

## The Nexus Between Quality Assurance Practices and Customer Service Satisfaction of Hotels in the Upper West Region of Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates quality assurance practices and their relationship with customer service satisfaction in Upper West Region hotels. The mixed-method technique was used. The study also collected data from primary and secondary sources. Using a convenience sampling technique, the researchers sampled 275 clients or patrons of Upper West Region hotels. The findings suggest that hotels impaired the application of quality assurance standards. Additional research found that hotels provide inadequate customer care and services. The findings on measures to improve customer satisfaction were: the necessity to hire quality workers; the provision of in-service training on customer care services; and the integration of technology to improve customer care services.

**Keywords:** Hotels, Quality Assurance, Customer satisfaction, Practices & Services.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the current economic environment is characterized by a profound global crisis on the one hand, and rising concern within the hotel business on the other, to discover solutions that can sustain economic efficiency while limiting negative repercussions (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2003). Tourists' adjustment to the changing economic conditions has resulted in a greater desire to attain the optimal quality-price balance for purchased tourism services, particularly hotel facilities (David and Francis, 2004). The quality of services provided by each supplier is the result of combining two factors: quantity, which is more material in nature and is represented by equipment and amenities such as food, scenery, and working methods, and quality, which is mostly behavioral (Woo & Ennew, 2005). The material component influences the quality of tourist services by emphasizing the comfort, functionality, beauty, and ergonomics of the equipment offered by certain units (Hands 2001). One of the most important influences on these needs is technicality, which defines comfort and service quality (Goncalves, 1997). The greater the technicality, the better the service, because they give heating and phonic isolation, diverse room facilities, and solid installations, which lead both to lower maintenance expenses and fewer complaints (Jones and Haven-Tang, 2005).

In this development, it is anticipated that a high level of professionalism will ensure a standard in the hotel business. To varied degrees, the Upper West Region's hotel business is not immune to the consequences of the limiting phenomena; quality assurance services to ensure client satisfaction could be critical. As a result, an urgent endeavor is needed to address this rising threat. Quality service delivery has increasingly become a major priority and difficulty for service providers (Cooper et al, 1993). The hospitality business has gained a lot of attention as it becomes more competitive (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2003). The hotel industry has undergone an infusion of new entrants, new competition and a new manner of conducting business in recent years. Hotels lose the bulk of their customers because the service they receive is not satisfactory and sufficient, thus they migrate from one hotel to another (Woo & Ennew, 2005).

However, delivering quality services is one of the most important and difficult tasks that service organizations face due to its unique characteristics such as intangibility, variability, perishability, inseparability, and labor-intensive nature, as well as the definition of quality, which is still a very subjective concept (Lazer and Layton, 1999). Customers typically judge service quality; hence the definition of service quality is based on customers' perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations (Mensah, 2009).

The overall system's efficiency can only be achieved if we monitor and evaluate client requests, define and control the process, and execute continuous improvements. Quality is a multifaceted concept comprised of various factors and criteria (Scarnati & Scarnati, 2002). All quality aspects or criteria are equally vital in achieving 100% quality (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithml, 1998). If even one quality aspect is lacking, the product or service cannot be considered complete (Woo & Ennew, 2005). The most important component in gaining a lasting competitive advantage is providing the highest possible service quality, which leads to increased customer happiness, retention, and profitability (Jones and Haven-Tang, 2005). A service provider who does not deliver to meet the demands of his/ her customers is likely to experience low patronage (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). Hotels are becoming increasingly cognizant of the threat that poor service quality poses to their continued existence. This needs a study to investigate the phenomena in the Upper West Region. The study looks at quality assurance processes in hotels, as well as consumer views of quality assurance practices in hotels and steps to improve quality assurance standards in the Upper West Region.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Quality

The customer's concept of quality is significantly broader. First, customers are concerned with the physical product's longevity, safety, convenience of use, and installation (Yoo and Park, 2007). Customers are worried about service quality, which includes advertising accuracy and truthfulness, responsiveness, and continuous support. Finally, customers' perceptions of quality include psychological characteristics such as the company's understanding of its products, the courtesy and sensitivity of sales and support personnel, and the product's reputation (Russel, 2003). Quality has become an important aspect of customers' decisions about services and products, and they look for what they want to see and need in a product or service. This means that the company (hotels) must consider what and how its customers define quality. To be considered high-quality by the customer, a service or product must meet both current and future needs. From this perspective, the quality of a product or service is defined by what the buyer desires and is willing to pay for.

