

The impact of Service quality on customer satisfaction in Obuasi Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) - The customers perspective

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Abstract

Globally several studies had been conducted using SERVQUAL model in different discipline and context. However, little had been discussed on comparing the impact of Service quality on customer satisfaction in Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) from the customer perspective. The study adapted the modified version of SERVQUAL model as a tool to measure the variables of the study. The study used convenience sampling method to select customer of ECG. The questionnaires were distributed and collected for analysis using SPSS and Microsoft Excel Software. Simple Regression was used to test for the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. The result indicates that all the five dimensions of service quality performed poorly $P > 0.05$. Furthermore the service quality had a negative impact on customer satisfaction and concludes that the service quality deserves improvement. The study finally recommends that staff should be engaged on regular basis to be trained on issues of costumer services and its effects on organizational performance. Further studies on SERVQUAL model using the five service quality dimensions can gradually close the gaps to bring success to the ECG.

Keywords: Service quality, SERVQUAL model, Customer Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The age of goal setting in the service sector has been moved to improving the service quality and management standards to meet customer satisfaction (Huang, 2013). Several studies in various disciplines over the years have linked service quality and customer satisfaction together. Even though service quality and customer satisfaction remains a dominant component in service delivery the challenge in satisfying the customer over the years still remains exist for the service provider. There has been a different method for measuring customer satisfaction for which Expectancy-disconfirmation model is one of such paradigm (Oliver, 1980). The high acceptability in comparing standards by expectancy- disconfirmation paradigms in the measurement of customer satisfaction has enjoyed widerange of support in academic literature (Oliver, 1994: Halstead, Hartman and Schmidt 1994; Garchal et al, 1994; Zeithmal et al, 1990; Anderson and Sullivan, 1990; Tse and Wilton, 1998; Kennedy and Thirkell, 1988; Oliver and Winer, 1987; Bearden and Teel, 1983).Nonetheless the expectancy- disconfirmation paradigms had received a lot of criticism (Churchill and Supernant, 1982; Gronroos, 1993; Buttle, 1996) it is still popular in this line of service quality Literature. In all these criticism, the SERVQUAL measuring tool has been used by several researchers to examine numerous service industries such as Banks (Oyetunji et al, 2014); Education (Samanhya et al, 2014) and Health (Mileide et al (2013) and Aikins et al, 2014).In spite of the recognition of service quality in various service industries, very little research had been conducted in the Power generation field on the issue of service quality assessment.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:To evaluate the extent to which service quality dimensions are adhered to satisfy customers. Secondly, is to determine the difference between customer expectation and perception. And finally to determine the extent to which service quality dimensions explain customer satisfaction.

1.1. Service Quality

Service quality has a broad definition depending on the school of thought adapted. Service quality may be defined as customer perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations (Czepiel 1990). Service quality can be measured in terms of customer perception,

customer expectation, customer satisfaction, and customer attitude (Sachdev and Verma 2004). Ekinici (2003) indicates that the evaluation of service quality leads to customer satisfaction. Captured below in table are definitions on service quality.

According to (Jiang, Klein, Tesch and Chen 2003) definition of service quality used the word “feel” which measure only the objective element (customer silent test created). However, Ghobachan, Speller and Jones 1994) was not specific on the customers expectation. In the definition of Parasuraman et al (1988); Lewis and Booms (1983); and Lewis and Booms (1983) are not more detailed definitions which can be adopted in the context of this study. This study would adjust to Gronroos (1984) definitions which describe the process in as well evaluated the service quality based on subjective element measure.

1.2. Service Quality Dimensions

Many researchers in this 21st century use either the SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al (1985 and 1988) or the technical and functional quality dimensions of Gronroos model (1982 and 1984). According to Johnson, R. (1995) in his study established that Responsiveness is a crucial determinant of quality, as it is a key component in providing satisfaction and the lack of it is a major source of dissatisfaction. However, Gi-Du Kang and Jeffrey James (2004) examined the conceptualization of service quality from a European perspective (i.e. Gronroos’s model). The result established that the interaction between a consumer and an organization’s representatives does have an important influence on a consumer’s image of the organization and subsequent evaluation of service quality. The current did not consider the Gronroos study from Gi-Du, K. et al (2004) because of its shortcoming on customers responding in Korean language and it did not give a full description of the technical quality interview.

