

Developing A Systematic Licensing Curriculum Model for Local Authorities: Evidence from the local Government Stakeholders Need Analysis

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ABSTRACT - Local authorities play a crucial role in regulating and facilitating the business environment through licensing systems that ensure compliance, safety, and economic order. However, procedural complexity, fragmented knowledge management, and uneven service delivery remain persistent challenges in the Malaysian local governance context. This study examines the need to develop a systematic licensing curriculum model for local authorities by analyzing the perspectives of internal and external stakeholders—namely, local government officers and business license applicants under the Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ). Using a mixed-method needs analysis involving 76 officers and 227 business license holders, the research identifies administrative inefficiencies, limited inter-agency coordination, and deficiencies in structured training and procedural literacy. The findings reveal two distinct yet interconnected problem domains: (1) bureaucratic and procedural bottlenecks as experienced by officers, and (2) customer service and communication barriers as perceived by license applicants. Both groups, however, converge on the critical need for structured and systematic licensing education to enhance understanding, efficiency, and confidence in handling licensing procedures. Grounded in Knowledge Management Theory and Competency-Based Curriculum Development, the study proposes the new Licensing Curriculum Model, an educational and administrative framework designed to improve licensing processes through structured knowledge dissemination, inter-agency collaboration, and capacity building. This research contributes to the discourse on governance reform, knowledge-based public administration, and education-driven innovation in local government service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Local authorities in Malaysia are among the most visible institutions in the everyday lives of citizens. They regulate urban development, public health, and business activities through licensing systems that serve as mechanisms of control, standardization, and economic facilitation. According to the *Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171)*, local councils are entrusted with the responsibility to issue, monitor, and enforce business licenses within their respective jurisdictions. These licensing systems, while essential for governance, are often marked by bureaucratic rigidity, overlapping regulations, and fragmented communication between agencies (Zou, 2024).

In recent years, the Malaysian government has prioritized improving local governance efficiency through various reform agendas, including the *Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDigital)* and *Smart City Framework*. These initiatives emphasize transparency, digital readiness, and service innovation. Yet,

despite digitalization efforts, the licensing process remains cumbersome for both officers and business owners. Studies by Rashid and Hassan (2020) and Hassan and Tambi (2023) highlight that small and medium enterprise (SME) operators, particularly micro-entrepreneurs, often face prolonged approval times, unclear procedural requirements, and inconsistent communication with officers. Conversely, local authority staff contend with outdated workflows, limited procedural training, and a lack of cross-agency coordination.

This study emerges from that context — the intersection between administrative inefficiency and limited human capacity. While technological modernization has received significant policy attention, human and knowledge infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Effective licensing management requires not only clear digital systems but also competent, knowledgeable officers and informed applicants. Hence, this research explores the need for a systematic Licensing Curriculum Model—an educational framework that bridges procedural literacy, knowledge management, and service professionalism among all stakeholders in local government licensing ecosystems.

Problem Statement

The current business licensing ecosystem in Malaysia reveals a structural imbalance between procedural demands and human capacity within local governance. Despite its centrality to municipal administration, the system remains characterized by procedural complexity, fragmented coordination, and uneven knowledge distribution among stakeholders. Officers within local authorities such as the Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ) often accumulate long-term institutional experience through years of service; however, their experiential knowledge is rarely translated into structured learning or competency-based training. This results in a paradox where experience does not necessarily equate to updated professional competence, particularly in areas such as licensing pedagogy, customer engagement, digital governance systems, and regulatory literacy. The absence of structured instructional frameworks perpetuates knowledge asymmetry within the bureaucracy itself, hindering institutional learning and adaptive governance.

Conversely, business license applicants—comprising primarily micro-entrepreneurs and small business owners—encounter systemic barriers when navigating the licensing process. They face opaque and fragmented procedural guidelines, inconsistent documentation standards, and communication lapses across departments. For many, the lack of procedural clarity translates into time delays, administrative costs, and diminished trust in the local government's service delivery. The findings from the present needs analysis involving 303 stakeholders (76 officers and 227 license holders) substantiate this dual deficit. From the officers' perspective, the most significant challenge (Mean = 4.51) is inter-agency coordination among entities such as the police (PDRM), fire department (Bomba), and various technical divisions—reflecting bureaucratic fragmentation. Meanwhile, from the applicants' perspective, the most pronounced issue (Mean = 3.93) concerns the lack of professionalism and courtesy among officers, signalling weaknesses in service orientation and communicative competence. Both groups, however, exhibit a strong consensus (Mean > 4.20) on the need for structured and systematic knowledge systems to improve accuracy, procedural efficiency, and confidence in licensing management.

These findings expose a fundamental epistemic gap within local governance: inefficiencies are not merely procedural but educational and communicative in nature. The persistence of fragmented knowledge structures despite ongoing digitalization efforts indicates that modernization through technology alone is insufficient. A truly effective licensing system requires cognitive and pedagogical transformation—an education-driven approach that institutionalizes learning, fosters knowledge sharing, and embeds structured capacity-building within the bureaucratic process. This study therefore contends that a curriculum-based model of licensing education can reorient local authorities toward reflective, knowledge-based governance, transforming licensing administration into an adaptive and collaborative learning ecosystem that benefits both officers and citizens.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the major procedural and service challenges in local authority licensing administration.

