# Public Sector Governance: An Assessment of the Level of Understanding among Public Servants of Community Colleges in Pahang

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## ABSTRACT

Public sector governance is a fundamental pillar for strengthening integrity, transparency, and accountability in organisational administration. Within the context of Community Colleges in Pahang, a sound understanding of effective governance principles is critical to ensuring the continuity of quality educational service delivery. This study aims to assess public servants' level of governance understanding, examine the demographic factors influencing this understanding, and identify the main challenges in its practice. A quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected through a validated structured questionnaire involving 230 respondents from a population of 422 public servants across ten Community Colleges in Pahang, representing a 54.5% response rate. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics as well as one-way ANOVA and independent samples t-test. The findings reveal that the level of governance understanding is high (mean=4.54, SD=0.44), while practice challenges are moderate (mean=2.64, SD=0.94), reflecting an aggregate knowing-doing gap of 1.895 points on a five-point scale, with 48.3% of respondents experiencing a high gap. Inferential analysis found that differences in the gap across position group, length of service, education level, and gender were not statistically significant ($p>0.05$), indicating that the gap is pervasive and systemic. However, exposure to integrity training showed a significant effect ($t(226)=4.55$, $p<0.001$), with the trained group displaying higher gap awareness. These findings underscore the need for continuous and structured governance training programmes, accompanied by genuine structural reforms in the workplace. This study contributes foundational empirical data towards strengthening a culture of integrity-based governance in the nation's TVET education sector.

**Keywords:** public sector governance; integrity; knowing-doing gap; Community College; TVET

## INTRODUCTION

Public sector governance refers to the systems, structures, and processes used to direct, manage, and oversee public sector activities in pursuit of national policy objectives (World Bank, 1992). In the context of educational organisations such as Community Colleges, effective governance forms the foundation for service delivery that is efficient, conducted with integrity, and responsive to the needs of the local community. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015), public sector institutions must uphold the principles of transparency, accountability, and openness to ensure that public trust is continuously preserved.

In current practice, governance failures continue to be reported, including weaknesses in internal controls, conflicts of interest, and non-compliance with management procedures. Such situations reduce the efficiency of public service delivery and erode public trust in government institutions (Transparency International, 2024). Within technical and vocational education and training (TVET), strong governance practices become increasingly critical to ensuring the continuity of training programmes oriented towards industry needs and national development aspirations. Malaysia is currently implementing the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024–2028 as a continuation of the National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) 2019–2023, reflecting the government's sustained commitment to combating corruption and strengthening public governance (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024).

As providers of TVET education in Malaysia, Community Colleges play a major role in developing skilled human capital. Therefore, a deep understanding of governance principles among Community College public servants is essential to ensuring that institutional management is conducted transparently, responsibly, and with integrity. Accordingly, this study was conducted to assess the level of governance understanding among public servants in Pahang Community Colleges, identify the factors influencing it, and propose improvement strategies based on the study's findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses in depth the concept of public sector governance based on selected academic works and reports of international bodies. The discussion focuses on the core principles of governance, its importance in the context of TVET education, the factors influencing public servants' level of understanding, and the challenges in its implementation. The section concludes by formulating the research gap that justifies this study.

### Concepts and Basic Principles of Public Sector Governance

Public sector governance has been a key topic in organisational management discourse since the 1990s. It refers to the systems, structures, and processes used to direct and oversee public sector activities in pursuit of national policy objectives (World Bank, 1992). According to OECD (2015), good governance encompasses the principles of integrity, accountability, transparency, and openness in every aspect of administration. These principles form the basis of public trust in government institutions and ensure that public resources are managed optimally.

Transparency International (2024) elaborates on these principles in greater detail, where integrity denotes honesty and ethics in carrying out duties; accountability refers to responsibility for actions and decisions; while transparency involves the openness of information to stakeholders. Wook et al. (2022), in their empirical study of a public sector organisation in Malaysia, confirmed that ethics and integrity are two inseparable components of governance, and that employees' level of understanding and perception of both elements directly influences the quality of service delivery. In addition, Wook et al. (2022) in their empirical study further confirmed that the consistent internalisation of governance principles can significantly enhance stakeholder trust and the effectiveness of service delivery.

### The Importance of Governance in the Context of TVET Education

In the technical and vocational education sector, strong governance practices have become increasingly critical. Institutions such as Community Colleges play a major role in developing skilled human capital imbued with integrity. Therefore, robust governance is essential to ensuring that the training programmes offered are relevant to industry needs and of high quality. According to the 2023 MEB Annual Report, enrolment in the TVET stream at secondary level increased from 4.60% in 2019 to 10.51% in 2023, reflecting growing public confidence in this educational pathway (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). Nevertheless, this achievement remains far from the 70% target set by the government towards the end of the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (13MP), indicating a continuing need to strengthen the governance and image of TVET institutions.

Amin, Ahmad Suhaimi, and Nazuri (2023), in their comprehensive conceptual study of the direction of Malaysian TVET, identified governance weaknesses as among the main challenges hindering the transformation of TVET into an effective and competitive system. They emphasised that governance fragmentation involving multiple ministries and accreditation bodies causes overlapping responsibilities and misalignment in policy implementation, which directly affects the quality of technical education delivery. Subramaniam and Abdul Aziz (2023), in a systematic review of the literature on Malaysian TVET governance covering the period 2010 to 2022, identified studies on governance understanding among TVET institution staff as one of the most critical and pressing research gaps to be filled.

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### Factors Influencing the Level of Governance Understanding

Previous studies indicate that the level of governance understanding among public servants is influenced by several significant demographic factors. In their study of public organisations in Malaysia, Nor Aziah Alias and Arumugam Raman (2016) found that work experience, educational background, and exposure to integrity training programmes have a positive and significant relationship with the level of governance understanding. More experienced and highly educated public servants tend to have a deeper understanding of governance principles.

