience in mind and provide citizens with support and guidance when they need it.

State of e-service delivery in Bangladesh

There are several challenges to e-service delivery in Bangladesh, and some of these have been highlighted in the previous section of this paper. However, the most prominent issues are related to the areas of technological infrastructure and human capital.

a) Technological infrastructure

The lack of infrastructure in Bangladesh is one of the key factors that restrict innovation and economic growth. Technology is critical for development and innovation, and Bangladesh lags far behind in this area. The field of technology is changing rapidly, and dealing with it requires robust research and innovative approaches. Research and development (R&D) initiatives in developing countries are often funded and conducted by experts from the developed world and/or international agencies. Bangladesh has achieved considerable progress in the development of telecommunication facilities, but internet service remains weak and limited. Local technical and management skills are inadequate, and maintenance of platforms and equipment involves high costs. Besides, the country is frequently hit with power shortages that make it impossible for citizens to access services when needed. In short, the communication system is time-consuming, inefficient, and complex. The state of technology and expertise creates economic pressure and impedes innovative initiatives in the country ([Fahrima and Jaegal, 2012](#)).

b) Human capital

Innovation involves the development of new products, procedures, and processes. Bangladesh is yet to succeed in identifying and adopting new and more productive ways for public sector organizations to implement their programs. Most of these organizations cannot perform due to the absence of a structured and well-planned research management system. The lack of qualified and trained human resources is another significant factor affecting electronic service delivery in Bangladesh. Weaknesses in the local education system are further exacerbated by a high incidence of brain drain that pushes trained human resources to relocate to other countries. Bangladesh needs a competent workforce along with

government assistance and incentives to transform into a knowledge-based society. However, there are no effective arrangements for developing technologically skilled, experienced, and structured government officials within ministries and other governing bodies (Tahrima and Jaegal, 2012). The lack of skilled human resources and ICT ability among government officials contribute to the slow growth of e-government and service delivery.

Although digital public service delivery was initiated over a decade ago in Bangladesh, little progress has been achieved for many reasons. The dearth of infrastructure and capable human resources were identified as the principal causes. The absence of awareness of these facilities is also largely responsible. Moreover, the lack of willingness to try out the new and technologically based electronic service contributed to the problem. For these reasons, the new initiative has not been in practice long enough for analysts to determine the success or failure of the service delivery programs. Since citizens residing in the urban districts are more proficient in using technology and the population is larger, the volume of usage is relatively higher in the District e-Service Centers. However, there is not enough information for assessing the success or failure of the e-Service Centers at this stage.

Prospects of electronic service delivery in Bangladesh

With increasing integration into the world economy and rising demands from the local population, Bangladesh needs to prioritize the delivery of public services and the use of electronic means. This will require careful planning and effective implementation with attention to several areas. At the basic level, the system should be designed with the users in mind. It must be simple to use and trustworthy, with full technical support to deal with problems faced by the citizens. It will be ideal to undertake research to understand their needs and resolve the problems the government wants to address. A good strategy would be to conduct ongoing tests with users to guide design and development. The services should be agile and user-centered and regular update and improvements are critical.

The government of Bangladesh needs to share evidence, research, and decisions, and make available all non-sensitive data, information, and new code developed in the delivery of services to be shared and reused. It is necessary to use open standards and embrace practices, including the use of open-source software. At the same time, the security and privacy risks must be identified and addressed. However, the government must ensure that the security measures do not place additional burdens on the users.

Bangladesh is a small country in size, yet the issue of accessibility remains a formidable challenge. Services must be set up to meet or exceed accessibility standards. Users with distinct needs should be engaged from the outset to ensure that the system works for them. At the same time, public officials must be empowered to deliver improved services. They should have access to equipment, training, and technology, and empowerment is essential to allow officials to make decisions to suit the local conditions.

Governments engaging in electronic service delivery must be competent in data handling. To ensure the reliability of services, data from users should be collected efficiently and held in secure sites to be reused by agencies across the government. The services should be ethical to ensure that all citizens are treated fairly and equitably. This must be accomplished with great care, particularly in view of the emergence and increasing use of artificial intelligence. Finally, collaboration will remain a critical feature of electronic service delivery. It could entail the creation of multidisciplinary teams that will possess a range of skills for delivering common services. Collaboration and partnerships across the government will contribute to the success of electronic service delivery to the citizens.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the government of Bangladesh is interested in taking advantage of technological advancements to improve the delivery of public services. Several projects have been initiated, and some of these are helping citizens connect with service providers in the localities. They help citizens obtain information and gain access to services online. With these arrangements, it is becoming easier to follow the actions and performance of local institutions. Citizens' charters serve as useful sources of information on the plans and expectations of the work of government agencies. The social safety net appears to have strengthened support to the poor and vulnerable groups. Finally, the Grievance Redress System has the potentials to improve transparency and accountability in the operation of government agencies that deliver public services.

There are two conspicuous weaknesses that impose barriers on electronic public service delivery in Bangladesh. The country has made progress toward establishing an adequate technological infrastructure. Going forward, these will require significant investments and technical expertise to expand the services for covering the entire country. The supply of trained and capable human capital will require time proactive policies that could contribute to the development of human capital in Bangladesh.

With reference to the research questions of this paper, some observations are in order. The existing structures and procedures for electronic service delivery in Bangladesh are hardly adequate. Information on the services and procedures for obtaining them are compounded by the lack of connectivity and access across the society. Citizens are confronted with many institutional and procedural obstacles as they seek to comply with the requirements. They are affected by the paucity of infrastructure and equipment that are critical for delivering and accessing electronic public services. The digital divide remains a major challenge and needs to be addressed for all citizens to participate in the process. Finally, the government needs to initiate systematic research to collect data and ensure gradual introduction for communication and training to ensure that citizens at the grassroots level will be prepared to play their role in making electronic service delivery successful.

To sum up, there are many benefits for governments and citizens in electronic service delivery. However, it requires substantial investments in technology, training, and implementation facilities. Careful planning and management are critical for ensuring that citizens can access public services and take advantage of those offered by the government. In the process, it should be remembered that electronic delivery of public services requires strengthening communication channels, the competence of public officials, human and financial resources, and, more importantly, the political will of the government to take Bangladesh forward by harnessing the potentials of information technology.

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An evaluation of the influence of budgeting process on budget performance in Malaysia

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Budgeting
process and
budget
performance

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the influence of budgeting process elements (budget participation, preparation, implementation and evaluation) on budget performance of government.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional survey was administered among budget officers from government agencies, departments, and units in Malaysia. Descriptive and regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between the budgeting process and budget performance.

Findings – The findings revealed the significant influence of the two predictors: (1) budget participation and (2) budget implementation and evaluation, on budget performance. Both have positive and significant impacts on budget performance. However, budget preparation appeared to have no significant relationship with budget performance, although there is positive effect.

Originality/value – This study provides empirical evidence on the budgeting process factors that influence budget performance. The findings hopefully are of interest to government officials, especially frontline bureaucrats, who seek to ensure that budget performance meets expectations in Malaysia and other countries.

Keywords Budgeting process, Budget participation, Budget preparation, Budget implementation, Budget performance, Government, Malaysia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Performance measurement has been implemented in various areas and processes, such as reporting, management, and budgeting (Osma *et al.*, 2022; Wang, 2000). The main concern of budgeting is to ensure that the government is focusing not only on planning the budget, but also on executing and closely monitoring the budget in an objective, organized, and efficient manner to avoid any misuse of funds. In addition, budgeting seeks to secure taxpayers' trust in the government (Varotsis and Katerelos, 2020).

Budgeting and planning are two areas that require constant enhancement, considering their importance in the management process (Rigby *et al.*, 2020). Despite the awareness of its importance, many organizations are unable to implement precise budget planning and controlling processes. A budget has to be properly designed and effectively executed to foster better performance and high satisfaction. This is especially pertinent in the public sector, as the government is accountable for ensuring the efficient management of public funds.



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Budgeting involves various cycles which can be evaluated through performance measurement (Orlandi and Rabie, 2021). In Malaysia, the practice of budget performance measurement started in 1969 and developed extensively after 1972. Despite having been practiced for almost 50 years, Malaysia's budget performance is perceived as inconsistent from the perspectives of initial allocation and actual spending (The World Bank, 2018). The discrepancy between budget allocation and spending has raised questions regarding the optimization of resources. While it is unfair to make direct assumptions about these inconsistencies and the inefficiency in optimizing resources, there is evidence that several government agencies and departments perform poorly in managing and spending their allocated budget. As reported by the Malaysian Accountant General's Department (2018), the total amount of unspent allocation for that year was RM67.12 billion, with the largest portions attributed to the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Transport, which had unspent totals of RM29.19 billion and RM24.49 billion, respectively.

Underspending or overspending can significantly impact budget performance early in the financial year, as budgets are meticulously planned to optimize allocated amounts. While unspent allocations can be carried forward, this practice weakens the budget performance for the current financial year. Despite its importance, this issue remains underexplored in the literature, necessitating further investigation. Performance measurement is crucial for tracking progress and improving overall functioning (Wang, 2000). Thus, this study aims to: (1) investigate budget officers' practices and opinions on budget participation, preparation, implementation, evaluation, and performance; (2) identify correlations between budget factors and performance; and (3) examine causal relationships between budgeting process components and performance.

Overview of budgeting process in Malaysia

The budgeting process in Malaysia is intricate, reflecting the nation's dedication to comprehensive fiscal governance. It commences with pre-budget consultations, where government agencies and stakeholders contribute insights on economic conditions and priorities. The Ministry of Finance analyzes economic trends, revenue projections, and expenditure requirements meticulously. Budget proposals from ministries undergo scrutiny and approval within the Cabinet, aligning each with broader economic goals and national priorities. The Prime Minister then presents the approved budget to the Parliament, outlining fiscal policies, revenue and expenditure estimates, and developmental plans. Parliamentary deliberations and committee examinations offer opportunities for thorough scrutiny and adjustments to the proposed budget (Hassan and Tan, 2012).

Once approved by the Parliament, the budget receives royal assent from the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (King of Malaysia) formalizing it as law. The implementation phase involves government agencies executing the budget, with careful monitoring to ensure alignment with the approved budget and goal achievement. Periodic mid-year reviews provide opportunities for assessment and necessary adjustments, contributing to the adaptability and responsiveness of Malaysia's fiscal management (Hassan and Tan, 2012). Malaysian budgeting process is a comprehensive undertaking that involves multiple stages, ensuring transparency, accountability, and adaptability in fiscal governance. From pre-budget consultations to parliamentary deliberations and post-implementation reviews, each step contributes to the nation's ability to make informed and dynamic financial decisions.

Evaluating budget performance

A properly designed budget and budgeting goals help employees understand their roles better and improve their job performance, which then results in the proper usage of the

budget and the achievement of the organization’s desired goals (Barney, 2002). In the public sector, most budgeting activities are not profit-oriented; rather, they aim to circulate and spend taxpayers’ money in an efficient and reliable manner. Budgeting also plays a role as a communication device that allows the civil servant to engage with the public (Lapsley and Ríos, 2015) to ensure that budgeting goals meet public expectations. A budget must be well-managed and able to assure the public of transparency and accountability in public fund management (Lu and Willoughby, 2015).

Performance measurement is a dynamic tool for the realization of growth and better performance (Wang, 2000). Generally, performance measurement is used to evaluate the efficacy and efficiency of initiatives, programs, and projects. In this regard, budget performance measurement specifically refers to the process of allocating, spending, and managing the government’s financial resources in ensuring effective and efficient public expenditure. Willoughby (2004) argued that, if properly implemented, performance measurement in government budgeting results in increased management efficiencies, enhanced program efficacy, and ultimately, better budgets. Thus, budget performance measurement is an effective instrument that is vital for the public sector regardless of the size of the organization (Barney, 2002).

In public budgeting, a range of performance indicators are used to measure levels of achievement and activity. These measures are understood as systematic assessments, either quantitative or qualitative, throughout the period in which the institution operates. The results of these assessments later assist managerial decision-making under both stable and challenging economic conditions (Hou *et al.*, 2011; Melkers and Willoughby, 2005). Behn (2003) provided eight managerial purposes that can be evaluated in performance measurement (Table 1). Notably, budget is listed as one of these purposes.

Overall, a budget serves as a vital instrument for numerical and data-driven insights on a government organization’s performance which accounts for the activities (program, expenditure, policy, and budget allocation) carried out by the government for its citizens.

The nature of public budgeting dictates that budgets are allocated based on power battles and political will among stakeholders. This has made the public sector vulnerable to risks, rejections, objections, and criticisms from various angles, as it confronts a complex political system that requires following the preferences of a variety of political players and stakeholders. Such dynamics underscore the necessity of a well-planned and properly executed budgeting process, as illustrated in Figure 1, highlighting the need for budget performance measurement. Performance measurement in budgeting has a positive effect on

Managerial Purposes	Description
Evaluate	How effective is my government organization?
Control	How can I be certain that my employees are performing genuinely?
Budget	On what programs, people, or projects should my agency spend the public’s money?
Motivate	How can I inspire frontline employees, middle managers, partners from the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, stakeholders, and citizens to take the actions required to boost performance?
Promote	How can I persuade my political superiors, lawmakers, constituents, stakeholders, media, and the general public that my agency is doing a good job?
Celebrate	What successes deserve the crucial corporate tradition of success celebration?
Learn	Why does something work or not work?
Improve	What precisely needs to change for performance to improve?

Source: Behn (2003)

Table 1.
Managerial Purposes
to be Evaluated in
Performance
Measurement

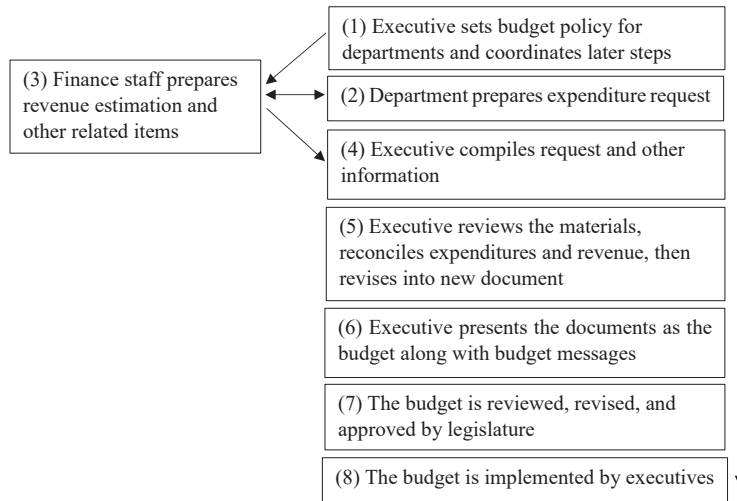


Figure 1.
Budgeting Process
(Sokolow and
Honadle, 1984)

the public sector’s performance as it allows the government to assess operational goal attainment, monitor management practices, and decide appropriate budget allocations. To examine budget performance, it is crucial to investigate the stages of the budgeting cycle (Wang, 2000), namely budget participation, budget preparation, budget implementation and budget evaluation. Since all these stages influence budget performance, examining the cycle will provide a better understanding of budget performance as well as improve existing procedures and practices to achieve a high-performing government. Based on the discussion, the study proposes a framework, as depicted in Figure 2.

Budget participation

Budget participation refers to the process where those who will be influenced by the budget participate actively in its development, specifically in democratic nations. This bottom-up approach aids the government in gaining wider insights into the issues and struggles faced by citizens, since giving the public the opportunity to discuss and negotiate the distribution of public resources. Management theorists often describe this process as ‘organizational learning’. Kim and Schachter (2013) stated that participation can improve budgetary effectiveness by enabling governments to make better decisions. For instance, the Ministry of Finance Malaysia carried out a public survey for Budget 2022 from May 31 to June 17, 2022, to receive feedback and suggestions for the improvement of next year’s budget (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2022).

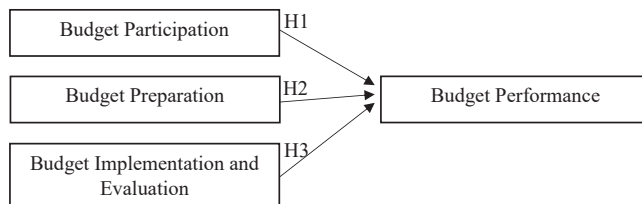


Figure 2.
Research Framework

Source: By authors

Citizen involvement in the budgeting process is a subject that has drawn scholarly interest for many years. Public participation in the budgeting process gives citizens the opportunity to debate and negotiate the allocation of resources, which helps the government gain a broader understanding of the problems and hardships the public face. [Ebdon and Franklin \(2006\)](#) cited four factors that are considered to impact the involvement process: governmental environment, process design, mechanisms, and goals and outcomes. In their study, governmental environment, process design, and mechanisms were considered as independent variables while the dependent variable was represented by the goals and outcomes of taking part in budgetary decision-making. They concluded that a discrepancy exists between public expectations of government services and the willingness of the public to finance such services. This suggests that the government may not have employed participatory methods with sufficient efficacy to collect data. However, practicing budget participation is not as easy as it seems, as illustrated by the two case studies conducted by [Kim and Schachter \(2013\)](#) on Los Angeles and Buk-gu in South Korea. These studies revealed that efforts to refine participation processes often conflict with the apathy of citizens, potentially due to busy schedules, a lack of resources, or mistrust in the political system.

From the employee perspective, budget participation allows subordinates to participate and express their views or opinions ([Chong, 2002](#)) and exchange facts and figures with superiors ([Shields and Shields, 1998](#)) in preparing a budget. An organization encourages its staff to join the budget setting process in the hopes of reducing budgetary slack and reaching better achievement ([Derfuss, 2009](#)). Although there is substantial research on the relationship between budget performance and participation, the results are varied. There are positive results from the participation of employees ([Nouri and Kyj, 2008](#)) as well as negative results in terms of managerial performance ([Gul et al., 1995](#)). Some studies also reported a non-significant relationship between budget participation and performance ([Otley and Pollanen, 2000](#); [Locke and Latham, 2002](#)). Based on the above analysis, it was posited that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Budget participation positively influences budget performance.

Budget preparation

Budget preparation is a sustainable rule through which reputable organizations and governments deliver financial implications in a viable manner. According to [Jatmiko et al. \(2020\)](#), budget preparation is an effective method for delineating the responsibilities of each participant within an organization. This analytical process is undertaken by both government and private sectors to direct ministries efficiently. Preparing a budget is a competent method for adjusting estimates from the previous year and for planning the next year's financial agenda, including the allocation of specific monetary amounts for various purposes ([Pasachoff, 2018](#)). Calculating expenses and projecting surplus income are key aspects of budget preparation, aimed at optimizing revenue and resource allocation within an organization.

It is vital to ensure the budget aligns with government aims and policies involving certain organizations and people with well-defined roles. This process, referred to as budget preparation, is deemed significant for the government as it assists in controlling expenditures and planning for crises while maintaining financial stability. According to [Donahue and Joyce \(2002\)](#), a government may struggle to meet its community's needs during a disaster if it faces administrative and resource constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of financial stability in a crisis, necessitating substantial fund allocations by governments, particularly to the medical sector for services such as quarantine facilities.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) emphasizes that to be able to advise policymakers on the viability and desirability of particular budget proposals from a

macroeconomic or microeconomic perspective, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the budget planning and preparation system beyond mere expenditure projections. In addition, the [IMF \(2022\)](#) states that systems for managing public spending call for four types of financial and fiscal restraints, which are:

- (1) Control of overall spending to ensure affordability (compliance with macroeconomic constraints);
- (2) Efficient methods for allocating resources to reflect expenditure policy priorities;
- (3) Effective public service delivery (productive efficiency); and
- (4) Reduction in the financial costs of managing a budget (efficient budget execution and cash and debt management practices).

Budget decisions can enhance the performance of individual organizations when guided by appropriate rules and regulations. Thus, the use of various accounting tools is essential to support the budget preparation process that prepare for and efficiently manage federal expenditures ([Gilmore and Clair, 2018](#)). Studies have found a significant relationship between budget preparation and budget performance ([Ho, 2018](#); [Arnold and Artz, 2019](#); [Aliabadi et al., 2019](#)). Thus, based on the above discussion, it was proposed that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Budget preparation positively influences budget performance.

Budget implementation and evaluation

Implementation and evaluation are two critical processes in measuring budget performance, as these stages involve putting the proposed budget, developed through participation and thorough preparation, into action and monitoring its progress and performance. Budget implementation and evaluation play a significant role in ensuring the smooth flow of capital and expenditure of the government while fulfilling citizens' needs.

According to the [IMF \(2022\)](#), budget implementation consists of six stages, including authorization, commitment, verification, payment authorization or payment order, payment, and accounting. Proper budget implementation influences subsequent monitoring of different budgeting scheme aspects ([Demir and Geyik, 2018](#)). To ensure smooth implementation, it is essential to engage the public during this phase. The undesirable effects of poor budget implementation are serious; they can be time-consuming to address and may lead to conflict without public engagement ([Beuermann and Amelina, 2018](#)). Though setting a budget rule is difficult and complex, budget viability can be increased through personnel involvement in the budget implementation process. The budgeting process can also be enhanced through ongoing reviews and monitoring to improve budget performance. In addition, feedback is crucial in the budgeting cycle, especially in terms of planning, supervision, leadership, and personnel management ([Joshi et al., 2003](#)). As a periodic monitoring tool for budget implementation, stakeholder feedback exerts a significant influence on budget performance ([Jing and Chao, 2018](#)).

Budget evaluation is the stage during which the actual expenditures are compared with the previously projected expenditures. This is essential in providing broader insight into the government's spending, revenue, and public needs. Budget evaluation is deemed important as it is able to confirm whether the budget is in line with policy. If the budget does not align with policy, or actual expenditure exceeds projections, minor or major amendments are necessary.

The budget is crucial for identifying the gap between allocated funds and actual expenditure in performance measurement ([Ho, 2018](#)). In this manner, budgeting is a standard to evaluate the success of an organization's or government's management. Accordingly, several studies have used budget variance as a tool to measure organizational achievement

and performance. The significant relationship between budget variance and performance has been empirically validated (Guilding *et al.*, 1998). Thus, based on the justifications, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Budget implementation and evaluation positively influence budget performance.

Underlying theories

The theoretical framework of this research was extracted from the models of several prior studies to investigate the effects of budget participation, budget preparation, budget implementation and evaluation on budget performance. As the features of budget participation that impact the government's performance remain unclear, Parker and Kyj's (2006) model has been used to investigate the connection between budget participation and performance in the government. As for performance measurement, the current budget participation literature has predominantly adopted organizational efficiency as a dependent variable.

Alternatively, this study adopted two main theories which are relevant to the research context. The first is Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory, which explains the relationship between culture and business settings. He initially introduced four cultural dimensions: power distance (as opposed to closeness), uncertainty avoidance (as against acceptance), individualism (as against collectivism), and masculinity (as against femininity) (Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018). Two new dimensions, long-term (versus short-term) orientation and indulgence (versus restraint), were then added to provide a more comprehensive understanding of national culture. Scholars have applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions to examine budget participation and the budget cycle (e.g., Aliabadi *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, Hofstede (1980) suggested that power distance and individualism are related to these budgeting aspects. Power distance is linked to budget participation in terms of how cultures manage human deprivation. Meanwhile, individualism refers to the individual's affiliation with the social class or culture to which the individual belongs (Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018).

