

## Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: Empirical Evidence from the Ghanaian Public Service

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### Abstract

The satisfaction of human need is an important objective organizations strive to achieve. The present study sought to examine service quality and customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public service. Using correlational research design and a purely quantitative research approach, the researcher collected data from 304 participants using questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson product-moment correlation test. The result showed that service quality significantly and positively related with customer satisfaction. In addition, customer perception and expectation significantly and positively related with customer satisfaction. The implications of the findings have been presented.

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Public Service, Ghana

### Introduction

In the face of heightening competition and customer sophistication, scholars and practitioners are laying more emphasis on quality service delivery as an important driving force to organizational excellence. These days, customers have become more knowledgeable and sophisticated in demanding for their rights partly due to technological upsurge and industrial interplay. As a result, their expectations of service quality delivery have risen considerably. The service industry (both in the public and private organizations) plays an important role in the economy of many countries. In today's global competitive environment delivering quality service is considered as an essential strategy for success and survival (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). Service quality is seen as the major driving force for business sustainability (Carlzon, 1987), it is also recognized as the success factor for firms (Rust and Oliver, 1994) and higher profitability (Gundersen *et al.*, 1996). Public sector organizations have come under increasing pressure to deliver quality services (Randall and Senior, 1994) and improve efficiencies (Robinson, 2003). Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from experiencing a service and comparing that experience with the kind of quality of service that was expected (Oliver, 1980). Many customer satisfaction studies have concluded that there is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Hence, the primary objective of service providers is to develop and provide services that satisfy customer needs and expectations. Customer needs and expectations are changing when it comes to governmental services and their quality requirements. However, service quality practices in public sector organizations is slow and is further exacerbated by difficulties in measuring outcomes, greater scrutiny from the public and press, a lack of freedom to act in an arbitrary fashion and a requirement for decisions to be based on law (Teicher *et al.*, 2002).

### The Public Service in Ghana

Many people tend to confuse the terms civil service and public service and use them interchangeably. However, in the 1992 Constitution, the Civil Service is considered a microcosm of the Public Service, that is, it forms part of the Public Service. The role played by the public service in national governance and administration is seen to be very vital. It is one of the institutions, which is closest to elected government and may rightly be said to be the secretariat of the executive arm of government. The public service as an institution is indispensable to governments all over the world in achieving political goals in the material, social and moral development. The effectiveness of the government, therefore, depends on the efficiency of the public service and its ability to respond in practical terms to its policy decisions. The public service assist Government in the formulation and implementation of policies, decisions, programmes and plans for the governance and development of the country and for the well-being of its citizens. The public service is therefore described as the custodian of the government's reputation, since if it is unable to carry out the policies faithfully and efficiently it does not only frustrate the Government, but it might seriously undermine the government's position and stability. The Civil Service comprises all servants of the state other than holders of political or judicial offices, who are employed in a civil capacity and whose remunerations are paid wholly and directly out of moneys voted by parliament. It is also a part of the machinery of the executive branch of government and exists to put into effect government policies. The term therefore covers all staff of ministries and departments from the permanent Principal Secretary to the daily rated employees in the District Councils. It does not include personnel of the armed forces, judges, teachers, the prisons service, the parliamentary service, the health service, the statistical service, the

national fire service, the customs, excise and preventive service, the internal revenue service, the police service and workers in the public boards and corporations. These classes of workers, together with the civil servants are called public servants (Adu, 1968; Heady, 1984; The Republic of Ghana, 1992: Abdul-Nasiru, Mensah, Amponsah-Tawiah, Simpeh, & Kumasey, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Customer satisfaction has become a subject of great concern to organizations and researchers alike in recent years where issues of quality service and customer satisfaction are concerned (Blumberg et al., 2005). These days there are a high number of complaints filed by the public due to delays in taking actions and providing services to them by some Ghanaian public organizations. For instance, several complaints from the public regarding their dissatisfactions with some public utility service providers are daily news. Consequently, service quality is quite low and this is a matter of concern to the public since they are the taxpayers and therefore expect good services to be provided to them (Abdullah, 2006). Odartey (2009) has opined that, several organizations in Ghana are underperforming and finally collapsing because they have relegated quality management to the background. He further argues that most organizations operate as if customers are the beggars, organizations do not pay attention to the quality of their employees. Thus, training and development of employees from top to bottom is relegated to the background.