### 2.2 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a planned and systematic procedure used to ensure that a product or service being developed meets client requirements. That is complete satisfaction. More precisely, quality assurance is a standard for meeting client needs (Hinson 2004). It outlines how a company will address the needs of a client or customer systematically and consistently. It demonstrates a company's dedication to providing quality products and services to its customers. According to Kotler (1999), Quality Assurance, or QA for short, refers to planned and systematic processes that assure a product or service's fitness for its intended use. It is a series of activities designed to ensure that products (goods and/or services) meet consumer expectations systematically and consistently. Quality assurance is concerned with improving and stabilizing processes to avoid or at least reduce the difficulties that cause faults or discontent in the first place.

### 2.3 Service Quality

High quality improves profitability and competitiveness (Yoo and Park, 2007). Furthermore, successful service quality promotes corporate expansion and wealth. Today's competitive challenges force many service companies to seek competitive advantage, efficiency, and profitable ways to differentiate themselves from competitors (Mei et al., 1999). The hospitality business, particularly hotels, has seen increased rivalry for good service quality and client satisfaction (Parayani et al., 2010). With this expertise, the hospitality industry must ensure that they are always ahead of the competition. Parasuraman et al. (1994) describe service quality as a global judgment or attitude relating to the overall excellence or superiority of the service. According to Larry (1997), quality service is a perceived judgment arising from an evaluation process in which the client compares his or her expectations to the service he or she perceives to have received. Customers are increasingly more confident in their rights and the power they hold in the marketplace. Ideally, they have gotten more demanding of the way suppliers serve them. With this realization, firms recognized that quality is a vital in-service delivery, while previously placing a high value on product quality. He went on to argue that the customer decides to stay at a particular hotel or shop at a specific store not simply because of the tangible product or the décor of the rooms or quality of the food but on much more intangible factors of level of service.

Berry et al., (2002) points out that "customers use five dimensions to form their judgment of service quality which are based on a comparison between expected service and perceived service." The quality of services is assessed during the delivery process. Every client interaction is referred to as a "moment of truth," an opportunity to satisfy or dissatisfy the consumer. These five aspects are called the SERVQUAL components and they are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible (Berry et al, 2002).

#### **2.4 Customer Service**

Business executives believe that retailers such as hotels that provide numerous customer services (delivery, gift wrapping, more pleasant surroundings, and sales assistance) satisfy their customers better than their competitors, arguing that this ensures and builds an acceptable level of confidence in the service provided to customers and promotes quality assurance. Many consumers are willing to pay for extra services as long as they are satisfied. (Zeithanl, Bitner, 2000). According to Donald (1994), understanding what clients want can help you please them. He asserts that understanding consumer expectations is influenced by the promises made by marketers in their advertisements and the degree to which those promises are met. Customer services are defined by Zeithanl and Bitner (2000) as actions taken by retailers (hotels) that affect how simple it is for a potential customer to learn about the company's offerings, how simple it is for a transaction to be completed once the customer tries to make a purchase, and how satisfied the customer is with the purchase. The pre-transaction, transaction, and post-transaction components of customer service are these three things.

#### **2.5 Methods of Quality Assurance Practices Adopted by Hotels**

It is been the belief of some managers over the years that product performance and service quality bring about satisfaction. Good practice forms useful managerial elements that bring about the quality of service which leads to satisfaction. (Donald, 1999) However, there is not one such thing as objective quality and therefore managers who are interested in customer satisfaction need to find out how customers perceive quality. Quality is made up of both the cognitive (thinking) and affective (emotional) aspects. Zeithanl and Bitner (2000) continue by stating that cognitive in the sense that it addresses the customer's way of thinking about the good or service that satisfies their demands. Additionally, Watt (2007) contends that it is effective in that it has to do with the customer's perception of the product or service being sold or provided, and this enhances the customer's level of pleasure. Stoke (2007) revealed that perceived quality is a significant indicator of consumer happiness.

#### **2.6 Customer's perceptions of hotels quality assurance practices and services**

According to Davidow and Uttal (1989), several uncontrollable factors, such as customers' prior experiences with other businesses and their advertising, their psychological state at the time-of-service delivery, their background and values, and the images of the purchased product, shape their perception. According to Zeithanl et al. (1990), a customer's perspective is based on a variety of intricate factors, such as their own pre-purchase beliefs and the opinions of others. According to Watt (2007), there is a correlation between customers' expectations and varying levels of satisfaction. It might be founded on prior product experiences, knowledge gained via commercials and word-of-mouth recommendations. Moreover, pre-purchase views, word-of-mouth communications, individual demands, customer experiences, and other personal attitudes all have an impact on customers' perceptions (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). Depending on their level of familiarity with a good or service, consumers have varying opinions on it (Torres & Kline, 2013).

