

A QUALITATIVE ENQUIRY OF OBSTACLES TO ADEQUATE PERFORMANCE AMONG MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

A qualitative enquiry was carried out by administering 5 interview questions to residents of Tembisa in Gauteng Province, South Africa to determine factors that are responsible for the non-payment of municipal service fees. The enquiry was part of a survey in which information was gathered from 544 residents of various townships in Gauteng Province. Saturation was attained after conducting individual in-depth interviews with 12 participants. The enquiry found that the underlying causes of nonpayment were poor motivation, a lengthy time taken for resolving account-related enquiries (longer than 5 working days), and a short duration of residence in Ekurhuleni (10 years or less).

Key words: Tembisa, Qualitative enquiry, Service delivery, Thematic analysis

Introduction and background to study

Qualitative research (Beh and Lombardo, 2021) is ideal for exploring subjective or qualitative phenomena. An example of a commonly used subjective phenomena is the level of satisfaction with the quality and affordability of municipal service delivery (Bell, 2022). The survey by Benit-Gbaffou (2018) has shown the need for upgrading municipal infrastructure and capacity for providing satisfactory services to clients. Gauteng Province has to cope with the difficult task of rendering satisfactory municipal services to a population of 16.1 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2021) who travel to the province in search of livelihoods, jobs, educational, water, electricity and health related services.

A qualitative enquiry was carried out in the township of Tembisa in Gauteng Province, South Africa to determine reasons for late payment and non-payment of fees owed to municipalities for rendering water, electricity, sanitation, waste management and property rates and tax related services to people who live and work in various townships in Gauteng Province. Tembisa has a population of 463,109 along with an unemployment rate of 34.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Tembisa is populated mostly by black South Africans (98.9%). Tembisa has a total area of 42.8 square kilometers. The township was established in 1957, and has a population density of 11,000 people per square kilometer. The main languages spoken at Tembisa are Northern Sotho (33.1%), Zulu (21.7%), Tsonga (13.3%) and Xhosa (7%). Tembisa is well known for protests over poor municipal service delivery, a high level of unemployment (34.5%), a high level of poverty (31% of the population earns a monthly median income of R620 or less), and the non-payment of municipal services (Tshuma, 2022). On 01 August 2022, it was reported that there were 4 deaths and a violent protest at Tembisa over poor municipal service delivery (News 24, 2022). The paper aims to shed light on the reasons for non-payment of municipal services at Tembisa township.

The enquiry was part of a survey in which information was gathered from 544 residents of various townships in Gauteng Province. In this particular survey, 14 eligible participants were chosen for the enquiry on purpose. The criteria for inclusion into the enquiry was being a formal resident actively living and working at Tembisa at the time of the survey and utilising 5 types of municipal services (water, electricity, sanitation services, waste management services, and municipal rates and taxes) on a regular basis. A purposive sample of 14 participants was selected to conduct the enquiry. The qualitative enquiry entailed the assessment of the level to which residents and ratepayers were satisfied with 5 categories of essential municipal services (water, electricity, sanitation services, waste management services, and municipal rates and taxes).

The qualitative enquiry entailed administering 5 interview questions (one question for 5 types of routine municipal services) to each eligible participant in a form of a 1-hour-long personal in-depth interview. These services were waste collection, sanitation services, payment of property rates and taxes, water services, and electricity services.

Saturation was attained after conducting individual in-depth interviews with 12 participants. As such, the last 2 of 14 interviews were a repeat of the first 12 interviews. Each interview was 1-hour long and was tape-recorded. Each one of the 14 participants of the qualitative enquiry was willing to participate in the survey. Thus, participation in the survey was voluntary. Anonymity was ensured for each participant. Records obtained from the qualitative enquiry were kept in confidence. The qualitative enquiry entailed the following 5 types of assessments:

1. Assessment of satisfaction of participants with the quality of municipal solid waste collection
2. Assessment of satisfaction of participants with the quality of sanitation services
3. Assessment of satisfaction of participants with property rates and taxes
4. Assessment of satisfaction of participants with the quality of water services
5. Assessment of satisfaction of participants with the quality of electricity services

Methods and materials of study

Thematic and document analysis

A qualitative enquiry (Braun and Clarke, 2020: 1-25) was conducted by conducting individual 1-hour-long in-depth interviews with 14 eligible residents of Tembisa Township. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. Tallies, codes and categories were used for creating 2 themes for a qualitative enquiry into the underlying causes of inadequate service delivery. Thematic and text analysis were used for performing qualitative data analysis. Trustworthiness was ascertained by comparing findings obtained from interviews with multiple sources of credible facts such as a review of the literature, data collected from the enquiry and expert opinion. This process is commonly referred to as triangulation (Aljerf, 2018).

The creation of 2 themes of qualitative analysis

Each interview lasted an hour. All in all, 14 such interviews were conducted. A state of saturation was reached after interviewing 12 of the 14 participants of study. When saturation is reached, there will be no more original information coming out of the respondents. When saturation is reached, opinions expressed by respondents become repeated all the time (Hennink, Kaiser &

Weber, 2019: 1483-1496). Each interview was transcribed. Tallies, codes and categories were created. Codes were used for creating 2 themes of study.