2. To examine the perceptions of local government officers and business license holders regarding the need for structured licensing education.
3. To justify the development of a new systematic Licensing Curriculum Model for enhancing local governance efficiency and service quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance and Licensing Systems

Business licensing serves as an instrument of governance that balances regulatory control with economic facilitation. In Malaysia, local councils are empowered to issue and enforce licenses under municipal laws and by-laws. These processes ensure compliance with health, safety, and environmental standards while contributing to local revenue streams (Local Government Act 1976). However, bureaucratic inefficiencies—manifested in redundant approvals, manual verification, and inconsistent communication—undermine their effectiveness (Darongke, 2022).

Scholars such as Brown et al. (2021) argue that effective governance depends not only on regulation but also on human capability and service competence. In the context of MBPJ, officers act as both regulators and service providers, requiring a hybrid skillset that combines procedural accuracy with interpersonal communication. Yet, most training provided to officers focuses narrowly on compliance and inspection procedures, with minimal emphasis on service delivery, communication ethics, or cross-departmental integration.

Bureaucracy, Efficiency, and the Problem of Fragmentation

The bureaucratic nature of local government, though essential for ensuring order and accountability, often results in fragmentation. Zou (2024) characterizes bureaucratic efficiency as a “contradiction in itself,” noting that multiple layers of approval and documentation may ensure control but simultaneously impede agility. Within local authorities, licensing processes typically involve several agencies — including fire safety (Bomba), police (PDRM), environmental health, and engineering departments — each with distinct procedural requirements and data systems.

Such fragmentation not only delays decision-making but also causes duplication of efforts and confusion among applicants. As a result, both officers and business owners experience procedural fatigue. The lack of an integrated framework for inter-agency coordination intensifies workload, erodes public trust, and reduces productivity (Aburayya et al., 2020).

This structural issue indicates that efficiency cannot be achieved solely through procedural reform or digitization; it requires knowledge alignment — a shared understanding of processes across departments and stakeholders. Hence, the call for a systematic curriculum model emerges not as an educational luxury but as an operational necessity.

Knowledge Management and Learning in Public Administration

Knowledge Management (KM) has evolved from a corporate tool into a vital governance mechanism (Sokoh & Okolie, 2021). In public administration, KM enhances institutional memory, supports decision-making, and fosters innovation. Nonaka's SECI Model (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization) offers a framework for understanding how tacit knowledge among officers can be transformed into explicit, shared knowledge that improves organizational efficiency.

In local governance, knowledge resides in the experience of officers — often undocumented and inconsistently transferred. This tacit dependence leads to discontinuities whenever personnel changes occur. The development of a Licensing Curriculum Model would serve as a formal KM mechanism by codifying experiential learning into structured modules, thereby ensuring continuity, standardization, and institutional learning.

Furthermore, Sanjuk et al. (2023) argue that public officers need both technical and adaptive competencies to manage complexity in governance systems. Structured curriculum-based approaches can close gaps between institutional policy and field-level execution by embedding continuous learning within daily administrative tasks.

Curriculum Design and Competency-Based Learning

Curriculum design in professional and administrative settings is increasingly viewed as a strategic mechanism for organizational transformation and human capital development. Within the domain of public administration, curriculum development transcends traditional educational boundaries by serving as a structured conduit for transmitting institutional knowledge, aligning competencies with policy objectives, and professionalizing the public service workforce. The Competency-Based Curriculum Development (CBCD) framework provides a theoretical foundation for this approach. It posits that curriculum design must move beyond the mastery of theoretical material or a teaching-oriented process to focus on the demonstration of competencies—which encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes that directly correspond to the necessity of preparing learners to be ready for the dynamic world of work. (Harahap et al., 2025)

In the context of local governance and business licensing, a competency-based curriculum approach provides an innovative response to entrenched procedural and knowledge challenges. Traditional training models in local authorities tend to be fragmented, episodic, and compliance-oriented, emphasizing procedural memorization rather than adaptive problem-solving. A Licensing Curriculum Model, grounded in CBCD principles, seeks to remedy these deficiencies by constructing a coherent educational architecture that systematically builds professional capacity at every level of the licensing process. Such a model would first identify key performance domains—including license application processing, regulatory inspection, customer interaction, inter-agency coordination, and digital system management. For each domain, it would articulate the requisite competency clusters encompassing legal literacy, regulatory interpretation, procedural accuracy, interpersonal communication, ethical behaviour, and digital fluency.

Designing such a curriculum requires integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning dimensions. Cognitive competencies would ensure officers comprehend licensing laws, regulations, and policy frameworks. Affective competencies would cultivate service ethics, empathy, and emotional intelligence—essential for fostering trust and legitimacy in public service. Psychomotor competencies, meanwhile, would focus on operational skills such as data entry, digital platform navigation, and document verification. Together, these domains form a holistic learning structure that balances technical proficiency with human-centered governance.

Moreover, the proposed model emphasizes iterative and cyclical learning—a process through which knowledge is continuously refined, updated, and re-applied in response to contextual changes. This approach is particularly relevant in local governance, where legal frameworks, technological systems, and citizen expectations evolve rapidly. Embedding curriculum-based learning within administrative routines ensures that training is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing mechanism of institutional renewal. Empirical evidence from sectors such as health and higher education supports the effectiveness of this model: studies by Saniuk et al. (2021) and Sanjuk et al. (2023) demonstrate that competency-based curricula significantly enhance operational coherence and adaptive learning capacities in complex organizations.

