

Article

Emotional intelligence and employee competence in enhancing public service satisfaction

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Abstract: This study looks at how emotional intelligence and employee competence shape citizen satisfaction in government service delivery. The research zeroes in on a busy municipal civil registration office where staff deal with lots of people every day. Using surveys from 100 recent service users, the study takes a straightforward numbers-based approach. The team gathered responses through structured questionnaires and ran multiple linear regression tests to see what really drives satisfaction. The results are pretty clear: both emotional intelligence and employee competence make a real, measurable difference in how satisfied citizens feel. While both matter, employee competence stands out as the stronger factor. What's interesting here is that the study explores both the emotional and technical skills of public sector workers at the same time something that hasn't gotten much attention, especially in developing countries. The takeaway Building up both emotional and practical skills among staff isn't just a "nice to have." It's strategic. When government offices invest in training that covers emotional regulation and technical know-how, service gets better and people notice. These findings don't just sit in theory they give policymakers and leaders real ideas for improving public service by focusing on targeted human capital development.

Keywords: administrative services; citizen perception; emotional intelligence; employee competence; human resource capability

1. Introduction

Public service organizations face more pressure than ever. People want fast, efficient, and truly citizen-focused services, but the work keeps getting more complicated (Karatzoudi et al., 2025; Vivona et al., 2025). It's not just about following procedures or having the latest technology anymore. What really counts is the people on the front lines, the ones who talk to citizens every day (Waardenburg et al., 2020; Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2023). Human resource management ends up at the heart of it all, making sure employees have the skills and mindset to meet the organization's goals. This is especially true in government, where employees often work under stress, face emotional situations, and deal with all sorts of public demands (Amaliyah et al., 2020; Karatzoudi et al., 2025; Kratsiotis et al., 2025). Researchers keep pointing out that it's not just technical know-how; the way employees behave and interact matters a lot, too. These factors drive service quality and help build public trust in government organizations (Amaliyah et al., 2019; Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

Employee competence is about what people know, what they can actually do, and the attitude they bring to the job. Emotional intelligence is different it's someone's

knack for noticing and managing emotions, both their own and other people's (Miao et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2024; Vivona et al., 2025). In public service, emotional intelligence really matters. It helps employees handle stress, deal with complaints with empathy, and stay professional, even when things get tense with citizens (Coronado-Maldonado & Ben íez-M áquez, 2023; Özal et al., 2024; Cheraghi et al., 2025; Oteng et al., 2025). Previous research has demonstrated that emotional intelligence is associated with higher customer satisfaction, while employee competence contributes to improved service quality. However, the existing literature largely treats emotional intelligence and employee competence as independent constructs and predominantly focuses on private sector settings (Miao et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2021). So, we still don't know much about how emotional intelligence and competence work together to shape citizen satisfaction in public sector administrative offices. This is especially true in developing countries, where the pressure on public services is intense and the hurdles are bigger (Van de Walle & Groeneveld, 2021; Coronado-Maldonado & Ben íez-M áquez, 2023).

This study digs into how emotional intelligence and employee competence team up to influence how happy people feel with public sector services. Here's the thing: both matter, but they play different roles. Emotional intelligence is all about how employees connect with people, showing empathy, listening, just being human. Competence, on the other hand, is about getting things done right and handling the job well (Coronado-Maldonado & Ben íez-M áquez, 2023; Marfu et al., 2025; Kratsiotis et al., 2025). What makes this research stand out is it doesn't just pick one or the other. It looks at both, and it does it in the public sector, where most studies usually focus on private companies or just one skill at a time (Miao et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2021; Oteng et al., 2025). By putting these two pieces together, the study brings a new perspective on what really makes people satisfied with public services. Turns out, both the personal side and the technical side shape how citizens judge the quality of service they get (Delcourt et al., 2019; Van de Walle & Groeneveld, 2021; Fernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

1.1. Hypotheses

After looking at the theory and evidence, this study puts forward a few key ideas to test how emotional intelligence and employee competence connect with citizen satisfaction in public service delivery, both on their own and together:

- **H1:** *Emotional intelligence boosts citizen satisfaction in public service delivery.*
- **H2:** *Employee competence also increases citizen satisfaction in public service delivery.*
- **H3:** *When you combine emotional intelligence and employee competence, they work together to raise citizen satisfaction in public service delivery.*