A study by Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi (2008) on public organisations in Malaysia found that continuous and systematic training is a key determinant in shaping competence and integrity awareness among public servants. This finding is supported by Wook et al. (2022), who confirmed through an empirical study of 850 employees of a public agency that the level of ethics and integrity in the public sector is generally better than in the private sector, partly due to the early establishment of an integrity culture through structured training programmes. The Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (EAIC, 2020) likewise emphasised that integrity training programmes designed contextually and relevant to daily tasks are more effective in enhancing the internalisation of governance practices.

### Challenges in Internalising Governance Practices

Although governance policies have been clearly outlined, their implementation at the organisational level often faces various complex challenges. The study by Nor Aziah Alias and Arumugam Raman (2016) in the context of Malaysian public organisations reported that the main challenges include organisational cultural constraints, a lack of leadership support, and unclear management procedures that hinder the consistent internalisation of governance. In addition, fear of negative repercussions also prevents public servants from carrying out whistleblowing, which directly undermines the principles of transparency and accountability within organisations.

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), in their seminal work, identified the 'knowing-doing gap' phenomenon as a major obstacle in translating knowledge and training into actual behavioural change within organisations. This phenomenon occurs when a gap exists between what individuals know and what they do in daily practice, stemming from environmental factors, organisational culture, and a lack of incentives to act in accordance with the knowledge held. In the Malaysian context, Wook et al. (2022) similarly found that although understanding of integrity is high among public sector employees, the implementation of actual practices still requires improvement in several critical dimensions, particularly relating to integrity infrastructure and performance measurement.

### Summary and Research Gap

Overall, the literature review confirms that governance is an important element in the public sector, particularly in TVET educational institutions. Although there are various studies on public sector governance in Malaysia, studies focusing specifically on the level of governance understanding among Community College public servants, particularly in Pahang, remain limited. Subramaniam and Abdul Aziz (2023), in their systematic review, explicitly identified community-based TVET institution-level studies as one of the most notable research gaps in the Malaysian TVET governance literature. It is this knowledge gap that this study seeks to fill. Therefore, this study is important in providing useful empirical data for formulating governance improvement strategies in TVET educational institutions, with a specific focus on the context of Pahang Community Colleges.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF STUDY

### Integrity and Governance Issues at the National Level

Although the principles of public sector governance have been clearly outlined in government policies, the level of their internalisation and implementation among public servants remains a critical issue. A failure to deeply understand the concept of governance can lead to administrative inefficiency, the waste of public resources, and a loss of public trust in government institutions.

This concern is supported by current statistical data. According to the Transparency International (2024) report, Malaysia's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score in 2023 was 50 out of 100, placing the country 57th out of 180 countries assessed. Although this represents a three-point improvement over the score of 47 in 2022, Malaysia remains at the minimum 'passing' level of 50 points and is still far from the government's target of ranking 25th in the world by 2033. This indicates that a significant gap between governance policy and actual practice still exists and requires serious and continuous attention. In response to this challenge, the Malaysian government launched the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024–2028 on 7 May 2024 as a continuation of the NACP 2019–2023, with five main strategies focusing on strengthening governance, public accountability, and more systematic corruption prevention (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024).

Furthermore, although statistics on corruption convictions among public servants show a decline from 74 cases (2020) to 70 cases (2021) and 21 cases (2022), this phenomenon does not necessarily reflect a reduction in actual corruption cases (MACC, 2022). More importantly, the existence of corruption cases among Malaysia's more than 1.48 million public servants indicates that strengthening the culture of integrity in the public service still requires continuous effort.

### The Problem Context in the TVET Education Sector

This governance challenge becomes more significant in the context of educational institutions such as Community Colleges, which are entrusted with developing skilled and highly ethical human capital. Weak integrity and governance at the institutional level not only tarnish the image of the education sector but can also directly impact industry and public confidence in TVET programmes. Although TVET enrolment shows an encouraging increase to 10.51% in 2023 from only 4.60% in 2019 (MOE, 2023), this figure remains far from the 70% target by the end of the 13MP, indicating an urgent need to strengthen the governance and image of TVET institutions (Amin et al., 2023).

Previous studies also confirm that a lack of deep understanding of the concept of governance among public servants contributes directly to weaknesses in procedural compliance, a lack of transparency in decision-making, and inefficiency in service delivery (Nor Aziah Alias & Arumugam Raman, 2016). When staff do not understand 'why' a procedure is important, they may view it as bureaucratic red tape, thereby opening the door to complacency or abuse of power.

### Research Gap and the Need to Conduct the Study

Although the issue of public sector governance has been widely studied at the national level, a notable knowledge gap exists. To date, no systematic study has specifically assessed the level of governance understanding among public servants in Community College institutions in Pahang. This gap creates an urgent need for an empirical study to identify the actual level of understanding, the factors influencing it, and the main challenges in practising governance principles at the grassroots level of TVET institutions.

Without data specific to the context of Pahang Community Colleges, any improvement effort may miss its target. Therefore, this study is essential in providing comprehensive baseline data for management to formulate more effective training and intervention strategies, thereby contributing to the development of a culture of integrity-based governance in TVET institutions.

## Research Objectives

### General Objective

This study aims to assess the level of understanding of the concept of governance among Community College public servants in Pahang. A comprehensive understanding of this concept is expected to serve as a catalyst for strengthening integrity, transparency, and accountability in the management of technical and vocational education institutions.

**Specific Objectives**

- To identify the level of understanding of the concept of governance among Pahang Community College public servants.
- To analyse differences in the level of governance understanding based on demographic factors such as gender, length of service, education level, position group, and exposure to integrity training.
- To identify the main challenges faced by public servants in understanding and practising the concept of governance in their daily tasks.
- To formulate strategic recommendations for strengthening the culture of governance in the TVET education sector based on the study's findings.