The introduction of a Licensing Curriculum Model also extends the application of curriculum theory into an underexplored area—public service education within operational governance. Unlike traditional classroom-based instruction, this model situates learning within the very processes of policy implementation. Officers and citizens become co-learners in understanding and improving the systems that regulate their interactions. By codifying experiential knowledge into structured educational modules, local authorities can institutionalize tacit expertise, promote organizational continuity, and elevate the overall standard of governance. In doing so, curriculum design evolves from a pedagogical tool into a strategic governance instrument—one capable of transforming bureaucratic compliance into adaptive competence and participatory learning.

Service Orientation and Emotional Intelligence in Public Service

Public service is inherently relational. Aburayya et al. (2020) emphasize that customer orientation among government employees significantly influences public satisfaction and trust. Similarly, Bakar and Ayu (2023) demonstrate that “service with sincerity” fosters positive emotional exchanges, strengthening public perception of legitimacy and care.

In licensing contexts, applicants' perceptions of officer professionalism and friendliness reflect deeper issues of institutional culture and training. Developing emotional intelligence and communication skills among officers is therefore not peripheral but central to governance reform. The proposed Licensing Curriculum Model addresses this by integrating modules on service ethics, empathy, and public communication, aligning technical efficiency with human-centered governance principles.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical orientation of this study rests upon the integration of Knowledge Management Theory (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and the Competency-Based Curriculum Development (CBCD) Framework (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This dual-theoretical foundation provides a multidimensional perspective that bridges organizational learning with pedagogical design, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how knowledge systems and competency formation can jointly enhance governance efficiency within local authorities.

Knowledge Management (KM) Theory emphasizes the dynamic process of knowledge creation, sharing, and utilization as the central determinant of organizational effectiveness. Nonaka and Takeuchi's seminal *SECI Model*—comprising the processes of socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization—conceptualizes how tacit knowledge (personal, experiential, context-specific understanding) is transformed into explicit knowledge (formalized, documented, and transferable content). Within the context of local governance and business licensing, this theory provides a lens to analyze how procedural knowledge—often tacitly held by experienced officers—can be codified and transmitted systematically across departments and generations of staff. In many municipal environments, procedural understanding remains embedded in individual experience rather than institutional systems, leading to inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and discontinuities when personnel changes occur. The KM perspective therefore underscores the necessity of transforming these implicit practices into explicit, standardized knowledge assets that can be taught, replicated, and improved upon through structured learning.

Applying KM Theory to licensing administration reveals that efficiency is a product not merely of process design but of epistemic architecture—how well knowledge circulates among officers, departments, and citizens. When procedural expertise is fragmented or undocumented, the licensing process becomes dependent on individual memory rather than institutional competence. By embedding KM principles into curriculum design, the proposed model operationalizes knowledge creation as an educational process, ensuring that experience is continuously captured, formalized, and disseminated to sustain organizational learning. This theoretical position aligns with later contributions by Sokoh and Okolie (2021) and Sanjuk et al. (2023), who argue that effective governance reform requires a transition from information management to *knowledge institutionalization*, where learning is embedded as an ongoing organizational function rather than a sporadic activity.

Complementing this epistemological foundation is the Competency-Based Curriculum Development (CBCD) Framework, which provides a pedagogical and structural dimension to the management of knowledge within organizations. The CBCD framework advances the idea that education and training should be explicitly tied to measurable competencies that reflect real-world job requirements. Harahap et al. (2025) contend that curriculum effectiveness is determined not by the volume of content delivered but by its alignment with demonstrable skills, behaviours, and performance outcomes. In the context of local governance, this theoretical approach shifts the focus of training from procedural compliance to *performance-based capability*. It calls for a systematic identification of the competencies required for effective licensing administration—legal literacy, digital proficiency, ethical communication, and cross-agency coordination—and the subsequent design of learning modules that cultivate these capabilities through iterative practice and feedback.

When applied to the Licensing Curriculum Model, the CBCD framework serves as the structural mechanism through which the abstract principles of Knowledge Management are operationalized. The process of codifying tacit procedural knowledge into explicit curriculum content corresponds to the *externalization* phase in Nonaka's SECI model, while the iterative cycles of learning, assessment, and reflection align with the *internalization* process, where knowledge becomes embodied in the behaviour and decision-making of officers. Thus, curriculum development becomes not merely an educational exercise but a knowledge management strategy—a deliberate attempt to institutionalize organizational learning through pedagogy. The emphasis on competencies ensures that learning is purposeful,

context-sensitive, and directly applicable to the operational realities of licensing work. It also provides a mechanism for standardizing quality across departments, thereby addressing the issues of inconsistency and subjectivity that frequently plague municipal licensing systems.

The integration of these two theoretical perspectives positions the Licensing Curriculum Model as both a *knowledge system* and an *educational intervention*. As a knowledge system, it facilitates the structured flow of information and experience within and across organizational boundaries, transforming the local authority into a learning organization capable of adaptive governance. As an educational intervention, it embeds learning processes into daily administrative operations, reducing procedural ambiguity, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and elevating the professional standards of service delivery. This dual function exemplifies what Argyris (1977 as cited in Patterson et al., 2023) conceptualize as *double-loop learning*—a process in which organizations not only refine their actions but also re-evaluate the assumptions that guide those actions.