1.2. Conceptual framework

This study brings together ideas from human resource management and public service performance to come up with a fresh framework. The main focus? How emotional intelligence and employee competence shape how satisfied people feel with public services (Waardenburg et al., 2020; Puspita Dewi et al., 2024). Emotional

intelligence covers the human side—how well public servants manage their emotions, show empathy, and keep things positive, even when situations get tough. Then there's employee competence, which is the nuts and bolts: having the right skills and professionalism so services are accurate, efficient, and dependable (Coronado-Maldonado & Ben íez-M áquez, 2023; Haag et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2024). Both matter, just in different ways. Together, they shape how people experience government services.

The framework starts with the idea that emotional intelligence and employee competence each shape citizen satisfaction on their own, but they also work together. It lays out the groundwork for testing these ideas with multiple linear regression, following the approach suggested by Hair and Sarstedt and their teams in 2019.

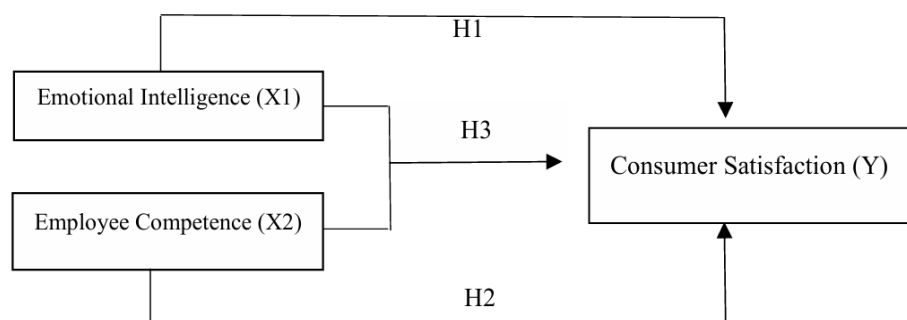


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework. Source: Processed data, 2025.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Subject of study

The study used a quantitative approach to look at how emotional intelligence and employee competence affect citizen satisfaction in public service delivery (Karimi et al., 2021; Haag et al., 2021; Dzordzormenyoh, 2025). Researchers focused on the Civil Registration and Population Office in Surabaya City, Indonesia. They surveyed 100 people who had actually received administrative services during the study period. To pick respondents, they used purposive sampling and only included people who were at least 17, officially registered as Surabaya residents, and had firsthand experience with the office's services (Karimi et al., 2021; Haag et al., 2021; Puspita Dewi et al., 2024). This way, everyone who took part knew enough about the service process to comment on employee performance and service quality. Of course, purposive sampling doesn't let you generalize the results to everyone, but it does give a closer look at real experiences in a busy public office where people interact directly with staff (Dzordzormenyoh, 2025; Hanu et al., 2025). The sample size 100 people works well for multiple regression analysis with two predictors. It's more than enough for the recommended sample-to-variable ratio and gives the study enough power to really test the hypotheses (Hanu et al., 2023; Puspita Dewi et al., 2024).

2.2. Measurement instruments

The study employed a structured questionnaire adapted from previously validated instruments and refined by the authors to fit the public service context. The

questionnaire focused on three main variables: emotional intelligence, employee competence, and citizen satisfaction (Hanu et al., 2023; Lintang & Rathakrishnan, 2024). They went with a five-point Likert scale for each question 1 meaning “strongly disagree,” 5 for “strongly agree.” It’s a familiar setup in HR and public service research when you want to get a real sense of what people think. For emotional intelligence, they leaned on established models and focused on things like emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and just how well someone picks up on others’ feelings (Riaz et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Basically, these areas show how employees understand and manage their own emotions, and how they react to the emotions of the people they work with or serve (Lintang & Rathakrishnan, 2024; Hanu et al., 2025).

We measured employee competence by looking at knowledge, technical skills, professional attitude, and how well people handled important tasks. These are the things that really count in public service, following competency-based HR frameworks (Hanu et al., 2023; Riaz et al., 2025). For citizen satisfaction, we paid attention to how comfortable people felt, how fast and helpful the service was, what quality they noticed, and the actual outcomes they got from public organizations. To make sure our tools actually worked, we checked reliability using Cronbach’s alpha. When scores hit 0.70 or higher, we knew our measures were solid (Hair et al., 2019; Lintang & Rathakrishnan, 2024).