Therefore, this current study would use the SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al (1985 and 1988) that identified perceived service quality into five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Tangibles involve the appearance of physical facilities, including the equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness involves the willingness to help customers. Assurance involves the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. This

assurance includes competence, courtesy, credibility and security. Empathy involves the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers. This empathy includes access, communication, and understanding the customer.

1.3.Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction has a direct impact on customers' behavioural responses and service quality. Rust and Oliver (1994) define satisfaction as the "customer fulfillment response," which is an evaluation as well as an emotion-based response to a service. Channoi (2014) in his study said that Service quality, corporate image and customer perceived value are three significant descriptors of customer satisfaction. Service quality is the most important determinant of customer satisfaction which is the most significant antecedent of customer loyalty. Service quality and customer perceived value are two significant determinants of corporate image

Athanassopoulos et al (2001) examined the impact of customer satisfaction on customers' behavioural responses. The results support the notion of direct effects of customer satisfaction on three criterion variables (decision to stay with the existing service provider, engagement in word-of-mouth communications, and intentions to switch service providers). Appiah et al (2011) investigated the role of the service quality variables in enhancing customer satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was used to find the impact service quality have on customer Satisfaction. The result revealed that service quality indicators such as responsiveness and empathy significantly impact on customer satisfaction. Niveen et al (2013) studied the factors affecting customer satisfaction on service quality. Factor analysis was used to measure the determinants of service quality. The findings showed customer satisfaction have significant effect on Reliability, Empathy, Assurance and Responsiveness but not on Tangibles.

Customer satisfaction has found to be an important mediator between perceived service quality and customer loyalty. Karim et al. (2014) studied the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction and the result of the study showed that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy significantly and positively influenced customer attitudes in terms of satisfaction that is service quality dimensions are crucial for customer satisfaction.

The customer satisfaction in this study is measured by using the difference between expectation and perception of performance called Disconfirmation theory (Anderson, 1973; Oliver, 1980).

1.4. Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

The study by Munusamy, J. et al (2010) investigated the measurement of customer satisfaction through delivery of service quality. The results confirm that Assurance, Responsiveness, Empathy, Tangibles have positive relationship but have no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Also Reliability has negative relationship but it has no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Naik, C.N. K. et al (2010) examined some of the factors that impacts customer satisfaction. The results established that services offered by retail units have positive impact and are significant in building customer satisfaction. For instance, Customers have highest expectations on the promptness of service, accuracy of transactions, security issues and concerns; the customer's lowest expectations are cleanliness, ambience, etc. Customers reported highest satisfaction for promptness and speed of service along with accuracy of transactions at cash counters. The lowest satisfaction levels were reported at the willingness of staff to assist customers in accessing facilities, assortments, information on products, stock positions etc. Akbar, M.M. et al (2009) investigated the effects of customers' perceived service quality, trust, and customer satisfaction on customer Loyalty. The results of the study indicate that trust and customer satisfaction are significantly and positively related to customer Loyalty. Agyapong (2011) examines the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The results showed that all the service quality items were good predictors of customer satisfaction. Shafiq et al (No Year) evaluated the hotels' service quality through customer satisfaction, using SERFPERF model. The results indicates that in Pakistan among the five dimensions of SERFPERF the dimension tangible and empathy needed to be focused more. Again, the result showed that there are positive statistical significance among the three dimensions of quality (assurance, reliability, and responsiveness) and customer satisfaction. Mosahab (2010) studied how to determine service quality and also find the relationship between service quality, satisfaction and loyalty. The results established that in all aspects, customers' expectation, are higher than their perceptions of operation and in fact the quality of offered service is low. Also, the findings further revealed that the customer satisfaction plays the role of a mediator in the

effects of service quality on service loyalty. Ravichandran et al (2010) argued that increase in service quality of the banks can satisfy and develop customer satisfaction which ultimately retains valued customers. Kazi (2011) identified the most important attributes in bank settings, which may be used to review characteristics of the banks as experienced by customers and founded that all the service quality attributes are positively related to customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty in the retail banking settings.

