

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Customer perceptions towards eThekweni Municipality customer service,
Durban, South Africa.**

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ABSTRACT

The advent of our country's democracy in 1994 created hope for a better life for all citizens especially those who were previously marginalized. This hope heightened expectations of a government that delivers better services, a government that is people centered. Subsequently a plethora of customer centric legislation were passed one being the White Paper on Transformation of Public Service. According to the Constitution of South Africa the mandate of a municipality is to deliver services to the satisfaction of the citizens who are customers. The understanding of the customer's needs the expectations as well as the perceptions is vital. This is to ensure that the needs are met. It is with this background that this research is undertaken. The aim of this research is to provide an understanding of the eThekweni Municipality customers' expectations and perceptions of the customer service quality. This is done so that the gaps are identified and measures be recommended to bridge these gaps. The research conducted for this study included both literature review as well as the empirical study. For the empirical part of the study the quantitative research approach was used with the survey method. The literature review provided prior studies on customer service quality from the view of general service industries in the private sector as well as the perspective of the South African government including the local sphere. This literature review provided the theoretical framework which formed the basis for the empirical study. The study was a non-intervention case study which observed trends. This was a survey and it utilized a survey design. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the selected sample. The questionnaire was inclusive of the SERVQUAL measuring scale. Essentially the findings indicated that customers of eThekweni Municipality have positive perceptions of the quality of customer service rendered through the Municipalities Sizakala Customer Service Centers. These perceptions were measured using the 05 service quality dimensions. These positive perceptions meant that customers are satisfied with the customer service received at the centers. The recommendations were provided to improve the satisfaction levels and these included the review of Customer Relations Management Strategy.

Key words: Customer Service, Expectations, Municipality, Perceptions, Service delivery, Service Quality, SERVQUAL

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the topic and broadly explains what will be contained in the study. The primary responsibility of the public sector or government is to provide services, most importantly those need to be quality services. Under the Apartheid government, it was not important how those services were delivered to certain population groups Moletsane, (2012). Services were rendered along racial lines and if you were non-white you would receive poor services if any.

However, in 1997 the democratically elected government of South Africa (RSA) introduced the White Paper to transform the Public Service. This erstwhile White Paper established a *Batho Pele* (People First) programme. The intention of the programme is to improve how services are rendered by putting customers first Moletsane, (2012).

This programme was a customised version of the private sector Customer Relations Management (CRM). All government Departments followed suit by implementing the *Batho Pele* programme. eThekweni Municipality's response was the adoption and implementation of a Customer Care Policy in 2013 eThekweni, (2013). The objective of the Customer Care Policy is to ensure that clients or customers experience excellence whenever they come into contact with eThekweni Municipality.

This study investigated the effectiveness of Customer Relations Management through testing the level of satisfaction of the customers. It measured the satisfaction levels that the customers have with the eThekweni Municipal customer service centers. A number of similar studies have been done in the field globally but a few have been undertaken locally. One such study was conducted by Belinda Mhlongo(2010).

In her conclusion and recommendations, she stated that management needs to make means to bridge the gap between the level of services rendered and customer expectations (Mhlongo, Nzimakwe, Naidoo, & Munapo, 2016).

One of the objectives of this study is to investigate the gap identified by Mhlongo. On a similar study done at eThekweni, Chetty, (2010) recommended that a comparative study be conducted at different customer contact points and not only at Sizakala Customer Service Centers.

Whilst Chetty (2010) discovered that there is a difference in the way services are rendered, Mhlongo in agreement indicated that Management needs to investigate and find reasons behind this difference. The two recommendations form the basis of this study. This study improves on the studies of the two researchers and makes good of their recommendations. The study investigated the implementation of Customer Relations Management by investigating the satisfaction levels of customers within the Municipality.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In most government institutions managers tend to think that they know what is best for their customers. They take this position with little or no empirical evidence. This leads to the development and implementation of plans that seek to satisfy this guessed and untested customer need. After implementing these plans customers remain despondent and dissatisfied. It is not uncommon for a community hall to remain unused because it was not what the community wanted; if they were consulted they would have perhaps preferred a bridge or a new sports field (Luke, 2017).