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Hair et al., 2019). Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine respondent characteristics and identify patterns in the research variables (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2019). Prior to hypothesis testing, regression assumptions were assessed, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of emotional intelligence and employee competence, both individually and simultaneously, on citizen satisfaction (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The significance of each regression coefficient was evaluated using t-tests, while the overall model significance was assessed using an F-test, both at a 5% significance level. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model (Hair et al., 2019).

3. Results and discussion

This section presents the empirical findings of the study. The statistical results are reported along with their interpretations to provide a clear understanding of the analysis. The main focus? How good the measurement tools are, what the basic numbers look like, and what the tests show about emotional intelligence, employee competence, and how satisfied people are with public services.

3.1. Measurement reliability and validity

We based our measurement tools for emotional intelligence, employee competence, and public service satisfaction on well-established studies. To make sure these tools actually work, we checked both reliability and validity. For construct

validity, we looked at the corrected item–total correlation, and for reliability, we used Cronbach’s alpha. Every item scored above 0.30 on the item–total correlation, which means they all passed the validity test (Hair et al., 2019). When it comes to reliability, the numbers look solid: emotional intelligence scored 0.745, employee competence hit 0.884, and public service satisfaction reached 0.906 on Cronbach’s alpha. All these numbers easily clear the standard 0.70 cutoff (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In short, the tools we used are both valid and reliable for further analysis. You can see the full test results in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Validity and reliability test results.

Variable	Number of items	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach’s alp
Emotional Intelligence	10	>0.30	0.745
Employee Competence	12	>0.30	0.884
Public Service Satisfaction	8	>0.30	0.906

3.2. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Descriptive statistics were first conducted to examine response patterns and variability among participants. Emotional intelligence, employee competence, and public service satisfaction were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The mean scores for all variables exceeded 3.50, indicating generally positive perceptions of public service performance. Pearson correlation analysis was then performed. The results indicate that emotional intelligence and employee competence are positively and significantly associated with public service satisfaction. These links aren’t just by chance either the p-values are well below 0.01. And since the correlation numbers all stayed under 0.80, there’s no problem with multicollinearity. Basically, these variables play well together if you want to run a regression. All the main numbers and the correlation matrix are in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

Variable	Mean ± SD	1	2	3
Emotional Intelligence	3.68 ± 0.61	(0.75)		
Employee Competence	3.82 ± 0.58	0.54**	(0.88)	
Public Service Satisfaction	3.76 ± 0.64	0.49**	0.71**	(0.91)

Note: $p < 0.01$; reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) are shown in parentheses.

3.3. Hypothesis testing

We ran a multiple linear regression to see how emotional intelligence and employee competence impact public service satisfaction. Before digging into the analysis, we checked the data for normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, and everything looked good. The results are pretty clear: emotional intelligence boosts public service satisfaction ($\beta = 0.257$, $p = 0.008$), which backs up our first hypothesis.

Employee competence has an even stronger positive effect ($\beta = 0.680$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the second hypothesis as well. Together, these factors explain 57.4% of the differences in public service satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.574$), so the model really holds up. The overall model also comes out significant ($F = 65.469$, $p < 0.001$), showing that both emotional intelligence and employee competence matter here. You can find the detailed results in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis results.

Predictor	Standardized β	t-value	Sig.
Emotional Intelligence	0.257	2.710	0.008
Employee Competence	0.680	7.812	<0.001
R^2	0.574		
F-value	65.469		<0.001

4. Discussion

The study looked at how emotional intelligence and employee competence affect public service satisfaction in government offices. Turns out, both make a real difference citizens notice when staff know what they're doing and handle situations well. It's not just about following the rules or having the right technology. The way public employees interact with people and get the job done really shapes how the public sees their experience (Karatzoudi et al., 2025). These findings highlight why investing in people matters, especially in public organizations dealing with heavy workloads, complicated processes, and constant public attention (Karatzoudi et al., 2025; Marfu et al., 2025).

