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Building Plan Approval Procedure: A Study on Stakeholder Satisfaction in Malaysia Current Practices

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Abstract

The building plan approval process is essential for ensuring construction project compliance, safety, and sustainability. However, existing procedures often face inefficiencies, delays, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. This study analyses critical aspects of the existing approval framework, with particular attention to the satisfaction levels of key stakeholders such as developers, architects, regulatory authorities, and the public. It proposes the standardisation of approval procedures, the expansion of digital submission platforms, and improved communication among stakeholders to optimise the overall process. These improvements can help reduce delays, lower costs, and create a more efficient and transparent approval system. The anticipated findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges within the building plan approval system, highlight critical inefficiencies, and offer recommendations to enhance procedural effectiveness. By addressing bottlenecks and improving stakeholder engagement, this research seeks to contribute to the optimisation of approval workflows and inform potential policy reforms. Ultimately, the study aims to support better project delivery and promote a more sustainable and well-regulated built environment. The findings of this study provide useful insights for policymakers, developers, and industry professionals to improve the building plan approval process in Malaysia. The research identifies key issues such as delays, unclear regulations, and a lack of transparency, which cause frustration among stakeholders. These improvements will benefit all stakeholders by reducing delays and creating a smoother, more reliable approval system for future construction projects.

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1. Introduction

The building plan approval process is a fundamental aspect of the construction industry. It ensures that proposed projects comply with regulatory requirements, safety standards, and environmental considerations. This process involves multiple stakeholders in Malaysia, including developers, architects, regulatory bodies, and the public. An efficient and transparent approval process is essential for maintaining order in urban planning and facilitating sustainable development.

However, inefficiencies and delays in the building plan approval process have been a persistent challenge, leading to dissatisfaction among stakeholders.

Common issues include bureaucratic complexity, inconsistent regulations across jurisdictions, and limited use of technology in streamlining approvals. These inefficiencies often result in project delays, increased costs, and reduced confidence in the regulatory system. According to Yu et al. [1], stakeholders frequently experience delays due to unclear guidelines and prolonged administrative procedures. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving stakeholder satisfaction and ensuring a more effective approval system.

Recent digitalisation efforts, such as the introduction of ePlan and other electronic submission platforms, aim to enhance the efficiency of the approval process. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing stakeholder concerns remains uncertain [2]. This research seeks to evaluate the satisfaction levels of key stakeholders in the building plan approval process and identify the primary factors contributing to inefficiencies. By examining these challenges, the study aims to develop recommendations for improving approval procedures, fostering better stakeholder engagement, and enhancing transparency in the system.

Despite its critical importance, Malaysia's building plan approval process faces significant challenges that hurt stakeholder satisfaction and the timely completion of construction projects. The inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and inconsistencies in the approval process are well-documented, with delays being a major concern for all parties [3]. These delays often result from bureaucratic inefficiency, unclear guidelines, and the complex, multi-stage nature of the approval process [4]. As a result, stakeholders, including developers, architects, and regulatory bodies, frequently experience frustration and dissatisfaction.

Bureaucratic Inefficiency and Complexity: One of the most significant issues in the building plan approval process is bureaucratic inefficiency. The process often involves multiple stages and requires approvals from various departments and agencies, each with its requirements and timelines. This multi-layered process not only creates confusion but also delays project timelines. Developers and architects report frequent frustrations due to the inconsistency of requirements across different local authorities, leading to repeated revisions and delays [5]. These inefficiencies, compounded by inadequate staffing and resources in local councils, further exacerbate the problem [6].

Lack of Transparency and Communication: A critical issue that contributes to dissatisfaction is the lack of transparency and poor communication throughout the approval process. Many stakeholders report unclear or inconsistent feedback from regulatory bodies, leading to confusion and a sense of injustice. Developers and architects often find it difficult to understand the reasons behind rejections or delays in approvals, while public stakeholders, such as residents, feel excluded from the decision-making process. This lack of transparency erodes trust between parties and contributes to dissatisfaction [7].

Inadequate Technological Integration: Many local authorities still rely on outdated, manual systems for processing building plan approvals. This lack of technological integration contributes to delays, errors, and miscommunication. Despite the introduction of online platforms like ePlan in some regions,

the widespread adoption of digital tools remains limited. The failure to implement modern technologies such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) or other digital submission systems hinders the potential for streamlining the approval process [8]. The absence of these tools results in inefficiencies that frustrate developers and architects, who must wait for approvals in a cumbersome and outdated system.