It is against this background that this study was undertaken. The intention was to make recommendations to eThekweni Municipality to align their customer service offering with customer needs. The results of the study offer management an opportunity to consider developing and implementing plans based on empirical evidence so that planning captures exactly what customers may need.

This in turn will improve customer satisfaction which is the ultimate mandate of customer service within eThekweni. In summary, this research intends to assist in improving the satisfaction levels of customers. Employees of the Municipality will also benefit because they will be implementing informed plans that increase the satisfaction levels of customers which allows them to make a meaningful contribution towards customer service.

The study therefore also intends to assist eThekwini Municipality to reflect and use a researched approach to align how business process are currently to a more customer centric approach.

1.3 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The study is about the satisfaction levels of customers that utilise the services of the eThekwini Municipality, particularly customers who go to the municipal offices looking for services. These services vary from request for new services, complaints for services not rendered or purely to look for information.

The study explains the pockets of excellence and identify the areas of improvement and make recommendations for service delivery improvement. The study is conducted at customer service centers to understand the views of these customers. It will exclude customer service officials and other municipal officials; management was also not part of the study.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The approval of the Customer Care Policy by eThekwini Municipality has been viewed as positive by most researchers such as Ngcamu, (2013), Sibiya, (2013), and Mhlongo, (2016). However, the policy has not borne the intended results as evidenced by the level of dissatisfaction expressed by customers and the expected quality of services rendered Mhlongo, (2016).

Mhlongo, (2016) investigated and results indicated that customers were not satisfied with the levels of customer service rendered at the Sizakala centers. In her report she found that there is a gap of -0.57 using the SERVQUAL Model. In a study by Ngcamu (2013) the findings were that the human resources in the form of officials are not evenly spread and that the fragmented business processes make it difficult for officials to offer a comprehensive and an effective service.

In another study motivation was mentioned as a factor preventing the effectiveness of the policy(Chetty, 2010).Amongst other recommendations made by previous studies, management should continuously monitor the quality of services rendered at the centers (Mhlongo et al., 2016). It is against this background that this study intends to investigate the satisfaction levels of customers, identify shortcomings and recommend possible solutions.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to establish the satisfaction levels of customer with the level of customer service being provide by eThekwini Municipality at the Sizakala Customer Service Centers.

The objectives of this research study are as follows:

- To investigate the satisfaction levels of customers that use the eThekwini Municipal customer service centers.
- To investigate the difference between customer expectations and the level of services rendered at eThekwini Municipal customer service centers.
- To investigate areas of improvement.

1.6 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is; Are the customers that use eThekwini Municipal customer service centers satisfied with the customer service that they receive. In order to achieve the objectives, the following key questions need to be answered by the research:

- What are the satisfaction levels amongst customers that use the eThekwini Municipal customer service centers?
- What is the difference between customer expectations and the level of services rendered at eThekwini Municipal customer service centers?
- What are the areas of improvement?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The academic research conducted for the current study included review of literature review as well as an empirical study. For the empirical part of the study, a quantitative research approach was used with the survey method. Quantitative approach designs represent a post-positivist philosophical assumption.

This approach entails the examination between and among variables in answering research questions and hypotheses. It is better because it eliminates the bias of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). EThekwini Municipality is visited by a large number of customers; this approach is therefore ideal as it allows for a broader study and enhanced accuracy.

1.7.1 Research Design

The research design can be simply defined as the basic plan on how a researcher plans to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2008). The study was a non-intervention case study which observed trends. In other words, it will be a survey and will utilise a survey design. True to the nature of a case study, this research will explore the processes and activities of eThekweni Municipal customer services centers. Questionnaires will be used to collect data from the selected sample.