Emotional intelligence really shapes how people feel about public services. When employees know how to handle their own emotions, show real empathy, and build solid relationships, they make a difference especially in jobs where they're dealing with people all day (Coronado-Maldonado & Ben f ez-M  rquez, 2023; Walter et al., 2024; Kratsiotis et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). It helps them keep their cool under stress, listen to what citizens need, and stay professional, even when things get tense (Martin et al., 2024;   zal et al., 2024; Cheraghi et al., 2025; Kratsiotis et al., 2025). In public administration, people often feel rushed or get frustrated with bureaucracy, but employees who understand emotions can calm things down and make the whole experience smoother. This isn't just a hunch past research backs it up, showing that emotional intelligence plays a big role in service quality, building good relationships, and keeping customers satisfied, whether it's in government or private companies.

Employee competence stands out as the biggest factor shaping how people feel about public services. It really comes down to how these services run lots of rules, a focus on accuracy, and everything moving by the book (Amaliyah et al., 2020). When folks deal with public agencies, they mostly judge the experience by how accurate the information is, how fast things get done, and whether their requests actually get sorted out (Vivona et al., 2025). So, things like technical know-how, knowing the procedures inside and out, and having the right skills matter most for making the service feel reliable and the organization look credible. Competent staff cut down on mistakes, speed up the process, and make sure everything lines up with the rules. That's what

builds trust in public institutions. All of this lines up with competency-based theories, basically, the idea that skilled employees drive better service, more accountability, and stronger organizations.

These findings really matter for how public organizations handle their people. It's clear public sector HR teams need to get serious about building emotional intelligence. That means offering real training in things like communication, emotional regulation, and stress management. These aren't just buzzwords; they help staff handle tricky situations with the public (Walter et al., 2024; Cheraghi et al., 2025). At the same time, organizations have to set clear standards for service think accuracy, speed, and following the rules, then back those up with ongoing technical training that keeps up with changing policies (Amaliyah et al., 2020; Vivona et al., 2025). And when it comes to measuring performance, don't just look at technical skills. Mix in emotional and behavioral markers too. That way, you get a fuller picture of how employees are doing and the kind of service they deliver (Karatzoudi et al., 2025). When HR policies bring all these pieces together, the payoff is big: smoother operations, better service relationships, and, honestly, happier citizens (Coronado-Maldonado & Ben íez-M áquez, 2023).

This study takes a fresh look at public service satisfaction by digging into both emotional intelligence and employee competence in government offices. It shows how emotional and technical skills work together to shape how citizens see public services (Amaliyah et al., 2024; Karatzoudi et al., 2025). The results make it clear: employee competence stands out, but emotional intelligence matters too. Together, they give us a better picture of how people drive public service delivery (Zhao et al., 2025). Next steps? Researchers can build on this by adding things like organizational culture, leadership style, or workload pressure into the mix. They can also use long-term or more advanced analysis to really get at how human capital affects public service results.

5. Conclusion

So, in short, this study dug into real data to see how employees' emotional intelligence and competence shape how satisfied people feel with public services at the Civil Registration and Population Office in Surabaya City. Turns out, when you put emotional intelligence and competence together, they have a big impact on citizen satisfaction they actually account for 57.4% of the difference. The rest? That comes down to other factors in the organization and the broader context.

The results show that emotional intelligence really boosts citizen satisfaction. When employees can handle their own emotions, show empathy, and navigate social situations well, people notice, and they feel more satisfied with public services (Kratsiotis et al., 2025; Oteng et al., 2025). But, honestly, employee competence matters even more. Strong technical skills, solid know-how, and real professionalism make a bigger difference. They're key for keeping services accurate, efficient, and reliable.

This study adds something new to the conversation around human resources and public service. It looks at how emotional intelligence and employee competence, together, shape how satisfied citizens feel with public sector services. On the practical

side, the findings point to a clear takeaway: public organizations need to build HR systems that focus on both competence and emotional intelligence. This means more than just hiring people with the right skills. It's about running training sessions, offering ongoing skill-building, and holding workshops that help employees manage their emotions. All of this boosts not only how well people do their jobs, but also how they interact with the public.

If you're running public services, focus on raising the bar for employee skills, match your training to what people actually need, and build workplaces where staff feel supported. That's how you get better service and happier citizens. Mixing emotional support with strong competency standards really boosts quality, helps teams respond faster, and builds trust with the public. Down the road, there's room to grow this model, maybe by looking at things like workplace culture, leadership, how heavy the workload gets, or even how digital systems fit in. It's also worth comparing different organizations or regions to see what really works everywhere.

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