However, Hofstede's theory is unable to explain the organization's perspective of budget performance, especially in Malaysia. The budgeting system in Malaysia has gone through a reform process that shadows private sector practices to improve efficiency and performance (Din *et al.*, 2015). Hence, considering the elements of business practice and measurement would be appropriate to investigate this issue in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study adopted the Performance Pyramid Theory (Gilbert, 1978) to fill in the gaps in Hofstede's cultural dimension theory in the framework. The Performance Pyramid Theory puts forward the idea of a variation in the organizational working environment and its motivations. The pyramid has a set of goals for external performance as well as internal effectiveness. The measurement aspects are evaluated horizontally due to their interaction at every level of the organization as well as vertically across the pyramid levels, which is more complex in the public sector setting due to the government's multi-tiered levels. The bottom level of the pyramid labelled 'measuring in the trenches', aims to enhance delivery quality and performance with shorter cycle times and reduced waste (Gilbert, 1978). Non-financial indicators, such as product quality and customer satisfaction, are applied to evaluate activities at this level. Lynch and Cross (1991) suggested that measuring performance should account for the organizational vision as well as individual goals, as these are important elements of any organization. In this research, organizational vision refers to government agencies' vision to achieve social profit rather than financial profit. Meanwhile, individual goals are similar to those of the private sector.

Methodology

The unit of analysis of this study was the individual, specifically budget officers who work in government agencies and departments at federal and state levels. These officers are mandated to perform two important tasks, namely budget preparation and budget oversight during execution (Hadley *et al.*, 2019). A cross-sectional survey questionnaire was administered to the eligible officers. As shown in Table 2, the measurement scales for budget performance, budget preparation, and budget implementation and evaluation were derived from Wang (2000). Meanwhile, the measurement scale for budget participation was adopted from Milani (1975). The research instrument was structured using a five-point Likert scale with a set number of responses ranging from “1” (*strongly disagree*) to “5” (*strongly agree*). Reliability and validity analyses were performed and measured via Cronbach’s Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). The results of instrument reliability and validity are presented in Table 2. This study further conducted correlation analysis using Spearman’s rank-order correlation and ordinal logistic regression to measure the strength and direction of the association between the variables at the ordinal level.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The study sample consisted of 117 budget officers from federal and state agencies in Malaysia. The majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 70.1 percent, and they exhibited a balanced age distribution, with the largest group ranging from 33 to 39 years old. Support staff, ranging from Grade 19 to Grade 38, constituted 41.9 percent of the respondents. This was followed by professional and management officers, with Assistant Directors at Grade 41 to 44 making up 35.9 percent, and Principal Assistant Directors at Grade 48 to 54 comprising 22.2 percent. Regarding tenure in the budget profession, most respondents had one to five years of experience. An additional 26.5 percent had accrued six to 10 years’ experience, 23.9 percent had 11 to 15 years, and seven percent had over 15 years of experience.

Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient

This study conducted Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis to measure the strength of the association between the independent and dependent variables. The correlation coefficient results indicated positive associations between all the independent variables and the dependent variable. However, the coefficient values were below 0.39. Budget implementation and evaluation showed a moderate relationship with budget performance ($r_s = .328$), while

Variable	Source of Scale	Item	Reliability	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Budget Performance	Wang (2000)	22	.845	.943	.438
Budget Participation	Milani (1975)	6	.781	.937	.713
Budget Preparation	Wang (2000)	3	.803	.888	.725
Budget Implementation and Evaluation	Wang (2000)	9	.791	.894	.487

Table 2.
Measurement Model

Source: By authors

budget participation indicated a weak relationship ($r_s = .216$). Lastly, budget participation demonstrated a negligible relationship ($r_s = .195$) with budget performance. The correlation analysis results imply that the budgeting process has a significant yet minimal influence on budget performance. Considering these results, this study proceeded to measure the magnitude of the budgeting process' impact on budget performance via regression analysis.

Ordinal logistic regression

The predictor variables for this study (i.e., budget participation, budget preparation, and budget implementation and evaluation) were tested a priori to verify that there was no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity. The ordinal logistic regression analysis then found that two predictors, budget participation ($p = .049$) and budget implementation and evaluation ($p = .001$), have significant influences on budget performance. Budget participation demonstrated a positive effect on performance ($\beta = .838, SE = .425, Wald = 3.883$). The estimated odds ratio of 1.147 indicated that with each one unit increase in budget participation, the odds of improved budget performance are 1.147 times higher. Similarly, a positive effect was found for budget implementation and evaluation ($\beta = 1.372, SE = .421, Wald = 10.605$). This predictor also significantly contributed to the model with an estimated odds ratio of 1.286, whereby an increment of one unit in budget implementation and evaluation improves budget performance by 1.372 units. Overall, it is assumed that any enhancement in budget participation and budget implementation and evaluation would significantly increase budget performance. The detailed findings of the ordinal logistic regression are presented in [Table 3](#).

In brief, the ordinal logistic regression analysis conducted in this study revealed mixed results. Only budget participation, as well as budget implementation and evaluation, were found to have positive and significant effects on budget performance, thus supporting [Hypotheses 1](#) and [3](#). However, budget preparation appeared to have no significant relationship with budget performance, although the beta coefficient indicates a positive effect. Consequently, [Hypothesis 2](#), which posited a relationship between budget preparation and budget performance, was not supported.

Discussion

This research endeavored to examine the impacts of budget participation, preparation, implementation and evaluation on budget performance. Using correlation and regression analyses, the findings provide evidence that the two predictors: (1) budget participation; (2) budget implementation and evaluation have positive and significant impacts on budget performance. The significant relationship between budget participation and budget

Variable	Estimate	Standard Error	Wald, χ^2	Odds ratio	Budget performance		P-value
					95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower limit	Upper Limit	
Budget Participation	.838	.425	3.883	1.147	.004	1.672	.049
Budget Preparation	.024	.383	.004	0.993	-.727	.776	.949
Budget Implementation and Evaluation	1.372	.421	10.605	1.286	.546	2.198	.001

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.
Source: By authors

Table 3.
Regression Analysis

performance shows that budget officers' involvement in the budgeting process influences budget performance, in line with the findings of previous studies on this relationship (Nouri and Kyj, 2008; Shield and Shield, 1998). Participation strengthens confidence and a sense of belonging towards the organization (Yuliansyah and Khan, 2017), which in turn leads to increased support for budgetary decisions and enhanced performance (Buele *et al.*, 2020; Oh *et al.*, 2019). Participation also boosts the efficiency of top managers in their administrative tasks and enhances managerial performance (Hooze and Ngo, 2018).

Most of the respondents agreed that they are involved in their unit's budgeting at a large scale and that their supervisors initiate discussions frequently when preparing the budget. This is pertinent to the context of public organizations, which serve dual functions as financiers and providers of public services (Lapuente and Van de Walle, 2020), thereby functioning indirectly as managers of public funds. Public servants are thus required to actively participate in the budgeting process and be well-informed of any budget follow-ups. Indeed, previous research demonstrates notable levels of budget participation in the public sector (Kamau *et al.*, 2017), attributed mainly to job satisfaction among public sector employees (Fachrudin *et al.*, 2021; Schneider and Vaught, 1993).

From a budget preparation perspective, the regression analysis indicates no significant relationship with budget performance. The absence of a significant relationship between budget preparation and budget performance in this study may stem from various factors. These include the intricacies of the budgeting process, methodological constraints, sample size, timing of data collection, and organizational context, all of which have the potential to impact outcomes significantly. Contrary to Mat *et al.*'s (2022) argument on the significance of preparation for task delegation and employee connectivity, suggesting changes in budget preparation may not impact performance, Huang (2019) underscores its importance in ensuring readiness for implementation. Meanwhile, political leadership, including ministers and legislators, plays a pivotal role in shaping budgetary goals. Finance ministers define fiscal policies, setting priorities guiding the budget process, reflecting the government's vision from economic development to social welfare. Legislators, through parliamentary deliberations, ensure alignment with diverse societal needs, impacting resource distribution across education, healthcare, infrastructure, and societal well-being. Thus, the budgeting process is critical for translating political vision into tangible outcomes.

Lastly, budget implementation and evaluation were shown to have a strong positive relationship with budget performance, suggesting that changes in budget implementation and evaluation will greatly impact budget performance. This is in line with previous studies (Ho, 2018) that suggested the influence of budget implementation on budget performance. To strengthen budget implementation, it is pertinent to improve the awareness of stakeholders at this stage to ensure all relevant parties are informed of the budgeting process and progress (Verenych *et al.*, 2019). Awareness not only enhances the effectiveness of implementation and evaluation but also bolsters legal and regulatory compliance, contributing to improved budget performance. This eventually benefits the overall budgeting system and its efficient operations.

Conclusion

This study underscores the pivotal role of budget participation in shaping budget performance within public organizations. To enhance decision-making, the study advocates for the inclusion of relevant employees from all administrative levels in budgetary activities, organizing discussions hierarchically when participant numbers are substantial. While budget preparation may seem less influential, its regular review is essential to align with evolving budgetary activities, ensuring well-organized documents for optimal decision-making.

Budget implementation and evaluation demonstrate the strongest correlation with performance, highlighting potential risks for organizations lacking in these areas. To address these challenges, the study recommends implementing communication channels and real-time reporting systems for effective monitoring. These measures underscore the critical need for a comprehensive approach to budgeting processes in public organizations.

Moreover, the study has practical and ethical implications. Practically, modifying current practices to enhance participation across all hierarchical levels within Malaysia's decentralized governmental structure is essential. Effective communication can mitigate challenges arising from the three-tiered system — federal, state, and local governance. Ethically, involving various stakeholders in the budgeting process requires prioritizing national benefits over individual or group interests. Adhering to rules and regulations ensures ethical decision-making, involving administrative employees, budget officers, and stakeholders in upholding ethical standards.

The findings of this study offer actionable insights for improving budgeting practices in the Malaysian public sector and beyond. Emphasizing stakeholder engagement, rigorous monitoring, and evaluation processes is crucial for enhancing transparency and accountability in budget formulation and execution. In Malaysia, this means actively involving government agencies, civil society, and citizens in the budgeting process and implementing robust mechanisms for oversight. Additionally, the non-significant relationship between budget preparation and performance suggests a need to streamline procedures and ensure alignment with organizational goals. These principles have universal applicability and can enhance resource allocation efficiency in government budget performance.

This research employed a cross-sectional survey method, limiting the breadth of respondents' perspectives. The majority were junior and middle-level officers, potentially constraining insights into organizational decision-making. While valuable, these findings primarily represent specific tiers within the organization, limiting generalizability. Future research should utilize qualitative techniques, such as interviews or focus groups, with budget officers and stakeholders to provide more comprehensive insights into the budgeting process and performance.

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A study of political party affiliation as a means to enhance gender equality and women's political participation in Kazakhstan

Parties and
gender politics
in elections

45

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Abstract

Purpose – The article aims to identify the main mechanisms for promoting more Kazakhstani women participation in the legislative authorities based on a study of the competition of political parties in 2023.

Design/methodology/approach – Utilizing the structural-biographical method, the article investigates the ways of increasing women's participation in the political life of Kazakhstan. This empirical study comprises a total of 18 biographies of women deputies / candidates on party lists who were elected to the legislative body. Content analysis was also conducted to investigate the pre-election programs of the political parties.

Findings – This study has identified that political party is the main resource for promoting gender equality and involving women in the decision-making process. All 18 women deputies of the Mazhilis, the lower house of parliament, are members of political parties. The findings show that women candidates without party affiliation were unable to get into representative body. The results of the election campaign of 2023 provided evidence for determining the gender order in the Kazakhstani political space. The party has become an effective channel for promoting women participations in the parliament of the country. By comparison, in single-mandate constituencies no woman was able to pass to the elected body.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature of gender equality and women's political participation in Kazakhstan and may be relevant for other countries. It also has practical significance and policy implications for the government and political parties.

Keywords Gender equality, Women representation in politics, Political participation, Political parties, Political biography, Party programs, Kazakhstan

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Rwanda, New Zealand, Mexico, Nicaragua, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America have shown high growth in women's representation in legislative bodies. The process of inclusion of women in Rwanda began with the establishment of a 30 percent quota for women in elected positions in 2003 (WE Forum, 2023). Women make up 61.3 percent of the Rwandan



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parliament making Rwanda not only the first country in Africa in terms of women's representation in parliament but the leading country worldwide (UN Women, 2023). India is following the similar scenario, as in 2023 it passed an ordinance to reserve 33 percent of seats in the lower house of parliament and state assemblies for women. The Indian electoral system is showing a steady positive trend. Realization of the principle of proportional representation will probably be achieved by 2029 (UN Women, 2023).

Equal rights and opportunities of men and women in Kazakhstan are regulated by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women" under the Concept of Family and Gender Policy until 2030. Article 1, paragraph 2 (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2009) defines gender equality as a legal status ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women and effective access to participation in the political, economic, social, public and cultural spheres of life, irrespective of their sex. The introduction of a minimum 30 percent quota to include young people under 35, women of all ages and persons with disabilities on electoral lists is an important step in addressing the gender issue.

In 2021, the Election Law was also amended to provide for a 30 percent minimum for women and youth. This quota is in effect when the parties that passed to the Mazhilis decide within themselves who exactly will get the mandates they won (Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995). In 2022, a third category, persons with disabilities, was added to the two categories of citizens. According to Article 89, paragraph 4: "In the party list, the number of representatives of the three categories: women, youth, persons with disabilities, in the aggregate, shall not be less than thirty percent of the total number of candidates included in the list" (Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995). At the same time, the Law does not oblige to include all three named categories of citizens in the lists and does not establish their percentage ratio. For this reason, there was such an asymmetry based on the results of the election campaign in 2023.

In Kazakhstan, despite the attempts to meet international standards, women's participation in political decision-making remains insufficient. The 2023 election campaign (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023) provided an opportunity to analyze the gender order in Kazakhstan's political space by showing the following results. The proportion of women in the 8th Mazhilis was lower than that in previous convocations. The total number of women deputies did not reach 30 percent, which can be explained by the fact that the quota was extended to the other two categories of the population, youth and persons with disabilities.

Of the six parties that entered the Mazhilis following the 2023 election campaign, only two parties passed the 30 percent women's quota threshold. These are the Respublika Party and the People's Party of Kazakhstan (PPK). At the same time, an analysis of the pre-election program documents displayed the PPK as the main advocate for women's rights and freedoms. The ruling party Amanat declared its focus on solving many problems related to family, demographic and women's issues, but delegated the smallest number of women to the Mazhilis.

None of the self-nominated women who are not affiliated with any party were elected to the Mazhilis. This is confirmed by the results of this study, according to which the only effective channel for promotion to the highest representative body in the current situation is membership in a political party. Changes in the gender policy of Kazakhstan are primarily due to the initiatives of the authorities and their aspirations to comply with the global agenda in this issue. The study aims to identify the main mechanisms and tools for promoting more Kazakhstani women to the legislative authorities based on the example of the competition of political parties in 2023.

Literature review

Theoretical framework

This study is based on the theory of elites by Best and Higley (2018). In the modern Kazakhstani political system, the elite is formed due to inclusion of women's participation. In accordance with

the theory of elites, the advancement of women in politics occurs according to the principle of “consensually united elites”. These systems are structurally integrated, concentrated within functionally differentiated sectors. They are characterized by an approximation to common norms of political behavior among disconnected elites competing for the support of economically successful voters who are not prone to abrupt changes in the status quo. In addition, members of such elites have reached a tacit consensus on the norms and rules of political behavior.

Studies on gender equality and women’s involvement in politics in some countries

The issue of forming a female political elite is a discourse in the academic community. [Kantola \(2019\)](#) highlighted the strengths of women’s organizations of political parties in promoting the main issues of gender equality in Finland. However, both the “feminism” and the “politics” of women’s organizations of political parties which have been traditionally evident in Finland and other European countries are now considered obsolete, and this paradox is critically explored in this article.

According to some of the Russian scholars, parties can be considered as the main channel for promoting women in politics ([Pushkareva, 2008](#)). Pursuant to the rational choice theory, candidates may run for various positions only if applicable. [Norris and Lovenduski \(2004\)](#) believe that these opportunities are determined by the institutional and political situation as well as by the specific structure of elected positions and the rules. Therewith, the paramount importance is attached to the values dominating in a particular society, which in their turn influence the social and political roles of women and men. According to scholars, the higher the level of economic development, the more democratic the state is ([Inglehart and Norris, 2010](#)).

The relatively low engagement of women in politics and decision-making, according to a number of scholars, can be primarily explained by the socio-economic position of women ([Gnedash, 2007](#)). The reset of the gender order is extremely slow, because “gender continues to be viewed through the prism of reproductive and biological functions of the sexes” ([Pushkareva, 2008](#), p. 119). A study by Russian scholars devoted to the promotion of women to the highest echelons of power can also be of some interest. The low level of engagement of Russian women in politics, according to [Zhidkova \(2003\)](#), is determined by the strong influence of parties and their leaders. The applicability of foreign experience and practices to reduce the gender gap in the political field is analysed in [Herbut \(2014\)](#). On the basis of comparative analysis, the thesis about the influence of party characteristics on the representation of the female sex in parliamentary institutions is maintained.

The gender specific features of Russian representative institutions at the regional level have been researched by [Kolesnik \(2021, p. 470\)](#). Based on empirical studies of career trajectories, Kolesnik concluded that “women are admitted to the governmental bodies”, but the political elite is formed on the closed principle. Therefore, there are no “outsiders” in politics. Moreover, there is no open political competition.

Since the 1990s, gender quotas have been introduced to improve women’s equality. In 2023, [Kim and Fallon \(2023\)](#) examined cross-national and longitudinal effects on attitudes toward female politicians and the mechanism through which gender quotas are allocated. Using multilevel modeling in 87 countries, they examined how different types of quotas, with different characteristics and levels of power, shape perceptions of women in politics. In [Asanbekova and Karabayeva’s article \(2022\)](#), there are several examples of violations of gender principles set forth in the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic through the analysis of constitutional and legal acts of the Kyrgyz government in order to identify the norms consolidating the principle of equality of rights and freedoms for men and women in all regions of the Kyrgyz Republic.

For the political role of women, the analysis of gender relations shows that a new item has been introduced into the system of nominating candidates by political parties in the Uzbek

political system (Ochilova, 2022). Article 22 of the Elections Act was supplemented by a new provision: “The number of females must account for no less than thirty percent of the total number of candidates for deputies from political parties” (Ochilova, 2022). Hence, the institution of private quotas for nomination of political parties has been imposed by the Uzbek national legislation. As of January 1, 2022, Uzbekistan ranks 45th among 190 parliaments of the world with a 32.7 percent share of women in the Oliy Mazhilis.

Gender equality and political employment of women in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, Naizabayeva and Yessim (2022, p. 59) noted that “nowadays, the majority of Kazakhstani women highly appreciate the importance of traditional values and behaviors determined by ethnic and religious customs for women”. However, gender equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan is considered by the authors of the article on the identification of gender issues from the perspective of implementing the gender equality strategy in the country for the period from 2006 to 2016. The results of the article are controversial. On the one hand, the authors claim the impossibility of a traditional gender order and gender socialization. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that the situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan is changing very slowly towards the gender equality (Shelomentseva *et al.*, 2019).

Women’s integration into politics is blocked both by stereotypes that women are not suitable for leadership and by the phenomenon of the “family cage”. That is, when the patriarchal family creates not only external but also internal obstacles to women’s leadership in politics (Lipovka *et al.*, 2023). The work by Lipovka and others represents the first cross-cultural study of gender stereotypes about political leaders embracing post-socialist Central Asian and Central European countries. Interestingly, Potluri *et al.* (2016) report existence of a typical pyramid of gender bias, according to which women should automatically occupy the lower and middle levels in the political and managerial hierarchy. Despite the fact that in the legal context, the state forms legislation aimed at ensuring equal rights, but the gender issue does not lose its relevance (Moniruzzaman and Kazi, 2019).

The issue of women’s participation in the political process are investigated by the Kazakhstani political scientist, Tlegenova. According to the author, despite the desire of the authorities to comply with international norms and requirements on gender equality, women’s participation in political decision-making processes is extremely low. In reality, political parties play an intermediate role in the development of gender equality. But it is the parties that have mechanisms for promoting candidates for political positions through their inclusion in the electoral lists (Tlegenova, 2021).

Promoting gender policy in Kazakhstan is attributed to non-governmental and international organizations. The Kazakhstani Government often cooperates with NGOs focusing on gender equality. But even in this case, collaboration is limited to social issues of women. Gender equality is often understood as the representation of women in governmental bodies. However, in this way, a formal approach has evolved, as the goal of gender development is active participation of women in decision-making in all policy areas, including allocation of resources.

The topic of gender equality and women’s participation in the political process has been sufficiently studied in foreign historiography. In Eastern Europe, the experience of overcoming gender inequality since the 1990s has been described. The research of Russian authors examines women’s practices of coming to power, where political parties play the central role. Central Asian researchers mainly focus on the analysis of normative acts regulating the representation of women in the highest authorities. In Kazakhstan, researchers are concerned about issues related to the influence of traditions and customs, prevailing stereotypes in society on ensuring equal rights and opportunities in politics between women and men.

This study fills the research gap as follows. First, this article identifies the main mechanisms and tools for the promotion of women in the Mazhilis. The 2023 election

campaign is being analyzed for the first time. In this election race, the analysis of the program documents of political parties is carried out in order to identify topics on gender equality. Then, this information correlates with how many women have passed to the Mazhilis on party lists and reveals how much the declared slogans in the election race were reflected in the number of women from certain political parties in the legislature. Second, with the help of structural and biographical analysis, the career trajectories of women deputies are analysed. As a result, the pattern is revealed – all women deputies entered politics through party membership.

Research methodology

Scholars consider that the study of socio-demographic characteristics of the political elite is the dominant approach in modern elitology. Firstly, biographical data are available. Secondly, they can sufficiently characterize the career trajectory of the political elite (Best and Higley, 2018). One of the effective qualitative methods appears to be structural-biographical. The adoption of this method made it possible to scrutinize both individual characteristics and the typical structure of the life path of women who came to power.

This study is based on secondary data including biographies of deputies / candidates shown in the public domain: on the websites of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the information system “Paragraph” under [Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan \(2023\)](#). Biographies comprise the brief information on the life trajectory of female candidates including the details about their education, career path, and marital status. The official biographies occupy no more than two pages. The authors also identified the main social characteristics of the candidates. The next step was to determine the typical scenario of entering the power. A total of 18 biographies of the candidates who were elected to the legislative body were analyzed.

Content analysis was applied to analyze the pre-election programs of the political parties. The texts of pre-election programs and campaign documents of the party platforms were studied, and the frequency of raising the issues of gender equality in them was counted. The content analysis of the texts revealed the number of references to the following wordings: gender, women, family, children, domestic violence, etc.

Findings and discussion

Current situation in the Kazakhstani party arena

In 2023, the majority of the political party system was returned to the electoral process. This contributed to the inclusion of a large number of women by political parties in their party lists. At the beginning of the election campaign, there were 80 women in the party lists for the elections to the Mazhilis. The number of women in Kazakhstan accounts for more than 51 percent; hence, the female population represents the majority of the electorate. As a result, it is important that the programs and speeches of candidates delivering addresses from political parties or independently be gender specific.