By synthesizing Knowledge Management and CBCD theories, this framework provides both a conceptual justification and an operational pathway for reimagining local governance as an educational enterprise. It transcends the dichotomy between administrative efficiency and professional development, proposing instead that governance effectiveness emerges from the integration of learning and administration. The proposed model, therefore, is not merely a curriculum proposal but a theoretical manifestation of how structured knowledge creation and competency-based learning can transform local authorities from procedural bureaucracies into intelligent, knowledge-driven institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design anchored in the principles of needs analysis and evidence-based curriculum development. The primary goal was to generate empirical insights into the perceived challenges, competency gaps, and training needs among local government stakeholders involved in business licensing. The design reflects the *diagnostic phase* of curriculum planning (Taba, 1962), which prioritizes understanding learner and institutional needs prior to model formulation. Quantitative analysis was chosen to capture patterns of perception across two stakeholder categories—officers and applicants—allowing for comparative evaluation and inferential understanding of systemic weaknesses.

The methodological choice aligns with the pragmatist paradigm, which values research that informs practice and policy. In this case, the emphasis was on deriving actionable knowledge to propose the design of a new systematic licensing curriculum model that would directly respond to stakeholder realities within the MBPJ ecosystem. While qualitative methods might capture narrative depth, the quantitative design enabled the measurement of stakeholder consensus, ranking of challenges, and prioritization of knowledge needs—elements necessary for model validation in curriculum engineering.

Population and Sampling

The study's population consisted of two key stakeholder groups directly engaged in the licensing ecosystem under the Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ): (1) *local authority officers* responsible for licensing administration, inspection, and enforcement, and (2) *business license applicants and holders*, primarily representing micro and small enterprises. From these populations, 303 respondents were selected, comprising 76 officers and 227 applicants. The sampling approach was stratified purposive sampling, chosen to ensure representation from both administrative and user perspectives—two crucial dimensions for curriculum design and validation.

The officer group represented a diverse cross-section of MBPJ's internal departments, including Licensing, Health and Environment, Enforcement, and Building Control. Their inclusion was essential for capturing institutional knowledge and identifying procedural bottlenecks. The applicant group included small business owners across sectors such as food and beverage, retail, and services. This cohort provided the external perspective of those navigating the bureaucratic licensing system. Such dual sampling enriched the dataset by reflecting both *service delivery* and *service experience*, forming a holistic foundation for identifying gaps in knowledge, communication, and system efficiency.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on prior literature in public service delivery, knowledge management, and competency-based curriculum design (Hassan & Tambi, 2023; Sokoh & Okolie, 2021). The instrument comprised three sections:

1. Demographic Information, capturing variables such as age, gender, position, years of service or licensing experience, and sectoral background.
2. Issues and Challenges in Licensing Administration, containing 10 items addressing bureaucratic, procedural, and inter-agency issues.
3. Perceptions on the Need for Structured Knowledge and Training, consisting of 8 items measuring agreement on the importance of structured learning and professional competency development.

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The instrument was pre-tested with a pilot group of 10 respondents (5 officers and 5 applicants) to ensure clarity and face validity. Expert validation was also conducted by three senior academics specializing in governance, curriculum design, and organizational learning. Minor modifications were made to refine wording and ensure semantic equivalence between officer and applicant questionnaires.

Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients above 0.85 across all constructs, indicating strong reliability. Content validity was ensured through expert panel review, while construct validity was verified through factor analysis, confirming that all items loaded appropriately on their respective dimensions. These statistical assurances strengthened the credibility of the dataset and provided a robust empirical base for the development of the subsequent curriculum model.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, to identify dominant perceptions and patterns among respondents. The focus was not on inferential hypothesis testing but on interpretive synthesis—linking quantitative findings to theoretical constructs and curriculum implications. Cross-group comparisons (officers vs applicants) were examined to highlight perceptual divergences and convergences. This interpretive approach aligns with *analytic induction*, a method that moves beyond mere description to identify underlying causes, consequences, and interrelations between variables (Thomas, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional committee under Universiti Sains Malaysia. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was secured from all respondents. The survey was anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Data were stored securely and used solely for research and developmental purposes under the new systematic licensing curriculum model initiative. The study adhered to the principles of research integrity and participant confidentiality as outlined in the *Malaysian Code of Responsible Conduct in Research (2019)*.

FINDINGS

Demographic Information

Table 1 below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study participants, comprising 76 officers from the Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ) and 227 business license applicants and holders.

The demographic structure of respondents reveals a complex interaction between institutional experience and entrepreneurial emergence, forming the social foundation for the licensing ecosystem's current challenges. The gender composition shows a near balance among officers but a clear female majority among entrepreneurs (57.7%), signalling what Abdullah (2022) identifies as the feminization of microenterprise in Malaysia. Women are increasingly entering small-scale business sectors—particularly food and retail—due to flexible entry requirements and digital market accessibility. However, these entrepreneurs often lack prior exposure to bureaucratic procedures, creating a cognitive gap between entrepreneurial initiative and regulatory literacy.

From an administrative standpoint, officers' demographics (52% male, majority aged 36–40 years) illustrate a mid-career workforce with strong institutional memory but potentially limited exposure to modern service-learning paradigms. Scholars such as Sokoh and Okolie (2021) argue that long-serving civil servants tend to internalize tacit procedural knowledge—rules, routines, and informal practices—yet often lack opportunities to formalize or update this knowledge within structured professional learning systems. The finding that one-third of officers have over ten years of service underscores this point: their experience forms the backbone of licensing governance but simultaneously constrains innovation when not coupled with systematic retraining or competency-based learning frameworks.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 303)