The study is therefore directed towards the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in some Ghanaian public organizations.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Concept of Service*

Concepts of service are of great importance, this is because of the impact it has in businesses across the world. Service is largely intangible and is normally experienced simultaneously with the occurrence of production and consumption. It is the interaction between the seller and the buyer that renders the service to customers (Gronroos, 1988). Service could also be viewed as any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Kotler, *et al.*, (2006) defined services as a form of product that consists of activities, benefits, or satisfactions offered for sale that are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything. In the opinion of Lovelock and Wright, (2002) and cited by Nimako and Azumah, (2009) services refers to economic activities offered by one party to another, most commonly employing time-based performances to bring about desired results in recipients themselves or in objects or other assets for which purchasers have responsibilities. Some scholars however contend that service and services have different connotations (Solomon et al., 1985; cited in Nimako & Azumah, 2009). Whilst “service” involves the whole organizations performance in providing the customer with a good experience, “services” implies something that can be offered to the customer. Needless to say, “services” by definition are outcome-related or directed at the value created since it is something of value delivered to a performance to meet customers’ needs. Services are also distinguished from goods because they possess some unique characteristics. Fisk et al., 1993, (as cited in Hinson, 2006) suggest four service characteristics and these are intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability.

#### *Service Quality*

According to Lovelock & Wright (2002), after making a purchase, customers compare the service expected to what is actually received. Customers decide how satisfied they are with service delivery and outcomes, and they also make judgements about quality. Although service quality and customer satisfaction are related concepts, they are not exactly the same. Many researchers believe that customers’ perceptions about quality are based on long term, cognitive evaluations of an organization’s service delivery, whereas customer satisfaction is a short term emotional reaction to a specific service experience. Following service encounters, customers may evaluate the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and may use this information to update the perceptions of service quality. Customers must experience a service before they can be satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome. Although researchers have studied the concept of service for several decades, there is no consensus about the conceptualization of service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) as different researchers focused on different aspects of service quality. Reeves and Bednar (1994) noted there is no universal, parsimonious, or all-encompassing definition or model of quality. However, the most common definition is the traditional notion that views quality as the customer’s perception of service excellence, i.e. quality is defined by the customer’s impression of the service provided (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Thus, service quality is defined as the gap between customers’ expectation of service and their perception of the service experience. The assumption behind this definition is that customers form the perception of service quality according to the service performance they experienced. It is therefore the customer’s perception that rates the service quality of an entity. Many researchers accept this approach of service quality. According to Gronroos (1988), service quality is commonly defined as a discrepancy between the service quality that is delivered by the organization and the service performance that

employees expect. Lewis (1994) suggests that perceived service quality is a consumer judgement which is derived after comparing consumer's expectations of service with their perceptions of actual service performance. Conceptually, service quality is defined as global judgment or attitude relating to the overall excellence or superiority of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

#### *Customer Perception*

Service quality is a critical component of customers' perception because it is an antecedent to customer satisfaction. Perceptions are defined in various ways, Strydom, Jooste and Cant (2000) define customer perception as the process of receiving, organizing and assigning meaning to information or stimuli detected by the customer's five senses and opine that it gives meaning to the world that surrounds the customer. Perceptions are also described as the end result of a number of observations by the customer. Customers perceive services in terms of quality of services provided and the satisfaction level attained. Perceived service quality is a consumer's judgement (a form of attitude) that has an outcome based on comparisons consumers make between their expectations and their perceptions of the actual service performance (Lewis, 1989). It is also considered to be a dynamic phenomenon that changes with the receipt of various types of delivered service (Hamer, *et al* 2006). Customer perception of service quality influences consumer behaviour (Bitner, 1990) and intention (Dutta & Dutta, 2009). Organizations can provide the best services to their utmost capabilities but if the customer does not perceive them to be of quality, all is in vain. Thus it is very essential for the service provider to understand how customers can perceive the service as quality service and carry a euphoric feeling (Dutta & Dutta, 2009). It is the responsibility of service providers to understand the factors affecting customer perception, elements of service quality and satisfaction to have a competitive edge and to be able to create a perceptual difference. If all these are considered, then the service provider can target the customer with a total service experience and the customer perceives the service as quality and spreads positive word of mouth about the product. Thus perception is one of the factors affecting customer satisfaction (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003; Dutta & Dutta 2009). Customer perceptions are influenced by many external and internal factors such as culture, social, psychological and economic factors, making the way in which customer perceives products and services to be highly subjective (Reisinger & Wryszak, 1994). Therefore measuring customer perception of service is important as the customer's evaluation of service and future behaviour depends on the customer perception of service. In a situation where there is a gap between perception of service and expectation, where perception falls completely short of expectation after comparison or where service meets or exceeds customer expectation, it can result in either a dissatisfied or a satisfied customer after the service encounter.