#### **2.7 Measures to Enhance Quality assurance service among hotels**

The majority of establishments these days prioritize quality, as seen by the increase in companies submitting applications for quality awards like the ISO awards. Hoteliers need to differentiate their products and services from the competition in a highly competitive market. Understanding the demands of their clients and then aiming to meet or beyond them is one approach for hoteliers to do this (Torres & Kline, 2013). Overall, client satisfaction, inclination to return, and referrals are all boosted by high-quality service. Eventually, profitability is also increased by satisfied customers (Torres & Kline, 2013).

Workers have a significant influence on the quality of services (Kusluvan et al., 2010). In a similar vein, Mohsin & Lockyer (2010) discovered that effective service quality delivery requires managerial support and staff dedication. This is because contented workers are more dedicated to quality and continual development (Matzler et al., 2004), and as a result, they are more likely to be dedicated to providing high-quality services. Additionally, research has demonstrated that contented workers exhibit strong motivation and positive morale at work (Eskildsen & Dahlgarrd, 2000). Consumer satisfaction is increased when there is a focus on them in overall quality management (Sit et al., 2009). Customers are crucial to providing high-quality services (Crick & Spencer, 2010).

According to Stevens et al. (1995), patrons of restaurants will choose establishments that satisfy their expectations for quality and value. If restaurateurs overlook this, patronage will drop as customers patronize rival eateries. At least two factors contribute to the customer's assessment of this service quality: their level of satisfaction with the offerings and how the front-line staff carried them out (Chapman & Lovell, 2006). Conversely, managers frequently utilize customer happiness as a predictor of recurring business, which generates new business and brand loyalty (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002).

Companies generally agree that one of the most crucial factors to take into account when starting a quality improvement program is employee concerns. The overall quality effort will typically fail if staff issues are not resolved (Brian, 2006). This indicates that before considering the quality of services and products, employees' needs as employees should be taken into account. The development, delivery, and customer service of any product will be of worse quality if employees are dissatisfied with the internal structure of any company (Fitzsimons, 2005). Therefore, every facet of employee consideration should be taken into account when raising a company's quality standards.

Evans (1994) pointed out that competition frequently concentrates on ongoing technological advancement for products where technology is a crucial component of product performance. Evans (1994) emphasized further that a corporation produces less expensive and technologically superior items in such markets. Businesses are finding that providing consumers with a steady supply of technologically advanced items gives them a competitive edge in the global economy (Evans, 1994). Anticipating a customer's requirements and being prepared with a technologically enhanced product are examples of market-perceived quality (customer satisfaction) (Evans, 1994).

## **2.8. Theoretical Underpinning**

A comprehensive view of the service system is necessary to identify the possible measures of service quality. Therefore, quality can also be looked at from content, process, structure, outcome and impact.

### **2.8.1 Content**

Employees must follow the company's standard procedures to ensure the high quality of the services or commodities produced. Standard operating procedures are typically defined for routine services, and service professionals are required to adhere to these processes until completion. The content here mandates that staff do not leave any procedures unmarked. In this regard, quality assurance necessitates that everything is done to the utmost extent possible in terms of the procedures to be followed to reach the final stage.

### **2.8.2 Process**

Is the order of events in the service process appropriate? This is because a logical sequence of activities must be followed and coordinated. There must be engagement between employees and customers. Employees are responsible for adhering to or following the required process while producing the product or service. No step or action should be skipped or neglected. Each procedure or action must be carried out in an ordered manner. As a result, proper coordination of the various processes is required to ensure that no distortion occurs.

### **2.8.3 Structure**

Are the physical facilities and organizational design suitable for the service? These and the supporting equipment comprise only a portion of the structural dimension. To ensure quality, physical facilities and organizational design in the production of services and products must be adequate, if not excessive. When these are in insufficient supply, things cannot be done properly, resulting in poor quality. The staff's qualifications must also be considered. The presence of active self-evolution methods and members' understanding of their peers' performance are indicators of organizational efficacy in controlling quickly.

### **2.8.4 Outcomes**

What changes in status had the service experienced? The ultimate test of service quality is an examination of the final result. The most frequently requested question is whether or not the buyer is satisfied. In services, it is assumed that the status quo is okay unless the number of complaints increases. The more complaints companies receive, the higher the likelihood that quality is low.