It again revealed that empathy demonstrates the highest positive correlation with customer satisfaction and tangibility shows the least positive correlation with customer satisfaction.

The purpose of this present study is therefore to explore the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

2. Research Methodology

The study used quantitative research design technique and survey method. The modified version of the SERQUAL model by Parasuraman et al (1988) was adopted for designing the questionnaire. Through convenience sampling methods one hundred customers were selected to answer as structured questionnaire. This study adopted the SERVQUAL instrument of Parasuraman et al (1985, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1994) for measuring service quality with twenty-two (22) items accompanied by seven-point scale questionnaire. The instrument had a number of features that are describe below. The questionnaire has been categorized into three sections. These include Customer Expectation, Perceived service quality and General information. The questions in the questionnaire were closed -ended with a six point Likert scale type which has higher internal consistency with cronback alpha of 0.84 and Dichotomous types of questions were used in the demographical component.

2.1. Statistical Tool and Software

The study used descriptive and inferential statistical analysis in the data analysis component. Tables, charts, percentages were the descriptive statistics deployed for the data analysis while regression and correlation analysis remains the on inferential application used. In generating the result for the various statistical technique the statistical packages for service solutions(SPSS) was used.

3. Data Analysis, Results and Findings

This section presents the data analysis and results and discussion in various thematic areas of the research.

3.1.Total Service Quality

The results in Table 2 indicate the composite scores from a total of seventy subjects who shared their thought on their expectations and perceptions about service. The table comprises of the average mean scores of Expectations, Perceptions and the gap scores as against the service quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy).

Table 1: Average Score of Expectation and Perception of Respondents

Average Service Quality dimensions	Expectations	Perceptions	Gap Scores
Responsiveness	3.9	3.28	-0.63
Reliability	3.85	3.05	-0.8
Assurance	3.78	2.98	-0.81
Tangibles	3.62	2.99	-0.63
Empathy	3.53	2.88	-0.65
Average	3.74	3.04	-0.70

From the results in Table 1 indicates the average mean score of Expectation. Presented in the Table are respondent's average mean ratings of the entire service quality dimension with Responsiveness (3.90) ranked highest than the others, followed closely by Reliability (3.85), Assurance (3.75), Tangibles (3.62) and Empathy (3.53). Therefore, the average mean on service quality dimension is 3.74. Furthermore, Table 1 also contained the average mean score of Perception. The respondents ranked Responsiveness (3.28) as the highly perceived service quality dimension, followed by Reliability (3.05), Tangibles (2.99), Assurance (2.98) and Empathy (2.88). Thus, the mean score of Perception on service quality dimension is 3.04.

Consequently, Table 1 again provide the gap score between Perception and Expectation (P-E). The smallest gap of the entire service quality dimension were created by both Responsiveness (-0.63) and Tangibles (-0.63), followed by Empathy (-0.65), Reliability (-0.80) and Assurance (-0.81). Therefore, the average gap score difference between Perception and Expectation is -0.70.

3.2.The difference between Expectation and Perception

As demonstrated in Table 2 are the expectations and perceptions of customers of Obuasi ECG on a twenty (22) items for expectation and perception answered by seventy respondents. The mean values of expectation and perception have been summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Expectation and perception gap