**Research Questions**

- What is the level of understanding of Pahang Community College public servants regarding the concept of public sector governance?
- What demographic factors influence the level of governance understanding among Pahang Community College public servants?
- Does work experience have a significant relationship with the level of understanding of governance principles?
- How does exposure to integrity training influence public servants' level of understanding of the concept of governance?
- What are the main challenges preventing public servants from fully practising governance principles in daily management?
- What strategic measures can be taken to enhance the level of understanding and internalisation of governance principles among Community College public servants?

**Significance of the Study**

This study has significant importance in the context of managing technical and vocational education institutions in Malaysia, particularly at Pahang Community Colleges. The significance of this study can be seen from four main, mutually complementary perspectives.

First, from a practical standpoint, this study can help Community College management understand the actual level of their staff's understanding of governance principles. This information is important for designing more focused and effective training programmes to strengthen the culture of integrity and transparency in institutional administration.

Second, from a policy perspective, the results of this study can serve as valuable input for policymakers in evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives introduced under the National Anti-Corruption Plan (NACP) 2019–2023 and its continuation through the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024–2028 (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024). The study's findings can be used to refine strategies for strengthening the culture of good governance in public educational institutions, particularly in the TVET sector.

Third, this study also contributes to the local academic literature in the field of public sector governance, particularly in the context of TVET education, which has received relatively little attention in previous research, as identified by Subramaniam and Abdul Aziz (2023) in their systematic review. The findings of this study can open avenues for further, more in-depth studies relating to governance and integrity in the education sector.

Fourth, from a social perspective, enhancing the level of understanding and internalisation of governance among public servants is expected to increase public trust in the integrity and credibility of public educational institutions in this country.

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

### Scope of the Study

### Limitations of the Study

- The study population involves only public servants of Community Colleges in Pahang and does not include colleges in other states. Therefore, the generalisation of findings must be made with caution.
- Data were collected using a questionnaire method that relies on the honesty and accuracy of respondents' answers, which may be influenced by the tendency to provide socially 'positive' responses (social desirability bias).
- This study measures only the level of understanding of governance principles based on respondents' self-perception and does not directly assess actual practices in the workplace.
- Other factors such as organisational culture, leadership style, and internal institutional policies are not studied in depth within the scope of this study, although they are acknowledged as relevant variables.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes in detail the design and methods used to conduct this study. The discussion covers the research design, population and sample, the research instrument including its validity and reliability procedures, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis techniques used to address each research objective.

### Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. This design was chosen because it enables the researcher to collect data on the level of understanding, demographic factors, and challenges faced by respondents at a specific point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The quantitative approach is appropriate for this study because the research objectives require numerically quantifiable measurement and statistical comparison between groups. Data analysis involves descriptive statistics to describe the study variables and inferential statistics to test differences between groups based on demographic factors.

### Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised 422 public servants serving at ten Community Colleges across Pahang, consisting of 286 academic staff and 136 support staff. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling to ensure that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, the recommended minimum sample size for a population of 422 is 201. This study successfully collected data from 230 public servants across all ten Community Colleges in Pahang, exceeding the required minimum sample size by 29. The overall response rate was 54.5%, which is considered satisfactory and sufficient for the planned descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

### Research Instrument

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on the literature review and research objectives. The questionnaire comprised three main sections:

- Section A: Respondent Demographic Information — collecting respondents' background data such as institution, gender, length of service, education level, position group, and exposure to integrity training.
- Section B: Level of Governance Understanding — measuring respondents' level of understanding of the

concepts of integrity, accountability, and transparency using a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), comprising nine items.

- Section C: Challenges in Governance Practice — identifying the main challenges faced by respondents in practising governance principles, also measured using a five-point Likert scale, comprising six items.

**Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

To ensure that the instrument was of high quality and met academic standards, validity and reliability procedures were carried out. In terms of content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in the fields of public management and TVET education to ensure that it genuinely measured what it was intended to measure. In terms of reliability, a pilot study was conducted on 30 public servants from a Community College outside Pahang. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeding 0.70 is considered to indicate a good level of reliability and is sufficient for studies in the social sciences (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

**Data Collection Procedure**

After obtaining approval from the relevant Community College management, the questionnaire was distributed to randomly selected respondents via the Google Forms platform. Respondents were given an explanation of the study's purpose and an assurance of data confidentiality to encourage voluntary and honest participation. A two-week period was allocated for data collection, and the 54.5% response rate obtained was sufficient for the planned statistical analyses.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

All collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0. Data analysis was carried out based on the research objectives:

- For Objective 1: Descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) was used. The interpretation of mean scores was based on three categories: Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–3.67), and High (3.68–5.00), adapted from Likert (1932).

- For Objective 2: The Independent Samples t-test was used to compare mean understanding scores based on gender and exposure to training (two categories). One-way ANOVA was used to compare mean scores across position group, length of service, and education level (three or more categories). The significance level was set at $p<0.05$.

- For Objective 3: Descriptive analysis (frequency and percentage) was used to determine the most prominent challenges among respondents.

**Research Ethics**

This study fully complied with research ethics principles. Respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their identities would be kept entirely confidential. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes and reported in aggregate without reference to any specific individual.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings systematically based on data obtained from the questionnaire distributed to public servants at ten Community Colleges in Pahang. Descriptive analysis was conducted to address each research objective and question. The discussion of findings is organised in the following order: (i) respondent demographic profile; (ii) level of governance understanding (Section B); (iii) challenges in governance practice (Section C); (iv) comparative analysis by demographic factors; and (v) analysis of the knowing-doing gap phenomenon.