### **2.8.5 Impact**

What is the end effect of using the service? Are the clients safe, secure, etc.? These are the questions that must be posed. However, the impact should also include a measure of service and accessibility, which is typically expressed as the population serviced per unit area. It should be noted that the other five elements of quality measurement are taken from the company's perspective; thus, both customers and service providers must

understand that they must all judge service from two perspectives. With quality ensured from the production stage, through service delivery to clients, the subsequent reward is satisfaction.

The most crucial aspect of quality assurance is the customer's perspective. Product and service design must take into account client expectations and quality requirements. A thorough commitment to quality is required throughout an organization to successfully improve and manage product and service quality. The dedication must begin at the top and flow down through all levels of the organization, including all areas and departments. Employees must actively participate in the quality improvement process and accept responsibility for quality. Improving service and product quality is cost-effective, but the cost of bad quality far outweighs the cost of achieving acceptable quality.

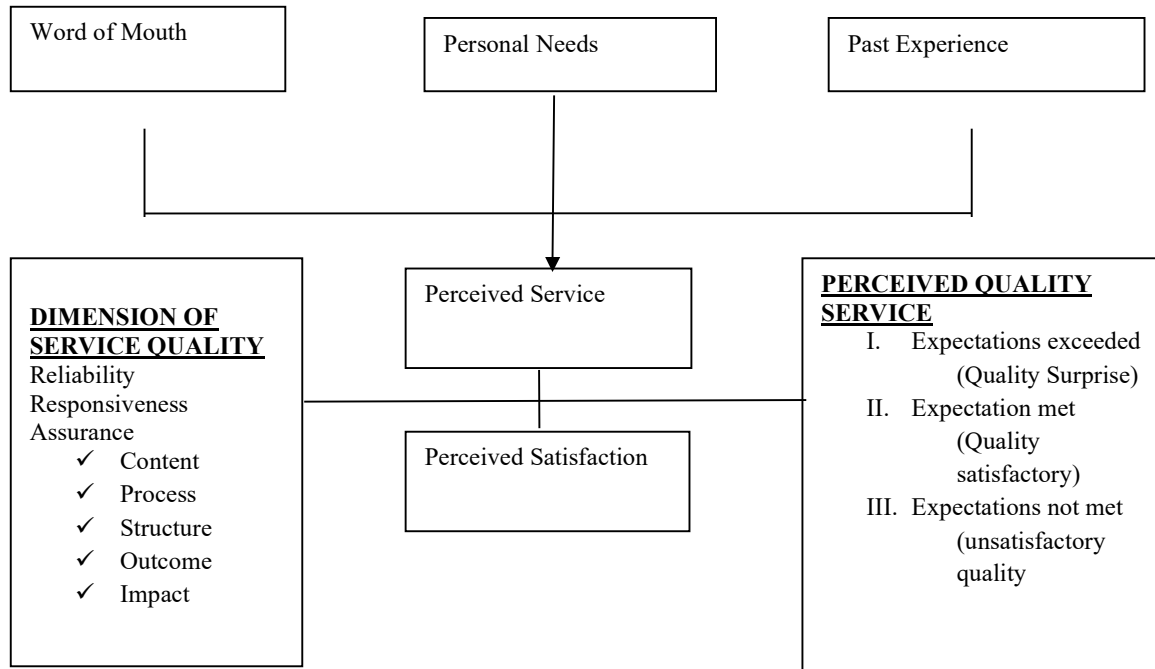


Figure I: Approach to Measuring Quality Service

Source: Adopted from Torc Williams 2005 and modified in 2023

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Geographically, the study concentrated on all hotels in Ghana's Upper West Region. The study area has a lot of hospitalities and tourist attractions that will attract travelers to demand the services of hotels. The Wechiau Hippopotamus Sanctuary is located in the Wa West District, southwest of Wa, along the Black Volta River. The Gwollu Wall in the Sissala District is the birthplace of a previous Ghanaian president. Kobine, Kakube, Zumbeti, Willa, Damba, Paragbiele, Bagre, Kala, Bongngo, and Singma are festivals that highlight the regional population's way of life. The Walas, for example, observe the Damba, which is designed to usher in the New Year. During this event, the Chief is judged on his physical health to continue guiding his people. Both the Kokube festival of the Nandom people and the Kobine festival of the Lawra people are observed to praise God through the ancestors for blessing those with a plentiful harvest.