#### *Customer Expectation*

Customer expectations may be described as the desires or wants of the consumer. It is the expectations the customer expects from the organization and its range of products or services, i.e. what customers feel the organization should offer them. These expectations are, in most instances, different from what the customer gets in real-life situations from the organization. What is important here is to focus on the customer perceptions, rather than on the reality of the performance (Brink & Berndt, 2005). According to Williams (2000), customers are driven by needs, and increasingly expect to receive excellent service. When service truly satisfies, it enhances the quality of life of consumers and consumers will want more of the service. Consumers demand faster and better service and are loyal to organizations that consistently provide the highest levels of service. No business or organization can succeed without building customer satisfaction and loyalty. Likewise, no person can make a good living without meeting the needs of the customer. That is what people in organizations do: they serve others and they succeed through the service (Timm, 2008).

#### *Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction*

Researchers have attempted to make distinctions between service quality and customer satisfaction, even if the terms, service quality and customer satisfaction are used interchangeably in practice. The most common explanation of the difference between the two is that perceived service quality is a form of attitude (the customer's relatively enduring affective orientation), a long-term overall evaluation, whereas satisfaction is an emotional reaction, a transaction-specific measure (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew 1991; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rust & Oliver, 1994). Rust & Oliver (1994) clarified in detail some distinctions between the meanings of quality and satisfaction. First, the dimensions underlying quality judgment are rather specific, whether they are cues or attributes; yet satisfaction judgment can result from any dimension, quality related or not. Secondly, quality perceptions do not require experience with the service or provider; satisfaction, in contrast, is purely experiential. Third, Rust & Oliver note that quality has fewer conceptual antecedents, but satisfaction is influenced by a number of cognitive and affective processes including equity, attribution, and emotion. Given a premise that only customers judge quality, service quality can also be defined as "a judgement about a service's overall excellence or superiority" (Schneider & White, 2004.). On the other hand, satisfaction can be defined as "a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasure level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment" (Oliver, 1997). That is, satisfaction is more related to a judgment of how the service emotionally affects the customer and customer's

experiences, while service quality is related to a judgement of the service product itself and is not necessarily tied to these experiential processes.

#### *Empirical Literature on Service Quality in the Public Sector*

Public sector services are responsible and accountable to citizens and communities as well as to its customers. Several researchers have dealt with service quality in public services (Bryslan & Curry, 2001; Rowley, 1998; Wisniewski, 2001). Bryslan & Curry (2001) stated that the literature clearly supported the use of SERVQUAL in the public sector. According to Gowan *et al.* (2001), service provision is more complex in the public sector because it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpressed needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done. In addition, Caron & Giaque (2006) pointed out that public sector employees are currently confronted with new professional challenges arising from the introduction of new principles and tools inspired by the shift to new public management.

Anderson (1995) also measured the quality of service provided by a public university health clinic. Using 15 statements representing the five-dimensions of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), she assessed the quality of service provided by the clinic at the University of Houston Health Center. Patients were found to be generally dissatisfied with the five dimensions of SERVQUAL. The highest dissatisfaction was felt with assurance. On the other hand, tangibles and empathy exhibited the lowest level of dissatisfaction. Using the SERVQUAL approach, Wisniewski (2001) carried out a study to assess customer satisfaction within the public sector across a range of Scottish Councils services. In the library service, the analysis of gap scores revealed that tangibles and reliability had negative gaps which indicate that customer expectations were not met. On the other hand, responsiveness and assurance were positive implying that customer expectations were actually exceeded by the service provided. Furthermore, Donnelly *et al.* (2006) carried out a study to explore the application of SERVQUAL approach to access the quality of service of Strathclyde Police in Scotland. The survey captures customers' expectations of an excellent police service and compares these with their perceptions of the service delivered by Strathclyde Police. The paper also reports on a parallel SERVQUAL survey of police officers in Strathclyde to examine how well the force understands its customers' expectations and how well its internal processes support the delivery of quality services in the police department. It was found that Strathclyde Police appears to have a good understanding of the service quality expectations of their customers as represented by the responses of elected councillors in the area covered by the force. There is room for improvement in service quality performance both from the viewpoint of the customer and through police force attention to the definition of, and compliance with, service quality standards.

Agus *et al.* (2007) carried out a research to identify management and customer perceptions of service quality practices in the Malaysian Public sector. It is important to note that whereas the SERVQUAL model focused on identifying "gaps" between expectations and actual delivery, their model focused only on perceptions of actual service delivery. They used nine of the ten service dimensions identified by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). Their study looked at the perceptions of management and customers, thereby excluding the views of FLE. It is thus observed that most of the studies to date, have concentrated on service quality in US and European public service sector, while some more recent studies have looked at service quality in developing countries (Agus *et al.*, 2007).