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**Respondent Demographic Profile**

This study successfully collected responses from 230 public servants serving at ten Community Colleges in Pahang, out of a population of 422, namely Rompin Community College (n=51, 22.2%), Temerloh Community College (n=42, 18.3%), Bentong Community College (n=26, 11.3%), Kuantan Community College (n=25, 10.9%), Jerantut Community College (n=24, 10.4%), Raub Community College (n=16, 7.0%), Bera Community College (n=15, 6.5%), Paya Besar Community College (n=14, 6.1%), Pekan Community College (n=8, 3.5%), and Lipis Community College (n=7, 3.0%). The overall response rate was 54.5%. The complete respondent demographic profile is summarised in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 230)**

| Variable | Category | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 134 | 58.3 |
| | Male | 96 | 41.7 |
| **Length of Service** | More than 16 years | 117 | 50.9 |
| | 11 – 15 tahun | 73 | 31.7 |
| | 6 – 10 tahun | 20 | 8.7 |
| | Less than 5 years | 20 | 8.7 |
| **Education Level** | Bachelor's Degree | 106 | 46.1 |
| | Ijazah Sarjana / PhD | 60 | 26.1 |
| | Diploma / STPM | 42 | 18.3 |
| | SPM/Certificate | 22 | 9.6 |
| **Position Group** | Lecturer | 126 | 54.8 |
| | Implementing Group (Administration/Support) | 57 | 24.8 |
| | Pengurusan & Profesional (Pentadbir) | 47 | 20.4 |
| **Latihan Integriti / Tatakelola** | Ya (pernah menghadiri) | 171 | 74.3 |
| | Tidak (belum pernah) | 57 | 24.8 |

Note: Percentages are calculated based on N=230. The total population is 422 (286 academic staff and 136 support staff). Response rate = 54.5%.

Based on Table 5.1, the majority of respondents were female, totalling 134 (58.3%), compared with 96 males (41.7%). In terms of length of service, respondents who had served more than 16 years formed the largest group with 117 (50.9%), followed by the 11-to-15-year group with 73 (31.7%). This indicates that more than eight in ten respondents (82.6%) had served at least 11 years in the public service, reflecting a broadly experienced and mature sample.

In terms of academic attainment, 72.2% of respondents held a first degree or higher, reflecting the increasingly highly educated profile of the TVET institution workforce. In terms of position group, lecturers formed the largest group (54.8%), followed by the implementing group (24.8%) and administrators (20.4%). In terms of training exposure, the majority of respondents (74.3%) had attended a course or training related to integrity or governance within the past three years, while 57 (24.8%) had not received any such exposure. This information is important in the context of the fourth research question concerning the influence of training on the level of governance understanding.

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**Level of Governance Understanding (Section B)**

Section B of the questionnaire contained nine items measuring respondents' level of understanding of the concept of public sector governance. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Descriptive Analysis of Section B Items — Level of Governance Understanding (N = 230)**

| Item | Statement | TS+STS (%) | KS (%) | S+SS (%) | Min (SP) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B8** | Good governance practices can reduce the risk of abuse of power in daily duties. | 0.0 | 0.4 | 99.6 | **4.70 (0.47)** |
| **B5** | Governance principles are important for enhancing public trust in Community Colleges. | 0.0 | 1.3 | 98.7 | **4.68 (0.50)** |
| **B2** | Fully understand the meaning of the integrity principle (honesty and trustworthiness) in public service. | 0.0 | 0.9 | 99.1 | **4.62 (0.50)** |
| **B1** | Understand the meaning of public sector governance as a transparent and accountable management system. | 0.4 | 4.8 | 94.8 | **4.53 (0.61)** |
| **B3** | Fully understand the meaning of the accountability principle (being responsible for actions) in daily duties. | 0.0 | 2.6 | 97.4 | **4.53 (0.55)** |
| **B6** | Understand one's role in supporting government policies related to governance (e.g. NACP). | 0.0 | 3.0 | 97.0 | **4.53 (0.56)** |
| **B4** | Fully understand the meaning of the transparency principle (openness of work processes) in the organisation. | 0.0 | 3.5 | 96.5 | **4.52 (0.57)** |
| **B9** | Confident in the ability to apply governance principles in daily duties. | 0.0 | 4.3 | 95.7 | **4.46 (0.58)** |
| **B7** | Know the correct channel for reporting any misconduct or integrity violation. | 0.9 | 12.2 | 86.9 | **4.28 (0.71)** |
| | **Overall Section B** | | | | **4.54 (0.44)** |

Note: D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, SwD=Somewhat Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree. A+SA = combined Agree and Strongly Agree. Interpretation: Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–3.67), High (3.68–5.00) [adapted from Likert, 1932].

Based on Table 5.2, the overall level of governance understanding was high, with an overall mean of 4.54 (SD=0.44). All nine items scored a mean above 4.20, indicating high consistency in respondents' understanding across all measured governance dimensions. Item B8 recorded the highest mean score (mean=4.70, SD=0.47), with 99.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that good governance can reduce the risk of abuse of power. This finding aligns with the argument of Transparency International (2024) and is supported by Wook et al. (2022), who confirmed that awareness of the protective role of governance is among the strongest dimensions among Malaysian public servants.

Item B7, relating to knowledge of misconduct reporting channels, recorded the lowest mean score in Section B (mean=4.28, SD=0.71), with 13.1% of respondents indicating doubt or lack of knowledge (D+SD=0.9%, SwD=12.2%). This finding indicates that procedural knowledge relating to reporting mechanisms still needs strengthening, consistent with the findings of Nor Aziah Alias and Arumugam Raman (2016), who identified procedural ambiguity as among the main challenges in internalising governance. This knowledge gap relating to reporting channels has direct implications for the effectiveness of whistleblowing mechanisms in Community College institutions.

### Challenges in Governance Practice (Section C)

Section C of the questionnaire contained six items assessing the challenges faced by public servants in practising governance principles. Table 5.3 presents the descriptive analysis findings.