At the lineage and settlement levels, the inhabitants of the Upper West Region are arranged under chiefs. Chieftaincy is a prestigious institution that plays a significant role in community mobilization. In Sissala, the chiefs are referred to as Koro (e.g., Tumu Koro) while the other districts are referred to as Na (e.g., Wa Na). There are 21 traditional paramountcies, including two in Jirapa-Lambussie, three in Lawra, seven in Nadowli, five in Sissala, and four in Wa.



Figure II: Map of Upper West Region  
 Regions  
 Source: GSS, 2021



Figure. III: Map of Ghana showing  
 Regions

The research design refers to the overall plan employed by the researcher to obtain answers to the research questions and to test the hypothesis formulated (Nortey, 2009). It encompasses decisions about how the research is conceptualized, the conduct of the research and the type of contribution the research is intended to make to the development of knowledge in a particular field of study. In developing a research design, theoretical, methodological and ethical considerations relevant to the study are taken (Cheek, 2008). The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative research methods using the descriptive design. The descriptive study provides the researcher with a narrative investigation and description of the quality of relationships, situations, events, materials and conditions as observed in the natural setting of the community.

The study sampled 275 customers or people who have experience in direct hotel services in the Upper West Region. The questionnaires were designed in a Google file and shared with respondents to complete and submit electronically, while a face-to-face interview approach was used for key informant interviews. The research gathered data from primary and secondary. This was necessitated in the sense that; primary data would provide information in answering research questions, while the secondary data would enrich the study, especially in the review of literature. The quantitative data collected was edited to address questions that have been answered partially or not answered and then analyzed using Word Excel and then presented in frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts, with brief comments highlighting key observations. The quality data was analyzed using themes and quotes. The analysis would also confirm the reviewed literature, as well as contradict those that are not in conformity.

**4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**  
**4.1 Quality Assurance Practices of Hotels**

The data on quality assurance practices to guarantee customer satisfaction revealed that 5% of respondents strongly agree there is quality assurance practice, while 21% also agree that there is quality assurance practice. Furthermore, 35% strongly disagree there are quality assurance practices, while 27% disagree there are quality assurance practices, with 12% remaining neutral in their responses.

Data from key informant interviews on the perspective of hotels regarding customer service reveal that hotels are providing quality care services to their clients. The views of key informants are variant to findings from field data gathered using questionnaires as they suggested custom care is a priority to hotels achieving better performance and business growth.

An informant had this to say;

*Customers are kings and queens in business and should be served excellently so that they can keep patronizing the services of the hotels. This helped keep hotels in business as they grew by striving to keep their customer. Customers must be satisfied with the services provided to them by the staff of the hotel. Customers should leave the hotel satisfied and willing to come as well as feel secure whenever they come back. We should make them feel our facility is a second home to them (Key Informant, Wa 2023).*

The study's findings contradict Watt (2007), who claims that quality assurance is effective if the customer's assessment of hotel services increases the customer's level of satisfaction. It also contradicts Stoke (2007), who stated that perceived quality is a strong predictor of consumer pleasure. This is often due to hotels' superior services, which ensure customer happiness.

**Table I: Customer Service Quality Practices of Hotels in the Upper West Region**

Variables	Response					Total	Percent
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
Food and beverage quality	6	23	5	10	20	64	23
Complaints & feedbacks	2	5	10	24	16	57	21
Time management	2	2	7	15	24	50	18
Environment	3	15	8	11	12	49	18
Communication	1	12	2	15	25	55	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>14 (5%)</b>	<b>57(21%)</b>	<b>32(12%)</b>	<b>75(27%)</b>	<b>97(35%)</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey (May, 2023)

#### 4.2. Customer Perceptions of Hotel Service Quality

The data on the impact of customer perceptions on hotel service quality revealed that 36% of respondents place maximum interest in the fact that service quality is good as they strongly agree in offering their response. The data further indicates that 56% held the view that they strongly disagree there is service quality of hotels. More so, 3% disagreed there is good customer service care, while another 2% agreed there is customer care service. Also, 2% remained undecided in their response as to whether customer service quality is good or otherwise. The data suggest that customer service issues are a major issue confronting the hotel sector in the Upper West Region and this influences their performance and development. Details are provided in Table 1.