The election campaign of 2023 has made the “female factor” relevant in the political life of the country. Democratic processes require the development of gender equality. The role of parties in this process is evident. Considering the 30 percent quota, the Kazakhstani parties have updated their composition in order to meet the quota requirements. At the same time, parties cannot ignore gender issues in terms of women’s political engagement. Policy papers and campaign materials are of special interest in terms of investigating the gender agenda, how it is translated both into the real policy regime and into the statutory documents.

The program of the Amanat Party was updated in 2023. Being the party dominating the political space, it tries to serve the interests of all segments of the population. In the new

edition, the program contains 10 sections - requests covering issues that are relevant in their opinion: from ecology, development of villages to special attention paid to the young generation. The key emphasis in her party document is placed on the social sector. Out of the 10 sections - requests of the Amanat party program, No. 7 "To be part of a united society with common values" is devoted to women's issues and contains gender terminology. Content analysis of the program text has revealed the number of mentions of the following words: "gender" – 1; "women" – 2; "family, family-related" – 17; "children, children-related" – 10; "domestic violence" – 1; "sex" – 2.

The context of the two theses foregrounds the development of the potential of women politicians and their participation in the life of the country. In the first case, women's rights are declared among other listed values in terms of their observance: traditional moral principles, state and native languages, the ability to understand and respect all points of view. In the second case, the Amanat party claims that the active participation of women in public administration needs to be expanded. That includes creating an inclusive culture and gender parity, where salaries and positions will be allocated based on skills rather than gender.

The Ak Zhol Party updated its program in February 2023. The party views itself as a right-liberal political force. According to the statistics, women currently make up 36 percent of the total number of the party members. Despite compliance with the norm of 30 percent quota, there are no women from the media sphere in the party, i.e., recognizable persons who would be really involved in political activities. The Congress approved the party list of candidates for deputies of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 54 people were approved as candidates for deputies of the Mazhilis according to party lists, of which 15 were women.

As far as the scope of the party's program is concerned, it does not conceptualize gender issues. There is no gender terminology in the text. Content analysis of the text reveals 7 mentions of the word "family, family-related". But there are no concepts such as "gender", "woman", "children", "abuse", "domestic violence". The current gender agenda was not reflected in the policy document. It should be noted that Ak Zhol considers itself the legal successor of the political legacy of the Alash Party. Alash has broached the problem of women more than 100 years ago in its program published in 1917 where women's issues take up an entire section.

The PPK is one of those parties that actively promotes women's rights and freedoms. As the concrete results of their activities in the previous convocations of the Mazhilis of the Parliament, the election program of the PPK supported the movement of women for retirement at 58. Consequently, a moratorium has been put on retirement at the age of 61 for 5 years. PPK believes that women should be present in all the governmental bodies. The former Communists plan was to raise the profile of doctors and nurses, preschool teachers and childminders, instructors and coaches. The PPK's gender agenda can be divided into several topical units – maternity fund and assistance to large families, lowering the retirement age and combating domestic violence.

The PPK advocates the development of the State program for free housing construction for large families in villages. Within the implementation of the Rural Development Program, this will solve a great number of social issues in urban areas, such as unemployment, lack of places in kindergartens and schools. The PPK supports an increase in payments for the birth of a child and child care allowances by five times, monthly payments to mothers in single-parent families for children under three years old, the development and raise in the number of specialized centers for pregnant women.

As a social assistance to children from large families, the PPK plans to provide free education in higher and secondary educational institutions, to reimburse expenses for sports and creative clubs through the Artsport program. The party takes a stand in favor of lowering the retirement age for women to 58 years, and for women with more than 4 children

to 55 years. Another promise by the PPK is to provide support to single-parent families and to establish a State Alimony Fund. Within the campaign against domestic violence, candidates from PPK consider the issue of rendering legal and psychological assistance to women as very important. In addition, stiffening criminal penalties for such offenses is also regarded as essential.

In the opinion of representatives of the People's Democratic Party Auyl, moving to the city has turned into a "one-way ticket" for many rural residents, in particular, for women and youth. Therefore, to restore and develop the infrastructure of the village, the Auyl Party intends to apply an integrated and systematic approach. One measure to take is to improve the social situation of women from villages, to establish comfortable conditions for them. In addition, they promise to use food payment cards for low-income families and representatives of vulnerable social groups.

In comparison with the election program of 2021, it can be stated that there was a gap in the social and gender equality issues at that time. Thus, the program included such items as lowering the threshold level for obtaining the status of a "multiple children mother" (above 3 children), as well as setting the retirement age for multiple children mothers upon reaching 53 with the payment of a basic pension; developing a family well-being index to improve the quality of life in rural areas; introducing the institute of support of a family in a difficult life situation; paying the guaranteed children's capital, starting from birth and until the age of 18, instead of inefficient, short-term payments; ensuring equal access of families with children to educational services at mandatory and additional levels.

Candidates from the National Social Democratic Party (NSDP) pay considerable attention to social support. They advocate the adoption of a new Labor Code which would eliminate gender inequality in calculation of wages for people holding similar positions and performing the same functions. They also plan to lower the retirement age of women to 58 years and reduce the working day by one hour for women with children. In the third section of the program, the Respublika party considers the formation of a unified cultural space of the people of Kazakhstan based on family values to be its main task.

The historical pattern of the representation of women in the Mazhilis of the Parliament is shown in [Table 1](#).

In comparison with the previous convocations, positive dynamics has been evidenced only since the 6th convocation. However, the recent elections displayed a decrease in the proportion of women in the lower chamber of the Parliament.

In order to trace the dynamics of changes in the number of women in the Parliament, it is necessary to consider statistical data for each year, since women's promotion to the highest legislative power is not limited only to election campaigns ([Figure 1](#)). For example, every three years, there is a rotation of members of the Parliament. [Figure 1](#) shows the general increase in

Convocations / years	Mazhilis	
	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
1 st convocation (1996-1999)	86.57	13.43
2 nd convocation (1999-2004)	89.61	10.39
3 rd convocation (2004-2007)	89.61	10.39
4 th convocation (2007-2011)	85.98	14.02
5 th convocation (2012-2016)	79.44	20.56
6 th convocation (2017-2020)	72.9	27.1
7 th convocation (2021-2023)	72.6	27.4
8 th convocation (2023 - up to now)	82.4	17.6

Source: By authors

Table 1.
Percentage of Men and
Women in the Mazhilis
of the Republic of
Kazakhstan

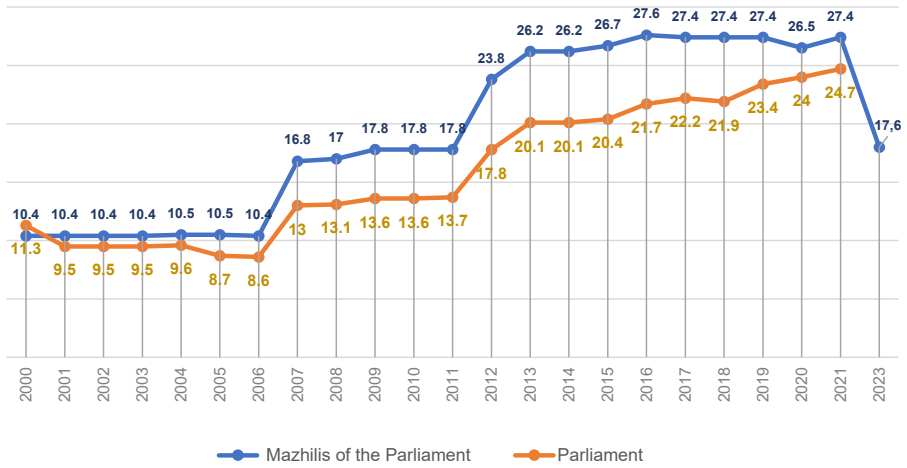


Figure 1.
Percentage of Seats Held by Women in the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Senate, Mazhilis)*, in percentage

Source: By authors

women’s representation in the Parliament from year to year. But this happens only due to the Senate, the upper chamber of the Parliament. Growth can also be observed in the Mazhilis, but the recent elections showed a negative effect.

Additionally, high female representation is shown by the Respublika Party, where 3 out of 6 deputies are women – i.e., 50 percent. The Amanat Party of power has only 10 women out of 62 deputies. The People’s Party of Kazakhstan nominated 2 women out of 5 deputies. The parties Auy!, Ak Zhol and NSDP nominated one woman each (Figure 2).

Structural and biographical analysis

When considering the general socio-demographic characteristics of the Mazhilis of the Parliament, it is worth paying attention to the legal status of deputies, for example, in terms of age (age not restricted), personal characteristics, and professional background. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan states from what age it is possible to run for deputies of the lower chamber of the Parliament – this should be a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan who has reached the age of 25. Representatives of the middle age (41-50 years

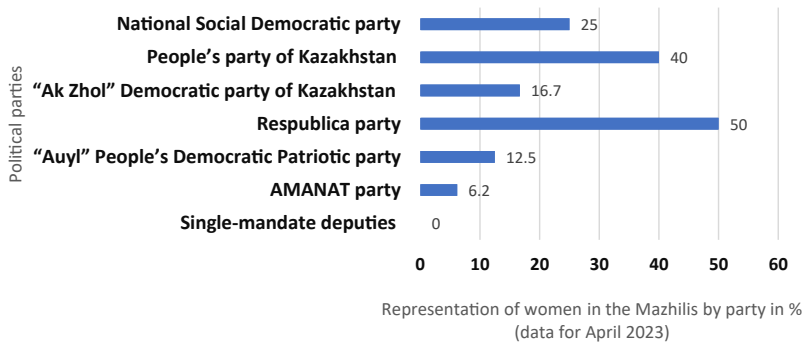


Figure 2.
Women Representation in the Mazhilis by party in percentage

Source: By authors

old) prevail among the female deputies. Female MPs aged over 60 were elected to the lower house of parliament from the Ak Zhol and PPK parties. The youngest deputy (26 years old) at the time of the election was a candidate from the Respublika Party.

The analysis of the data shows that there is a gender disparity at the highest levels of government, in the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Career paths

Empirical data on the female deputies of the Mazhilis of the Parliament enable us to identify the focal points, the transition points, and the beginning of a professional career in the life paths of representatives of the political elite. Professional career is a part of the multidimensional life path of an individual and has an impact on other areas of their life, while being dependent on them. For instance, the gender analysis of the biographies of deputies demonstrates that, subject to their age, there is an asymmetry in evidence among men and women when they enter the elite. Women for the first time occupy an elite position much later than men. 11 percent of women are represented in the young cohort of deputies of the Mazhilis (from 18 to 40 years old). 89 percent of women appear to be in the middle-aged group. Women achieve high positions in power hierarchies at a later age on average. This is most likely to show that when women plan their professional trajectory, other aspects of the life scenario come to the fore (perhaps family, marriage). In this regard, it is appropriate to mention the biological reasons for the low representation of women in politics. Proponents of the biological approach believe that “a woman herself is responsible for low participation in politics, since she allegedly not only lacks desire, but also has a ‘natural shift’ of interests in the field of family and household relations, in the private / personal sphere” (Kolesnik, 2021, p. 480).

The variable related to the characteristics of career trajectories – “pre-elite work” – allows us to identify which work precedes the occupation of the first elite position by a representative of the deputy corps. In this context, data analysis demonstrates that women generally are employed in the highest hierarchical positions in education, culture and healthcare – 38 percent, more than 20 percent of women are recruited to the legislative authority through the highest positions in economic institutions. The data on the positions of “deputy assistant, employee of the representative body of the regional and republican levels” and “head of the representative bodies of the republican level” are also of interest, when in the groups under consideration (the position of “pre-elite work”) women make up about 28 percent.

The analysis of the structural biographies of female deputies reveals that their career started in the local executive authorities. They used to be either employees or heads of departments of healthcare, education, and social protection. Kazakhstani executive bodies act as one of the main channels of recruiting to deputy positions. For instance, the empirical data show that 28 % of women were engaged in political and administrative spheres, i.e., they could work in the parties or be deputies of previous convocations. In addition, they could hold administrative positions in public authorities. 22 % of women were involved in the economic field, i.e., in business. The majority of the female deputies used to have managerial positions in healthcare, education, and social protection.

Another aspect is the “status trigger” in the elite career of female deputies. The analysis is based on individual biographies of female representatives of the political elite. Formalized data (i.e., information from their official biographies) show that they began their professional path in the social sphere, for example, in kindergartens and schools. Typically, their career developed dynamically, so, in some time, they became heads of departments of healthcare, education, or social protection. For instance, the turning point in the biographies of one of the deputies was appointment to the managerial position. We may observe her vertical

movement from the lower to city level the higher regional one within 10 years. After having achieved the highest elite position in regional administrative authorities, she experienced horizontal movement, which means that she could hold a position of a head of regional department of education, and then change to the analogical position in social protection. After they started moving up their career ladder, they usually entered a political party.

The second case of the biography of a female deputy also illustrates that the professional journey was connected with teaching at a university as well as working in executive authorities in Astana, the capital city of the country. But then there was a turn in the biography, and she ran for the presidential election from the National Alliance of Professional Social Workers. After participation in the presidential race, she was proposed as a candidate to the Mazhilis deputies.

The third case of the “social” biography of a female representative of the political elite demonstrates the “purest” case of a career ascension within educational institutions when there had been twenty years of experience in preschool institutions before professional experience was converted into a deputy position.

Thus, even a schematic analysis of the biographies of the political elite in terms of connection of the career of female deputies with the social sphere traditionally mentioned in the academic literature as the main channel for recruiting for the position of a deputy of the Mazhilis reveals that out of three cases, only one professional biography turns out to be an example of a career ascension within one social institution (preschool).

Educational trajectories of women

The educational level of deputies is regarded as an important characteristic when considering gender inequality in the political elite. Education is viewed as a pass not only to politics, but also to the political elite, militate in favor of this. For instance, the accumulated educational level enables the elite to remain a special cultural community for a long time, and shared values, attitudes, and commitments contribute to building social ties and reducing uncertainties within elite groups (Engelstad, 2018). The training of representatives of the European elite in prestigious (often closed) educational institutions allows us to argue that education often plays the role of an exclusive channel for recruitment into the political and economic elite of society and appears to be a way of its self-closure (Hartmann, 2011).

Empirical data on the first higher education in the gender context show that there is a difference in the main educational profiles of women and men. Among female deputies, diplomas in pedagogical (about 40 percent), economic (22 percent), and medical (11 percent) fields predominate. Representatives of the elite get their second higher education at a more mature age, while occupying elite positions in government institutions. The second higher education is generally related to economic and legal majors (11 percent).

Postgraduate education and a degree are essential elements of the educational capital of the political elite. The empirical data obtained reveal that about 17 percent of female deputies have master’s degrees, and almost 30 percent of deputies are Candidate of Sciences (the type of Kazakhstani scientific degrees equivalent to PhD which existed before 2010) and 5 percent are PhDs. All of them had defended theses on economic, legal and medical areas. This trend is very stable. In most cases, women become holders of PhD immediately after getting higher education which looks natural within the educational trajectory.

Conclusion

The investigation into gender equality issues in the highest legislative branch of the government of Kazakhstan has identified the unbalanced character of representation of men and women in the deputy positions.

The ideas and results presented in the article are new, as previous studies only provide general information about gender inequality in Kazakhstan, or how it manifests in the managerial sector, etc. For the first time, on the basis of content analysis of documents and campaign materials, the level of participation of political parties in addressing gender inequality is investigated. The relevance of the gender issue has shaped trends in electoral policy. In reference to the Election Law, the state initiated a 30 percent quota for the promotion of women. But this number included other categories: the disabled and the youth, which significantly reduced the possibility of women's political participation. As a result, only in two parties that women deputies were represented in numbers exceeding the 30 percent threshold.

Based on the structural-biographical method, the study discusses the ways and mechanisms of increasing women's participation in the political life of Kazakhstan. The results of the election campaign of 2023 provided material for determining the gender order in the Kazakhstani political space. Thus, the party has become an effective channel for promoting women in the parliament of the country. For comparison, in single-mandate constituencies, no woman was able to pass to the elected body. Analyses of biographies and career strategies confirm the thesis that women gain political weight by working across party lines. The changes in Kazakhstan's gender policy are primarily due to the initiatives of the authorities with endeavors to comply with the global agenda in this area.

The findings show that women candidates without party affiliation were unable to get into representative bodies. The situation is different for male candidates without any party affiliation. For instance, 7 male candidates who do not adhere to any of the parties could join the Mazhilis in a single-seat constituency (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). The right to be elected in a single-seat constituency has been given to political parties, social movements, and citizens through self-nomination (Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan", 2024).

This implies that those women candidates with party affiliation were able to get representative bodies and thus the finding is consistent with the theory of elites. The theory of elites is concentrated around the leader having an advantage in electoral competition. The attempt by this study to explain the nature of women's political leadership through the theory of elites will give rise to a discussion in the regional space. In addition, it will make it possible to overcome the specificity of elite formation without gender conditioning through the creation of a new legal framework.

This study will hopefully make theoretical and methodological contribution in the discourse of gender equality and women political participation. The results in Kazakhstan can be used for comparison with similar studies in other countries and give impetus to further research of this topic. The study recommends that it is crucial for the political parties to revise the pre-election program documents in the direction of increasing the ways and measures to address gender inequality. It also has practical significance in terms of proposing the need to revise the quota principle in future, or increase the percentage of the allocated quota for women.

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A study of the decentralised administrative arrangements between the central and local governments in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis

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Abstract

Purpose – Decentralised administrative arrangements and the active function of local government organisations are essential to tackle crisis effectively. Using Bangladesh as a case study, this paper examines the central and local government administrative arrangements during COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach – This study applies qualitative content analysis and interviews to explore the local government's role in Bangladesh's COVID-19 management by interviews of 18 participants including government officials, experts, non-government organisations (NGOs) representatives, and the general public. This paper also analysed academic papers, policy documents and other publicly available documents, including newspaper reports.

Findings – The Constitution of Bangladesh intensified the active participation of local government in each administrative unit through decentralised administrative management. This paper however reveals that the administrative arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh was primarily a centrally led system. The local government was not sufficiently involved, nor had it integrated into the planning and coordination process. This indicated the absence of active decentralised administration.

Originality/value – This study fills the research gap of the administrative pattern and local relations in COVID-19 management by exploring the local government's role during the catastrophic situation and highlights the importance of decentralised administrative actions in managing the crisis.

Keywords Government administration, Local governments, Decentralisation, Crisis management, Bangladesh

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The worldwide health catastrophe caused by COVID-19 pushed the world to a test (Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020; Li and Song, 2022). Though it is a health concern, nothing is outside the administrative and governance procedure; thus, it was also a test of administrative competence for countries. The epidemic had devastating global impact on government, governance and socio-economies (Greer *et al.*, 2020; Gauld, 2023; Farid Uddin, 2021). Because of the extremely high transmission of COVID-19 cases, governments in countries carried broad measures to battle the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, the lack of sufficient governmental actions also led to a surge in contamination rates and generated disastrous circumstances in some countries. Countries that neglected to instigate collaborative administration actions experienced more challenges and harsh situations (Anwar *et al.*, 2020; Biswas *et al.*, 2020; Gauld, 2023). It was evident that decentralised administrative arrangements and strong collaboration between central and local governments were essential to combat the COVID-19 crisis (Dutta and Fischer, 2021; Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020). An epidemic like COVID-19 is an inimitable crisis, and it is true that it may not happen often, nor it is an exclusive crisis. However, decentralised administrative actions and coordination between central and local governments are essential to tackle any crisis. This study looks at the central and local government administrative interactions and investigates the local government's involvement in managing COVID-19, using Bangladesh as a case study.

Along with the central government's key responsibilities, the role of local governments is considerably associated with the successful management of disasters (Dutta and Fischer, 2021; Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020). The hypothesis of this study is that the lack of decentralised administrative roles between central and local governments augmented COVID-19 hardships. It also assumes that a strong collaborative partnership between the top and bottom-level government tiers could have helped alleviate the COVID-19 challenges. The research questions include: 1. What is the administrative setup of the Bangladesh government's COVID-19 emergency response plan? 2. How intense are the local government units involved in the COVID-19 response plans?

Investigating the local government's role in managing COVID-19 has significant scholastic and practical significance. Regardless of socio-economic status, all countries face various crises or disasters. Exploring the COVID-19 pandemic situation can serve as an outline, and the lessons learned can help solve challenges and prepare for the future. Most importantly, countries that are surrounded by numerous limitations and difficulties, specifically developing countries, often struggle to manage disastrous situations. The experiences from COVID-19 are helpful for these countries to learn the lessons and look for evidence-based solutions through strong administrative collaboration. Furthermore, this study enriches existing research on COVID-19 by adding new perspectives. For instance, Farazmand *et al.* (2022) signify the government's initiatives to reduce COVID-19 hardships and raise concerns about transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The research argues that a robust central-local partnership can establish transparency and accountability and ensure wider citizen involvement with government activities.

In addition, there is a considerable amount of research on COVID-19 from various policy and political perspectives (Li and Song, 2022; Greer *et al.*, 2020; Farid Uddin, 2021; Hossain, 2021). However, there is a scarcity of studies exploring the central-local government relations in COVID-19 strategic actions. Research on decentralised government actions is critical for academics, researchers and policymakers. This study fills the gap by exploring the local government's position during COVID-19 and highlights the local government's importance in managing the crisis.

Research methods

This study has applied the qualitative method with content analysis and interviews to investigate the local government's role in COVID-19 management and strategic approaches in Bangladesh. It also analysed academic papers, policy documents and other publicly available documents, including newspaper reports, to collect fundamental related information.

Interviews were conducted to obtain the perceptions of various stakeholders. Electronic tools have become a popular way to gather data conveniently during crises (Dahlin, 2021). The authors used electronic devices including e-mail and phone calls to reach the targeted informants. Regarding the size of samples, Lincoln and Guba (1985) endorse between 12 and 20 interviews for qualitative research. Other researchers do not suggest particular figures but recommend an adequate number (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). In this study, around 50 respondents across government officials, experts, non-government organisations (NGOs), and the general public were invited, of which 18 agreed to participate (Table 1).

The interviewees were e-mailed and asked to respond to structured questions about the COVID-19 state of affairs and the government's administrative positions. The interviewees are selected by using personal and peer networks, applying the snowballing method. Sixteen interviews were conducted using e-mail, and two were over the phone (15-30 minutes). The confidentiality of the interviewees was strictly followed by adopting codes.

The concept of government

Government is an ancient term, an entity of a group of citizens with authority to govern a state. MacDonald (1961) explains government as bestowing power to one or many leaders and accepting and trusting them to govern according to the by-law. Besides, Badach and Dymnicka (2017) define government as the official and administrative organisation and a legitimate body exercising power and authority over the people (Fasenfest, 2010). With the changing pattern of society, the patterns of governments are also changing. The transformation of the government's role in the moving social, political, and economic contexts is a big challenge, and decentralisation is often considered the most appropriate measure to modify the role of government (Saito, 2008). Decentralisation is a reorganisation that changes the hierarchical government style of top-down management and delegates political decision-making authority to local-level small-size self-government units (Faguet, 2014; Bardhan, 2002).