**Table 5.3: Descriptive Analysis of Section C Items — Challenges in Governance Practice (N = 230)**

| Item | Statement | TS+STS (%) | KS (%) | S+SS (%) | Min (SP) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **C1** | I lack continuous training on governance practices that are practical and relevant to my duties. | 27.4 | 25.2 | 47.4 | **3.22 (1.05)** |
| **C6** | Wujud kebimbangan akan menerima kesan negatif jika saya melaporkan salah laku (whistleblowing). | 44.3 | 20.4 | 35.2 | **2.83 (1.30)** |
| **C2** | The existing work culture does not seriously emphasise the aspects of integrity and transparency. | 52.6 | 19.6 | 27.8 | **2.60 (1.21)** |
| **C4** | A high workload makes it difficult for me to comply with all governance procedures consistently. | 58.3 | 16.1 | 25.7 | **2.49 (1.22)** |
| **C3** | Governance-related procedures and policies at the college level are complex and unclear. | 58.3 | 24.8 | 17.0 | **2.40 (1.04)** |
| **C5** | There is a lack of good support and example from superiors/leadership. | 65.7 | 13.5 | 20.9 | **2.32 (1.23)** |
| | **Overall Section C** | | | | **2.64 (0.94)** |

Note: D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, SwD=Somewhat Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree. Interpretation: Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–3.67), High (3.68–5.00) [adapted from Likert, 1932].

Overall, the mean score for Section C was 2.64 (SD=0.94), within the moderate category. The most prominent challenge was a lack of continuous training (C1, mean=3.22, SD=1.05), where 47.4% of respondents acknowledged that they agreed or strongly agreed with the existence of this challenge. This finding is highly meaningful as it indicates that nearly half of Pahang Community College public servants feel that existing governance training programmes remain insufficient in terms of practicality and task relevance. This underscores the need for more practical, periodic, and relevant governance training programmes, consistent with the emphasis of Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi (2008) on the importance of systematic and contextual training, and supported by Wook et al. (2022), who found that integrity infrastructure and measurement systems are the dimensions most in need of improvement in Malaysian public organisations.

Item C6, relating to concern about the negative repercussions of whistleblowing, obtained a mean score of 2.83 (SD=1.30), the second highest in Section C. Significantly, 35.2% of respondents acknowledged that such concern exists, meaning more than one in three respondents still felt unsafe in carrying out misconduct-reporting responsibilities. This finding aligns with the framework of Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) on the role of organisational culture and the institutional environment in determining individuals' readiness to act in accordance with the knowledge they possess. Item C5, namely a lack of leadership support, recorded the lowest mean score (2.32, SD=1.23), with 65.7% disagreeing — a positive sign that exemplary leadership remains intact in Pahang Community College institutions.

### Comparative Analysis by Demographic Factors

Table 5.4 presents a comparison of Section B (understanding) mean scores, Section C (challenges) mean scores, and the knowing-doing gap (B−C) based on five demographic variables, providing a comprehensive analytical picture of the governance patterns within the study sample.

**Table 5.4: Comparison of Understanding (B) and Challenge (C) Mean Scores and the Knowing-Doing Gap by Demographic Factor (N = 230)**

| Group | n | Mean B (SD) | Mean C (SD) | Gap (B−C) | Interpretasi Jurang |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | | | |
| Lelaki | 96 | 4.56 (0.43) | 2.57 (0.90) | 1.986 | Moderate |
| Wanita | 134 | 4.53 (0.45) | 2.70 (0.97) | 1.830 | Moderate |
| **Integrity Training Exposure** | | | | | |
| Ya (pernah menghadiri) | 171 | 4.59 (0.42) | 2.48 (0.86) | **2.105** | High |
| Tidak (belum pernah) | 57 | 4.38 (0.48) | 3.04 (0.98) | **1.338** | Moderate |
| **Length of Service** | | | | | |
| Kurang daripada 5 tahun | 20 | 4.59 (0.38) | 2.43 (0.83) | 2.156 | High |
| 6 – 10 tahun | 20 | 4.36 (0.42) | 2.60 (0.78) | 1.761 | Moderate |
| 11 – 15 tahun | 73 | 4.51 (0.42) | 2.76 (0.91) | 1.756 | Moderate |
| Lebih daripada 16 tahun | 117 | 4.58 (0.47) | 2.62 (1.01) | 1.960 | Moderate |
| **Education Level** | | | | | |
| SPM / Sijil | 22 | 4.60 (0.45) | 2.84 (0.77) | 1.760 | Moderate |
| Diploma / STPM | 42 | 4.52 (0.43) | 2.48 (0.90) | 2.045 | High |
| Ijazah Sarjana Muda | 106 | 4.51 (0.45) | 2.49 (0.86) | 2.020 | High |
| Ijazah Sarjana / PhD | 60 | 4.58 (0.44) | 2.96 (1.09) | 1.618 | Moderate |
| **Position Group** | | | | | |
| Pengurusan & Profesional (Pentadbir) | 47 | 4.65 (0.39) | 2.54 (0.99) | **2.110** | Tertinggi |
| Kumpulan Pelaksana (Pentadbiran/Sokongan) | 57 | 4.56 (0.44) | 2.55 (0.89) | **2.005** | High |
| Pensyarah | 126 | 4.49 (0.46) | 2.72 (0.95) | **1.765** | Moderate |
| **Keseluruhan (N = 230)** | **230** | **4.54 (0.44)** | **2.64 (0.94)** | **1.895** | — |

Note: Mean B = mean governance understanding score; Mean C = mean practice challenge score; Gap = Mean B − Mean C. A positive gap indicates that understanding exceeds practice (the knowing-doing gap phenomenon). All groups' Mean B fall within the High category (≥3.68). Gap interpretation: High ≥2.0, Moderate 1.0–1.99, Low <1.0. Adapted from Likert (1932).