A key informant had this to say on feedback;

*Although there is a code of ethics in hotels that is used to improve service delivery and customer care; every organization must have a feedback system or a way for customers to report their concerns, challenges as well as suggestions. This brings out concerns to the right table and makes addressing of their concerns easy. This generally improves the way things are in the perspective of the customers. This customer or guest satisfaction is the ultimate assurance that will guarantee they come back to purchase your product and if they feel their concerns are not adhered to, they simply will not come back and your business will suffer; this is a common phenomenon as some hotel workers have bad attitudes and customer care is very unfortunate (Key Informant, 2023).*

The study confirmed the contribution of Zeithaml et al. (1990), whose work revealed that customer's perspective is based on a variety of intricate factors, such as their own pre-purchase beliefs and the opinions of others, as well as several uncontrollable factors, such as customers' prior experiences with other businesses and their advertising, their psychological state at the time-of-service delivery, their background and values, and the images of the purchased product.

**Table II: Customer Service Quality of Hotels in the Upper West Region**

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Customer Service Quality	Strongly Agree	99	36
	Agree	8	3
	Neutral	5	2
	Disagree	8	3
	Strongly disagree	155	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey (May, 2023)

#### 4.3 Measures to improves quality practices of hotels in the Upper West Region

The study revealed that 43% of respondents indicate staff quality in terms of recruitment is very critical in terms of guaranteeing customer service quality. The data also revealed that 32% of respondents indicated the use of technology will enhance the efficiency of services and meet the increasing demand for customer quality. Also, 15% of respondents cited in-service training of hotel workers, especially frontline workers to be more conversant with customer relation services. In addition, 5% indicated provision of feedback and communication will enhance customer satisfaction, while another 5% also indicated customer relationships by hotels will guarantee customer satisfaction.

On employee motivation influence on job performance, an informant has this to say;

*Most hotels in the Upper West Region do not have incentive packages to motivate their employees, so we stick to the salary structure. Compensation and incentive plans are not available here even though they will be good for the employees and will motivate them to work toward achieving them. This will make employees do their best to earn these packages but the economic conditions and taxes in the industry are making it tough to put in place these packages (Key Informant, 2023).*

These findings support the work of Torres and Kline (2013), who discovered that understanding their client's needs and then attempting to fulfill or exceed them is one way for hoteliers to do so. According to Torres and Kline (2013), high-quality service increases consumer happiness, willingness to return, and referrals. Customer satisfaction eventually leads to higher profitability.

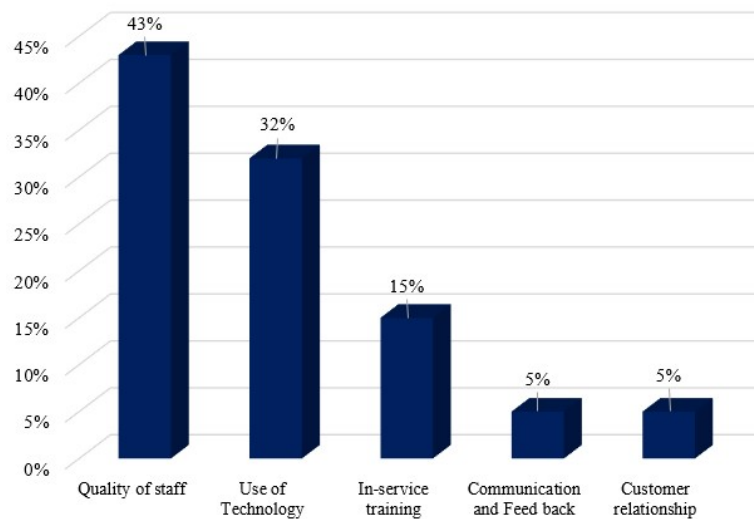


Figure IV: Measures to improve customer service quality of hotels

Source: Field Survey (May, 2023)



## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that although the majority of hotels quality assurance practices of hotels in the upper west region are compromised. It is further concluded that customer satisfaction is very poor as the majority of hotels are not conscious of guaranteeing quality services. On measures to enhance quality services to achieve customer satisfaction, the findings concluded that communication and feedback, product quality, and customer relationship will guarantee customer satisfaction issues. It is therefore recommended that hotels enhance the implementation of quality assurance practices to achieve customer satisfaction given the fact that customer satisfaction enhances business growth and every employee must strive towards that. It is also recommended that hotel operators and their management should do regular capacity building for their employees. The Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and government should ensure facility managers provide basic environmental hygiene at the facilities.

### Authors Contribution

Tahiru Lukman, Haq Mohammed Issah, and Ibrahim Kaleem conceived and designed the study, collected field data, analyzed the results, and wrote the manuscript. Peter Yabepone contributed to the manuscript text and supported in data analysis, as well as proofread the manuscript as well.

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### Conflict of interest

The researchers state that they have no conflict of interest

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