Demographic Variable	Officers (n = 76)	Applicants (n = 227)	Interpretation
Gender	52.0% Male, 48.0% Female	42.3% Male, 57.7% Female	Gender distribution among officers reflects traditional male-dominated bureaucratic roles, whereas the larger proportion of female entrepreneurs signifies Malaysia's growing female participation in microenterprise sectors (Abdullah, 2022; Rashid & Hassan, 2020).
Age Range	36–40 years (31%) largest group	36–50 years (44%) largest group	Officers are largely mid-career professionals with administrative experience; applicants represent a mature entrepreneurial demographic balancing business and family responsibilities.
Ethnicity	94.7% Malay	79.7% Malay, others 20.3%	Reflects MBPJ's ethnic composition, showing that the licensing ecosystem primarily serves local Malay-majority communities, though with notable multicultural participation.
Years of Service / Licensing Experience	33.3% with >10 years	57.7% with <3 years	Officers' long tenure reflects institutional continuity; applicants' limited licensing experience indicates the emergence of first-time entrepreneurs navigating formal bureaucracy.
Sector / Department	Licensing, Health,	Food & Beverage (36%), Retail	Officer representation ensures administrative diversity; applicant

Conversely, the majority of applicants (57.7%) have fewer than three years of licensing experience, reflecting Malaysia's surge in new micro-entrepreneurship following post-growth (Hassan & Tambi, 2023). This influx of inexperienced applicants introduces an administrative burden on officers, who must now engage with a more diverse clientele requiring clearer communication and guidance. The intersection of these demographic realities creates a structural mismatch: institutional expertise on one side and user unfamiliarity on the other. As Rashid and Hassan (2020) note, such asymmetries between bureaucratic cultures and public expectations often produce communication breakdowns, procedural frustration, and perceived inefficiency.

Ethnicity and sectoral composition further reinforce the localized nature of MBPJ's administrative culture. The predominance of Malay officers (94.7%) and Malay-majority applicants (79.7%) mirrors the demographic profile of Petaling Jaya, yet the presence of non-Malay entrepreneurs (20.3%) signifies a multicultural governance environment. This diversity requires culturally sensitive communication and multilingual procedural guidance, yet current training programs do not address cross-cultural service competence—highlighting another gap that the proposed new Licensing Curriculum Model could fill. Sectoral representation among applicants (36% food and beverage, 29% retail, 23% services) corresponds with sectors that are highly regulated, inspection-intensive, and documentation-dependent. Such industries are particularly vulnerable to bureaucratic friction. Therefore, the data confirm that any reform in licensing education must be grounded in practical, sector-specific competency frameworks, equipping both officers and entrepreneurs to handle technical and compliance complexities efficiently.

In synthesizing these demographic findings, it becomes evident that the licensing ecosystem operates at the intersection of stability and transition. Officers bring continuity and procedural expertise, while applicants bring innovation and digital agility. However, the lack of structured communication channels and standardized training frameworks hinders these strengths from converging productively. The demographic patterns thus rationalize the need for a systematic licensing curriculum model—one that institutionalizes continuous learning for officers, enhances procedural literacy among applicants, and fosters shared understanding across age, gender, and experience divides.

In essence, the demographic data are not merely descriptive; they illuminate the structural preconditions for administrative reform. The coexistence of experienced but untrained officers with emerging yet inexperienced entrepreneurs exemplify what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe as a *knowledge imbalance*—where tacit expertise remains isolated within bureaucratic silos while new entrants lack the explicit procedural knowledge to engage effectively. Addressing this imbalance through structured curriculum-based learning would enable knowledge transfer, reduce communication gaps, and modernize the licensing process through education rather than enforcement.

Major Issues and Challenges in Licensing Administration

The data in Table 2 reveal that both officers and applicants perceive the licensing process as bureaucratically cumbersome and structurally fragmented, albeit from distinct vantage points. For officers, *inter-agency coordination* (Mean = 4.51) emerges as the dominant challenge, reflecting the operational complexity of managing multiple regulatory bodies—such as Bomba (fire), PDRM (police), and environmental or technical units—each operating under separate procedural jurisdictions. This aligns with Zou's (2024) argument that Malaysia's local governance remains trapped in "administrative parallelism", where overlapping mandates impede institutional coherence.

The second-highest concern among officers, *complexity of procedures* (Mean = 4.43), reinforces this structural inefficiency. Officers often engage in redundant verification processes, exacerbated by the lack of consistent SOPs (Mean = 4.32). This supports the contention of Rashid and Hassan (2020) that procedural overregulation in local councils not only delays service delivery but also weakens accountability due to dispersed responsibility. The high mean scores (>4.0) across multiple items point to systemic inefficiencies rather than isolated departmental issues—suggesting an institutional knowledge gap that cannot be resolved through policy reform alone, but through structured internal learning systems.

Table 2. Key Issues and Challenges in Licensing Administration

Issue	Officers (Mean)	Applicants (Mean)	Interpretation
Inter-agency coordination difficulties	4.51	3.72	Highlights bureaucratic fragmentation between departments such as PDRM, Bomba, and Health, causing duplication and delays.
Complexity of procedures and documentation	4.43	4.07	Confirms that both groups view licensing as overly complex and burdensome.
Lack of updated guidelines and consistent SOPs	4.32	4.10	Indicates absence of a unified procedural manual or standardized knowledge management system (Sokoh & Okolie, 2021).
Delay in approval and feedback mechanisms	4.20	4.11	Reflects inefficiency due to serial approvals and poor communication feedback loops.
Professionalism and courtesy of officers	3.80	3.93	Applicants perceive interpersonal interaction and service attitude as inconsistent, suggesting lack of service-oriented training.
Lack of digital integration across units	4.28	3.98	Points to data silos and fragmented use of digital systems among departments.