The findings in Table 5.4 reveal several significant and policy-relevant patterns. First, the most prominent difference between groups was between those who had attended integrity training (Mean B=4.59) and those who had not (Mean B=4.38), a difference of 0.21 points in understanding. More critically, however, the difference in practice challenges was far greater at 0.56 points (2.48 versus 3.04), indicating that the benefits of training are more evident in reducing practice challenges than in increasing already-high understanding. This confirms the findings of Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi (2008) and Wook et al. (2022) that systematic integrity training has a measurable impact on reducing barriers to governance practice.

Second, analysis by position group revealed an interesting descriptive pattern: administrators (Management & Professional) recorded the highest understanding score (4.65) but at the same time had the largest knowing-doing gap (2.110). This means that although administrators understand governance best, they are also most aware of the challenges in practising it consistently — possibly because they face greater pressure, more diverse demands, and greater decision-making complexity in their daily duties. This finding aligns with the argument of Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) that the most knowledgeable individuals are also the most aware of the complexity of implementing that knowledge in practice.

Third, analysis by length of service revealed a notable non-linear pattern: the group serving less than five years showed the largest gap (2.156), followed by the group with more than 16 years' experience (1.960), while the mid-career group of 11–15 years showed the smallest gap (1.756). This suggests that newer public servants are still in the process of internalising governance knowledge into work habits, while the experienced may have developed certain habits that are not always aligned with formal procedures. Fourth, in terms of education level, postgraduate staff (Master's/PhD) showed the smallest gap (1.618), suggesting that higher education may help to narrow the gap between governance knowledge and practice.

To verify whether the differences in the gap between groups were statistically meaningful or merely coincidental, a series of inferential statistical tests was conducted. One-way ANOVA showed that the differences in the gap across position group ($F(2,227)=1.87$, $p=0.156$), length of service ($F(3,226)=0.90$, $p=0.444$), and education level ($F(3,226)=1.91$, $p=0.129$) all failed to reach significance ($p>0.05$). Likewise, the t-test for gender was not significant ($t(228)=1.01$, $p=0.316$). This means that although there is descriptive variation in the gap values between these groups, the differences are not large enough to be considered scientifically meaningful and may have occurred by chance. This finding actually carries a more important message, namely that the knowing-doing gap is pervasive and systemic, spanning all demographic groups regardless of position, length of service, education level, or gender.

Conversely, the only factor showing a genuinely statistically meaningful difference was exposure to integrity training. The t-test confirmed that the trained group showed a far larger gap (mean=2.105) than the untrained group (mean=1.338), with $t(226)=4.55$, $p<0.001$. This difference is real and fully reliable, not coincidental, making it the most robust empirical finding in this study. This phenomenon can be understood as an effect of heightened awareness: integrity training not only conveys knowledge but also increases participants' sensitivity to the gap between ideal standards and actual practice in the workplace.

**The Knowing-Doing Gap Phenomenon in Governance**

The most theoretically significant finding is the existence of a clear and measurable knowing-doing gap. This gap was calculated as the difference between the mean of Section B (governance understanding = 4.54) and the mean of Section C (practice challenges = 2.64), yielding an aggregate gap of 1.895 score points on a five-point Likert scale. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) define this phenomenon as a situation in which individuals or organisations know what needs to be done but fail to translate it into consistent and effective action in daily practice. In the Malaysian context, the study by Wook et al. (2022) likewise identified a similar phenomenon in public organisations, where the dimension of integrity measurement, research, and assessment recorded the lowest score despite a high understanding of integrity principles.

**Table 5.5: Distribution of the Magnitude of the Knowing-Doing Gap (B − C) Among Respondents (N = 230)**

| Gap Category (B − C) | Score Range | n | % | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jurang sangat tinggi | 3.00 – 4.00 | 47 | **20.4** | Understanding far exceeds practice |
| Jurang tinggi | 2.00 – 2.99 | 64 | **27.8** | Understanding notably exceeds practice |
| Jurang sederhana | 1.00 – 1.99 | 70 | **30.4** | Understanding somewhat exceeds practice |
| Jurang rendah / selaras | 0.00 – 0.99 | 39 | **17.0** | Knowledge and practice nearly aligned |
| Tiada jurang (C ≥ B) | < 0.00 | 10 | **4.3** | Practice meets or exceeds knowledge |
| **Jumlah keseluruhan** | — | **230** | **100.0** | — |

Note: Gap = individual Section B mean minus individual Section C mean. A positive gap means understanding exceeds practice. Overall mean gap = 1.895 (SD = 1.160).

Based on Table 5.5, the distribution of the knowing-doing gap reveals the true scale of this phenomenon in the study population. The number of respondents experiencing a meaningful gap (score ≥1.0) was 181, or 78.6%, while only 49 (21.3%) showed reasonably good alignment between knowledge and practice (gap <1.0). More strikingly, 48.3% of respondents (111) experienced a high to very high gap of 2.0 points or more, confirming that this phenomenon is not confined to a small minority but is a widespread systemic feature within the Pahang Community College public servant population. Only 4.3% (10) showed a situation in which the practice-challenge score exceeded the understanding score, possibly reflecting public servants who are highly self-critical or who face a particularly challenging work environment.

The analysis of the gap by position group in Table 5.4 reveals an interesting descriptive pattern: on average, the administrator group with the highest governance understanding (Mean B=4.65) also recorded the largest gap (2.110), although it must be emphasised that the difference between these position groups was not statistically significant (ANOVA: p=0.156). Conversely, lecturers with lower understanding (Mean B=4.49) recorded the smallest gap (1.765). This indicates that the pressure, complexity, and diversity of demands in administrative roles create greater structural barriers to consistent governance practice. In this study, the moderate practice-challenge score (Mean C=2.64) and the notable gap of 1.895 points indicate that Pahang Community College institutions are facing challenges similar to those reported by international studies on governance implementation in the public sector.