Local government is an invention of decentralisation and a devolved administrative setup (Chikerema, 2013). It is considered a suitable form of decentralisation to ensure broader participation, growth-based redistribution, citizen-centric policies and strong governmental responsiveness (Saito, 2008). Local government is a formal institution operated by the elected representative to deliver a wide variety of services at the local level (Aminuzzaman, 2010). It is

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Number of interviewees</i>
One	Politicians (Central politicians and elected local government representatives)	4
Two	Stakeholders (Local government experts and non-government organization representatives)	5
Three	Government officials (Field administration)	4
Four	Citizen	5
Total		18

Source: By authors

Table 1.
Summary of
interviewees

a semi-autonomous political institution with a small or large capacity to exercise political power (Kumar Panday, 2006). It contains a small geographical area that formulates an agenda, vision, and course of action to ensure advancement and welfare (Frantzeskaki *et al.*, 2014). Local government is crucial in establishing local-level democracy and ensuring citizen engagement in the government's development plans (Bhuiyan, 2011).

However, the government's nature, roles, structure, and responsibilities vary from country to country, and central-local relations are determined based on integrating their works and autonomy (Kumar Panday, 2006). In the federal system of government, the central government works at the centre level or nationwide, while the sub-national government works at the province or state level and the local government at the community level (Kin, 2009). In the unitary system, the central government operates at the national level, and local governments operate at the sub-national level (OECD/UCLG, 2016). Central and local governments share responsibilities to accomplish intergovernmental matters (Amnå and Montin, 2000). Local government is a fundamental component of government functionalities while local authorities carry out local services; however, the central government controls and assigns local authorities' functions (Aminuzzaman, 2010; Kumar Panday, 2006; Bhuiyan, 2011).

Bangladesh is a developing country in South Asia, with 166.5 million people (August 2022) (BBS, 2022) and 148,460 square kilometres. It has a historically instituted strong local government system (Khan, 2016; Bhuiyan, 2011). The Bangladesh Constitution (Ministry of Law, 1972) safeguards the public-oriented authority system and stresses empowered local government (Article 59.1 and Article 60). However, in reality, the administrative arrangements in Bangladesh have never been genuinely decentralised and local governments are not empowered and supported by the central government (Khan, 2016). In various countries, local governments have played substantial leadership and managerial role in managing the COVID-19 catastrophe (Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020; Greer *et al.*, 2020; Dutta and Fischer, 2021). Bangladesh's local government also has broad experience and leadership capacity in managing various disasters (Khan, 2016). It could play an active role in caring for vulnerable grassroots citizens, predominantly in remote areas. The COVID-19 pandemic administrative actions again reflected the conventional top-down administrative approach and missed the proper utilisation of decentralised administrative arrangements. Thus, the involvement and role of the local government in Bangladesh in managing COVID-19 deserve significant attention. The literature review informs this study in understanding the importance of decentralised administration and realising the interrelation between central and local governments.

Administrative arrangements in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a legislative and unitary style of government system. The Government of Bangladesh has two sets of administration: central administration and field administration. The central administration is based mainly in the Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka, and works under the Cabinet Division. The Cabinet Division is the Prime Minister's executive office, which facilitates smooth business operations in Cabinet Ministries and assists in decision-making by ensuring coordination between ministries and departments. The field administrative setup of the Bangladesh Government is divided into several Divisions, which are divided into numerous Districts in the country. Then, every District is again split into several Upazilas (sub-districts), the Upazilas are segregated into Unions, and every Union is apportioned into 9 Wards (a Ward is a small area or a suburb).

The Cabinet Secretary is the head of the Cabinet Division, and the Secretary is the head of each Ministry or Division within vital Ministries. Besides, some subservient higher

administrators work under the Secretary at each Ministry or Division, such as Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary and Assistant Secretary. Field Administration is scattered around various administrative entities, such as the Division, the District and the Upazila or Thana, and the Union, a local government entity comprising different villages. In field administration, a Commissioner leads the organisational unit of the Division. A Deputy Commissioner (DC) distributes government policy in their district administrative unit in backing with the other junior civil servants. Finally, the Upazila Nirbahi (Executive) Officer (UNO) operates the Upazila or Thana-level administrative unit. The Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA) positions and monitors the central and field administration officers. The Prime Minister is the existing Minister and is in charge of the Ministry of Public Administration with backing from a State Minister. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives regulates local governments (Figure 1).

Bangladesh has a decentralised administrative system operated by local government institutions and headed by elected public representatives. The local governments are organised into rural and urban clusters; the rural local governments include Union Parishads, Upazila Parishads, and Zila Parishads. The urban local government includes City Corporations and Municipalities (Pourashavas) operating in the city regions. The City Corporations, Pourashavas, and Union Parishads comprise a few Wards (a small area).

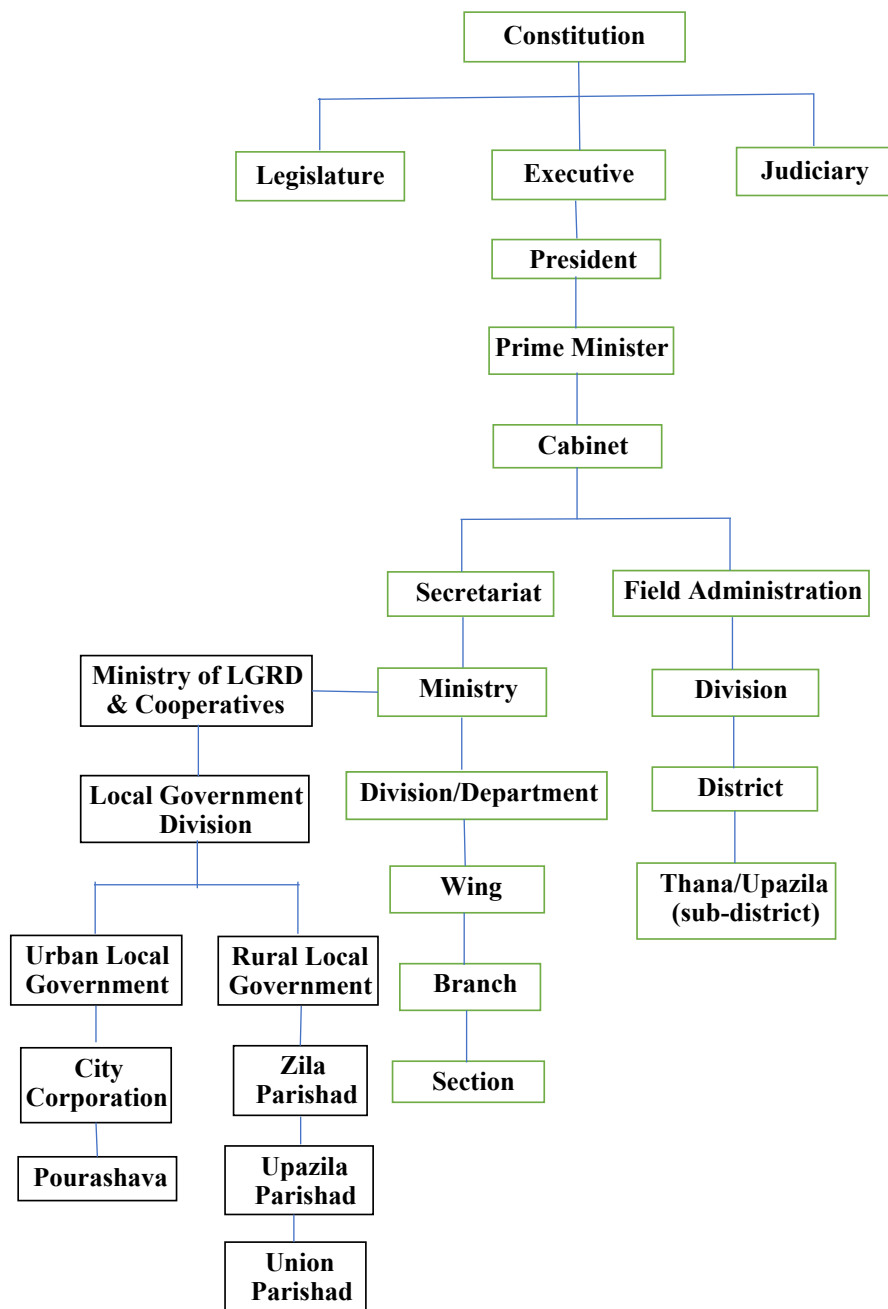
Bangladesh's government administrative arrangements in managing COVID-19

The first coronavirus incidents were confirmed in Bangladesh on 8 March 2020. On 23 March 2020, the government announced that all public and private offices would be closed from 26 March to 4 April 2020 to control the spread of the virus. By that time, Bangladesh started to experience community transmission on 25 March 2020. The number of COVID-19 cases spread to broader areas, and on 5 May 2020, the Bangladesh government confirmed that the contagious virus had spread all over the country.

The Bangladesh government announced the “National Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP) for COVID-19, Bangladesh” on 10 March 2020 based on the World Health Organisations (WHO)'s “Global COVID-19 Preparedness Plan” issued in February 2020 and the “WHO Country Readiness Checklist”. This Preparedness Plan of WHO is an essential guide for developing a COVID-19 national plan in Bangladesh. The key aim of the plan was to control coronavirus and manage COVID-19 administrative activities in Bangladesh. It also specified preparedness, response activities, and priority issues to lessen the effect on well-being and the economy. Following the Response Plan, various committees were established at the national and local levels. However, no members from the local governments were included in the national committee, and minimal local government members were included in the local-level committees (Table 2).

In addition to the National Response Plan, the Health Services Division of the Health and Family Welfare introduced the “Bangladesh Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 (BPRP)” in July 2020 (MoHFW, 2020b). This Response Plan outlined the formation of various committees (Table 3), their purposes, areas of exertion, and significant actions essential to breaking the spread of the virus, identifying the infectious people rapidly, coordinating the situations effectively, and controlling the pandemic as guided in the International Health Regulations 2005.

Furthermore, to prevent the coronavirus from spreading and manage the situation, the MoHFW formed various local government committees in March 2020 (Table 4). However, these committees' key objectives were to work under the direction of the National Committee on Coronavirus to create awareness, take the initiative on financial and logistics issues, and provide information to the National Committee on Coronavirus.



Source: By authors

Figure 1.
Structure of
governments in
Bangladesh

Committees	Committee composition	Local government's representation
National Committee for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairperson: Minister of MoHFW - Member Secretary: Secretary (Health Service Division), MoHFW - Other members: 30 members from other government departments, health professional associations, and donor agencies 	No member from elected local government units.
National Coordination Committee for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adviser: Chief Physician of Prime Minister - Other members: 26 members from other government departments, health professional associations, and donor agencies 	No member from elected local government units.
National Technical Committee for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Twenty-four members from other government departments, health professional associations, and donor agencies 	No member from elected local government units.
Committee at Division Level for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairperson: DC, Member - Secretary: Divisional Director, Health - Other members: ten members from other government departments' field administration units 	No member from elected local government units.
The committee at District Level for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairperson: DC - Member Secretary: Civil Surgeon - Other members: 11 from other governmental departments field administration units, and two local government representatives 	Only two members from the vast elected local government units: Chairman Sadar Upazila Parishad and Mayor, Sadar Municipality. Besides, the Chairman of Zila Parishad acts as Advisor along with the Member of Parliament
The committee at Upazila Level for Prevention and Control of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairperson: UNO - Member Secretary: Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer - Other members: seven members from other governmental departments' field administration units and one local government representative. 	Only one member from the massive elected local government units: the Municipality Mayor

Source: Adapted from [MoHFW \(2020b\)](#)

Table 2. Structure of the committees and the role of local government in the National Response Plan

Committee	Composition
High-Level Multi-Sectoral Coordination Committee Sub-national multi-sectoral COVID-19 committees	Headed by the Minister for MoHFW, who advises the Prime Minister's Office on multi-sector intrusions to lower the spread of the virus. Subnational multi-sectoral COVID-19 committees at each Division, District, Upazila, City Corporation, Municipality, and Union Parishad manage and implement government advice.
National Technical Advisory Committee National Public Health Coordination Group	High-level National Technical Advisory Committee comprised of government and independent specialists to guide government policies. An 8-member national stage public health coordination group, i.e., one member for each of the eight divisions of Bangladesh, has been formed by MoHFW to manage the COVID-19 actions at the division level.

Source: Adapted from [MoHFW \(2020b\)](#)

Table 3. Committee's structure and role of local governments in the Bangladesh Response Plan

Types of Local Government	Local Government Units	Composition	Role of local governments
Urban Local Governments	City Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - President: Mayor of the City Corporation - Member Secretary: Chief Health Officer of the City Corporation - Other members: eight members from various government departments 	To perform the guidance of the National Committee on Coronavirus; build consciousness, initiate financial and logistics support, and notify COVID-19 information to the National Committee on Coronavirus.
	Pourashavas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - President: DC - Mayor serves as a member of the COVID-19 Prevention Committee at the district level and a member of the Upazila committee under the Presidentship of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer 	
Rural Local Governments	Zila Parishad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - District Commissioner as a President - Civil Surgeon as Member Secretary - 9 other members from various government departments, including the Mayor and Chairman of the Sadar Upazila Parishad 	
	Upazila Parishad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upazila Nirbahi Officer as a President - Upazila Health and Family Welfare Officer as Member Secretary - 8 other members from various government departments, including the Mayor of that Upazila Parishad 	
	Union Parishad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Union Parishad Chairman as President - Union Parishad Secretary as Member Secretary - Union Parishad Members as Member 	

Source: Adapted from Barishal District (2020), MoHFW (2020a), MoPA (2020)

Table 4.
Local government committees formed by MoHFW to assist the National Committee

Some existing national policies and laws were also applied during the COVID-19 disaster. For example, Bangladesh's Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control, and Eradication) Act 2018 assisted in stopping, controlling, and eradicating COVID-19 virus infection and helped generate people's consciousness. In addition, the National Health Policy (NHP) 2011 was applied to set priorities, distribute resources, and ensure the healthcare needs of the citizens.

An analysis of central-local collaboration in COVID-19 administrative actions

National Health Policy identified 39 strategies to achieve better health services. Strategy 21 of the NHP emphasises the importance of incorporating local governments to ensure health

services to the broader people. However, the health system in Bangladesh is surrounded by various challenges (World Health Organization, 2015). This section evaluates the COVID-19 administrative actions by analysing the interviewee's perception of this study.

When COVID-19 struck Bangladesh, the Government was not sufficiently equipped to cope with the pandemic. Without a coordinated managerial approach, Bangladesh faced challenges in testing infected people, treating patients, and ensuring adequate protective measures, and as the days went by, bitter battles were evident in Bangladesh's COVID-19 management system. Consequently, COVID-19 worsened, and the virus spread throughout the country. One interviewee, who is a local government expert and academic, said,

The government did not have an effective policy. The number of COVID-19 infections has been on the rise in the country in recent days. The so-called lockdown was not effective, and the government failed to implement social distancing. Central and local governments did not have proper coordination. Due to a lack of coordination, the government could not stop community transmission.

The Constitution of Bangladesh strongly admits the importance of local governments, and local government is an inevitable organisational element (Aminuzzaman, 2010). Local government was expected to play a constructive role during the COVID-19 crisis (Dutta and Fischer, 2021). However, local governments in Bangladesh played a limited role in awareness building, relief distribution, and pre and post-lockdown responsibilities (Sohel *et al.*, 2022). Bangladesh's coronavirus management was primarily a centrally dominated approach, and the local government was not sufficiently involved (Table 2). The absence of decentralised administrative tasks and responsibilities was a fundamental problem for collaboration between the central and local governments. One interviewee, who is a Union Parishad Chairman, stated,

Government has been handling the COVID situation centrally. The local government is working as a separate entity. Sometimes, the government gives help packages for local people, which is not sufficient for all. The administration has the central authority to tackle COVID situations all over the country. So, the government plan has not been successful all-time.

The introduction of the local government is the remoteness of central authority, sharing the state's responsibility and a means to create a more reactive and effective government action through a decentralised administrative system (Bardhan, 2002). The local governments are more suitable than the central government for providing public services to the people far from the central government or their field administration (Saito, 2008). Bangladesh's National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 involved central and local administration amply in constructing the national and local level response committees. However, the local government had not integrated into the planning and coordination point. There was no member from elected local government units in the National Preparedness and Response Plan, which had three national and divisional committees. Besides, there were around 50-100 local government units at the District and Upazila level; however, the District and Upazila level National Response Plan incorporated only 2 and 1 members, which reflected poor local engagement. One citizen interviewee said,

As the central government has been dealing with this situation by its bureaucrats, i.e., UNO, SP (Superintendent of Police), DC and Secretary, there is very little scope for the local government, people's representatives as well. But I think local governments can contribute from their area and capacities, which will help face these challenges. However, in Bangladesh, we cannot see this scenario!

Local governments are the leading service sources to local people and initial respondents in times of catastrophe (Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020; Dutta and Fischer, 2021). In a time of crisis, it is essential to get accurate data to initiate the necessary actions. The Bangladesh government's

coronavirus numbers did not represent the exact COVID-19 condition as the government database only reflected the cases that came to the hospitals with COVID-19 signs. The individuals who died before diagnosis were not counted as COVID-19 deaths; many people who died with COVID-19 signs throughout the nation remained out of the record (Maswood, 2020). A contributor to the Bangladesh government's COVID-19 National Technical Advisory Committee claimed in Maswood (2020) that "the government's claim of 1.41 percent fatality rate does not represent the actual fatality rate. It is surprisingly low, and the rate misrepresented the actual scenario." To make a responsive plan, the representation of accurate information is essential. In this circumstance, local governments could collect actual data on COVID-19 infectious people, which would be very supportive for the administration of the pandemic situation.

As vital local influencers, local government units could also play a leading role in the risk prevention and communication stage. However, the local government institutions were not involved in the administrative risk communication process. One interviewee, who is a government officer positioned at the field administration, said,

The role of local governments in Bangladesh has been crucial in the lowest tier of public administration for every reason. The importance of the local government has been significant in every emergency of Bangladesh.

Central governments are frequently criticised for being too far and detached from the wider general population, and local governments are often believed to be essential to bringing about the country's aspirations, both egalitarian and progressive (Saito, 2008). Citizen confirms their participation in the government system through local government organisations (Khan, 2016). In a time of crisis, the role of government units is essential in implementing central government policies. Bangladesh has roughly 10 million people who work in various countries as migrant workers (Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2021). As soon as the global economy had been knocked intensely by the COVID-19, before Bangladesh shut down its borders in March 2020, over half a million people came back home; instead of isolating themselves, they were roaming around the country, meeting friends and families, attending communal crowds (Anwar *et al.*, 2020; Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2021). The government was unsuccessful in launching a well-operated isolation system, and the local administrations struggled to keep the connection of the communal spreads of the virus from the returned travellers, and fear dispersed across the community; subsequently, the COVID-19 dispersed quickly to the entire population (Anwar *et al.*, 2020). MoHFW formed various local government committees in March 2020 (Table 4); however, their involvement mainly was to implement the direction of the national committees. The local government had not been given sufficient authority to initiate independent actions to enforce lockdown, isolation, and other preventive measures. A local government expert interviewee said,

Local government bodies and representatives should be given the leadership role in implementing the programs. These bodies would have achieved more success in implementing lockdown programs, contract tracing and other needed COVID-19 protocols.

Local government can be specified as the junior-level government organised locally, and it promotes central government in the distant areas of a country (Bhuiyan, 2011). Alternatively, local governments also act as local managers of the central government in the periphery. The strategy in combatting the spread of COVID-19 is the more rigid social distancing rules, strict lockdowns, higher testing, tracking the infectious people, encouraging contaminated people to take treatment, and institutional quarantine system. When COVID-19 hit Bangladesh, the local government could not influence these strategies due to the absence of substantial involvement. However, the government considered it a health issue and emphasised communities with professionals. A citizen interviewee said,

Local government as an extension or representative of central government may assist the central government from every aspect, especially from an awareness-building point of view. Local government stays closer to the mass people, among whom most are unaware of the consequences of a pandemic or may be indifferent toward the gravity of the problem. The local government may actively assist the central government in this regard.

The functions of sub-national government units are viewed as an operational resolution to current heightened difficulties for real-time and practical adherence to specific neighbourhood circumstances (Saito, 2008; Dutta and Fischer, 2021). Bangladesh has vigorous local government ranks to include the entire state. Local governments may operate for the efficiency of the progressive measures of the central government (Khan, 2016). The participation of the masses is vital to executing protective measures. In the COVID-19 challenging situation, local governments were nearer and attached to the public, thus adept at traversing situation-specific community measures (Dutta and Fischer, 2021). The local governments tried communicating and engaging with the people and the government departments during COVID-19 through their digital unit; however, local governments are constrained by resource limitations (Hossain, 2021). However, concerning the vulnerabilities of COVID-19, the benefit of complying with the government actions and people's deliberate conformity with the government guidelines, the central government has been unsuccessful in getting along with the broader people (Biswas *et al.*, 2020). One interviewee, who is a member of a major political party, said,

The Coronavirus epidemic is a catastrophe where prevention is essential. In that case, personal health awareness, maintaining social distance, preventing free movement, in some cases taking lockdown or shutdown measures are controlled. And the local government is more effective than the central government in managing or controlling these measures.

The motivation of local leaders is critical to policy formulation and implementation (Aminuzzaman, 2015). The ability to enforce lockdown was demonstrated to fail when over 100,000 people showed up for a funeral during the COVID-19 crisis (Dhaka Tribune, 2020). Local governments could be functional and productive in implementing government response plans. As the local government institutions were closer to the local people, connecting and making people more informed about this pandemic was easier. At the same time, it was challenging for the central government to communicate effectively with remote citizens who were far away during times of crisis. A central politician interviewee, said,

Working closely with local government bodies will make it easier to implement epidemic response projects and achieve success in a short time.

Bangladesh's local government organisations are prominent, considering their implication and effectiveness (Aminuzzaman, 2010). Local governments' representative participatory approach confirms citizens' active engagement and, consequently, a platform to produce a persuasive and functional managerial action (Khan, 2016; Bardhan, 2002). Besides, local governments are the most critical informers to the community and preliminary contact points (Dzigbede *et al.*, 2020). Gao and Yu (2020) argue that local governments remain crucial participants in instigating the COVID-19 public health emergency administration process. Central and local governments in various countries have indicated the importance of local governance during the pandemic. For example, Dutta and Fischer (2021) study on Kerala (An Indian state) shows strong local governance and coordinated and integrated central-local attempts to manage the pandemic. Evidence from Kerala reveals that the central government declared clear policies to the states and field administrations for concrete measures to be commenced by involving local governments and other local stakeholders. Their study identifies practical local and central government actions in ensuring local governance, including urgent mobilisation of activities, cross-sectoral and multi-scalar integration,

target-driven administrative activity, social security and control, and volunteerism and support. In addition, [Dzigbede et al. \(2020\)](#) outline local government resiliency in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. The research identifies that local governments have confronted pandemic challenges with leadership, management, determination, knowledge sharing and previous experiences. The lack of appropriate involvement of local government units incapacitated the central administration in Bangladesh; thus, it contributed to the surge in infection rates as the government failed to convey the devastating impacts to the broader people. The critical action that could assist in managing the COVID-19 condition was to ensure an active decentralised administration and to connect with the citizens fruitfully through the local governments' strong engagement in all aspects of government committees and plans for prompting evidence-based decisions. In the COVID-19 critical time strong organisational coordination between central and local government could enable quick managerial action and efficiency.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is an emerging country with considerable human resources and citizens. It has the sharpest expanding economy amongst the South Asian countries and has yielded significant social and economic progress in slashing hardship, constant monetary progress, social values, increased life expectancy, enhanced learning levels, and better food making ([The World Bank, 2020](#); [Chakravorty, 2018](#); [Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2021](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially overwhelmed Bangladesh's socio-economy. It has also reflected the poor local government's role and signified that stronger central-local relationships were essential to combat vulnerability.