Creswell (2014) defines a survey design as that design that provides a description of trends, opinions and attitudes by studying the sample of that particular population in question. This design has been chosen for a number of reasons, some being the simplicity of developing and collecting questionnaires. The questionnaires are also economical to develop (Creswell, 2008).

1.7.2 Sampling design

When planning to conduct research, it is advised that a sampling strategy and sample size be specified; this must be based on similar published studies (Guetterman, 2015). In similar studies conducted, non-probability convenience sampling was used (Moletsane, 2014 and Mhlongo, 2016). This is a version of purposeful sampling which according to Patton (2015) is the selection of information rich cases that will provide depth for the study. This study will also make use of non-probability convenience sampling in line with similar studies stated above.

1.7.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The study will make use of the survey method for data collection. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire. These questionnaires will be administered by the researcher or research assistants at the customer service centers which form part of the sample.

1.7.4 Significance of the Study

There is a need to conduct studies to the wider customer service centers and not only the Sizakala Centers. Mhlongo (2010) and Chetty (2010) agreed by indicating that comparative studies between different customer service centers need to be undertaken. In order for management to intervene, specific problem areas need to be identified and this study will address that.

For the municipal officials to implement improvement mechanisms to the quality of services they provide, they need to understand the shortcomings in service provision from the perspective of the customer.

The study will assist also by making a contribution in the body of knowledge of customer service in the public sector. A lot of research has been done on the service quality and customer service comprehensively but most of the work is done in the private sector. The study will provide some answers that may assist other researchers in the field.

The study will also identify and explain these shortcomings. The customers will eventually benefit when the recommendations are implemented. This is because the needs of customers and factors that will improve the satisfaction levels of customers will be clearly understood.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This study will be presented and will follow the below structure:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The first chapter will consist of the introduction of this research work. This chapter consists of the background framework of the study and places it in context. Problem statement, research objectives, research questions, aim and significance of the study will be included. It will also present the structure of the study. It covers how the collected data will be analysed.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter of the study is dedicated to the review of literature linked to the study objectives. The chapter will first define customer service concepts. Customer satisfaction will be characterized under the chapter and empirical studies reviewed. Further to this, the service quality and how it influences the customer satisfaction will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

In line with similar studies this chapter will present details of the method used to conduct the study. The study employs qualitative methodology.

The chapter will explain the research design utilised in the study, the population and link it to the selected sample, the data collection methods adopted, the data analysis methods picked, questionnaire development, pilot study, validity and reliability and the research strategy adopted.

Chapter 4 – Presentation of Results

In this chapter findings collected by this study will be presented. It will be presented in line with the research questions which had to be answered, in the beginning there will be the introduction as well as the rate at which the responses were received for the study. The findings will be collected from the study participants who will be intercepted by non-probability convenience sampling.

The researcher together with his staff will position themselves in the customer service centers and approach customers who visit these centers to participate in the study. To aid the study the data collectors explained the study and the relevant ethical issues to the respondents. Further to this the research process was fully explained before the actual questionnaires administered once the consent was ascertained.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This chapter will present the findings of the study. Previous studies will be compared with the research findings. Firstly, studies as discussed in the literature review will be presented and secondly these will be contrasted with the findings of the study. Conclusions will then be drawn.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will present a summary of the study, the conclusions and the recommendations the study will make to eThekweni Municipality for policy improvements. The chapter begins by providing a summary in terms of the findings made from the literature as well as the findings from the primary study. At the end this chapter will conclude by recommending providing the scope for future studies.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FURTHER AREAS FOR RESEARCH

The study was conducted at the Sizakala Customer Service Centers. This could be limiting in that customers not only come to these centers for services, they visit other points of service such as libraries, clinics as well as police stations. The views of those customers were not captured and that limited the study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter one of this study presented the research topic; the motivation and background of the study was substantiated and the value of the research and research methodology were explained. The next chapter will present the synthesis of literature with specific focus on customer service and service quality theories and their application.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SOUTH AFRICAN SPHERES OF GOVERNMENT

AN OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Within the Republic of South Africa (RSA) Local, Provincial as well as National government were established through legislation as three spheres of government. All of these spheres has a distinct function. The Constitution of the RSA requires all these three spheres to operate together as a single body of integrated administration in order for the Nation to function as a collective (RSA, 1996).