The strong endorsement of digital literacy by both groups reflects the broader policy direction of Malaysia's *MyDigital Blueprint (2021)* and *Smart Selangor Vision*, which call for integrating human capital development with digital governance. However, the slightly higher mean for communication and service training (Means = 4.32 and 4.36) reveals that stakeholders view human interaction as equally, if not more, vital than technological proficiency. This aligns with the theory of *communicative governance* (Habermas, 1984 as cited in Muttaqien, 2023), which holds that legitimacy in governance arises from dialogue and understanding rather than technical control alone.

These results substantiate the central hypothesis of this study: governance reform must be both cognitive and behavioural. The development of a curriculum model such as a systematic licensing curriculum model addresses these dual needs by embedding procedural knowledge (cognitive) and communication ethics (behavioural) within the same educational structure. The empirical evidence thus reinforces the theoretical integration of Knowledge Management Theory and Competency-Based Curriculum Development as mutually reinforcing frameworks for administrative transformation.

Thematic Interpretation

The results of the needs analysis coalesce into three overarching themes: procedural fragmentation, service orientation deficit, and educational imperative for structured learning. These themes, when synthesized, reveal the contours of an administrative ecosystem that is both fragmented and reform-ready.

1. **Procedural Fragmentation and Bureaucratic Redundancy**
The high mean scores for coordination and procedural complexity illustrate what Osborne (2010) terms "the institutional sclerosis of mature bureaucracies." Officers' recognition of inter-agency inefficiency (Mean = 4.51) indicates a willingness within the system to acknowledge its own constraints. This transparency presents a rare opportunity to implement reforms grounded in collective learning. Integrating Knowledge Management Theory into the curriculum design ensures that tacit procedural knowledge—currently isolated in departmental silos—can be codified into shared educational modules that promote consistency, reduce redundancy, and enable cross-agency collaboration.
2. **Service Orientation Deficit and Communication Gaps**
Applicants' perceptions of insufficient professionalism (Mean = 3.93) confirm that bureaucratic competence must extend beyond procedural accuracy to include interpersonal

and ethical dimensions. Bakar and Ayu (2023) describe such challenges as symptoms of *low emotional intelligence governance*, where administrative legitimacy erodes due to lack of empathy. Embedding communication and public engagement modules into the proposed curriculum would help officers develop empathy, active listening, and conflict management skills, rehumanizing public service delivery and restoring public trust.

3. Educational Imperative for Structured

Knowledge The strongest thematic consensus—high mean values (>4.20) across items related to training—demonstrates widespread recognition of learning as a governance function. Both officers and applicants acknowledge that procedural reform must be underpinned by institutional learning. As Seghroucheni O.Z. et al. (2025) argue, effective organizations convert tacit experience into explicit knowledge, creating continuous cycles of innovation. The proposed new systematic licensing curriculum model embodies this philosophy by transforming licensing procedures into *curricular content*, ensuring institutional memory, professional standardization, and continuous capacity building.

Synthesis

The integrated findings demonstrate that while Malaysia's licensing administration faces entrenched procedural and service challenges, it also possesses the cognitive readiness for transformation. The high degree of consensus between officers and applicants indicates a shared recognition that structured, curriculum-based learning can resolve inefficiencies more sustainably than piecemeal administrative reforms.

In sum, the data validate the study's conceptual foundation: inefficiencies in licensing are not merely technical or procedural but educational and epistemic. The convergence of empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning confirms that the next frontier of local governance reform must focus on *learning architectures*—systems that institutionalize knowledge, embed competency development, and professionalize service delivery. These insights form the empirical foundation for the new Licensing Curriculum Model, discussed in the next section.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the needs analysis underscore the persistent challenges within Malaysia's local licensing administration system, particularly the interplay between procedural inefficiency, fragmented inter-agency coordination, and deficits in service-oriented communication. While these issues are often attributed to outdated bureaucratic structures, this study contends that their root cause lies deeper—in the absence of systematic, education-based frameworks that govern how knowledge is created, transmitted, and operationalized within local authorities. The data, therefore, not only reveal what is dysfunctional within the system but also expose the epistemological limitations of governance practices that treat licensing as a technical activity rather than as a learning process.

Knowledge Fragmentation and Institutional Learning Deficits

The most significant finding from the officer responses (Mean = 4.51) was the difficulty in inter-agency coordination. This issue represents a classical manifestation of *knowledge fragmentation*—a condition in which procedural information and regulatory mandates are dispersed across institutions without a central mechanism for synthesis (Kalmenovitz et al., 2022). In the Malaysian context, departments such as PDRM, Bomba, Health, and Environmental units each maintain distinct approval protocols, resulting in serial dependencies that delay the entire licensing process. While digitalization initiatives like *MyLesen Online* and *Smart Selangor e-Services* have attempted to streamline workflows, their impact remains limited because technological systems have not been complemented by cognitive systems—that is, by structured processes for knowledge sharing and mutual understanding among agencies.

From a Knowledge Management (KM) perspective, this fragmentation illustrates the failure of the *externalization* and *combination* stages in Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model, where tacit institutional knowledge must be formalized and integrated to enable organizational learning. Officers often rely on implicit experiential knowledge—acquired through years of service—but this knowledge

remains undocumented and inaccessible to newcomers or other departments. Consequently, each unit operates in epistemic isolation, perpetuating inefficiency even when technological infrastructure exists. As Sokoh and Okolie (2021) assert, bureaucratic modernization fails when it digitizes processes without digitizing cognition—that is, when systems are upgraded without equivalent investment in learning mechanisms.