This study found that Bangladesh's coronavirus administrative arrangement was primarily a top-down and centrally-controlled approach. No local government institutions were involved in the National Preparedness and Response Plan and the administrative risk communication process. Local government institutions were included in the sub-national level committees. However, they were not included in the planning and coordination level of the COVID-19 District and Upazilla Response Plan. Also, the representation of local government members in numerous committees was inadequate, considering the proportions.

This study argues that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis showed new challenges, and conventional top-down administrative approaches appeared insufficient to tackle the situation effectively. Bangladesh has many possibilities, and an effective local government system is mandatory to resolve various difficulties. COVID-19 was not solely a public health, administrative, law enforcement, or disaster concern but an all-inclusive matter. Thus, considering the COVID chaos as a lesson, the study suggests establishing a solid partnership between central and local governments. The local government of Bangladesh could also play a vital role in managing the COVID-19 situation. This research highlights the need for a decentralised administrative pattern to face any crisis.

The central government should abide by the spirit of the constitution and enable a decentralised administrative framework by involving the local government in governmental matters and considering the local governments as active partners instead of junior or subordinate bodies. The central government has to ensure a collaborative relationship with the local government as they have a strong and extensive network. Local government's active participation is essential in developing governance and democracy in Bangladesh; thus, the central government must facilitate them and take the necessary initiative to remove difficulties towards decentralised administration. Finally, the local governments' active involvement can help achieve the central government's plans and policies and help effectively manage any crisis.

This study contributes to the literature as broad investigations that explore the central-local association in COVID-19 management plans are scarce. It shows that local governments

were overlooked by the central government and its field administrations. Furthermore, this study briefly explores the doomed role the central government gave to the local governments in the COVID-19 response plans. This study also highlights the importance of local government organisations in the COVID-19 response process and emphasises the need for a decentralised government system to improve administrative capacity. A collaborative approach is proposed to ensure that local governments can respond effectively to the challenges.

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An analysis of the relationship between organisational resilience and Local Educational Management Units' responses on education services delivery in Peru during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose – During the COVID-19 pandemic, Local Educational Management Units (UGELs), the key government stakeholders in the provision of education services in Peru, implemented responsive interventions. This paper analyses the relationship between UGEL organisational resilience and their responses during this period.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was conducted to measure UGEL management practices, with 251 valid responses from directors and managers. Based on organisational resilience theory, 67 questions were grouped into 13 factors and 3 components: (1) leadership and organisational culture, (2) preparation for change, and (3) networks building on the Organisational Resilience Index (ORI). These factors correlated with the number of interventions and the impact of those interventions implemented by UGELs.

Findings – The findings indicated that of all ORI components, leadership and organisational culture ranked the highest. Moreover, the ORI is positively associated with the number of interventions and the perceived impact produced by those interventions. Interestingly, it was found that when the gender variable is included in the correlation between the ORI and the number of interventions, women leading UGELs display a higher number of interventions than their male counterparts; and the coefficient increases even more when women lead a UGEL in a more challenging context (i.e., when the UGEL is located in a low-income area and operates under scarce resources).

Originality/value – This is the first study in Peru which analyses organisational resilience in the education sector, specifically about UGELs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It may help set priorities for institutional strengthening initiatives aimed at improving organisational resilience, which is particularly important in such uncertain and changing contexts.

Keywords Organisational resilience, COVID-19, Education services, Peru

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Peru was one of the first Latin-American countries to adopt quarantine measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. In the education sector, the government promptly cancelled



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regular in-person classes in schools. The Ministry of Education approved a regulatory framework to implement online classes nationwide and established the “Yo aprendo en casa” (*I learn at home*) strategy to continue providing educational services (Ministry of Education, 2020a).

One of the key participants in providing education services is the Local Educational Management Units (UGELs). These units report to regional governments, monitor schools’ performance, and provide technical assistance to schools. During the pandemic, some of these UGELs implemented responsive interventions to the crisis.

Based on the resilience literature, this study analyses UGEL organisational resilience and its response to the crisis. The research question is: What is the relationship between UGEL organisational resilience and its response to the COVID-19 outbreak? To answer this, an Organisational Resilience Index (ORI) was developed based on components and factors identified in the literature. The hypothesis was that UGELs organisational resilience is associated with their response capacity during the crisis.

The subsequent sections detail the institutional arrangements in the education sector, the actions taken by the government during the pandemic, a literature review on organisational resilience, the methodology, findings, and finally, the conclusion.

Educational policy and institutional design for service delivery in Peru

The education system in Peru has undergone significant changes in the last two decades in terms of stakeholders’ responsibilities and roles at the national, regional, and local levels. According to the General Education Law 2003 (Peruvian Congress, 2003), the educational service is organised into basic and higher education. Basic education is for children from 3 to 11 years, is compulsory and, when provided by the government, is free.

The education system is decentralised. There are four key actors: i) the Ministry of Education (MINEDU), ii) the Regional Offices of Education (DREs) in the regions, iii) Local Educational Management Units (UGELs) in the provinces and districts, and iv) schools. The education service provision aims to highlight the role of the local actors: UGELs and schools, because they are the closest to the people.

MINEDU has the leading role in ensuring a national vision that integrates diversity (Ministry of Education, 2013) and preserves the unity of the educational system. Its main function is to set national policies and educational standards. Besides, MINEDU defines the technical-normative guidelines for educational service provision and supervises its compliance. It also leads intergovernmental and intersectoral coordination within the educational system.

The DREs are specialised units in the regional governments responsible for ensuring and supervising the provision of educational services in the regions and coordinating with UGELs. UGELs are responsible for supervising the provision of educational services and technical assistance to schools (Ministry of Education, 2015b).

The main processes performed by UGELs are as follows:

- Local educational planning and development;
- Supply management and human resources management;
- Infrastructure maintenance and investment management;
- Technical support and assistance to increase educational service quality; and
- Quality standard assessment of pedagogical and administrative performance in schools.

According to the UGEL 2020 database, there are 222 UGELs distributed in all 24 regions of Peru. One region has two or more provinces, and one province can cover two or more districts.

Depending on its scope of intervention, each UGEL, on average, serves between eight and nine districts of a province. However, the scope of UGELs can vary significantly: some span as many as 33 districts in a province, while others, in contrast, serve only one district. This indicates that a UGEL might cover entire provinces or merely single districts in certain cases.

Therefore, the educational sector governance involves active participation of national, regional, and local actors. Regional and local levels are responsible for adapting and customising education provisions due to the country's cultural, social, and economic diversities. In addition, its jurisdictions differ greatly in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and operating capacity. Thus, using these two variables, MINEDU classified UGELs by the typology as presented in [Table 1](#).

The guidelines for decentralised educational management, approved by General Secretariat Resolution No. 938-2015-MINEDU ([Ministry of Education, 2015a](#)), point out that the decentralised management of education implies considering a progressive change from the sectoral approach to a territorial approach of public service delivery oriented to the citizen. This contributes to the improvement of students' learning and development in schools, reducing inequality gaps in education.

However, there is a widespread discussion about the problems of decentralised educational management in Peru. According to the [Multisectoral and Intergovernmental Commission for the Strengthening of Decentralization \(2018\)](#), the regulatory framework linked to decentralisation does not define the specific responsibilities of each level of government to guarantee an orderly and efficient provision of public services. In its final report, it states that there are overlaps and underlaps between various levels of government. Specifically, in the education sector, after analysing its key processes, it is concluded that there is tension between the exercise of authority by the national government and implementation of educational service at the local level. The tension occurs as the national level (MINEDU) exercises its authority without allowing discretion for UGELs. This means that even though it works under a chain-of-command model, there is not much margin for innovation at the local level.

Educational policy and institutional arrangements in the context of COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Peruvian government implemented measures to limit the spread of the virus across the country in mid-March 2020. These included rescheduling the start of classes in public schools and suspending classes in private educational institutions. Shortly after, the academic year commenced on April 6, adopting an online education approach with the implementation of the "I learn at home" (ILAH) strategy.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Level of operational capacity</i>	<i>Level of territorial challenge</i>	<i>Number of UGEL</i>
A	High	Low	36
BC	Average or limited	Low	16
D	High	Average	24
E	Average	Average	59
F	Limited	Average	23
GH	High or upper	High	40
I	Limited	High	22

Note: The typology of UGELs was prepared in 2015, when there were 220 UGELs registered to date in the Registry of decentralised educational management units. At the time of approval of the typology, 4 UGELs Type I were in the process of regularisation per the Technical Standard approved by Vice-ministerial Resolution No. 047-2015-MINEDU ([Ministry of Education, 2015b](#)).

Source: Adapted from [Ministry of Education \(2015a\)](#)

Table 1.
Typology of Local
Educational
Management Units

At the same time, the government announced the acquisition and distribution of technological devices (tablets) for students and teachers who needed them the most (Ministry of Education, 2020a).

In May 2020, through Ministerial Resolution No. 184-2020-MINEDU, the suspension of in-person educational service provision in all public and private schools was ordered, while the State of National Emergency was in force (Ministry of Education, 2020b). Likewise, in the same month, MINEDU implemented an online platform for schools during the year, due to the conditions of the crisis, which allowed more students to access public education. On the other hand, some regulatory instruments and pedagogical guidelines for online services or blended learning services in rural areas, were approved, among others.

The main effort of MINEDU to respond rapidly to the suspension of the educational service and start the 2020 school year was implementing the ILAH strategy. This distance education strategy proposed learning experiences to students at all levels and educational modalities of basic education in the country from their homes, implying the development of skills remotely accompanied by their teachers and their families. The ILAH strategy was freely accessible and free of charge and worked through different channels: the Internet, radio, and television. On the ILAH website, students could find and use educational resources, primarily videos and homework published weekly and scheduled daily. In addition, guidance was provided for families and teachers on this website. On television, the ILAH program was broadcast from Monday to Friday with educational content and differentiated schedules according to level and grade. Learning sessions from 15 to 30 minutes were broadcast on the radio, depending on the grade. These programs were produced exclusively by MINEDU, with no participation of regional or local actors as co-producers.

UGELs mainly oversaw communicating the school's strategy and resources and engaging schools, teachers, and parents to use them. They identified the existing conditions for implementing ILAH and designed alternative mechanisms for its access in areas without access to the Internet or television. For example, the UGEL Pichari Kimbiri in the region of Cusco, managed to increase access to ILAH through specific awareness activities for the community, as well as managing its dissemination in 11 radio stations in the area (Ministry of Education, 2020d).

Additionally, they oversaw guiding and providing technical assistance to teachers, school directors, and education staff on virtual education, as well as monitoring and reporting the progress and difficulties in the implementation of ILAH. For example, the UGEL Alto Amazonas – San Lorenzo in the region Loreto, managed to implement the Internet in the institutions of 64 rural educational networks, which allowed access to ILAH pedagogical resources and virtual technical assistance to managers and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2020d).

Even though it was estimated that a significant percentage of families accessed the content from ILAH in October 2020, and more than half have done so through the web, the telecommunications gap in the country indicated that households without a computer or the Internet could not access the platform, and therefore they had to opt for the other channels. In addition, it was most likely that students in rural areas were the most affected, as they could not access the online education service. Indeed, MINEDU, used the exercise of authority for assuring that regional and local actors comply with the regulatory instruments and guidelines, and left limited chances for innovation.

To avoid and tackle this, the UGEL implemented other strategies to share the training content of ILAH. As indicated in the guidelines for directors of DREs and UGELs within the framework of the measures adopted for the prevention and control of COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, 2020c), UGELs could identify geographic areas where it was not possible to implement the ILAH strategy and propose alternative or complementary strategies in those territories.

In short, after the declaration of a health emergency and the national state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19 in Peru, the education sector actors implemented multiple actions to implement the distance education service. However, effective distance learning through accessible and quality education for children and adolescents in the country did face challenges. Closing the access gap for students and teachers to information and communication technologies, the digital gaps, the implementation of intercultural and territorial approaches, and the diverse capabilities of UGEL staff and teachers, among others, presented serious problems.

According to the literature in the next section, organisational resilience is key to addressing crisis and uncertainty. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse the organisational resilience of UGELs, key stakeholders in the Peruvian education system, and their resilience in terms of its response to the COVID crisis.

Literature review on organisational resilience and its factors

From organisational theory, there are different perspectives to understanding organisational resilience. On the one hand, the literature indicates that resilience allows organisations to cope with crises and not interrupt their operational capacity (Barnett and Pratt, 2000; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007). On the other hand, it suggests that resilience inherently transforms and strengthens organisations, enabling them to overcome threats (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). In this approach, resilience gives organisations a competitive advantage since it boosts their capacity for constant change (Parsons, 2007). Thus, more resilient organisations are better prepared to perform in contexts of uncertainty and achieve good results.

Likewise, other contributions argue that organisational resilience allows planning, responding, and recovering from threats and crises, and the recovery of environments where organisations operate, to the extent that by transforming their goods and services, they can restore the imbalance of the environment affected by a negative event (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

Based on the above, resilience is characterised using notions such as recovery (Hale and Heijer, 2006), robustness (Tierney, 2003), absorption (Berkes, 2007), survival, and prosperity (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007; Seville, 2009), and organisational transformation (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). Thus, whether scholars refer to survival, system adaptation, shock absorption, robustness, ability to bounce back from adversity, or to transform and innovate, organisational resilience is always approached as positive and desirable (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

However, the study of the drivers of organisational resilience is relatively recent, and even more so is the impact of resilience on organisations' responses (Barasa *et al.*, 2018). On this subject, Lee *et al.* (2013) identified drivers of organisational resilience encompassing management practices and the use of resources to ensure planning, response, recovery, and transformation of organisations.

These encompass the capacity to be aware of what is happening in the context and understanding what this means now and, in the future (Endsley *et al.*, 2003), a strategic and behavioural readiness to respond to early warning signals in the internal and external environment of the organisation, before they transcend (Lee *et al.*, 2013), the management and mobilisation of the organisation's resources to ensure its ability to operate during business-as-usual, as well as during a crisis (Lee *et al.*, 2013; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007), the collaboration between organisations to expand resources and equip themselves with the capacity to learn and respond (Moore and Westley, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2014); amongst many others.

To sum up, several factors contribute to organisational resilience. They have been used by researchers and practitioners either to assess the level of organisational resilience as a whole or to identify the most influential factors. This research has adapted a survey designed by Resilient Organizations in New Zealand (Resilient Organizations, 2017) to examine the UGEL level of resilience during COVID-19.

Research methodology

This study assesses the relationship between the ORI and UGEL response. Data collection was carried out through a self-administered questionnaire in October 2020. This tool was adapted from the organisational resilience measurement questionnaire ([Resilient Organizations, 2017](#)). The survey was validated by two civil servant experts from the Ministry of Education. Four pilot tests were conducted before data collection with the heads of UGELs to test the understanding and clarity of the questions.

The survey consisted of questions regarding management practices in UGELs mainly using Likert scales (ranging from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 8 “Strongly agree”), based on the organisational resilience theory.

Organisational resilience was measured by developing an ORI based on 67 questions (items) grouped under three components: (1) Leadership and organisational culture, (2) Preparation for change, and (3) Networks building; and these were grouped under 13 sub-components: Situational awareness, Leadership, Team commitment, Decision-making, Innovation and creativity, Networks and collaboration, Information and knowledge management, Minimisation of silos and coordination, Internal resources, Unity of purpose, Proactive posture, Planning, and Participation in exercises.

The authors analysed the reliability of the survey using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for both the initial three components and the last thirteen sub-components. Additionally, to estimate the index of organisational resilience of UGELs, first, a simple average of the values for each sub-component was used, then again averaged to obtain it for the three components. Finally, the index comprises the simple average of these three components.

The study population comprises UGEL staff who are directors (heads of UGELs) and managers (heads of pedagogical management, institutional management, and administration offices). The number of officials who fulfil this criterion is more than 800, and the total number of UGEL is 222. If grouped by gender, 69 percent are led by men and 31 percent are led by women ([Ministry of Education, 2021](#)). The data were collected after the five Zoom capacity-building sessions held by the Ministry of Education on October 24 and 25, 2020. From a total of 354 respondents, after a verification process, 251 valid cases were obtained. From this sample, 81 respondents were UGEL directors (51 males and 30 females, representing 63 percent and 37 percent respectively).

Moreover, the sample reached 148 out of 222 UGELs. The 148 UGELs covered 128 out of 196 provinces. Considering the size of the territory or the population of certain provinces, some UGELs encompass a smaller area than a whole province. For instance, large cities such as Lima have seven UGELs within one province.

Organisational responses are assessed based on the number of interventions carried out by UGELs (first variable). The number of possible interventions can range from 0 to a maximum of 8. The second variable is the perceived impact of the intervention, which is gathered using a scale with the possible answers: High, medium, or low impact. These variables are used as dependent variables.

First, a linear OLS regression is set to estimate the association of the ORI with the number of interventions. The model follows this equation 1:

$$NI_i = \alpha + \beta Index_i + \gamma'Z + \epsilon_i$$

Where NI_i is the UGEL number of interventions. $Index_i$ is the ORI value for UGELs. Z is a vector of control variables that consists of the age, gender, and job level of the respondent, along with the type of UGEL. Finally, ϵ_i is the error term. The job-level variable takes the value of 1 when the respondent is the UGEL director and 0 otherwise. Additionally, UGELs are categorised into seven types according to the Ministry of Education based on the geographical challenges and operational capability ([Table 1](#)).

To analyse the correlation between the ORI and the probability of high, medium, or low impact, the authors conducted a second model which consists of an ordered logit estimation of the following equation:

$$Impact_i = f(Index, Z)$$

The ordered logit estimation is done considering that the values of the $Impact_i$ variable ranged from: (1) high impact, (2) medium impact, to (3) low impact. As a result of this final regression, the estimated conditional probabilities for each impact are calculated concerning the ORI value. In contrast to the first regression, an OLS estimation cannot be carried out as the dependent variable is not numerical.

Results and findings

Descriptive analysis

The ORI sample average is 6.06, ranging from 0.0 to 8.0. When analysed by its three components: “leadership and organisational culture”, “networks building” and “preparation for change”, the highest value corresponds to “leadership and organisational culture”, at 6.37. When grouped by the 13 sub-components, the authors found that the highest values correspond to the “situation awareness” factor, at 6.74. The lowest values correspond to “internal resources”. This means that during the pandemic, civil servants from UGELs highlighted the ability to grasp what is happening as a key factor. Yet, resources were not sufficient to overcome the challenges.

Regarding the COVID-19 response, reorganization for remote work was developed by UGELs in 94 percent of all cases; followed by the implementation of social-emotional support strategies. In contrast, the provision of technological tools for students; and engagement of volunteers to cover accessibility gaps were the less frequent interventions, at 23 percent, and 18 percent respectively. Most of the respondents agreed to exhibit many management practices which were on average five types of interventions of eight possible actions.

Regarding the perception of the impact of UGEL interventions, 48.8 percent of all the respondents valued as high the impact of their intervention, and only 4.8 percent of them mentioned that their impact was low. Interestingly, when estimating ORI for each category, those who valued as high their impact, also display a higher resilience index (Table 2).

Inferential analysis

Table 3 shows the result of the estimation of equation 1; after controlling for gender, age, and job level of the respondent and types of UGELs, a significant coefficient of 0.310 is obtained for the index. This can be interpreted as a positive and significant association between the number of interventions conducted by UGELs and ORI. In particular, an increase of one point on the index, leaving the rest constant, is associated with an increase of 0.310 in the number of interventions.

This assessment found that a UGEL led or managed by a woman is associated significantly with an increase of 0.453 over the number of interventions. Age is also

Level of perceived impact	N	%	ORI average	St. Dev.
Low impact	12	4.8	5.68	1.43
Medium impact	121	48.8	5.76	1.18
High impact	115	46.4	6.41	0.87
N	248	100.0	6.06	1.11

Source: By authors

Table 2.
Level of perceived
impact and
organisational
resilience index
average

Table 3.
Regression between
the number of
interventions
developed by UGELs
and the organisational
resilience index

Variables	Coeff.	St. error	T - stat	p-value
ORI	0.310	0.094	3.29	0.001
Woman	0.453	0.227	1.99	0.047
Age	0.061	0.014	4.34	0.000
BC Type	-0.026	0.417	-0.06	0.95
D Type	-0.366	0.406	-0.9	0.367
E Type	0.176	0.324	0.54	0.588
F Type	0.473	0.413	1.15	0.253
GH Type	0.227	0.335	0.68	0.499
I Type	0.592	0.393	1.51	0.133
Director	0.116	0.232	0.5	0.617
Constant	-0.315	0.892	-0.35	0.725
N	251			
F	4.35			
p-value	0.00			
R ²	0.1534			

Source: By authors

associated positively and significantly with the number of interventions, although its coefficient is lower, at 0.061.

Additionally, the results can be evaluated by combining the coefficients. Statistically significant associations of the variables were found as follows: i) if UGEL is Type F, ii) if UGEL is Type I, iii) if there is a woman manager in the UGEL, iv) if the UGEL director is a woman, v) if a woman leads a Type F UGEL, and vi) if Type I UGEL is led by a woman. Table 4 shows the linear combination of an increase of one point on the index with these features. First, it was found that when the ORI increases in one point in UGEL Type F, there is a 0.784 increase in the number of interventions. Likewise, one point increase in the ORI in UGEL Type I is associated with a 0.902 increase in the number of interventions. Moreover, when there is a woman manager, one point increase in the ORI results in a higher number of interventions, at 0.763. Also, when a woman is the UGEL director, the coefficient increases to 0.880. Finally, when a woman is a director in a UGEL Type F the coefficient increases to 1.353; likewise, if a UGEL Type I is led by a woman, the coefficient increases even more up to 1.472 the number of interventions.

These findings are consistent with contemporary literature that remarks successful experiences of women leaders in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, studies showed

Table 4.
Linear combination
with control variables
of UGELs

Linear coefficient with Organisational resilience index	Coeff.	St. error	T statistics	p-value
BC Type	0.284	0.414	0.690	0.494
D Type	-0.056	0.417	-0.140	0.893
E Type	0.486	0.326	1.490	0.137
F Type	0.784	0.418	1.870	0.062
GH Type	0.537	0.335	1.600	0.110
I Type	0.902	0.398	2.270	0.024
Woman	0.763	0.252	3.030	0.003
Director	0.427	0.237	1.800	0.074
If UGEL has a woman director	0.880	0.309	2.850	0.005
If Type F UGEL is led by a woman	1.353	0.519	2.610	0.010
If Type I UGEL is led by a woman	1.472	0.517	2.850	0.005

Source: By authors

that female leadership displayed different features such as effective early alert responses, transparent and evidence-based decision making, good practices of knowledge sharing, and vulnerable population targeted protection measures (Funk, 2020), as well as effective quarantine measures that led to lesser deaths during the pandemic (Sergent and Stajkovic, 2020).