Themes were created manually. The creation of themes was based on tallies, codes and categories. Similar ideas, arguments and opinion were placed under the same category in order to ensure homogeneity. The process of creating themes was moderated by 4 suitably trained and qualified experts.

Tembisa Township falls under the City of Ekurhuleni. Theme 1 assesses the capacity and commitment for rendering satisfactory municipal services to people who live and work at Tembisa Township. Theme 2 assesses the suitability and feasibility of ways and means of alleviating obstacles to satisfactory municipal services from the point of view of people who live and work at Tembisa Township. According to Braun and Clarke (2020: 1-25), thematic analysis is suitable for data analysis in cases where there are clearly identified or distinct themes. In this study, 2 themes will be used by conducting a critical review of the literature on determinants of satisfactory municipal services in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Theme number 1 (The identification of factors that undermine satisfaction with the quality of municipal services)

Theme number 2 (Feasible remedial actions for alleviating dissatisfaction with the quality of municipal services)

Assessment of the level of trustworthiness in responses obtained from participants

In qualitative enquiries, triangulation (Aljerf, 2018:240-250) is used to confirm that responses given by participants are credible or trustworthy. Leckner and Severson (2019: 79-94) state that multiple sources of facts should be used for achieving this task. To this end, three commonly used sources of facts are a critical review of the relevant literature, facts established out of views and opinions expressed by interviewees, and opinion expressed by experts (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson & Palmer, 2019: 733-739). In cases where views expressed by interviewees are corroborated by multiple sources of facts, it is generally accepted that information provided by interviewees is trustworthy or credible enough (Braun & Clarke, 2020: 1-25). The trustworthiness of information obtained from interviewees is considered accurate enough or trustworthy in cases where views that are expressed by interviewees are independently corroborated by multiple, independent and authentic sources of facts. This is how trustworthiness was ascertained in this particular qualitative enquiry.

Summary of results obtained from individual in-depth interviews

Eligible participants of the qualitative enquiry provided answers to 5 interview questions in respect of the quality of municipal services rendered by municipal employees. In what follows next, the 5 interview questions are presented along with a succinct summary of responses provided by the 12 participants of the qualitative enquiry.

Interview question 1: How satisfied are you with the quality of municipal solid waste collection services that are rendered to households in the City of Ekurhuleni?

Nine of the 12 participants indicated that they were generally happy with the schedules used for picking up municipal solid waste from households. These participants indicated that it was quite normal for municipal employees to be late or early by about 30 minutes from scheduled pick-up times. They were prepared to allow such deviations as pick-up times were subject to factors such as traffic delays, road or lane closures, accidents and unexpected administrative difficulties such as the breakdown or non-availability of trucks and employees as well as wage-related strike actions.

Six of the 12 participants indicated that dustbins were vandalised by scavengers due to late collection by municipal employees, and that this problem was exacerbated at times of wage negotiations and strike action. They indicated that private waste collectors must be kept on stand-by to carry out waste collection at scheduled times from households during times of service interruption.

Three of the 12 participants stated that schedules for waste collection must be made precise by using proper planning and adequate preparation. Waste must be picked up from each household precisely at the time announced to residents. There must be no deviation from scheduled pick-up times by more than 15 minutes.

One of the 12 participants stated that no deviation must be allowed in respect of waste collection times announced to households. The participant stated that any such delays were a result of poor planning, inadequate logistical coordination, poor commitment to service quality and disrespect to account holders.

Two of the 12 participants repeated views expressed by the first 12 participants of the survey. As such, their responses were discarded from data analysis.

Interview question 2: How satisfied are you with the quality of sanitation services that are rendered to households in the City of Ekurhuleni?

Eleven of the 12 participants indicated that they were generally happy with the quality of sanitation services rendered to households. These participants indicated that there was a need to upgrade sewerage systems and old pipes that are used for sanitation services. They emphasised the need for managing human waste efficiently and properly at all times. The main items were the proper functioning of sewerage pipes, the smooth transfer of waste from flush toilets to piped sewer systems, the efficient removal of waste from septic tank pit latrines, the management of ventilated improved pit latrines, and the management of pit latrines with slab or composting toilets.

Five of the 12 participants highlighted the need for spending enough resources on the upgrading of sanitation infrastructure. Two of the 14 participants indicated that the demand for sanitation services had grown due to new arrivals in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Two of the 12 participants indicated the benefits of allowing private companies to alleviate the need for sanitation infrastructure in townships.

One of the 12 participants indicated that standards from the World Health Organisation (WHO) should be followed for upgrading sanitation infrastructure. The participant pointed out that inadequate sanitation infrastructure allows the contamination of drinking water with human

waste, and that it was essential to inspect, upgrade, maintain and expand municipal sanitation infrastructure on a regular basis.

Interview question 3: How satisfied are you with the quality of property rates and taxes services that are rendered to households in the City of Ekurhuleni?