In this regard, the study's proposal for a systematic licensing curriculum model directly addresses the cognitive dimension of reform. By converting procedural experience into formalized training modules, the model aligns with Nonaka's principle of knowledge institutionalization, transforming tacit expertise into explicit, transferable learning content. This approach ensures that inter-agency collaboration is not merely a policy directive, but a learned competence embedded within officers' daily routines.

The Human Dimension: Communication and Service Orientation

While officers emphasize coordination and procedural challenges, applicants foreground interpersonal issues such as professionalism and courtesy (Mean = 3.93). This divergence reflects what Habermas (1984) describes as a crisis of communicative rationality—where bureaucratic logic prioritizes procedural correctness over understanding, empathy, and dialogue. For many applicants, particularly new micro-entrepreneurs, engagement with the licensing system is their first sustained interaction with formal governance. Their perception of unfriendliness or lack of support among officers therefore symbolizes a deeper alienation from institutional structures that are meant to serve them.

In governance studies, service orientation is increasingly recognized as a determinant of legitimacy and trust (Berg & Johansson, 2020). The Malaysian Public Sector Transformation Framework 2.0 explicitly identifies citizen-centric service delivery as a national reform priority. Yet the empirical evidence here suggests that while technological advancements have improved access, the human interface of service remains underdeveloped. Applicants' dissatisfaction reveals not merely a gap in manners but a pedagogical gap in public administration—the absence of structured training in communication, empathy, and citizen engagement.

From the standpoint of Competency-Based Curriculum Development (CBCD), these findings indicate that the current training of licensing officers is content-oriented rather than competency-oriented. Officers may understand the legal and procedural aspects of their roles but lack the interpersonal and ethical competencies that underpin effective governance.

Embedding service communication, digital etiquette, and conflict management modules into a competency-based licensing curriculum would therefore reframe professionalism not as compliance but as communicative competence. This would align with modern governance paradigms that define efficiency not solely by speed or accuracy but also by the quality of human interaction (Aburayya et al., 2020).

Moreover, the data demonstrate that both officers and applicants assign equally high importance to communication training (Means = 4.32 and 4.36, respectively). This mutual recognition reveals an emergent *co-learning opportunity*—where both groups can benefit from shared educational interventions. Incorporating joint workshops or simulation-based learning within the proposed new systematic licensing curriculum model could foster empathy, reduce institutional distance, and create a more dialogic relationship between regulators and the regulated.

Digital Transformation and the Competency Paradox

Although Malaysia's MyDigital Blueprint (2021) promotes rapid digitalization across public services, the findings indicate that digital readiness remains uneven among both officers and applicants. Officers report challenges integrating digital systems across departments (Mean = 4.28), while applicants express difficulty navigating online licensing platforms (Mean = 3.98). This paradox—high investment in digital infrastructure yet low efficiency—mirrors what Bakar and Ayu (2023) term the "competency paradox of e-governance": the assumption that digitization alone guarantees modernization, even when human competencies lag behind.

Within the Knowledge Management framework, technology serves merely as an *enabler* of knowledge flow, not as its substitute (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Without sufficient training in digital literacy, data management, and cyber ethics, officers may use technological systems mechanistically rather than strategically, undermining the transformative potential of e-governance. This reinforces the argument for embedding digital competency modules into the proposed licensing curriculum—covering system integration, data visualization, and analytics-driven decision-making.

Furthermore, applicants' struggles with online applications reflect broader issues of *digital inclusion*. Many small entrepreneurs, especially from lower-income or older age groups, experience limited digital access and literacy. The data thus point to the necessity of a dual-track training model within the new systematic licensing curriculum model framework: one stream focusing on officer upskilling for system optimization, and another targeting applicants' empowerment through digital onboarding workshops. Such differentiation ensures that digital transformation is equitable and sustainable rather than exclusionary.

Convergence of Stakeholder Perspectives

A notable pattern in the data is the convergence of perceptions between officers and applicants regarding the need for structured knowledge and training. Both groups record mean scores above 4.20 across all items relating to procedural understanding, efficiency, and service improvement. This consensus is significant because it signals readiness for reform from both supply (administrative) and demand (public) sides of the governance equation. In policy implementation literature, the achievement of effective coordination, collaboration, and interaction between stakeholders is recognized as a critical precondition for successful innovation (Petersen and Kruss, 2020).

The mutual recognition that “structured training can improve management efficiency” (Mean = 4.29 officers; 4.26 applicants) demonstrates that the problem is not resistance to change but the absence of an effective educational infrastructure to support it. This insight reinforces the theoretical argument that learning, not legislation, is the most sustainable mechanism for governance reform. Whereas traditional administrative reforms rely on regulatory enforcement or structural reorganization, an educational approach builds adaptive capacity, fosters critical thinking, and institutionalizes improvement as a cultural norm.

The integration of Knowledge Management Theory and Competency-Based Curriculum Development within the new systematic licensing curriculum model thus offers an innovative response to Malaysia's broader public sector modernization agenda. It situates governance reform within a *learning ecosystem*—one where officers are not merely administrators but reflective practitioners, and citizens are not passive recipients but informed collaborators. As Argyris and Schön (1978 as cited in Blaak, 2023) theorized, such double-loop learning enables organizations to question and modify their underlying norms and assumptions rather than merely their behaviours.

Hence, the licensing process becomes an ongoing pedagogical dialogue between state and society—a space where knowledge is negotiated, competencies are developed, and governance is continuously improved.