**Analysis of Improvement Suggestions (Section D)**

Section D of the questionnaire contained two open-ended questions aimed at answering Research Question 6: "What strategic measures can be taken to enhance the level of understanding and internalisation of governance principles among Community College public servants?" A total of 229 of 230 respondents provided feedback, reflecting high engagement with and interest in governance issues. Thematic content analysis was used to categorise the open-ended responses into meaningful key themes.

**Suggested Most Effective Training or Programmes (D1)**

Respondents were asked to suggest one type of training or programme that would be most effective in enhancing governance understanding. Of the 229 responses received, 208 contained suggestions that could be meaningfully categorised. Table 5.6 summarises the thematic analysis results.

**Table 5.6: Thematic Analysis of Suggested Training/Programme Types (D1) (N = 208 Meaningful Responses)**

| Suggested Training/Programme Theme | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Kursus Integriti & Anti-Rasuah (termasuk kursus berstruktur, modul integriti, kesedaran) | **76** | **36.5** |
| Case/Scenario/Simulation-Based Training (case-based, scenario-based, real case studies) | **51** | **24.5** |
| Periodic Briefings/Talks/Seminars (periodic briefings, talks, seminars, perhimpunan) | **23** | **11.1** |
| Bengkel Interaktif (bengkel tatakelola, workshop integriti, sesi interaktif) | **12** | **5.8** |
| Management/Finance/Leadership Courses (project management, finance, leadership) | **8** | **3.8** |
| Programmes with MACC/Enforcement Agencies (MACC briefings, visits, agency talks) | **7** | **3.4** |
| Program Kerohanian & Nilai Murni (ceramah agama, kerohanian, nilai Islam) | **7** | **3.4** |
| Team Building/Group Activities | **4** | **1.9** |
| E-Pembelajaran/Microlearning/Video (video TikTok, e-learning, media digital) | **3** | **1.4** |
| Others | **17** | **8.2** |
| **Total** | **208** | **100.0** |

Note: 21 responses were excluded from the thematic analysis as they did not contain specific suggestions. Content analysis was conducted manually by the researcher. One response may contain more than one theme.

Based on Table 5.6, integrity and anti-corruption courses were the most frequently suggested type of training (36.5%), reflecting respondents' awareness of the importance of formal, policy-based training. More meaningful theoretically, however, is the fact that case-, scenario-, and simulation-based training ranked second (24.5%) — even higher than periodic briefings and talks (11.1%). This directly confirms the C1 finding (a lack of continuous, practical training, mean=3.22) and the recommendation in Section 6.1 concerning scenario-based training programmes. Respondents themselves, based on their daily experience, acknowledged that real-situation-based training approaches are more effective in shaping operational governance understanding than passive lecture methods (Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi, 2008; Wook et al., 2022).

**Suggested Improvements Beyond Training (D2)**

Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions other than training to strengthen the culture of governance and integrity at their Community College. Of the 229 responses, 193 contained suggestions that could be categorised. Table 5.7 summarises the thematic analysis results.

**Table 5.7: Thematic Analysis of Suggested Improvements Beyond Training (D2) (N = 193 Meaningful Responses)**

| Suggested Improvement Theme | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Exemplary Leadership — Tone at the Top (leaders set the example, management support) | **32** | **16.6** |
| Clear SOPs & Procedures (user-friendly guidelines, infographics, simple procedures) | **17** | **8.8** |
| Continuous Awareness Campaigns (posters, social media, periodic announcements, videos) | **13** | **6.7** |
| Collaboration with MACC/External Agencies (joint MACC programmes, visits, external briefings) | **11** | **5.7** |
| Safe Reporting Mechanisms (confidential complaint channels, safe whistleblowing) | **10** | **5.2** |
| Periodic Monitoring & Internal Audit (compliance audits, periodic monitoring) | **10** | **5.2** |
| Sistem Pengiktirafan & Anugerah Integriti (anugerah integriti, penghargaan staf) | **6** | **3.1** |
| Penguatkuasaan & Tindakan Disiplin Tegas | **6** | **3.1** |
| Program Kerohanian & Nilai Murni | **3** | **1.6** |
| Others (various suggestions that could not be categorised) | **85** | **44.0** |
| **Total** | **193** | **100.0** |

Note: 36 responses were excluded from the thematic analysis as they did not contain specific suggestions. The 'Others' category includes various suggestions that did not reach the minimum frequency to be categorised separately.

The findings in Table 5.7 reveal a clear picture consistent with this study's quantitative findings. The foremost suggestion was the empowerment of exemplary leadership or 'tone at the top' (16.6%), where respondents emphasised that a change in governance culture must begin from the level of top management and leadership. This finding is highly consistent with the descriptive pattern identified in Table 5.4, where administrators had the largest knowing-doing gap on average (2.110) — respondents recognised that leadership inconsistency between words and actions is a major barrier to a healthy governance culture.

The second most important suggestion was the need for clearer and more user-friendly governance SOPs and procedures (8.8%), confirming the C3 finding concerning procedural complexity (mean=2.40). The suggestion for a safe reporting mechanism (5.2%) confirms the concern recorded in C6 (mean=2.83, 35.2% agreeing). Interestingly, more than half of the responses in the 'Others' category (44.0%) encompassed various creative and context-specific suggestions, including establishing an active Integrity Committee, an 'Integrity Ambassador' programme, an 'Open Door Policy', and a monitoring system based on integrity KPIs — reflecting the high creativity and awareness among Pahang Community College public servants regarding governance needs.

Overall, the findings of Section D confirm and reinforce the six strategic recommendations presented in Section 6. More significantly, these findings show that the recommendations in Section 6 are based not merely on the researcher's analysis and the literature but are also empirically supported by the direct voices and suggestions of 229 Pahang Community College public servants themselves.