Nine of 12 participants indicated that their monthly property rates and taxes were over-priced in comparison with the level of services rendered to them by the municipality. They indicated that their property rates and taxes were not commensurate with the quality of municipal services rendered to property owners. The main issues highlighted by these participants were difficulty and lack of resources for upgrading and expanding municipal infrastructure and inability to cope with new communities in the City of Ekurhuleni, inability to collect service fees from people who consume municipal services, and a growing number of illegal electricity and water connections by migrant communities.

Four of the 12 participants pointed out inadequate, failing and crumbling infrastructure such as rotten water and sewerage pipe lines, damaged municipal roads, interruptions with electricity power supply, frequent municipal strike actions, failure to collect waste on scheduled time, and an escalation of criminal activities.

Two of the 12 participants indicated that the City of Ekurhuleni was under pressure due to failure to construct homes to all people who are entitled to homes, and inability to cope with a large number of new arrivals into the City of Ekurhuleni from other parts of Gauteng and other provinces.

One participant indicated that service fees must be collected from all people who use municipal services by using appropriate legal means.

Interview question 4: How satisfied are you with the quality of water services that are rendered to households in the City of Ekurhuleni?

Ten of the 12 participants indicated that water service fees must be collected from all people who use municipal water by using appropriate administrative and legal means.

Seven of the 12 participants pointed out inadequate, failing and crumbling infrastructure such as rotten water and sewerage pipe lines, damaged municipal roads, interruptions with electricity power supply, frequent municipal strike actions, failure to collect waste on scheduled time, and an escalation of criminal activities.

Four of the 12 participants indicated that the City of Ekurhuleni was under pressure due to failure to construct homes to all people who are entitled to homes, and inability to cope with a large number of new arrivals in the City of Ekurhuleni from other parts of Gauteng and other provinces.

Interview question 5: How satisfied are you with the quality of electricity services that are rendered to households in the City of Ekurhuleni?

Ten of the 12 participants indicated that electricity service fees must be collected from all people who use municipal electricity services by using appropriate administrative and legal means.

Eight of the 12 participants pointed out the need for accurate and current electricity bills.

Seven of the 12 participants indicated that the City of Ekurhuleni was under pressure due to illegal electricity connections by people who do not wish to pay for electricity services.

Four of the 12 participants indicated that the City of Ekurhuleni was under pressure due to a large number of new arrivals in the City of Ekurhuleni from other parts of Gauteng and other provinces.

Assessment of trustworthiness based on multiple sources of credible facts

Surveys were conducted in various local municipalities in Gauteng Province by Worku (2017, 2018, 2020) and have identified root causes of non-payment of municipal services as well as influential determinants of satisfaction with municipal service delivery in the City of Tshwane. Results obtained from data analyses are similar to results obtained from the current qualitative enquiry. A critical review of the literature confirms that views expressed by interviewees who participated in this particular survey have been reported repeatedly in the past as such. Views sought from experts on municipal service delivery in Gauteng-based local municipalities were in agreement with substantive views expressed by interviewees who participated in the current qualitative enquiry. In such cases, Aljerf (2018), Leckner and Severson (2019), Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson and Palmer (2019) and Braun and Clarke (2020) state that findings obtained from qualitative enquiries are trustworthy and transferrable. The level of trustworthiness of information obtained from interviewees is considered accurate enough or trustworthy in cases where views that are expressed by interviewees are independently corroborated by multiple, independent and authentic sources of facts. This is how trustworthiness was ascertained in this particular qualitative enquiry. These multiple sources are adequate to establish trustworthiness in the qualitative enquiry carried out in the survey. According to the authors, findings of the study are transferrable enough. As such, inferences and generalisations can be made about the population living in all parts of the City of Ekurhuleni. Results obtained from this qualitative enquiry are consistent with measurements taken by Das, Das and Barman (2021) and D'Inverno and De Witte (2020). These authors have quantified and identified determinants of satisfactory service delivery in service delivery institutions.

Main findings of qualitative enquiry

- Municipal employees and officials at Tembisa must be able to collect municipal service fees from all people who use the services by using all possible administrative legal means. Doing so enables the local municipality at Tembisa to meet service level agreements and expectations successfully. By so doing, municipal employees at Tembisa will be able to avoid the likelihood of protests over poor municipal service delivery.
- Municipal employees and officials at Tembisa need to maintain, upgrade and expand the current municipal infrastructure and capacity in order to cope adequately with an increased demand for municipal services by a growing and highly sophisticated clientele.
- The private sector should be provided with an incentive to take part in upgrading and expanding decaying municipal infrastructure.
- All municipal employees should be subjected to performance appraisal in order to ensure value for money.

- Municipal employees must be recruited based on merits that are directly related to key performance indicators and key performance areas. Political interference must be discouraged.

There is significant concurrence between findings obtained from the current qualitative enquiry and those findings published in the past several years by Marivate (2014), Khale (2015), Worku (2017, 2018, 2020), Nhamo, Rwizi, Mpandeli, Botai, Magidi, Tazvinga and Mabhaudhi (2021), Pieterse (2021), Pietersen (2021), Rogerson (2018), Van Schalkwyk, Dorrington, Seatlhodi, Velasquez, Feizzadeh and Johnson (2021). The authors have identified key determinants of satisfactory municipal service delivery in various economic sectors.

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