Stakeholder Engagement and Public Satisfaction: The building plan approval process also faces challenges in terms of stakeholder engagement. Developers and architects often complain about the lack of clarity in approval requirements and the unpredictable approval process, leading to increased costs and delays. Public stakeholders, including local residents, also report dissatisfaction when their concerns regarding new developments' environmental and social impact are not properly addressed. The public's perception of the approval process is often one of exclusion and lack of transparency, which can result in opposition to projects and delays in the construction process [9].

Impact on Project Timeliness and Costs: The inefficiencies in the building plan approval process result in delays and increase project costs. Developers are forced to account for these delays, leading to budget overruns and strained stakeholder relationships. The inability to secure timely approvals also affects investor confidence, as the unpredictability of the approval process creates uncertainty [10].

2. Methodology

Based on **Figure 1: Research Design of Methodology**, this study adopts a **mixed-method approach** to gather comprehensive data that supports the research objectives (RO1, RO2, and RO3). This approach integrates **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods to ensure a well-rounded analysis of stakeholder satisfaction in Malaysia's building plan approval process.

RO1: A cross-reference study will analyse existing government reports, planning documents, and case studies related to Malaysia's building plan approval process. This method allows for a comparative analysis of past policies, approval procedures, and regulatory frameworks, helping to identify key inefficiencies and inconsistencies. The findings from this phase will serve as a foundation for evaluating stakeholder satisfaction and identifying potential areas for improvement.

RO2: A questionnaire will be distributed to key stakeholders, including building surveyors, developers, and regulatory authorities. The questionnaire will use a Likert scale to assess satisfaction with approval timelines, regulatory transparency, and digital system adoption. The collected data will be analysed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software to identify trends and correlations influencing approval efficiency.

RO3: Interview sessions will be conducted with industry experts, such as architects, local authority representatives, and urban planners. These interviews will provide qualitative insights into the challenges faced in the approval process and gather expert opinions on strategies for improvement. Thematic analysis will be used to categorise responses and extract key themes contributing to policy recommendations.

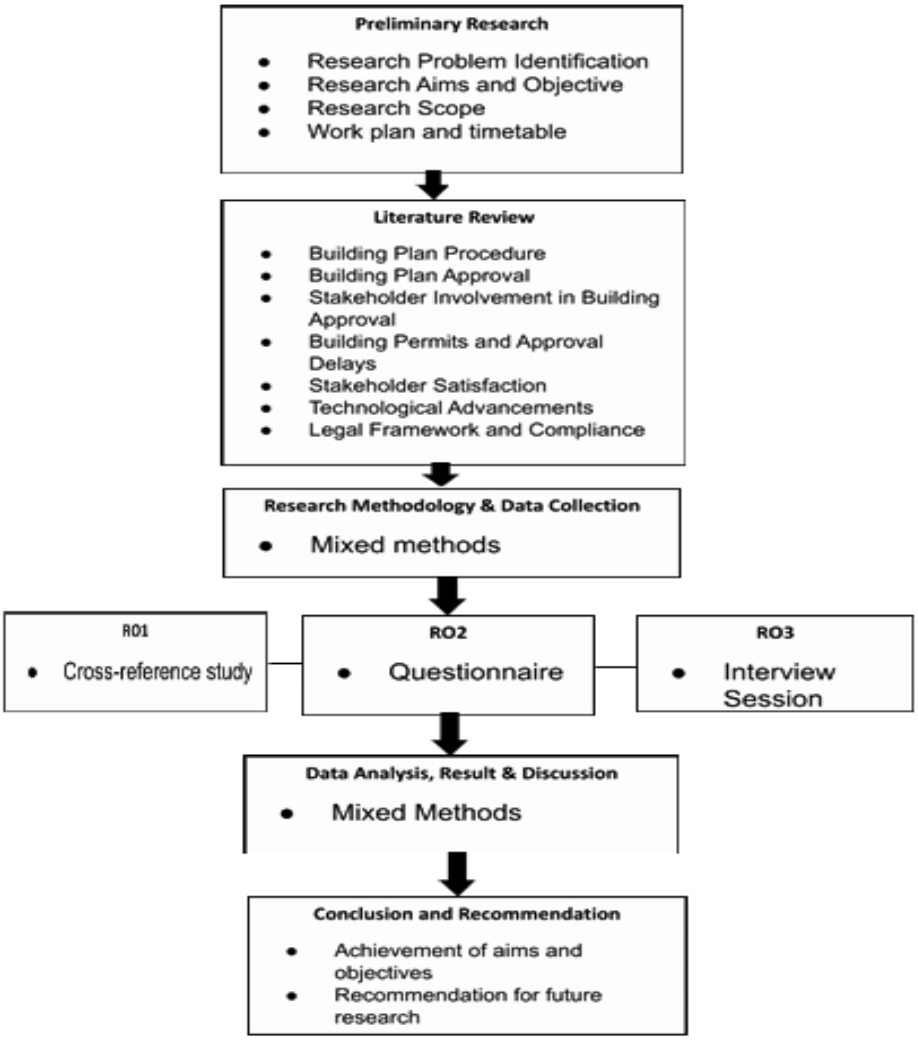

Figure 1: Research Design of Methodology.