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

Correlational research design was employed in this study. Correlational design was found to be appropriate because the study sought to determine relationship between service qualities, perceived, expected service quality and customer satisfaction. The study was purely quantitative because questionnaire was used to gather data for the study.

### *Population*

The study comprised all customers of public sector organizations within the Greater Accra Metropolis. Greater Accra Metropolis was chosen because the majority of public sector organizations are located within the metropolis. In addition, because of easy accessibility to data, this location was found to be ideal.

### *Sample Size and Sampling Technique*

A total of 304 participants were selected for the study. Non-probability sampling technique was utilized to drawn participants for the study. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. Thus, participants who were interested in the study and had time to complete the survey instrument were selected. The sample was diverse in nature as it comprised participants of different sex, educational background and age distribution. The demographic composition of the participants is presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1:**  
**Sample Characteristics of Respondents**

		Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Sex:</b>	Male	197	64.8
	Female	101	33.2
	Missing system	6	2.0
<b>Education:</b>	Secondary	59	19.4
	Undergraduate	132	43.4
	Postgraduate	77	25.3
	Diploma	19	6.3
	Certificate	2	0.7
	Missing system	15	4.9
	<b>Age:</b>	18-24	66
	25-34	120	39.5
	35-44	58	19.1
	45 and above	47	15.5
	Missing system	13	4.3

**Total Number of Respondents (N=304)**

*Instrument*

The **SERVQUAL** scale by Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1991) was used in this study to measure service quality. It has two subscales: perceived service quality and expected service quality. Each subscale contained 22-items. Each of the subscales measured the five-dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy respectively. Items on the SERVQUAL scale were based on a 7-point likert format of *strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, disagree and strongly disagree* respectively.

Service quality is obtained by subtracting expectation score from the perception score for each item ( $Q=P-E$ ). Therefore, if perception exceeds expectation ( $P>E$ ), service quality is very satisfactory. If perception equals expectation ( $P=E$ ), service quality is satisfactory. However, if expectation exceeds perception ( $E>P$ ), service quality is poor.

**Customer satisfaction** was measured using the 25-items scale developed by McMurtry and Hudson (2000). The scale is based on a 7-point likert response format ranging from *None of the time (1)* to *All of the time (7)*. Sample items on the scale included “*the services we get from public organizations are a big source of help to us*”, “*employees of public organizations really care about their customers*”.

*Data Collection Procedure*

The research instrument was pre-tested to ascertain the suitability and reliability of the scales for the study. A convenient sample of 20 participants was used to conduct this initial study. The outcome showed that, participants were generally comfortable with all the items on service quality and customer satisfaction scales. Reliability analysis showed that, service quality and customer satisfaction scales were highly reliable. The reliability values for the two scales were: service quality ( $\alpha=$ ), and customer satisfaction ( $\alpha=$ ).

Questionnaire was administered to participants who volunteered to be part of the study. The questionnaire was administered by hand to all the 304 participants. Ethical issues such as confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity of respondents were incorporated into the study and steps were taken to fulfil them in the study. Data collection took four (4) weeks.

**Results**

Preliminary were conducted for the study variables. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation and reliability coefficient for the variables were computed to summarize the data. As shown in **Table 2**, all the variables had very high reliability coefficients and thus exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.7 required for statistical analysis (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 2:**  
**Summary of Mean, Standard Deviation Scores and Reliability Coefficient of Study Variables**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Alpha
Customer expectation	304	118.072	27.426	.902
Customer perception	303	93.162	31.681	.905
Customer satisfaction	304	99.845	25.379	.916
Service quality index	303	-24.805	31.349	-

**NB:** Alpha value for Service quality index contains negative values. The index was derived with the formulae ( $SERQUAL=Expectation-Perception$ )

*Test of Hypotheses*

The study sought to examine the relationship between service quality index, service quality dimensions (i.e. customer expectation and perception) and customer satisfaction. The hypotheses were tested using bivariate correlation test (i.e. Pearson Product-Moment correlation) because the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) was assumed to be measured on an interval scale. In addition, the strength of the relationship between the variables was determined using Cohen (1988) criteria. Further, the amount of shared variance for each relationship was determined. The hypotheses tested were:

- There will be a significant positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public sector
- Customer expectation will relate significantly and positively with customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public sector
- Customer perception will relate positively and significantly with customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public sector

As shown in **Table 3**, the hypothesis that, there will be a significant positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public sector was supported ( $r=.305$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This means that, an increase in service quality was associated with an increase in customer satisfaction and a decrease in service quality was also associated with a decrease in customer satisfaction. The correlation of .305 shows that the amount of shared variance between service quality and customer satisfaction was 55.2%. Following Cohen's (1988) criteria,  $r=.305$  shows that a strong positive correlation existed between service quality and customer satisfaction.