Variables	Dimensions	Expectations	Perceptions	Gap Scores
modern equipment's		4.1	3.54	-0.56
Visually appealing		2.89	2.26	-0.63
Employees neatness		3.99	3.39	-0.6
Service materials	Tangibles	3.49	2.76	-0.73
Promises		3.91	3.11	-0.8
Show interest		3.94	3.14	-0.8
Perform service right		3.66	2.83	-0.83
Provide service promise		3.93	3.13	-0.8
Error free records	Reliability	3.8	3.03	-0.77
Employees behavior		3.76	2.94	-0.82
Safe Transactions		3.86	3.06	-0.8
Courteous		3.66	2.87	-0.83
Knowledge	Assurance	3.83	3.04	-0.79
Service performance info		4.17	3.94	-0.23
Prompt Service		3.94	3.3	-0.64
Willing to Help		3.77	2.96	-0.81
quick response to request	Responsiveness	3.73	2.9	-0.83
Individual attention		3.36	2.71	-0.65
Personal attention		3.56	2.79	-0.77
Interest at heart		4.11	3.57	-0.54
Specific need		3.19	2.6	-0.59
convenient working hours	Empathy	3.44	2.74	-0.7

From table 2 the means expectation of the respondents who answered the questionnaires indicate that expectations had the highest mean scores for the five service quality dimension as well as the individual items. On the contrary, the average scores of customers that responded to the questionnaires graded perception as lowest mean score for the five service quality dimensions and all the service quality items as in Table 2. Consequently, the gaps scores between expectation and perception is negative which signifies that expectation was higher than perception which obviously means that consumer are not happy with the quality of service at Obuasi ECG

3.3. Relationships between Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

The scattered diagram in figure 1 depicts a graph of satisfaction against the individual SERVQUAL items to show the relationship between both variables.