The local sphere consists of approximately 250 autonomous administrations known as Municipalities. The RSA has legislation that forms the basis for the establishment of these Municipalities (RSA, 1996). These pieces of legislation include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) as well as the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) amongst others.

2.2. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, ACT 108 OF 1996

As outlined in the Constitution of Republic of South Africa (1996), local government administrations are to deliver a transparent and accountable government for local communities where they operate in. This should consist of economic and social development as well community participation in all matters of government (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017); this constitution mandates Municipalities to make sure that basic services are delivered to Municipalities.

2.3 WHITE PAPER ON TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY, 1997

The 1997 White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery is also known as *Batho Pele*. The legislation lays down the foundations for the delivery of services in the public sector (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017). *Batho Pele* dictates that public servants should treat citizens as customers and render a very high level of customer service.

The legislation (White Paper) also lays the foundation for holding these public servants accountable for their actions. *Batho Pele* introduces 08 principles, namely: information, consultation, access, courtesy, redress and value for money, service standards, openness and transparency.

As an example under the principle of redress, *Batho Pele* indicates that should there be a shortfall in the expected services, the public servant should apologise and seek to correct the mistake or the under delivery that occurred. Under the principle of consultation, the White Paper mandates public servants to consult citizens on the standards and quality of services they are to receive. This principle further states that where possible citizens should be given a choice on the services offered (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017).

2.4 WHITE PAPER ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1998

This 1998 White Paper on Local Government gives a guide on how local government should fulfil its developmental orientated mandate. Basically, it gives effect to the obligation as stated in the Constitution. It further establishes the framework for the establishment of the developmental oriented local government that commits to the needs of citizens, improves the quality of life and holistically addresses the needs of the community (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017).

The Paper instructs municipalities to put in place measures to improve public participation through policy development and implementation. The White Paper further establishes the Integrated Development Planning (IDP), which is a mechanism where the municipality develops a community based development plan. This plan should include short, medium and long-term plans. The Paper is unambiguous in mandating municipalities to formulate credible strategies to achieve IDP goals within specific targets which are time bound (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017).

2.5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT MUNICIPAL SYSTEMS ACT NO. 32 OF 2000

The Local Government Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000 as amended in 2014), is centered on citizen engagement in the business of municipalities. Under this Act, Clause 73 mandates local governments to ensure that they prioritise the delivery of basic needs.

It further says local governments must put measures in place so that communities receive at least the minimum package of municipal services which are water and sanitation and the provision of electricity (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017). The Act further outlines the duties as well as the rights of citizens. One of these rights is the right to be included in the decision-making processes and make oral and written submissions in those decisions. The other right is to be informed as citizens, especially of the decisions of the municipality that will affect the community's rights and property (Moletsane, 2012).

2.6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT: MUNICIPAL STRUCTURES AMENDMENT ACT NO. 1 OF 2003

The Municipal Structures Act (No. 1 of 2003 as amended), gives a mandate to municipalities to cultivate measures to engage or consult citizens and communities in rendering services, performing its functions as well as whilst they exercise their powers. Municipalities are mandated to review the needs of the communities on an annual basis. Municipalities should also have mechanisms to prioritise and meet community needs (Moletsane, 2012).

2.7 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MUNICIPALITIES

In terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) the responsibilities of local municipalities are as follows (RSA, 1996):

- A municipality has executive authority in respect of, and has the right to administer local government matters and other matters assigned to it by nationally or provincially approved legislation.
- A municipality may pass and implement and monitor by-laws for the effective administration of the matters which it has the right to administer in terms of relevant legislation.
- Subject to Section 151 (4), a by-law that is in conflict with national or provincial legislation is invalid. If there is a conflict between a by-law and national or provincial legislation that is inoperative because of a conflict referred to in Section 149, the by-law must be regarded as valid as long as that legislation is inoperative.