3. Results

The responses from online surveys will be systematically grouped, categorised, and analysed based on themes relevant to the research objectives. Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software will be used to process the data efficiently, ensuring accurate data management and interpretation.

An ordinal scale will be applied to rank stakeholder satisfaction levels with the building plan approval process, from highest to lowest. This ranking method will help identify key factors influencing approval efficiency, such as processing time, regulatory clarity, and digital system adoption. However, the ordinal scale does not measure the exact difference between ranks but provides a clear order of priority based on stakeholder preferences.

As a result, the analysis will produce a structured list of factors affecting the approval process, highlighting the most critical issues that require improvement. These findings will guide recommendations to enhance efficiency, transparency, and stakeholder satisfaction within Malaysia's building plan approval framework.

From Table 1, several major themes regarding factors contributing to delays were identified. Mr. A highlighted bureaucratic inefficiency and poor communication as primary causes. Mr. B and Mrs. C

emphasised complex procedures and inconsistent guideline enforcement. Ms. D pointed out poor communication and slow review processes, while Mr. E noted the lack of coordination among fragmented departments. All respondents concurred that these delays could be prevented through better regulation, enhanced communication, and centralised systems.

Table 1: Data Analysis of Interview Questions.

Respondent	Answer	Code	Theme
Mr. A	...bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of communication between stakeholders. Delays could be prevented with clearer communication and faster feedback loops...	Bureaucratic inefficiency Lack of communication	Bureaucratic inefficiency Lack of communication
Mr. B	...The complexity of the process and the involvement of multiple departments with different delays. Process and enforcing deadlines could prevent these delays.	Complex process	Complex process
Mrs. C	...Lack of clarity in regulations and inconsistent application of guidelines by different authorities leads to delays. More comprehensive, upfront guidelines could prevent this...	Complex approval process	Complex approval process
Ms. D	...Poor communication and slow review processes are major factors. Clear expectations and a more organised review system would reduce delays...	Poor communication Slow review process	Poor communication Slow review process
Mr. E	...The involvement of multiple departments with different focus areas and a lack of coordination leads to delays. These can be prevented by streamlining the approval process and assigning specific timelines.	Lack of coordination Fragmented process	Lack of coordination Fragmented process

Mr. A emphasised bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of communication between stakeholders as critical causes of delay. He suggested clearer communication and faster feedback loops would significantly improve the process. This reflects a systemic issue in inter-agency coordination. Therefore, Mr. B and Mrs. C cited the complexity of the approval process and involvement of multiple departments as key contributors to delays. Mrs. C further noted that the lack of clarity and inconsistency in applying regulations worsened the situation. These findings indicate the need for regulatory streamlining and clearer standard operating procedures (SOPs). Ms. D highlighted communication issues and a disorganised review system as core challenges. She recommended setting clear expectations and improving the review mechanism to enhance efficiency. This theme echoes Mr. A's concern, showing a pattern of communication-related inefficiencies. Then, Mr. E pointed to the fragmented nature of departmental responsibilities and lack of coordination, emphasising that these delays could be reduced by streamlining the process and assigning clear timelines. This aligns with Mr. B's observation on the complications arising from multi-agency involvement.

The analysis of respondent feedback revealed that delays in the building approval process are primarily attributed to four recurring issues: bureaucratic inefficiency, complex approval procedures, poor communication, and lack of coordination among departments. Respondents highlighted that overlapping departmental responsibilities, inconsistent application of regulations, and fragmented workflows significantly hinder timely project approvals. Ineffective communication and unclear guidelines further exacerbate the situation, leading to misalignment among stakeholders and slow

review processes. The findings suggest that streamlining the approval system, enhancing inter-agency coordination, enforcing clear timelines, and improving communication channels are essential strategies to reduce inefficiencies and accelerate the building control process.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the challenges within Malaysia's building plan approval process, particularly inefficiencies, delays, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. A mixed-methods approach identifies key issues affecting approval timelines, communication, and regulatory compliance. The findings provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to stakeholder dissatisfaction and offer recommendations for improving efficiency, transparency, and stakeholder engagement.

This research enhanced approval procedures, leading to faster approvals, reduced project costs, and improved stakeholder satisfaction. Implementing digital tools, clearer regulatory guidelines, and improved communication between authorities and stakeholders can make the approval process more effective and reliable. Future research can expand on these findings by exploring broader policy implications and technological advancements in the approval system.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest with any other party in the publication of the current work.

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