The second model uses the ordered perception of the intervention impact within an Ordered Logit regression framework. Indeed, a probability of occurrence is estimated using ORI as a variable of interest and the aforementioned control variables. The initially estimated coefficients do not represent a marginal “effect” or association as on the first regression but an odds ratio. These coefficients are later transformed into marginal effects.

The first plots indicate a positive association between the probability of occurrence of a higher impact and the ORI value. In contrast, the probability of occurrence of a lower impact is negatively associated with ORI (Figure 1).

If an index value of 6 is considered, this represents a point close to the sample average, and an estimated probability of achieving a high impact of around 40 percent is obtained. Similarly, the probability of occurrence of a medium impact at this value is close to 40 percent. This indicates that, on average, there is a split possibility of having a high or a medium impact perception. Yet, these probabilities diverge when the index goes to each extreme. A value of 8 on the index is associated with a high probability, while the contrary happens with a value of 1. The general trends are maintained along the estimated probabilities for each of the three components of the ORI.

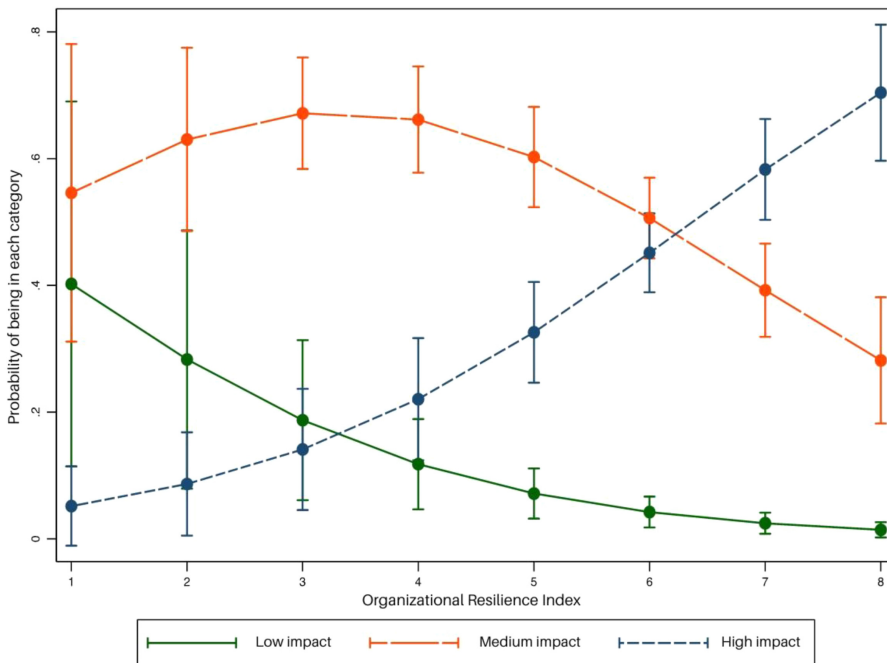


Figure 1. Relation between ORI and probability of levels of impact of response actions

Source: By authors

Conclusion

This paper analyses the relationship between UGEL organisational resilience and their COVID-19 response. First, it was found that UGELs ranked well in the Organizational Resilience Index (ORI) with an average score of 6.06 on a scale ranging from 0.0 to 8.0. Second, of all components of ORI, “leadership and organisational culture” had the highest average. Third, a higher level of organisational resilience led to more interventions or actions by UGELs in the context of the COVID crisis. Furthermore, when the gender variable is included in the correlation between the ORI and the number of interventions, it was found that having a female UGEL manager or director is associated positively with the increase in the number of interventions implemented by UGELs in the context of the crisis. This is especially relevant for UGELs characterized by limited operational capacity and high territorial challenges (Type I), where having a woman director increased by 1.472 in the number of interventions. Additionally, the higher the ORI, the higher the perceived impact produced by UGEL interventions.

These findings call for more focused institutional strengthening initiatives related to leadership and organisational culture in public organisations, as they have greater influence on organisational resilience. Decision-makers at the Ministry of Education and the regional governments in charge of the UGEL should prioritise the development of the leadership capability of the directors and heads of the UGEL, as well as other members with this capability, to enhance the resilience of these organisations. Courses, workshops, and executive training should also be provided.

Moreover, based on the findings regarding the influence of women directors in the UGELs’ response to the crisis, more in-depth studies of female leadership from a gender perspective are recommended. Specifically, the particularities, and the influence on the response capacity of organisations facing crises and adverse events could be explored.

Finally, the article highlights the importance and potential of further studies to explore the organisational resilience drivers of those UGELs which MINEDU classified as having a high level of territorial challenge and a limited operational capacity. It is worthwhile to analyse the challenges of achieving equity within UGELs or how organisational resilience could be associated with the roles of regional and national authorities within the education sector.

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The impacts of workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress on poor job performance of healthcare workers in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic

Poor job performance of healthcare workers

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this paper is to examine the profound repercussions of workplace bullying (WB), emotional exhaustion (EE), and psychological distress (PD) on poor job performance (PJP) within the intricacies of Thailand's healthcare sector. It also seeks to elucidate the moderating influence of COVID-19 burnout (CBO) on these variables.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper utilized a quantitative research approach. A total of 230 responses were collected from healthcare workers using convenience sampling during a significant surge of the coronavirus in March 2022. To assess the reliability and correlations between constructs, a dual-stage structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was applied.

Findings – During the global health crisis caused by COVID-19, WB and PD were found to positively predict PJP, except for EE. The presence of WB elevated EE and PD among Thai hospital staff. PD and EE partially mediated the relationship between WB and PJP. The positive moderating role of CBO among hospital employees significantly buffered the relationship between WB and EE.

Originality/value – The originality of this study lies in the examination of the poor mental health of Thai healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare reforms are required to protect the mental health of Thai healthcare staff to prevent poor job performance following unprecedented circumstances.

Keywords COVID-19 burnout, Workplace bullying, Psychological distress, Emotional exhaustion, Job performance, Healthcare

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The rise in COVID-19 cases in Thailand has resulted in a shortage of hospital beds (Haq *et al.*, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) reports that the number of coronavirus cases began to surge in April 2021, with 81,073 new confirmed cases in the final week of July 2021. There have been 578,375 confirmed cases and 4,679 deaths in Thailand since January 2021. In response to increased hospitalizations, 15,960,778 vaccine doses have been



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administered. Regrettably, the health system is insufficient to address unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and future health crises (Tejativaddhana *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the mental health of Thai healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 period.

Research on psychological well-being and mental health has provided valuable insights into related issues (Anasori *et al.*, 2020; Srivastava and Agarwal, 2020). For example, Yao *et al.* (2020) studied the impact of workplace bullying (WB) on emotional and cognitive factors among Chinese Research & Development (R&D) employees and emphasized the importance of considering various psychological and cognitive factors instead of solely emotional exhaustion (EE). Similarly, Anasori *et al.* (2020) investigated the effects of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion (EE) and psychological distress (PD) among hotel employees in North Cyprus but did not examine its impact on job performance. Although workplace bullying has been found to contribute to emotional exhaustion among hospitality workers in India (Srivastava and Agarwal, 2020), further research is needed to develop a model based on individual-specific variables that can predict its complete effects on employee performance. Haq *et al.* (2022) explored COVID-19 burnout (CBO) as a moderator in the context of job satisfaction and knowledge hiding among Thai healthcare workers. However, the relationship among these variables remains poorly understood, and there is a need to examine the mental health of Thai healthcare workers, especially during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to understand how psychosocial factors such as workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress affect job performance among Thai healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to achieve three objectives: (1) to explore the relationship between WB and PJP, (2) to investigate the mediating roles of EE and PD in this relationship, and (3) to study the moderating effect of CBO on the relationship between WB and EE.

This research adds to existing knowledge about workplace bullying, psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, and COVID-19 burnout among Thai healthcare workers during the pandemic. Previous studies by Srivastava and Agarwal (2020), Yao *et al.* (2020), and Anasori *et al.* (2020) have explored related topic. Additionally, it contributes to the ongoing discussion on the moderating role of COVID-19 burnout among hospital staff, as discussed by Haq *et al.* (2022), Yildirim and Solmaz (2020), and Yildirim *et al.* (2021). Our findings suggest that emotionally exhausted workers might have had a limited ability to perform well during the pandemic, despite previous literature suggesting the negative impact of emotional exhaustion on job performance (Akhtar, 2021; Çiftci, 2021; Dodanwala and Shrestha, 2021). The authors believe that this may be attributed to the emergency caused by COVID-19, the relevance to the healthcare industry, and the specific job responsibilities of these workers.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Workplace bullying, which is defined as interpersonal conflict among workers, has become a prevalent issue in the knowledge economy (Yildirim and Solmaz, 2020). As organizations consist of employees with diverse physical and emotional traits, clashes and instances of bullying can arise (Dodanwala and Shrestha, 2021). Although WB indirectly affects employee performance, it directly influences employee behavior (Anasori *et al.*, 2020). The stress caused by WB further deteriorates performance in the workplace (Bhatti and Ahmed, 2021). Khaliq *et al.* (2018) argue that WB negatively impacts the productivity of peers and leads to a decrease in employee efficiency, consequently affecting organizational productivity. Moreover, Khurram *et al.* (2020) highlight that stress and bullying not only harm employee health, but they also create challenges for managers and reduce organizational commitment among employees. WB is found to have an impact on emotional exhaustion and psychological distress (Anasori *et al.*, 2020; Khan, 2021).

EE is characterized as a state of emotional stress resulting from excessive demands and challenges (Lam *et al.*, 2010), which is a significant aspect of the workplace environment. In a supportive work setting, employees typically effectively manage their job responsibilities. However, in a negative workplace environment, employee mood and behavior can be compromised (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2017). Positive or negative emotions play a crucial role in influencing individual reactions to various events in the workplace (Rosander and Blomberg, 2019). They discovered that the presence of WB increases job overload, thereby increasing vulnerability to EE. This heightened state of exhaustion necessitates the use of additional psychological resources, leading to greater levels of exhaustion among employees (Chen *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, workers' psychosocial issues can have a more significant impact on their health than their work responsibilities (Misiolak-Marín *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, EE has become a significant factor in high-performance occupations, such as nursing (Labrague *et al.*, 2020), particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. Shkoler and Tziner (2017) reported that WB not only damages self-esteem, reduces interactions with peers, and diminishes performance, but also contributes to employees experiencing EE. Employees who frequently face disrespectful encounters are inclined to withdraw and withhold knowledge (Haq *et al.*, 2022), leading to feelings of exhaustion (Malik *et al.*, 2019). Although the mediating role of EE has been examined in various contexts (Anasori *et al.*, 2020; Akhtar, 2021; Çiftci, 2021), its indirect effect of WB on poor job performance through EE has yet to be investigated in the Thai healthcare sector, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study, PD is defined as a collection of unpleasant cognitive and emotional symptoms that affect an individual's natural mood (Khan, 2021). WB not only leads to PD but also has significant physical (Chan *et al.*, 2019) and psychological (Dodanwala and Shrestha, 2021) consequences. Employees who experience intimidation exhibit worse mental health than their peers (Attell *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is essential for decision-makers to recognize the severe impact of stress on employee performance (Berry *et al.*, 2016). Ferguson (2012) found that workplace bullying, characterized by rudeness and unpleasant behavior from subordinates and peers, contributes to PD, leading to reduced employee performance. Previous studies have shown a positive association between WB and PD (Attell *et al.*, 2017; Bhatti and Ahmed, 2021). Moreover, more frequent incidents of bullying have been found to lead to greater distress among nurses (Berry *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Chan *et al.* (2019) concluded that employees who have experienced WB exhibit higher levels of PD, which can have negative implications for work-related outcomes (Khan, 2021). It is worth noting that healthcare staff have also been found to leave their jobs due to elevated levels of PD during the COVID-19 pandemic (Khan, 2021; Haq *et al.*, 2022). Although underlying relationships have been investigated in previous research, no study has examined the impact of PD on poor job performance during the peak wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Thai healthcare context.

In hospital settings, establishing a positive and supportive work environment has become a major concern, as the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional work dynamics. COVID-19-related burnout can lead to decreased job performance and inefficiencies (Yildirim and Solmaz, 2020). The WHO has recognized burnout as an occupational phenomenon and included it in the International Classification of Diseases-11 (Misiolak-Marín *et al.*, 2020). According to the WHO, burnout is a syndrome experienced by employees who are unable to effectively manage chronic workplace stress. Additionally, Yeun and Han (2016) explained that WB can lead to acute levels of stress in employees, contributing to job burnout. Negative psychosocial factors have been found to have adverse consequences for workers, including depression, stress, depression, psychosomatic disorders, and burnout (Yildirim and Solmaz, 2020; Misiolak-Marín *et al.*, 2020). However, few studies have examined the moderating role of CBO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Haq *et al.* (2022) found that CBO significantly buffers the relationship between job satisfaction, knowledge hiding, and

turnover intentions. Similarly, [Yang et al. \(2021\)](#) revealed that job burnout plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between safety compliance, safety participation, and safety outcomes among Chinese mining workers. However, few studies to date have investigated the moderating role of CBO in the relationship between WB and EE.

Affective events theory suggests that emotions play a crucial role in employees' management of workplace situations. This theory explains the link between employee emotions and their response to dynamic workplace events, which influences their work performance. Such theory and the comprehensive work-stress framework ([Lu and Kao, 2002](#)) both suggest that workplace incidents can impact employee emotions, which in turn directly affect employee behavior ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)). In the context of our study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Thai healthcare sector, WB can contribute to EE and PD can lead to PJP.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study posits the following hypotheses and presents a conceptual model, as depicted in [Figure 1](#).

- H1. WB is associated with PJP.
- H2. WB has a significant impact on EE.
- H3. EE has a significant impact on PJP.
- H4. WB has a significant impact on PD.
- H5. PD has a significant impact on PJP.
- H6. WB has an indirect effect on PJP via EE.
- H7. WB has an indirect effect on PJP via PD.
- H8. CBO moderates the relationship between WB and EE.

Research methodology

Data collection and sample description

The survey method is an effective means for data collection in large populations. The respondents were healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, administrative staff, and medical assistants. There were two predefined criteria for respondents to participate in the

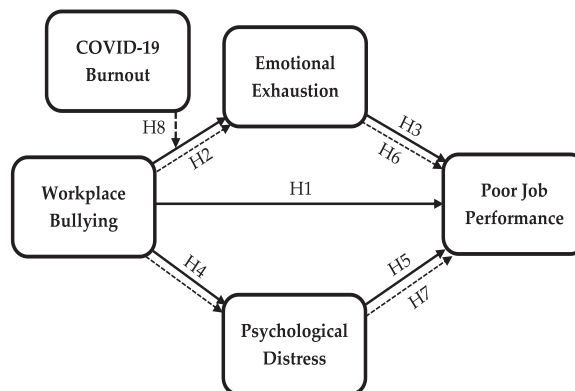


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

Source: By authors

survey: (i) the respondent performed healthcare duties during the COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) the respondent worked in a hospital for not less than one year to optimize the precision of the response concerning the COVID-19 period. The respondents were categorized based on whether they are affiliated with public or private hospitals (e.g., general hospitals, specialty hospitals) or with university or college medical centers. Data were collected using convenience sampling because of COVID-19 restrictions, with healthcare personnel serving as the individual units of analysis. The questionnaire was developed based on previous measurements of related constructs in the English language and then distributed to approximately 300 respondents. Due to unforeseen events, 263 responses were collected; however, 33 were excluded from further analysis due to invalid or incomplete data. The remaining sample size is sufficient for structural equation modeling (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014).

The collected data were compiled by using Microsoft Excel, and a CSV file was produced, which was then passed into Smart-PLS 3.3.3 for estimating partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). SEM was applied to estimate the proposed research modeling using a two-stage approach (Hair *et al.*, 2019), comprising a measurement model assessment and a structural model assessment. The measurement model assessment estimates the reliability and validity outcomes of constructs, and the structural model assessment assesses relationships between constructs in the model. To determine the PLS-SEM of the structural model, three factors related to the objectives and the characteristics of the data drove the decision to determine the PLS-SEM of the structural model. First, PLS-SEM is recommended when a study seeks to develop or expand upon existing theories and predict the relationships between constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Second, it is particularly useful for estimating latent variables that cannot be directly observed, such as attitudes, psychological characteristics, and behavior (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014). Finally, PLS-SEM provides increased precision and confidence in estimates, even when dealing with limited sample sizes or data sets that do not conform to specific distributional assumptions (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014).

Measures

Workplace bullying was assessed using four items from Escartin *et al.* (2017), and emotional exhaustion was measured with a nine-item scale by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Four items were used for psychological distress from Lynch *et al.* (2006) and Mewton *et al.* (2016). Poor job performance was measured with a four-item scale adapted from Noor *et al.* (2023) and Strebler (2004). A ten-item scale was used to assess the responses related to COVID-19 burnout (Yildirim and Solmaz, 2020). A five-point Likert rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used. All the items were adapted, and the adaptation process preserved the overall meaning of the instruments (Appendix).

Results

Demographics summary

This study collected primary data from healthcare workers, including doctors (30 percent), nurses (31.30 percent), administrative staff (23.04 percent), and medical assistants (15.65 percent), among which 57.39 percent were female and the other 42.61 percent were male. A total of 29.13 percent were affiliated with general hospitals, 17.39 percent were with specialty hospitals, 27.39 percent were with government hospitals, and 26.09 percent were with university or college medical centers. It is important to note that the respondents were selected to represent a variety of age groups, educational backgrounds, and levels of professional experience. A comprehensive breakdown of these demographics can be found in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics and measurement model assessment

The authors began with descriptive statistics, examining the mean and standard deviation. These findings are reported in Table 2. Measures of central tendency (i.e., mean) capture the normality of the data, whereas the standard deviation shows the dispersion of the data from its mean value or variations in the data. Respondents were asked to respond on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The highest mean and standard deviation values were 4.337 and 1.213, respectively.

To measure the indicator reliability, construct reliability, and convergent validity, the outer loadings (OL), Cronbach’s alpha (α), composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) were measured and are reported in Table 2. The indicator’s reliability was first measured through outer loadings. Table 2 illustrates that all OL values were above the threshold point of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019) except for two indicators, EE9 and CBO10, with 0.581 and 0.309 loadings, respectively. Thus, EE9 and CBO10 were removed due to low OL scores to ensure the reliability of the model. Moreover, statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ or **) OL values indicated satisfactory indicator reliability.

CR and α were used to assess the construct’s reliability and internal consistency. All coefficients for CR and α ranged between 0.777 and 0.943 and 0.857 and 0.952, respectively, which were above the threshold point of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019; Haq et al., 2022). Thus, the reliability of the model was maintained. The convergent validity of the model was measured by the AVE. AVE coefficients were between 0.536 and 0.692. With AVE coefficients above 0.50 for all variables, convergent validity was achieved (Hair et al., 2019).

The heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) was assessed to determine the discriminant validity of the model, as presented in Table 3. All the values for HTMT were within the acceptable range (below 0.90) and met the defined criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2019)

Demographics	Description	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Gender	<i>Male</i>	98	42.61%
	<i>Female</i>	132	57.39%
Job title and role	<i>Nurses</i>	72	31.30%
	<i>Doctors</i>	69	30.00%
	<i>Administrative staff</i>	53	23.04%
	<i>Medical assistants</i>	36	15.65%
Hospital type	<i>General hospitals</i>	67	29.13%
	<i>Specialty hospitals</i>	40	17.39%
	<i>Government hospitals</i>	63	27.39%
	<i>University or college medical centers</i>	60	26.09%
Education level	<i>MBBS</i>	69	30.00%
	<i>Doctorate Degree</i>	51	22.17%
	<i>Master’s Degree</i>	55	23.91%
	<i>Bachelor’s Degree or Professional Diploma</i>	55	23.91%
Age	<i>21–25 years old</i>	45	19.57%
	<i>26–30 years old</i>	50	21.74%
	<i>31–35 years old</i>	47	20.43%
	<i>35–40 years old</i>	43	18.70%
	<i>More than 40 years old</i>	45	19.57%
Job experience	<i>0–5 years</i>	56	24.35%
	<i>6–10 years</i>	64	27.83%
	<i>11–15 years</i>	53	23.04%
	<i>More than 16 years</i>	57	24.78%

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics

Source: By authors

Constructs	Code	OL	A	CR	AVE	M	SD
Workplace Bullying	WPB1	0.778**	0.819	0.881	0.648	4.294	0.91
	WPB2	0.801**					
	WPB3	0.813**					
	WPB4	0.828**					
Emotional Exhaustion	EE1	0.852**	0.943	0.952	0.692	4.059	1.213
	EE2	0.874**					
	EE3	0.879**					
	EE4	0.844**					
	EE5	0.879**					
	EE6	0.853**					
	EE7	0.846**					
	EE8	0.839**					
	EE9	0.579 (deleted)					
Psychological Distress	PD1	0.734**	0.777	0.857	0.599	4.26	0.943
	PD2	0.783**					
	PD3	0.806**					
	PD4	0.772**					
COVID-19 Burnout	CBO1	0.732**	0.892	0.912	0.536	4.281	0.946
	CBO2	0.737**					
	CBO3	0.728**					
	CBO4	0.737**					
	CBO5	0.723**					
	CBO6	0.699**					
	CBO7	0.711**					
	CBO8	0.739**					
	CBO9	0.771**					
	CBO10	0.309 (deleted)					
Poor Job Performance	PJP1	0.772**	0.811	0.869	0.570	4.337	0.917
	PJP2	0.765**					
	PJP3	0.811**					
	PJP4	0.781**					

Note: Outer loadings (OL); Cronbach's alpha (α); composite reliability (CR); average variance extracted (AVE); mean (M); standard deviation (SD); ** ($p < 0.05$).
Source: By authors

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, outer loadings, construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct	CBO	EE	PJP	PD	WB
CBO	-				
EE	0.749	-			
PJP	0.692	0.575	-		
PD	0.798	0.775	0.299	-	
WB	0.596	0.705	0.609	0.699	-

Note: COVID-19 burnout (CBO); emotional exhaustion (EE); poor job performance (PJP); psychological distress (PD); workplace bullying (WB).
Source: By authors

Table 3. HTMT ratio

and documented by [Annan-Prah and Andoh \(2023\)](#). All variables were discriminant, and discriminant validity of the model was achieved.

Structural model assessment

Following the measurement model was the structural model assessment, which estimated the statistical significance of beta (β) path coefficients, predictive relevance (Q^2), and explanatory power (R^2) were measured following the core criteria in structural model assessment. In considering R^2 , [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#) recommended that coefficients of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 indicate weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively. [Table 3](#) illustrates that the explanatory power of emotional exhaustion (0.591), psychological distress (0.604) and poor job performance (0.605) was moderate. It confirmed that the model explained 59.1 percent, 60.4 percent, and 60.5 percent of the variance in emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and poor job performance, respectively.

In assessing the predictive relevance (Q^2) of the model, [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#) posited that Q^2 values greater than zero, 0.25, and 0.50 suggest small, medium, and large predictive relevance of the model, respectively. From [Table 4](#), emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and poor job performance had large predictive relevance. In sum, the model demonstrated large predictive relevance.