- National and provincial governments must assign to a municipality by agreement and subject to any conditions, the administration of a matter, which necessarily relates to local government, if that matter would most effectively be administered locally; and the municipality has the capacity to administer it.

2.8 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The roles and responsibilities of local government can be normally categorised as follows(RSA, 1996):

- Infrastructure and basic services; this covers the delivery potable water and the management of sanitation, energy and electricity distribution, solid waste collection, storm water and coastal operations management, roads/verge management, public transport within that municipality.
- Social and welfare services; this is the provincial responsibility but there are functions such as early childhood development facilities, municipal health services, public parks and other recreational amenities.
- Governance and administration; these include nuisance control, traffic management and public order, fire-fighting services, building regulations etc.

The intention of this study is to make an addition to the body of knowledge on expectations and perceptions of customer services by citizens who are customers of eThekwini Municipality.

2.9 OVERVIEW OF ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY AND SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTERS

2.9.1 BACKGROUND

EThekwini Municipality is a municipality categorised as “A” in terms of the Municipal Systems Act; it is positioned on the east shoreline of South Africa in the Province of called Kwazulu Natal. It is made up of Durban as the major City and other smaller secondary towns such as Pinetown, Umhlanga, and Isiphingo etc. The municipality has a total surface of 2 297 square kilometres and is home to approximately 3.5 Million people (EThekwini, 2018).

2.9.2 ETHEKWINI MUNICIPAL VISION

In line with the Constitution, the objective of eThekweni Municipality is to deliver basic services in a sustainable manner among other functions (RSA, 1996). In order to deliver these services, the municipality has adopted a vision which states that “By 2030 eThekweni Municipality will enjoy the reputation of being Africa’s most caring and liveable City, where all citizens live in harmony” (EThekweni, 2018). In implementing this vision, the Municipality has developed an Integrated Development plan.

The following are Municipal Core Values:

- Sustainability
- Economically successful City
- Caring City
- Smart City
- Poverty reduction, democratic and equal City

2.9.3 THE EIGHT (08) POINT PLAN

To assist with the implementation of the IDP the Municipality developed 08 plans and formed the Eight Point Plan; the plan converts Municipal priority into focused activities that can be easily implemented. This eight-point plan is as follows:

Plan 1 : Develop and sustain our spatial, natural and built environment

Plan 2: Developing a prosperous, diverse economy and employment creation

Plan 3: Creating a quality living environment

Plan 4: Fostering a socially equitable environment

Plan 5: Creating a platform for growth, empowerment and skills development

Plan 6: A vibrant and creative city - the foundation for sustainability and social cohesion

Plan 7: Good governance and responsive local government

Plan 8: Financially accountable and sustainable city

The current approved organogram of the Municipality is in line with the current IDP and the 08-point plan. These 08 plans also inform the structuring of the municipality in terms of the organogram.

The Municipality has 08 clusters: Governance and International Relations, Treasury, Trading Services. Engineering, EThekwini Transport Authority, Human Settlements, Economic Development and Planning, Corporate and Human resources as well as Community Services.

Under the Cluster Governance and International Relations there is a Unit or an administrative department called Sizakala Customer Service Unit. This Unit is tasked with the coordination of customer services in the Municipality. Formally, the mandate of the Sizakala Customer service Unit is to control and managed the Sizakala Customer Service Centers (EThekwini, 2018).

ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY TOP STRUCTURE

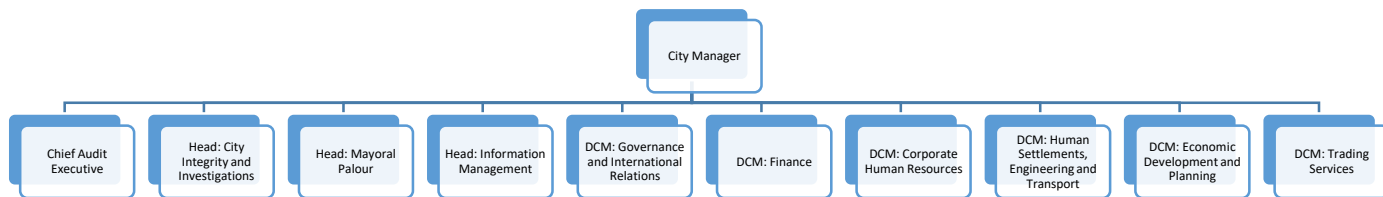


Figure 2.6 Approved Organogram of the eThekwini Municipality (EThekwini, 2018)

Source: (Adapted from eThekwini Annual Report, 2017/2018)

2.9.4 CUSTOMER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Municipality in 2013 approved a Customer Relations Management Strategy to improve the customer service offering. The main purpose of the strategy was to coordinate the fragmented customer services in the Municipality, which will in turn improve the relationship between the Municipality and its customers. Ultimately, this will lead to improved customer satisfaction (Municipality, 2013). The strategy goes further and states the platforms where customers will be serviced such as the walk-in centers, the contact centers, the mass community meetings and the web based media platforms. The strategy also gives guidance for the integration of the currently fragmented customer services.

This is done through the development and management of the Sizakala Customer service centers. Some of the strategic customer service programmes are also mentioned in the strategy. The programmes are customer service standards, customer service training as well as the monitoring and evaluation of customer service. The strategy also outlines the development and implementation of the Customer Care Policy (Municipality, 2013).

2.9.5 CUSTOMER CARE POLICY 2013

The Customer Relations Management Strategy also gave effect to the Customer Care Policy. One of the fundamental objectives of this policy is to guarantee that customers and anyone whenever making contact with the Municipality gets to experience excellence. The Policy outlines the commitment of the Municipality to customer care. Values are also laid out in the Policy: mutual trust and understanding, good customer care, service excellence, respect, integrity & professionalism (EThekwini, 2013).

The Policy also outlines the *Batho Pele* principles as laid out in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery; these are explained according to how they are understood and implemented at eThekwini. Customers are defined by the Policy. Of particular importance, the Policy lays down the framework for the development of the customer service standards as one of the principles. The Municipality must have standards; customers must know the level of service they will receive.

The policy also explains how customer service standards will be measured, which is through the annual surveys such as facilitation of customer focused groups, the “Mystery Shopper” programme as well as the customer satisfaction questionnaires. All these programmes will allow customers to provide feedback to the Municipality on not only how services are conducted but also how the Municipality can improve. The policy closes by making a service commitment to the customers and providing a mechanism for complaints. The Policy introduces the Sizakala Programme which is implemented throughout the Municipality by Sizakala Customer Service Unit.

2.10 SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICE UNIT

The Customer Care Policy gave effect to the Sizakala programme which is facilitated by the Sizakala Customer Service Unit. The mandate and purpose statement of the Sizakala Customer Service Unit is as follows: “To implement the Customer Relations Management Strategy (CRMS) and Customer Relations Management Policy (CRMP) in the Municipality and ensure the provision of accessible and effective customer services in accordance with the principles of Batho Pele.”

The Unit is further separated into 2 departments namely, Customer Services Department and Administration. Customer services are tasked with the management of front-line services for the Municipality. In addition, the Department oversees the following functions:

2.10.1 Provision of integrated customer services

The Unit ensures that Sizakala centers provide services that meet the needs of local customers. This means that the centers provide a customer made package of services. It is the function of the Unit to continuously engage customers to ensure that the correct combination of services is offered.

2.10.2 Facilitating the provision of infrastructure that will cater for integrated services

The Unit needs to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of customers. The Unit continuously extends the access of Municipal services. The Unit not only adds services to the existing centers but has an infrastructure programme to extend current offices and build new ones in line with community demands. The Unit also ensures that the facilities are adequately maintained at all times (Municipality, 2013).