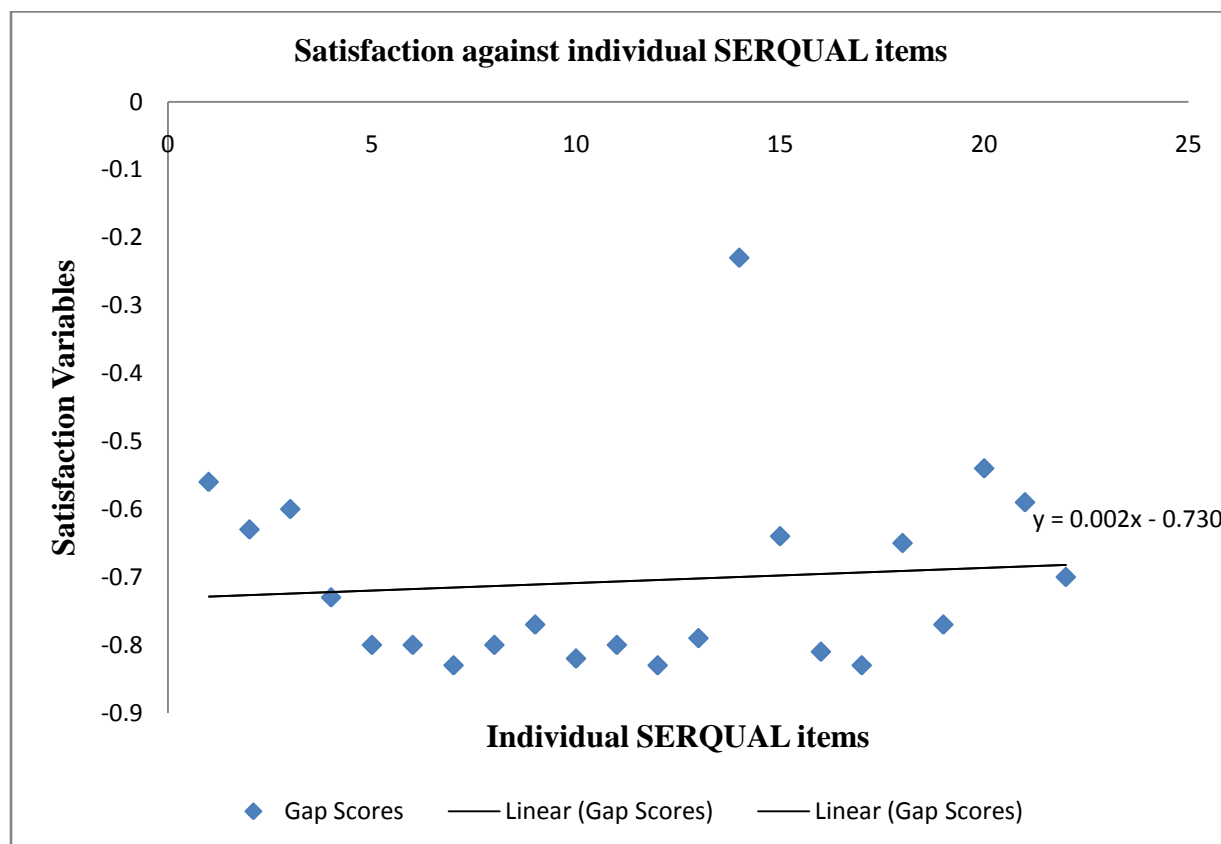


Figure 1: Scatter plot of satisfaction against servqual items

$$Y = 0.0022X - 0.7309 \quad \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

$$\text{Satisfaction} = 0.0022(\text{SERVQUAL items}) - 0.7309 \quad \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

The model shows how poor the SERVQUAL item explain customer satisfaction in the Obuasi branch of the electricity company of Ghana.

4. Discussion

The findings of this studies suggested the most rated service quality at Obuasi ECG is responsiveness. Table 2 indicates that the mean score on responsiveness produce a perception score of 3.28 and expectation score of 3.53. This means that when customer expectation is higher than the perceived service provided. Consumers are not happy with the performance of the service providers. The current studies is consistent with the work of Johnson, R (1995) but other studies by Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988) and Stromgren (2007) is inconsistent with the new result. Therefore, future studies under this area should identify the gap created between the developed and developing countries to breach the differences. In this present study, the gap between perception and expectation suggests that customers are not happy with the entire service quality dimensions. The results indicates that Assurance has the largest gap of -0.81 while Tangibles and responsiveness have the smallest gap of -0.61. In the studies of both Hussain et al (2010) and Prabha (2010) revealed that their work is in line with the new results whereas Rahaman et al (2011) was not consistent with the findings. In effect, the gap might due to the sampling method used and cultural difference may affect the service provider's inability to satisfy the customers. The study revealed that service quality at Obuasi ECG does not contribute positively to customer satisfaction and the model of customer satisfaction using SERVQUAL dimension as explanatory variable was statistically not significant with $p > 0.05$ for the test of model adequacy is indirectly or inversely proportional to customer satisfaction. The findings of new studies is consistent with Munusay et al (2010) while most of the previous works [Agyapong (2011), Appiah et al (2011), Niveen (2013), Karim et al (2014)] are not coherent with the new studies. Consequently, future studies should be able to pick a larger sample size in order for the results to be generalized.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to compare the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Obuasi Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) from a customer perspective. On the basis of the results obtained in the study the following conclusions were reached: The objective of the most rated service quality at Obuasi ECG was responsiveness. Even though, customers rated responsiveness higher than any of the service quality dimensions yet they were not satisfied with the provider's ability to provide prompt service as well as supporting consumers. The overall gap between perception and expectation suggest that customers are not happy with all the service provided for the five service quality dimension. Assurance is the service quality with largest gap. Also, tangible and responsiveness were the only dimensions with the smallest gap. It does not matter how small or large the gap, if the customer's expectation is always higher, then it would produce bad word of mouth, poor past experience, customer churn and high competition for providers. Therefore, closing all customer gaps to zero brings success. Service quality at Obuasi ECG is indirectly or inversely proportional to customer satisfaction. The results indicate that the higher customer satisfaction, the lower the service quality provided or when customer satisfaction is low, the service quality is high. This means that the customers are always happy no matter the kind of service provided. On the other hand, customers are not satisfied no matter the quality of service provided. Finally, the study has shown that service quality is a crucial component for Electricity Companies to focus on Service quality to meet their customers demand to make them happy.

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