The results of all hypotheses are reported in [Table 4](#). Workplace bullying was found to significantly predict poor job performance. Workplace bullying had a positive significant impact on poor job performance ($\beta = 0.430$; $t = 4.386$; $p = 0.001$), emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.424$; $t = 3.965$; $p = 0.001$), and psychological distress ($\beta = 0.777$; $t = 19.323$; $p = 0.000$). Thus, [hypotheses 1, 2, and 3](#) were accepted. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion had an insignificant negative effect on poor job performance ($\beta = -0.053$, $t = 1.505$; $p = 0.118$). As a result, [hypothesis 4](#) was rejected. In contrast, psychological distress had a positive significant influence on poor job performance ($\beta = 0.456$; $t = 4.649$; $p = 0.001$). Thus, [hypothesis 5](#) was confirmed and accepted.

Following the direct path analysis, the results of the moderation analysis hypothesis are shown in [Table 4](#). COVID-19 burnout had a statistically significant and positive moderating effect between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.271$; $t = 6.809$; $p = 0.001$). Thus, [hypothesis 6](#) was accepted.

The results of the mediation analysis are also reported in [Table 4](#). The indirect effect of workplace bullying \rightarrow emotional exhaustion \rightarrow poor job performance was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.039$, $t = 1.302$; $p = 0.002$). Likewise, the specific indirect effect of workplace bullying \rightarrow psychological distress \rightarrow poor job performance was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.355$, $t = 4.418$; $p = 0.001$). Thus, [hypotheses 7 and 8](#) were accepted and

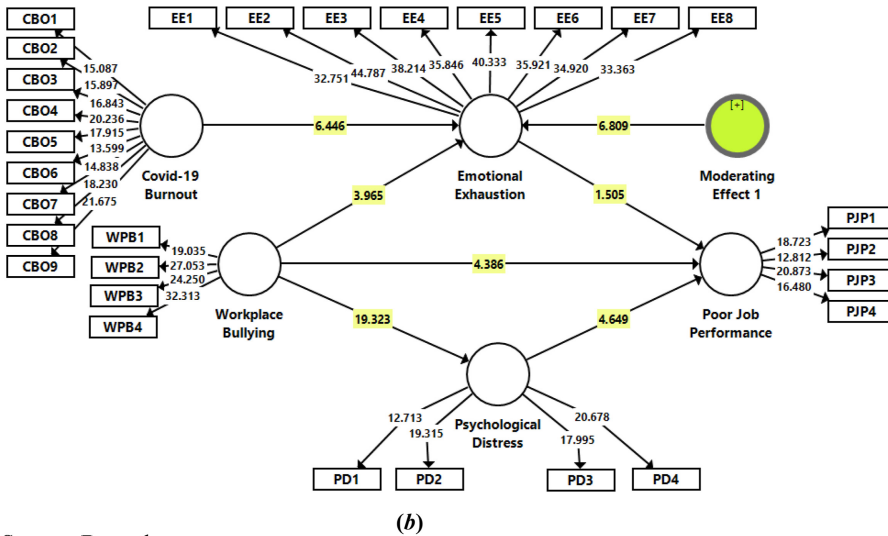
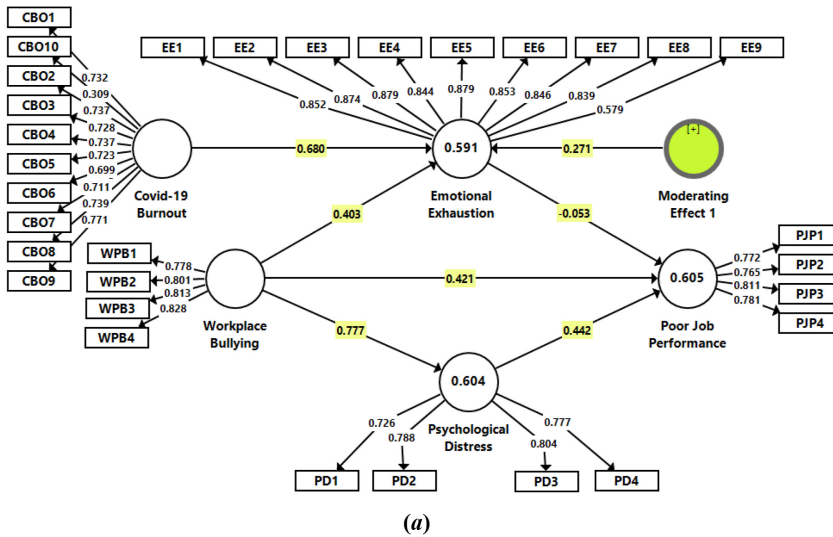
H.	Paths	Beta	M	SD	t Value	p Value	R ²	Q ²	Result
<i>H1</i>	WB \rightarrow PJP	0.421	0.428	0.098	4.386	0.001	0.605	0.597	Supported
<i>H2</i>	WB \rightarrow EE	0.403	0.407	0.107	3.965	0.001	0.591	0.566	Supported
<i>H3</i>	WB \rightarrow PD	0.777	0.778	0.040	19.323	0.001	0.604	0.584	Supported
<i>H4</i>	EE \rightarrow PJP	-0.053	0.095	0.060	1.505	0.118			Not supported
<i>H5</i>	PD \rightarrow PJP	0.442	0.465	0.098	4.649	0.001			Supported
<i>H6</i>	MI \rightarrow EE	0.271	0.307	0.046	6.809	0.001			Supported
<i>H7</i>	WB \rightarrow EE \rightarrow PJP	0.039	0.040	0.030	1.302	0.002			Supported
<i>H8</i>	WB \rightarrow PD \rightarrow PJP	0.355	0.362	0.080	4.418	0.001			Supported

Table 4.
Direct and indirect effects

Note: MI (moderating effect 1).
Source: By authors

they demonstrated a partial mediation. Both emotional exhaustion and psychological distress had a complementary partial mediating effect between workplace bullying and poor job performance. Comparatively, psychological distress had a stronger mediating role than emotional exhaustion.

Figure 2a presents a graphical representation of the Smart-PLS algorithm function, which illustrates the explanatory power (R^2), beta coefficients (β), and factor loadings of the construct indicators. R^2 values are presented in circles ranging from 0.591 to 0.605, and the latter values are highlighted in yellow, indicating the beta coefficients of each direct path or



Source: By authors

Figure 2. Structural equation model

direct effect. Moreover, values given on the arrows indicate each item's factor loading. Subsequently, Figure 2b shows the t-statistics for each direct effect and factor loading. Coefficients highlighted in yellow indicate the t-statistics of each path coefficient. Additionally, values given on the arrows indicate the t-statistics for each item's factor loading. This further confirmed that the results presented in Table 4 were aligned with the subsequent graphical representation of the Smart-PLS algorithm (Figure 2a).

The authors utilized simple slope analysis to examine the interaction effect of a third variable, such as COVID-19 burnout, on the relationship between two other variables in our model. Figure 3 presents the results of the simple slope analysis, specifically focusing on the interaction effects of COVID-19 burnout as a moderator. The analysis reveals that the direction of the association between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion is contingent upon the moderating effect of COVID-19 burnout. Therefore, Figure 3 provides empirical evidence to support the moderating effect of COVID-19 burnout in our model.

Discussion and implications

Based on the research findings, it is evident that high levels of workplace bullying detrimentally impact healthcare staff, which causes emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and poor job performance. It aligns with studies by Haq *et al.* (2022), Khalique *et al.* (2018), and Curado and Santos (2021), which highlighted the negative consequences of workplace bullying on job performance and turnover. This observation is not surprising, as psychologically distressed employees are unable to perform their duties effectively (Anasori *et al.*, 2020). The presence of workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress results in a significant decline in overall performance, which has severe implications for the health system.

However, it should be noted that the statistically insignificant impact of emotional exhaustion on poor job performance may suggest that employee commitment and satisfaction (Curado and Santos, 2021; Labrague *et al.*, 2020) play a role in restricting poor performance in hospitals. For healthcare workers, their responsibilities extend beyond mere task management; they have a moral and ethical duty to protect public health and save lives (Nittayasoot *et al.*, 2021). It can be explained as being a "good soldier" or organizational citizenship behaviour (Clercq *et al.*, 2018), they showed positive work behaviour that is not required by formal job description, and engaged in voluntary work

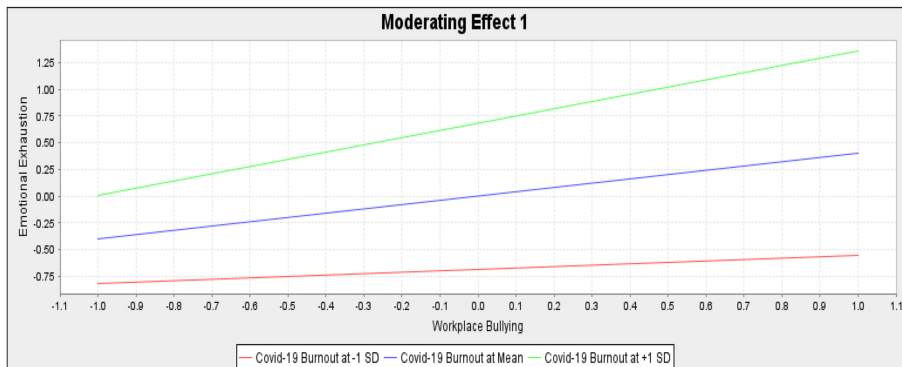


Figure 3.
Interactive effects

Source: By authors

efforts regardless of their emotional state. These findings also highlight the fact that healthcare workers in Thailand continue to display high levels of job engagement, even when experiencing emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic. This dedication has contributed to Thailand's success in controlling death rates and new cases, as Thailand was the first country outside China to report a positive case of COVID-19 (Nittayasoot *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the fear of job loss (Chen and Eyoum, 2021) has incentivized workers to persevere, even when they are emotionally exhausted due to the impact of COVID-19. The significant mediating role of psychological distress is also consistent with previous research (Khan, 2021). COVID-19 burnout among healthcare workers has intensified the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion, suggesting that a rise in COVID-19-specific burnout is associated with increased emotional exhaustion among hospital staff.

The theoretical implication of this research is twofold. First, scholars are more concerned with a traditional performance construct; studies are still lacking on the poor job performance construct, as performance and poor job performance differ in nature (Noor *et al.*, 2023). Examining the role of the mental health of healthcare workers on poor job performance adds knowledge to the existing literature on affective events theory and the comprehensive work-stress framework. From the COVID-19 perspective, exploring the relationship between negative psychological factors and poor job performance in Thailand using underlying theories, expands potential research avenue and enriches the study of mental health and poor job performance concerning the global health crisis.

The following policy recommendations are suggested. First, exploring the impact of mental issues on poor job performance can guide the healthcare sector to optimize national health policies and improve public health service practices. Policymakers should understand that the higher the healthcare staff's well-being, the more they tend to improve performance will result in positive supportive actions to public services. For instance, guidelines regarding compensation for adverse events in Article 6(4) of the Finance Ministry 2018 are limited to financial compensations and the Department of Mental Health only offers telephonic counseling for simple illnesses due to a lack of trained staff (Udomratn, 2007). Therefore, the Thai government should prioritize mental health and counseling of healthcare workers by introducing nationwide counseling and training programs to have a sufficiently trained workforce for effective counseling and mental health support of workers with mental health issues. Second, despite a long struggle to implement universal health coverage, the Thai government is still lacking in its requirements set to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3.c, a target of 44.5 doctors, nurses, and midwives required per 10,000 population (Nittayasoot *et al.*, 2021). As per WHO recommendation, an optimal workforce density is one trained epidemiologist for a 200,000 population. However, having 183 trained epidemiologists in Thailand equivalent to 0.55 per 200,000 population makes it more challenging and overwhelming to work in the healthcare sector. The problem of insufficient workforce is of utmost importance to address the COVID-19 situation and any future pandemics or health crises. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) needs to hire more human resource to align public health policies with SDG 3.c and WHO recommendations for successful implementation through training public health officers and nurses, which will lead to an optimal workforce density to prevent healthcare workers from poor psychological health, resulting in poor performance and undermining the effectiveness of health policies. This study suggests that the MoPH should increase health financing and fund allocation in on-the-job training and development programs to have sufficiently trained epidemiologists, extensive care nurses, and critical care experts to prevent workers from mental health issues due to overwork and enabling them to tackle the current and extraordinary circumstances in the future.

Conclusion

Given the COVID-19 health crisis, it is important to examine whether negative psychological factors have impacted the job performance of healthcare workers in Thailand. The study hypothesizes that workplace bullying is a contributing factor to the emotional exhaustion and psychological distress experienced by healthcare workers during the pandemic. This, in turn, directly or indirectly intensifies poor job performance in the global health crisis context. Furthermore, even in the face of emotional exhaustion, healthcare workers may still perform at work. This finding adds to the literature that emphasizes the detrimental impact of emotional exhaustion on job performance. Importantly, our study highlights that after experiencing extreme burnout specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, workplace bullying becomes an even stronger predictor of emotional exhaustion.

This study has several limitations. First, our findings may not be generalizable to the whole population of healthcare workers in Thailand, or to other sectors and countries. Moreover, during the COVID-19, hospitals in Thailand faced constraints to providing normal healthcare services to the public, which creates uncertainty regarding the structural relationships among the constructs examined in our study in normal situations or under other circumstances. This study suggests that healthcare workers were unable to discontinue their daily job duties during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when experiencing emotional exhaustion. This raises questions about the role of emotional exhaustion, as existing research (Çiftci, 2021; Reb *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Akhtar, 2021) widely supports the notion that emotional exhaustion leads to increased turnover intentions and decreased employee performance. Therefore, further research may investigate whether healthcare workers can effectively manage emotional exhaustion without compromising their work performance. Similarly, it is worthwhile to study COVID-19 burnout as a potential moderator between workplace bullying and psychological distress to gain a deeper understanding of the role of COVID-19 burnout in this relationship.

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(The Appendix follows overleaf)

Appendix. Items and sources for variables

100

Variable	Measure/Item	Code	Source
Workplace Bullying	My correspondence, telephone calls or work assignments have been controlled or blocked during the COVID-19.	WPB1	<i>Escartín et al. (2017)</i>
	My professional standing has been attacked at every opportunity during the COVID-19.	WPB2	
	My beliefs or opinions have been attacked during the COVID-19.	WPB3	
	I have been assigned lower-level or higher-level tasks than I had been performing previously during the COVID-19.	WPB4	
Emotional Exhaustion	I feel emotionally drained from my work during the COVID-19.	EE1	<i>Maslach and Jackson (1981)</i>
	I feel used up at the end of the workday during the COVID-19.	EE2	
	I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job during the COVID-19.	EE3	
	Working with people all day is really a strain for me during the COVID-19.	EE4	
	I feel burned out from my work during the COVID-19.	EE5	
	I feel frustrated by my job during the COVID-19.	EE6	
	I feel I am working too hard on my job during the COVID-19.	EE7	
	Working with people directly puts too much stress on me during the COVID-19.	EE8	
Psychological Distress	I feel like I am at the end of my rope during the COVID-19.	EE9	<i>Lynch et al. (2006); Mewton et al. (2016)</i>
	I feel nervous at the workplace during the COVID-19.	PD1	
	I feel hopeless at the workplace during the COVID-19.	PD2	
	I feel depressed at the workplace during the COVID-19.	PD3	
COVID-19 Burnout	I feel worthless at the workplace during the COVID-19.	PD4	<i>Yildirim and Solmaz (2020)</i>
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel tired?	CBO1	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel disappointed with people?	CBO2	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel hopeless?	CBO3	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel trapped?	CBO4	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel helpless?	CBO5	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel depressed?	CBO6	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel physically weak/sickly?	CBO7	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel worthless/like a failure?	CBO8	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel difficulties sleeping?	CBO9	
	When you think about COVID-19 overall, how often do you feel "I've had it"?	CBO10	

(continued)

Variable	Measure/Item	Code	Source
Poor job performance	I involve in lack of cooperation with work colleagues during the COVID-19.	PJP1	Strebler (2004); Noor <i>et al.</i> (2023)
	I usually face lack of capability to do the job during the COVID-19.	PJP2	
	My job role is overlooked and unclear objectives or unreal targets during the COVID-19.	PJP3	
	I usually involve in absence or a personal problem during the COVID-19.	PJP4	

Source: By authors

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The relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality and organizational performance: the case of local government organizations in South Konawe District, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality of the state civil apparatus, and organizational performance of the local government in South Konawe District, Southeast Sulawesi Province in Indonesia.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the relationships between variables through direct and indirect influence testing.

Findings – The findings reveal that career patterns influence neutrality and organizational performance. Neutrality of the state civil apparatus in politics mediates career patterns and local government organizational performance. The findings indicate that, first, promotions most significantly influence the organization's neutrality and performance. Second, demotions have the least influence on the organization's robustness and performance.

Originality/value – This paper is among the first to examine the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality, and organizational performance. Recommendations are provided to improve neutrality and organizational performance, that is, the need to increase promotions and reduce demotions.

Keywords Career patterns, Neutrality of state civil apparatus, Organizational performance, Indonesia

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Improving the performance of government organizations that provide public services is a universal demand of citizens worldwide. In countries with democratic systems, government leaders who enjoy strong public support are expected to improve the quality of governance (Charron and Lapuente, 2010; Tavits, 2006). Moreover, satisfactory performance of government organizations is essential for attracting investors, as studies on developing



countries demonstrate that those with good governance receive the majority of investments (Morrissey and Udomkerdmongkol, 2012). The development of suitable government organizations is also a demand for donor countries and international institutions in allocating foreign aids (Johnson and Zajonc, 2006).

Organizational performance is influenced by several factors. Shiu and Yu (2010) identify a correlation between organizational performance and factors such as marketing, organizational culture, and job satisfaction. Organizational performance is also related to knowledge management (Rasula *et al.*, 2012), work environment (Chandrasekar, 2011), leadership style (Ejere and Abasilim, 2013), motivation (Muogbo, 2013), emotional intelligence (Suan *et al.*, 2015), and organizational learning (Yeo, 2003). Furthermore, Higgins and Dillon (2007) assert that career patterns significantly influence organizational performance. Kim (2020) explains that employees who are promoted may encourage better organizational performance.

A person's career patterns are influenced by various factors. Zuckerman (1978) identified structural factors affecting access to career patterns in his study of medical officers in the United States. Another study by Xie *et al.* (2022) in China found that age, tenure, job type, career development awareness, legal awareness, professional mentality, psychological training, and career development paths are important factors affecting employee career promotion. In government bureaucracies, career progression, typically in the form of promotions, is influenced by both formal and informal factors. Formally, the recruitment and promotion process of civil servants is based on merit and less on seniority considerations, although political criteria and representativeness can be important selection criteria (Veit, 2020). Informally, promotions are strongly influenced by position, family relationships, membership in organizations, similar hobbies, wives, and friendship. Coates and Pellegrin (1957) mentioned that informal factors are often considered when formal rules are unclear.

Rosen *et al.* (2006) found that low political engagement has positive implications for organizational performance, whereas higher political engagement has negative implications for organizational performance. This finding appears to reflect the perception of many people that political involvement has a negative impact on organizational performance. Contrary to this assumption, Solís and Monroy (2015) determined that political involvement has a positive influence on organizational performance.

These studies indicate that organizational performance and career patterns are influenced by several factors and indicate relationships between them. However, none of these studies investigated the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality, and organizational performance. A general unresolved issue is the influence of career patterns when faced by the non-neutrality of civil servants in politics. Will the career patterns become better or vice versa? How will this influence the performance of civil servants in government organizations? Examining these questions underlies the importance of this research, which includes the neutrality variable of the state civil apparatus as a mediator between career patterns and organizational performance.

The importance of testing the neutrality variable in mediating career patterns and the performance of government organizations in Indonesia is relevant, considering that the history of bureaucracy in Indonesia is closely related to politics. The strong political influence in Indonesian bureaucracy is inseparable from the history of bureaucratic formation. According to Magenda (1989), the bureaucracy during Indonesia's colonial era was inherited from the aristocracy. After independence, when the old order was in power, the bureaucracy included political party partisans (Rozi, 2006). This indicates that since its inception, the Indonesian bureaucracy has not reflected professional characteristic. Indonesia's recruitment system is considered far behind that of Singapore, which consistently promotes employees according to merit, and it is common for younger employees to replace less-competent seniors (Satish, 2004; Sudrajat, 2016).

According to Soemerdjan (1996), the Indonesian bureaucracy at the beginning of independence (1945-1950) was far from the Weberian ideal of bureaucracy. In the New Order era, the military (ABRI), bureaucracy, and Golkar became the pillars of Soeharto's power (Suryadinata, 1997). During the decentralization era, the relationship between bureaucracy and politics became more diffused within local government units (Hadiz, 2004; Turner *et al.*, 2022). The behavior of the bureaucratic apparatus in Indonesia is different from that proposed by social scientists such as Weber (1947), Albrow (1970), and Etzioni-Halevy (1985), who describe bureaucracy as a modern organization that has professional characteristic and is neutral to political interests.

This paper investigates the factors influencing the performance of local government organizations in the South Konawe District, Southeast Sulawesi Province in Indonesia. One factor affecting this is mutation, a change in position — whether horizontal or vertical — within an organization (Hasibuan, 2000), influencing the career patterns of the civil state apparatus. In Indonesia, mutations of positions within local government organizations often occur before and after the election of regional managers, carried out by both incumbent and newly elected regional heads. Political factors generally influence the mutations that occur before and after regional elections. Beyond political factors, mutations are also driven by the desire to redistribute civil servants. This approach addresses the uneven distribution of civil servants (Atmojo *et al.*, 2016). Recently, mutations have also been driven by a policy aimed at streamlining the bureaucratic structure, as mandated by Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the state civil apparatus. The implication of this policy is a gradual transfer of positions from structural to functional positions (Rahayu and Rahmayanti, 2019).

The implementation of rotations, promotions, and demotions provoked condemnation in South Konawe District. First of all, this policy violates regional election law, as it was implemented within six months of the forthcoming election. Second, promotions, rotations, and demotions were made on short notice, in violation of the Indonesian state civil apparatus law, without a prior performance review. Third, demoted officials are not given a position. These acts may jeopardize the bureaucracy's political neutrality, as well as the performance of local government agencies and staff career paths.

Mutation often ignores employees' professionalism and competence. The placement of unprofessional officials is reflected in assigning positions that do not correspond to their field of expertise. The abandonment of competence is evident from positions that are assigned without meeting the requirements of the rank; for example, the second echelon position is occupied by a group that remains low in terms of banding. Furthermore, the abandonment of competence is reflected in the placement of employees in positions that have never passed leadership education and training or have never passed structural positions. This practice is often found in the appointment of lecturers who work in universities (functional positions) to become heads of service (structural positions) in regional apparatus organizations. This phenomenon causes the career patterns of civil servants to be uncertain and has implications for the ineffectiveness of organizational performance.

Literature review

Career patterns

Career patterns concern the sequence of work positions that a person holds during their life (Pant *et al.*, 2018). Ivancevich and Konopaske (2013) define a career pattern as a position in which an organization transfers its employees to different positions to develop employees in the appropriate positions. This position-transfer process, also known as mutation, entails changes in an employee's position/place/job, which can occur horizontally or vertically (promotion/demotion) within an organization (Hasibuan, 2000). The career pattern of civil servants/the state civil apparatus can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal (Rakhmawanto, 2018).