**Table 3:**  
**Bivariate Correlation between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction**

Measures	1	2
Service Quality	-	.305**
Customer satisfaction	-	-

**Total Number of Respondents (N=304)**

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)*

The prediction that, **customer expectation will relate positively and significantly with customer satisfaction** in the Ghanaian public service was also supported by the results in the current study ( $r=.411$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This implies that, 64.1% of variance existed between customer expectation and customer satisfaction. It also showed that a strong positive correlation existed between customer expectation and satisfaction (Cohen, 1988). See **Table 4**.

**Table 4:**  
**Bivariate Correlation of Customer Expectation and Customer Satisfaction**

Measures	1	2
Customer expectation	-	.411**
Customer satisfaction	-	-

**Total Number of Respondents (N=304)**

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)*

The hypothesis that, **customer perception will relate positively and significantly with customer satisfaction** was supported ( $r=.653$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The r value (.653) shows that a strong positive relationship existed between customer perception and customer satisfaction. 81% of variance existed between customer perception and customer satisfaction ( $r=.653$ ). See **Table 5**.

**Table 5:**  
**Bivariate Correlation between Customer Perception and Customer Satisfaction**

Measures	1	2
Customer perception	-	.653**
Customer satisfaction	-	-

**Total Number of Respondents (N=303)**

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)*

**Discussion**

The public institutions in Ghana have generally been at the receiving end of complaints for poor service delivery. Today, the public sector of Ghana has been perceived to be performing poorly. In view of this, the researcher sought to examine service quality and its dimensions (customer expectation and perception) on customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian public sector. The mission of the study therefore, was to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, customer expectation and customer satisfaction and customer perception and satisfaction within the public sector context. Empirical evidence in the present study showed that,

service quality, customer perception and customer expectation all related significantly and positively with customer satisfaction. The present findings are in agreement with previous research outcomes. For instance, the observation that customer perception significantly and positively related with customer satisfaction corroborated a number of reported evidence (Dutta & Dutta, 2009; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). This finding is justified because irrespective of the time the service is delivered, the customer is satisfied to the extent that the service received meets quality standard. Consistent with this the view expressed by Bitner (1990) that, perceived service quality is a significant driver of consumer behaviour.

The finding on the link between customer expectation and satisfaction is in alignment previous sentiments expressed by scholars in the field (Timm, 2008; Williams, 2000). According to these researchers, human behaviour is driven by needs (Timm, 2008; Williams, 2000). It is imperative to note that, the outcome of the present study regarding customer expectation and satisfaction is largely influenced by the service customers of the Ghanaian public service receive. In the view of Williams (2000), there is an important link between satisfied service and quality of life of the consumer. Thus, the evidence gathered in the present study about the Ghanaian public service clearly showed that, customers are satisfied with the kind services they receive.

### Implications of Findings

What does the finding obtained in the study suggest? There are a number of implications worth noting by leaders and managers of public sector organizations in Ghana. First, given that there is an important link between expected service and customer satisfaction, it behoves on managers to ensure that customers receive excellent service(s). Secondly, it is imperative that service provided was of the highest quality because it is only quality service that can attract and retain customers to the organization.

### Limitations and Recommendation for Future Studies

The study is not without limitations. First, the significant relationships obtained does not suggest cause-effect link. This is as a result of the design utilized in the study. Generally, correlational research designs suffer from third-variable problems and thus make it difficult to draw cause-effect relationship. Secondly, though the study was about the Ghanaian public sector, the study was limited to one geographic area (Greater Accra). Thus, draw conclusions on the basis of representation must be considered carefully. Despite these limitations, the study has produced significant findings which would keep public sector customers in Ghana to question their definition of satisfaction, "is it the end product, the process they go through to get the service etc.). Against this backdrop, the researcher recommends that future researchers should consider variables such as expected time of service delivery, and value placed on the service as possible moderators of the link between service quality, customer expectation, perception and satisfaction in the Ghanaian context or other contexts.

### Conclusion

The findings obtained in this Ghanaian-based study are consistent with previous studies. It was found that service quality and its dimensions (i.e. customer expectation and perception) significantly and positively related with customer satisfaction. From this study, it can be stated that when customers get what they expect and perceive, they tend to feel satisfied with the service rendered than when they don't get what they expect and perceive. It is important that organizations seek the need-satisfaction link as a driver and determinant of customer satisfaction and not just service delivery. Thus, the evidence rolled-out by this study has significant implications for both public and private sector organization.

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