2.10.3 Complaints Management

The Unit facilitates the handling of complaints for the Municipality. Should customers fail to get assistance directly from the Service Units for services such as Water and Electricity, customers can direct those complaints through to Sizakala.

This can be done telephonically and or through electronic mail. The Unit has a dedicated email address sizakala@durban.gov.za as well as a toll free number (0800 33 10 11) to receive these complaints.

2.10.4 Implementation of *Batho Pele* programme

One of the roles of the Unit Sizakala is to rollout the *Batho Pele* Project/Programme. The objectives and outputs of *Batho Pele* are as follows:

2.10.4.1 *Batho Pele* Objectives

- Improve levels and quality of service delivery
- Put in place service delivery that puts the customer first.
- To ensure that all employees within eThekweni municipality adhere to the principles of *Batho Pele* and are more accountable to the citizens.

2.10.4.2 *Batho Pele* Outputs

- *Batho Pele* programmes implemented
- Revitalisation strategy implemented – embracing service delivery transformation initiatives
- Employees adhering to principles and eThekweni customer care policy
- Research and advisory services conducted
- *Batho Pele* mainstreamed and institutionalized
- Professionalism

The administration Department is tasked with the following functions in support of customer services:

2.10.4.3 *General administration*

These are functions such as procurement, financial management, human resources and auxiliary services like records management, fleet management and messenger services.

2.10.4.4 *Provision of research*

This section provides support to all the customer service projects with emphasis on research. They are the ones who manage the customer satisfaction programme, “Mystery Shopper” programme as well as the annual needs surveys.

2.10.4.5 Statistics and information

This section receives, interprets and keeps the statistics and information for the Unit as well as the Municipal customer service.

2.11 SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTERS

The mandate of the Sizakala Customer Service Centers is to provide a basket of Municipal and government services in one place. Customers should be assisted at one place and not move around. Customers looking for help with Water or Billing the service should be in one place. The Unit currently has 35 centers distributed across the Municipality (see figure 2.7 below).

These centers differ in sizes in line with the services that they render. These centers also include what is known as the Thusong Center, where even the Provincial and National government services are provided. In such centers one may find the social grants application service with the South African Social Security Agency. The aim is to ensure that all services required by citizens are available.