A promotion in the office implies an increase in power and responsibilities beyond the previous level (Manullang, 2001). Conversely, a demotion involves decreased income and responsibilities (Siagian, 2008). Position rotation refers to horizontal moves within a job, aimed at preventing burnout and enhancing employees' knowledge and expertise (Harindja, 2003). Mutation is common and acceptable when it serves career development, enhances employee abilities, and meets organizational needs (Winarsih and Ratminto, 2011).

The development of career patterns in Indonesian government agencies is termed the career patterns of civil servants. As mandated by Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the state civil apparatus, the career pattern of civil servants in Indonesia adheres to the merit system, which is based on qualifications, competencies, and performance in a fair and reasonable manner without distinguishing political background, race, color, religion, origin, gender, marital status, age, or disability conditions (Puspitapuri, 2017).

Political neutrality

Neutrality is defined as an attitude of not deviating from or taking sides with one party over another, staying away from intrigue, maintaining reputation, having no position or an unknown position toward competition between two or more parties, and not engaging in political struggle (Caiden, 1996; Johnson, 2016; Macdonald and Birdi, 2019; Rubin, 1988). De Vries (1996) describes neutrality as: to keep a distance, not to be involved, be impartial toward either side, not to do or say something that is not in one's authority, and not belong to political and ideological groupings. From the perspective of public administration (Caiden, 1996), the idea of neutrality is based on the separation between politics and administration, in which political duties are performed by politicians, and administrative tasks are performed by administrators.

The principle of civil service neutrality stipulates that civil servants must not actively engage in party politics, participate in electoral campaigns, or run for office unless they first resign; they can vote, but cannot publish their political beliefs (Sharma, 1996). Moreover, civil service neutrality is reflected in loyalty to the incumbent government within legal constraints, maintenance of confidentiality in decision-making, implementation of government policies regardless of political affiliation, having limited political rights, and impartiality in implementing rules (Scott, 1996).

Organizational performance

According to Martin and Kettner (1996), at least two primary approaches to measuring organizational performance exist, the behavioral approach and the results approach. The behavioral approach investigates behaviors directly related to the implementation of job tasks (Kim, 2022). The results approach (result-oriented criteria) examines whether the results obtained have been in accordance with the demands of the needy party and have been provided the best quality or distributed fairly to those in need. This study measures organizational performance from four perspectives: customer, internal business process, innovation/learning, and financial perspectives (Kaplan and Norton, 1992).

First, from the customers' perspective, the performance of an organization is assessed using four indicators: time, quality, service, and cost. Thus, the quality of service from the customers' perspective should be cheaper, better, and faster. Second, the perspective of internal business processes is related to the advantages that an organization has over other organizations. Organizational excellence, for example, can be measured from the competence of employees and the technology used. Employees' competence largely determines the success of their organizational performance. Similarly, technological excellence creates efficiency and effectiveness in service processes. Third, from the innovation perspective, public products and services create value. An organization's ability

to innovate adds value to organizational performance. Fourth, the financial perspective of recognizing the failure or success of organizational performance can be considered in the process of planning, using, and reporting synchronized finances. Satisfactory organizational performance can be measured by the appropriate and inappropriate use of financing. If there is financial misuse, lack of budget realization, and unacceptable findings of auditors in an organization, then the organization will be judged to have poor performance.

Methodology

The research was based on a quantitative method (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) with an explanatory approach to investigate the relationships between variables (Kothari, 2004). The population comprised 5,963 civil servants in the local government of South Konawe District in 2020. Data collection was done through distributing questionnaires to members of the sample of population selected through simple randomization. The sample consisted of 220 respondents, based on the sample size formulation of Bungin (2011). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework.

Career patterns were measured using the indicators of promotion, rotation, and demotion (Ivancevich and Konopaske, 2013). The neutrality of the state’s civil apparatus was measured by indicators of impartiality, reputation, and accountability (De Vries, 1996). Organizational performance was measured by customer satisfaction, competence of public servants, innovation, and finance (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). The hypotheses of this research were formulated by the conceptual framework: H1: Career patterns (X) positively influence organizational performance (Z). H2: Neutrality (Y) positively influences organizational performance (Z). H3: Career patterns (X) positively influence neutrality (Y).

The analysis model used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through a measurement model test (outer model) and a structural model test (inner model). The measurement model test used the partial least squares algorithm, whereas the structural model test used the bootstrap method.

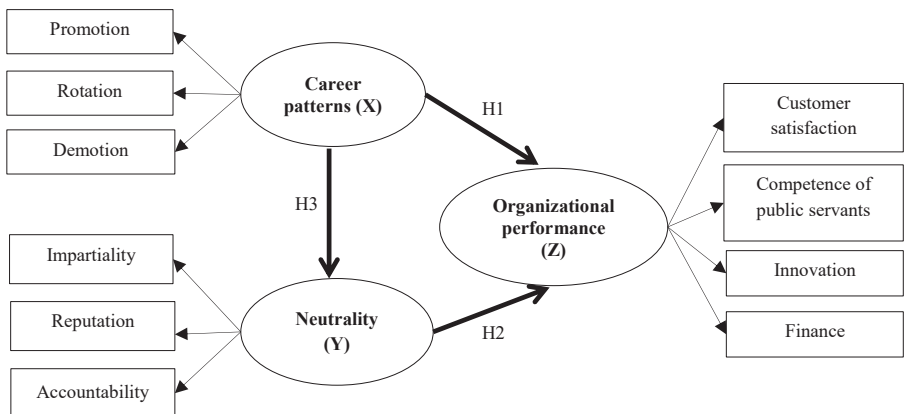


Figure 1.
Conceptual
Framework

Source: By authors

Results

Measurement analysis models (outer model)

a. Construct validity analysis

In this research, a validity test was conducted using SmartPLS 3.3.9, with the PLS algorithm procedure. Validity tests include convergent and discriminant validity assessments. The convergent validity test was conducted by examining the outer loading values with the condition that they should be greater than 0.5, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values with the condition that they should also be greater than 0.5. Both criteria were used to establish the validity of the relationships between the indicators and their associated latent variables. Table 1 shows that 12 out of 13 outer loading values are above 0.5, suggesting that most of the indicators are valid. However, one indicator, N1, has a loading below 0.5 and will be considered for further analysis.

The subsequent test of convergent validity was to examine the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values, as presented in Table 2, were greater than 0.5 for each variable, confirming their validity.

The second validity test was a discriminant validity test that aimed to determine the extent to which a variable is not correlated with other variables. The condition for discriminant validity is that the correlation between variables must be smaller than the correlation of the variable with itself. The discriminant validity test conducted in this study

Indicators	Career Patterns	Neutrality	Organizational Performance
CP1	0.919		
CP2	0.918		
CP3	0.873		
CP4	0.809		
CP5	0.927		
CP6	0.830		
CP7	0.806		
CP8	0.887		
CP9	0.883		
N1		0.204	
N2		0.922	
N3		0.854	
N4		0.808	
N5		0.908	
N6		0.854	
N7		0.794	
N8		0.881	
N9		0.882	
OP1			0.934
OP2			0.882
OP3			0.829
OP4			0.925
OP5			0.882
OP6			0.829
OP7			0.889
OP8			0.821
OP9			0.771
OP10			0.858
OP11			0.863

Source: By authors

Table 1.
Outer Loading
Indicator
Questionnaire Value
Test Results

was used to test the cross-loading value and the value of the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Calculating the value of the Fornell-Larcker criterion involves comparing the square roots of the AVE values with the correlations between variables.

The results of the discriminant validity test presented in [Table 3](#) indicate that all values of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the value in the correlation of latent variables, have a greater value than the correlation with other variables. This assessment was also observed in other variables, with the square root of the AVE value being greater than the correlation values between the variables. Thus, the discriminant validity test for all variables was met.

The discriminant validity of cross-loading follows the same principle as the validity of the discriminant based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In this case, the indicators of the variables are correlated with other variables. [Table 4](#) presents the value of the cross-loading test, with the value of the correlation of the indicator with the variable itself having a higher value than the correlation with other variables; thus, discriminant validity was met.

b. Construct reliability analysis

The next research instrument test was a reliability test using Smart PLS 3 with the PLS algorithm procedure. The reliability test was conducted by considering the Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability for each of the variables presented in [Table 5](#). The table indicates that the value of Cronbach's alpha met the minimum threshold of 0.70. The minimum value requirements for the composite reliability were also satisfied. It was concluded that the instruments used in this study were reliable because the respondents' answers were consistent.

Structural model analysis (inner model)

a. Multicollinearity Test (collinearity)

The multicollinearity test was conducted to ensure the absence of free or exogenous variables that have high correlation so that the predictability of the model is not compromised ([Sekaran and Bougie, 2016](#)) and to confirm that there is no reciprocal relationship between independent variables. The standard needed to prevent multicollinearity is a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value below 5 ([Hair et al., 2017](#)).

Based on [Table 6](#), the inner VIF values for all variables were less than 5. This indicates that there was no multicollinearity falsification in the research model.

	Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Information
Table 2. Value Test Results Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Career Patterns	0.763	Valid
	Neutrality	0.746	Valid
	Organizational Performance	0.745	Valid
	Source: By authors		

	Variables	Organizational performance	Neutrality	Career patterns
Table 3. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell- Larcker Criterion)	Organizational Performance	0.863		
	Neutrality	0.864	0.995	
	Career Patterns	0.870	0.873	0.874
	Source: By authors			

Indicators	Career Patterns	Neutrality	Organizational Performance
CP1	0.919	0.847	0.842
CP2	0.918	0.835	0.850
CP3	0.873	0.768	0.796
CP4	0.809	0.731	0.752
CP5	0.927	0.818	0.814
CP6	0.830	0.659	0.656
CP7	0.806	0.623	0.617
CP8	0.887	0.766	0.757
CP9	0.883	0.751	0.743
N2	0.811	0.934	0.922
N3	0.744	0.882	0.854
N4	0.711	0.829	0.808
N5	0.812	0.908	0.895
N6	0.715	0.854	0.836
N7	0.673	0.794	0.771
N8	0.761	0.881	0.858
N9	0.773	0.882	0.863
OP1	0.811	0.922	0.934
OP2	0.747	0.850	0.882
OP3	0.712	0.806	0.829
OP4	0.809	0.911	0.925
OP5	0.751	0.849	0.882
OP6	0.711	0.808	0.829
OP7	0.819	0.889	0.901
OP8	0.716	0.821	0.835
OP9	0.673	0.711	0.794
OP10	0.761	0.858	0.881
OP11	0.773	0.863	0.882

Source: By authors

Table 4.
Discriminant Validity Test Results (Cross Loading)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha >0,7	Composite Reliability >0,7	Evaluation
Organizational Performance	0,965	0,970	Reliable
Neutrality	0,951	0,959	Reliable
Career Patterns	0,961	0,967	Reliable

Source: By authors

Table 5.
Reliability Test Results (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha)

Variables	Organizational Performance	Neutrality	Career Patterns
Organizational Performance			
Neutrality	4.11		
Career Patterns		1	

Source: By authors

Table 6.
Inter-Variable multicollinearity Test Results

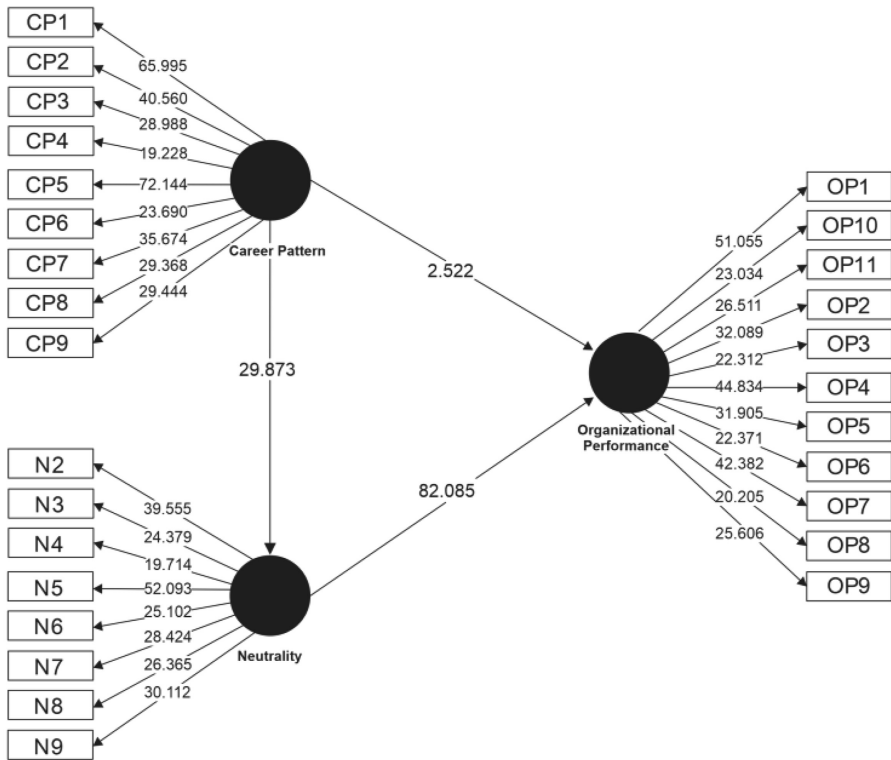
b. Causal relationship analysis

This section presents the analysis of the causal relationships between each variable. This was a one-tailed research using the bootstrap method with a significance level of 0.05 or 5 percent,

which means that the significance value or p-value cannot be more than 0.05. The influence of the latent variables is positive and significant if the t-value is greater than or equal to 1.96. To determine the extent to which the variation in the independent variable affects the description of the variation in the dependent variable, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used. To determine the indirect effect, a mediation test was conducted.

In Figure 2, one can see the path of the structural model along with the t-value of each relationship resulting from the software SmartPLS. The path diagram was derived from the direct effect test by examining the significance of the direct path coefficient of the relationship between each variable.

Based on the t-values from Table 7, the path of career pattern → organizational performance, neutrality → organizational performance, career pattern → neutrality had a significant influence. The hypothesis tests are discussed in the following sections.



Information:

- CP = Career pattern,
- N = Neutrality,
- OP = Organization performance

Note: Analysis Results via Smart PLS software

Source: By authors

Figure 2.
Path Diagrams and
T-Value Structural
Models

Indirect influences were also measured using mediation tests. This mediation test was conducted by analyzing the output from the SmartPLS software in the section specific to indirect effect.

Based on [Table 8](#), it was found that career patterns and neutrality had a significant indirect influence with a t-value (2.51) greater than 1.64. Researchers tested coefficient of determination or R Square to demonstrate prediction accuracy, where the independent variable can explain variations in the dependent variable in the regression model. According to [Chin \(1998\)](#), an R square value of 0.67 is considered strong, 0.33 is moderate and 0.19 is weak.

Based on [Table 9](#) results, the R square value for organizational performance was 0.799, which categorizes it as strong, indicating that the career patterns account for approximately 79.9 percent of the variance in organizational performance. The remaining 20.1 percent of the variance is likely due to other factors not included in the model. Similarly, the R square value for neutrality was 0.757, which is also in the strong range. This suggests that the career patterns explain roughly 75.7 percent of the variance in neutrality, with the remaining 24.3 percent influenced by external variables not captured by the model. In summary, the career patterns have a strong influence on the organizational performance (79.9 percent) and neutrality (75.7 percent).

Hypothesis testing

This research has three hypotheses: the authors tested the hypotheses by using the SmartPLS software, focusing on the t-value in structural models. [Table 10](#) presents the results of the hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P-Values	Information
H1	Career Patterns → Organizational Performance	0.33	2.522	0.012	Significant
H2	Neutrality → Organizational Performance	0.967	82.085	0.000	Significant
H3	Career Patterns → Neutrality	0.870	29.873	0.000	Significant

Source: By authors

Table 7.
Intervariable Direct Effect Test Results

Path	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P Values	Conclusion
Career Patterns → Neutrality → Organizational Performance	0.870	2.514	0.000	Significant

Source: By authors

Table 8.
Inter-Variable Indirect Effect Test Results

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Organizational Performance	0.799	0.784
Neutrality	0.757	0.756

Source: By authors

Table 9.
Inter-Variable Indirect Effect Test Results

Discussion

The results of the data analysis have revealed three aspects. First, career patterns positively influence organizational performance. This implies that the better an employee's career pattern, the better the organization's performance. Conversely, the worse the employee's career pattern, the worse the organization's performance. The results of this study supported the findings of [Naseer et al. \(2015\)](#) with respect to the impact of career success on organizational performance in the healthcare sector. In this study, promotion reflected a good career pattern, whereas demotion reflected a bad career pattern. Structuring employee career patterns through promotion, mutation, and demotion policies is important for improving the performance of public organizations. However, structuring employees' career patterns ahead of regional elections has the negative implication of neutrality, which can affect organizational performance. The implementation of promotions, rotations, and demotions ahead of regional elections may be interpreted as having a political tendency that encourages the bureaucratic apparatus to engage in practical politics. The implementation of mutations of 21 echelon II officials and 84 echelon III officials in the South Konawe District in 2020, which was in close proximity to the implementation of the Regional Elections, provided the impression of mutations based on system spoils and retained the impression of mutations based on senior systems and system merit.

Second, neutrality has a positive influence on organizational performance. Therefore, the higher the neutrality of employees, the better the performance of the organization. Conversely, the impartiality of employees damages organizational performance. Based on data submitted by the Election Supervisory Agency of the Republic of Indonesia at the hearing of the Commission III House of Representatives, Wednesday, November 18, 2020, there were at least 938 recommendations for violations of state civil apparatus neutrality in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections. The State Civil Apparatus Commission of the Republic of Indonesia has stated that brotherly ties and career interests were the causes of the civil apparatus being non-neutral. In South Konawe District during the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, the election supervisory agency cracked down on at least 6 state civil servants out of 11 cases of alleged violations of neutrality in the regional elections ([Bawaslu, 2020](#)).

The motives for the involvement of the state civil apparatus in South Konawe District include fraternal ties with candidates and career advancement. Social and economic motives also drive the political involvement of civil apparatuses in the country. Individuals holding positions in government organizations enjoy a higher social status than those without such positions. Economically, bureaucratic officials earn additional income from the payroll system and distribution of fees (gratuities) for government procurement. Civil servants who become bureaucratic officials earn additional income in the form of office and operational benefits. In addition, bureaucratic officials who occupy such positions automatically have

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P-Values	Information
H1	Career Patterns have a positive influence on Organizational Performance	0.33	2.522	0.012	Data support hypothesis
H2	Neutrality has a positive influence on Organizational Performance	0.967	82.085	0.000	Data support hypothesis
H3	Career Patterns have a positive influence on Neutrality	0.870	29.873	0.000	Data support hypothesis

Source: By authors

Table 10.
Summary of the Result
of Research Hypothesis
Testing

power over government budgets. This budgetary authority becomes a target for state civil servants seeking promotions. Consequently, the neutrality of the civil apparatus has a negative effect on its performance. Based on the assessment results of the Financial Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, the financial statements of the South Konawe District government for the year 2020 revealed a record of inadequacies; therefore, they received a 'reasonable with exceptions' predicate ([Financial Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021](#)). Moreover, in the results of the regional innovation assessment, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia noted that the South Konawe District was categorized as 'less innovative' ([Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020](#)).

Third, career pattern positively influenced neutrality. This implies that the better an employee's career pattern, the more neutral he or she will be. Conversely, the worse an employee's career pattern, the worse his/her neutrality. Structuring the career pattern of the state civil apparatus through the merit system, that is, placing the most qualified or best person in a job, can prevent neutrality of the civil apparatus of the state. In Indonesia, after the enactment of the State Civil Apparatus Law, the implementation of a merit system became necessary in the process of promotion, rotation, and demotion. However, in practice, this regulation becomes difficult to implement because of the strengthening of the patronage political system ([Pierskalla and Sacks, 2020](#)). Relatively solid bureaucratic organizations are used by incumbent politicians to mobilize the masses and politicize government programs and public services for electoral purposes ([Berenschot, 2018](#)).

The findings support the three hypotheses proposed in this research. In addition, this research revealed that the neutrality of the civil apparatus mediates the relationship between career patterns and organizational performance. There are two interesting findings. First, promotions significantly influence the neutrality and performance of organizations. That is, the more often a person is promoted, the higher the neutrality and performance of the organization. Conversely, the less frequently a person is promoted, the lower the neutrality and performance of the organization. Second, demotion has the least influence on an organization's neutrality and performance. That is, the fewer the demotions, the higher the neutrality and performance of the organization. Conversely, the more frequent the demotions, the lower the neutrality and performance of the organization. These findings indicate that neutral civil servants often receive promotions, whereas those who are not neutral rarely receive promotions.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the findings of this research, first, career patterns have a positive influence on organizational performance. This implies that the better an employee's career pattern, the better the organization's performance. Conversely, the worse the employee's career pattern, the worse the organization's performance. A good career pattern is reflected in promotions and a bad career pattern is reflected in demotions. The logic is that promotions improve organizational performance, while demotions worsen it. Second, neutrality has a positive influence on organizational performance. Therefore, the higher the neutrality of employees, the better the performance of the organization will be. Conversely, the impartiality of employees damages organizational performance. Neutrality is reflected in political involvement, partisanship, and the abuse of authority. Greater neutrality enhances organizational performance, while the lack thereof diminishes it. Third, career patterns positively influence neutrality. This implies that the better an employee's career pattern, the higher their neutrality. Conversely, the worse an employee's career pattern, the lower their neutrality. The logic is that promotions encourage neutrality within the state civil apparatus, whereas demotions undermine it. The structuring of career patterns ahead of regional elections has negative implications for bureaucratic neutrality, which leads to poor

organizational performance. Therefore, arrangement of career patterns should be distinct from the implementation of regional elections. Career patterns should be structured by increasing promotions and minimizing demotions.

During the management of career patterns of civil servants, it is important to consider the principle of neutrality, especially in countries that have a strong political and bureaucratic interface. The principle of neutrality has been taken into consideration in the filling of bureaucratic positions in Indonesia, especially since the enactment of the State Civil Apparatus Law in 2014. Its implementation is executed by the State Civil Apparatus Commission tasked with maintaining neutrality, supervising and fostering the state civil apparatus profession. The Commission has been quite successful in encouraging a merit system in filling state civil apparatus positions. However, after the revision of the Law at the end of 2023, the Commission was abolished which is a cause for concern. The authors recommend, first, in order to supervise the behavior of the state civil apparatus not to side with certain political interests and realize a professional bureaucracy, it is necessary to restore and strengthen the functions of the Commission. This will consistently encourage the implementation of transparent, competitive and merit-based management of the state civil apparatus, as well as improving the quality of public services, in order to realize strong government institutions as one of the goals of sustainable development. Second, it is necessary to strengthen internal government supervisors at the local level (such as the inspectorate) to prevent the behavior of state civil servants who deviate from their main duties and functions. Third, there is a need to involve professional organizations such as the Indonesian Association of Public Administration to monitor the behavior of bureaucratic apparatus in the regions. Fourth, the establishment of the Commission can be adopted by other countries that experience similar problems in maintaining the neutrality of the state civil apparatus, especially those experienced by developing countries.

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