From Bureaucratic Reform to Pedagogical Reform

The overarching implication of this study is that the crisis of local licensing in Malaysia is not purely administrative but epistemic. It is a crisis rooted in the failure to treat governance as a learning process. While procedural reforms—such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), digital portals, and policy integration—address surface-level inefficiencies, they do not tackle the underlying issue of *how officers learn, unlearn, and relearn*.

This study therefore advances the argument for a pedagogical turn in public administration: shifting from rule-based bureaucracies toward knowledge-based learning organizations. The new Licensing Curriculum Model exemplifies this shift by translating administrative functions into structured educational outcomes—where each procedural step becomes a learning unit and each service encounter becomes a pedagogical interaction. The model institutionalizes what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe as *ba*, or the shared context for knowledge creation—a dynamic environment where officers and applicants co-create meaning through communication, reflection, and collaboration.

Critically, this pedagogical framing also resolves the recurring tension between efficiency and empathy. Traditional bureaucratic reforms often trade one for the other—streamlining processes at the expense of human engagement. However, by embedding both technical and communicative competencies within a curriculum structure, the proposed model ensures that efficiency is *humanized* and empathy is *systematized*. This dual emphasis not only modernizes public service but also aligns with the national vision of *Malaysia Madani*, which prioritizes ethical governance, inclusivity, and human dignity as pillars of development (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the systemic challenges within Malaysia's local licensing ecosystem and to explore the necessity of developing a structured, competency-based curriculum framework—termed the new Licensing Curriculum Model—for local authorities. The findings from the needs analysis involving 303 respondents (76 officers and 227 license holders) provide strong empirical justification for the transformation of licensing administration from a procedural bureaucracy into a knowledge-driven learning ecosystem.

The study's results reveal that licensing inefficiencies are not merely technical but epistemic, emerging from knowledge fragmentation, inconsistent communication, and the absence of structured training mechanisms for both officers and entrepreneurs. Officers identified inter-agency coordination (Mean = 4.51) and procedural complexity (Mean = 4.43) as their foremost challenges, while applicants highlighted the lack of professionalism and service orientation (Mean = 3.93) among officers. Both groups strongly endorsed the need for structured training, knowledge standardization, and digital literacy development (Mean > 4.20), reflecting a shared recognition of learning as the key driver of reform.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research extends Knowledge Management Theory (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and Competency-Based Curriculum Development (CBCD) (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) into the realm of public administration. The integration of these frameworks allows for a reimagining of local governance as an educational process—where procedural knowledge is continuously codified, shared, and internalized through curriculum-based learning. The new systematic licensing curriculum model operationalizes this theory by institutionalizing structured learning within the licensing workflow, ensuring that knowledge creation, digital competency, and service ethics become routine organizational practices rather than sporadic initiatives.

The implications of this study are threefold. Theoretically, it advances an interdisciplinary paradigm that bridges pedagogy and governance, demonstrating how curriculum theory can inform administrative design. Practically, it proposes a scalable model that can be adopted by local councils nationwide to enhance service delivery and public trust. Policy-wise, it aligns directly with Malaysia's *Public Sector Transformation Framework 2.0*, *Smart Selangor Blueprint*, and *MyDigital* agenda by embedding knowledge-driven innovation and human capital development at the core of local government service.

Ultimately, the research underscores a critical paradigm shift: from governing through regulation to governing through education. By embedding continuous learning into the fabric of local governance, the new Licensing Curriculum Model represents a transformative pathway toward more transparent, efficient, and citizen-centric public service delivery.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although the study provides a robust foundation for developing a systematic licensing curriculum model, several limitations warrant consideration.

First, the data were collected from a single local authority—Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ)—which, while representative of Malaysia's urban governance environment, may not capture the full diversity of challenges faced by smaller or rural councils. Future studies should extend the sampling framework to include multiple local governments across states to enable comparative analysis and enhance generalizability.

Second, while this study integrates officers' and applicants' perspectives, it does not include policy-makers or inter-agency stakeholders (e.g., PDRM, Bomba, or Health Department officers) whose inputs could further refine interdepartmental coordination frameworks. Including these actors in subsequent research would enrich the curriculum design process and ensure system-wide alignment.

Third, the study primarily employed quantitative data through descriptive and mean analysis, which, while effective for identifying trends, lacks the narrative depth of qualitative inquiry. Future research could adopt mixed-method or ethnographic approaches to capture the lived experiences of officers and entrepreneurs engaging with the licensing system. Such approaches would provide deeper insight into behavioural, emotional, and cultural dimensions of bureaucratic learning.

Finally, this study's proposed new systematic licensing curriculum model remains conceptual; implementation and evaluation are necessary to test its efficacy. Future action research could pilot the model in selected municipalities, using longitudinal assessment to measure impacts on efficiency, knowledge transfer, and citizen satisfaction.

Despite these limitations, the findings contribute meaningfully to the emerging discourse on educational governance, offering a replicable framework for integrating knowledge management, competency-based training, and service ethics into public administration. This reorientation towards curriculum-based reform holds promise not only for licensing administration but for the broader transformation of Malaysia's public sector into a learning-oriented governance ecosystem.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. This includes financial, political, personal, or professional relationships that could be perceived as influencing the content or conclusions of this manuscript.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All listed authors have made a significant scientific contribution to the research in the manuscript, approved its claims, and agreed to be an author.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to enhance the clarity and readability of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ETHIC STATEMENTS

Not applicable.

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