**Summary of Findings**

Overall, this study found that: (i) the level of governance understanding was high (mean=4.54, SD=0.44), indicating the positive impact of national integrity programmes on public servants' conceptual understanding; (ii) practice challenges were moderate (mean=2.64, SD=0.94), with the greatest challenge being a lack of continuous training (C1, mean=3.22); (iii) exposure to integrity training showed a notable positive relationship with higher understanding and lower practice challenges; (iv) the administrator position group showed a descriptive pattern of the highest understanding but the largest gap (2.110); and (v) the knowing-doing gap identified — with an aggregate gap of 1.895 points and 48.3% of respondents experiencing a high gap — constitutes this study's important conceptual and empirical contribution to the Malaysian public sector governance literature, particularly in the context of TVET institutions.

## CONCLUSION AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings in Section 5, particularly the knowing-doing gap phenomenon identified with an aggregate gap of 1.895 points and the descriptive pattern of the administrator group having high knowledge but the largest gap on average, several strategic recommendations are presented to strengthen the level of governance understanding and practice among Pahang Community College public servants. These recommendations are organised based on the study's empirical findings and supported by the academic literature.

**Implementing Scenario- and Case-Based Training Programmes**

Given that C1 (a lack of continuous training, mean=3.22) was the highest challenge in Section C, training programmes need to be enhanced both qualitatively and quantitatively. Training should take the form of real-situation simulations, case studies relating to integrity issues in public institutions, and interactive workshops that stimulate critical thinking. Scenario-based training approaches are more effective in building operational understanding than passive lectures (Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi, 2008). Every public servant should be required to attend at least one integrity training programme each year, with priority given to the group that has never attended training (24.8% of respondents), who were shown to have a lower level of understanding and higher practice challenges.

**Strengthening Whistleblower Protection Mechanisms**

The finding that 35.2% of respondents acknowledged concern about negative repercussions for reporting misconduct requires firm and immediate action. Institutional management must establish safe, confidential, and trusted complaint channels, with concrete protection guarantees grounded in the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010. The formulation of an Internal Whistleblower Protection Policy at each Community College is a practical step worth considering. This also aligns with the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024–2028, which emphasises strengthening reporting mechanisms as one of the core strategies in combating corruption and strengthening governance (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024).

**Empowering Exemplary Leadership (Tone at the Top)**

Although the C5 score was the lowest (mean=2.32), indicating that the majority feel leadership provides good support, leadership at all levels needs to take a more proactive and visible role. The descriptive pattern identified — where administrators have the largest knowing-doing gap (2.110) — suggests that senior leadership requires specific structural support to narrow the gap between knowledge and practice in the context of high managerial pressure and demands. Open dialogue sessions between management and staff, public recognition of good governance practices, and fair and transparent enforcement against breaches would further strengthen a healthy governance culture (OECD, 2015).

### Developing Clear and User-Friendly Governance Procedures

The finding that 17.0% of respondents regard governance procedures as complex and unclear (C3) indicates the need to review existing procedures. All governance-related SOPs should be updated, written in easily understood language, and actively disseminated. The use of infographics, digital guides, and e-learning platforms can help disseminate governance information more effectively. Particular attention should be given to the misconduct reporting channel (item B7), which recorded the lowest understanding score (mean=4.28) — information about this channel needs to be disseminated more widely and periodically.

### Developing a Governance Monitoring and Evaluation System

A performance-based monitoring and evaluation system integrating governance indicators needs to be introduced. The study by Wook et al. (2022) found that the dimension of integrity measurement, research, and assessment recorded the lowest score in the Malaysian public sector compared with the private sector, indicating an urgent need to strengthen integrity evaluation systems in public institutions, including Community Colleges. Periodic assessment of procedural compliance and systematic internal audits would provide useful data for continuous improvement.

### Leveraging Information Technology to Promote Governance

The use of information technology such as e-learning platforms, microlearning modules, and institutional social media can be leveraged to disseminate governance content periodically and engagingly. The 'nudge' approach, through repeated and concise digital reminders, has been proven effective in shaping positive habits and behaviour within organisations (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). In the context of TVET's advancement towards Industry 4.0 as outlined by Amin et al. (2023), integrating technology into the dissemination of information and the monitoring of governance is a step aligned with the transformation direction of Malaysian TVET institutions.

### Concluding Remarks

Governance in the public sector is a fundamental element in ensuring the effectiveness, integrity, and accountability of public institutional management, particularly in the context of technical and vocational education. This study has successfully assessed the level of understanding of Pahang Community College public servants regarding governance principles, identified the practice challenges they face, and analysed patterns of difference based on demographic factors including position group — a novel analytical dimension for similar studies in Malaysia — based on robust empirical data from 230 respondents across ten Community Colleges in Pahang out of a population of 422.

The main findings show that the level of governance understanding was high (mean=4.54, SD=0.44), reflecting the positive impact of integrity programmes implemented at the national level. However, the existence of the knowing-doing gap, reflected in the moderate practice-challenge score (mean=2.64, SD=0.94) and the aggregate gap of 1.895 points, with 48.3% of respondents experiencing a high or very high gap, indicates that the gap between knowledge and practice still needs to be addressed systematically and differentially by target group. The descriptive pattern identified — administrators with the highest understanding but the largest gap — is a valuable new finding with important implications for the design of governance programmes in TVET institutions.

This study is not only relevant to Pahang Community Colleges but also has strong potential to be replicated and extended to other states such as Terengganu, Kelantan, and Sabah with appropriate adaptation of title and context. Further studies using mixed methods and incorporating cross-state comparisons are recommended to produce more comprehensive findings and contribute to the development of TVET governance policy at the national level, in line with the TVET transformation agenda outlined in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024–2028 and the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study complied with research ethics principles. Respondent participation was voluntary with informed consent, and data confidentiality was guaranteed throughout the study. The researchers acknowledge all Pahang Community College public servants who participated.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest relating to this study.

**Data Availability**

The data for this study were obtained through a questionnaire and can be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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