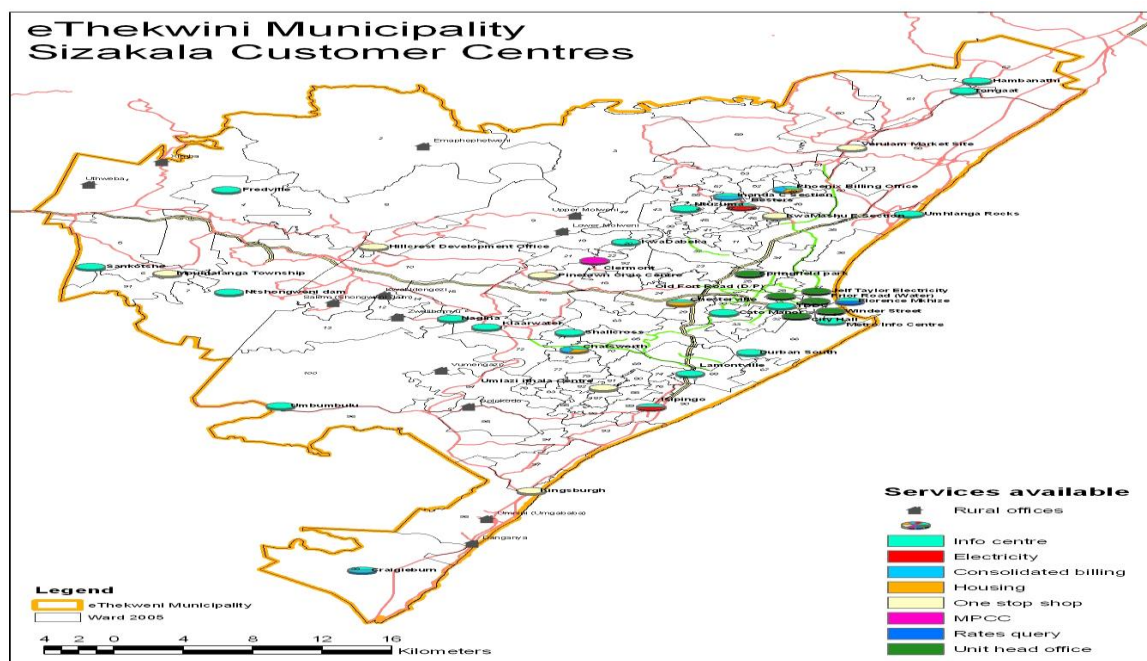


Figure 2.7 Approved Organogram of the eThekweni Municipality

2.12 CONCLUSION

Chapter two introduced and explained the structure of the South African government. It commenced with explaining the legislative framework in the form of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the White Paper on Transforming Public service delivery, the Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) as well as the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998). The roles and responsibilities of municipalities was explained. The chapter further introduced eThekweni Municipality, its vision, values as well as the framework that informs the Integrated Development Plan, the '08-point plan' approach.

Within eThekweni Municipality Sizakala Customer Service as Unit was explained starting with the policy framework in the form of Customer Relations Management Strategy and the Customer Care Policy. The chapter closed with the detailed explanation of the Sizakala Centers, the strategic link with Batho Pele as well as the location of these offices. The next chapter will review literature. It will introduce, explore and discuss different theories as well as discuss what scholars have researched around the topic of customer services.

CHAPTER THREE-THE SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will identify and critically discuss the theoretical aspects of customer service. It will provide and explain the theory that supports this study. Thereafter issues within the context of customer satisfaction and service quality will be explored. This chapter will begin by focusing on the theoretical framework of these aspects and how they link and lastly, their impact on customer service.

The researcher sought out scholarly articles that focused on customer satisfaction, Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) and customer relations management. A number of peer reviewed articles were utilised for the purpose of reviewing literature. The approach followed was to first search international studies, continental studies, South African studies and lastly, local studies were conducted in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and eThekweni Municipality.

The focus was on services, specifically public services. These studies revealed similar terms used. In a study on Sri Lanka libraries, 113 service quality determinants were used to define the customer satisfaction of the users of those libraries (Jayasundara, Ngulube & Minishi-Majanja, 2010). Another similar study in Pakistan used customer satisfaction as a term of interest throughout the study (Hanif, Hafeez, & Riaz, 2010). Lastly, a study in Tanzania used the service quality model to study the satisfaction of customers with the local business schools (Mbise and Tuninga, 2016). Most of these studies used service quality as the basis of their studies.

Different theories have been researched and are found in the body of knowledge within customer satisfaction. These theories include the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory(EDT), the Attribution Theory, the Equity Theory, the Comparison Level Theory, the Performance-Importance model, the Dissonance, the Value-Precept Theory and the Contrast Theory (Hanif et al., 2010).

Different theories were used but mostly the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) was used. Under this section, the use of EDT will be explained; a few studies will be discussed as well as different positions taken by the authors and how these relate to this study.

3.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

For many decades scholars have used the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) to investigate satisfaction levels, be it that of customers or citizens; this theory was first introduced by Oliver (1980). In essence, the EDT is a theory, which measures customer satisfaction regarding the perceived quality of products or services. The EDT assists in outlining how customers will arrive at conclusions with regards to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service or product informed by three constructs: expectations, disconfirmation and performance (Oliver, 1980).

The EDT has been used in a number of studies to investigate citizen satisfaction with public services as well as satisfaction with products. In Mexico, the theory was used to investigate and explain satisfaction levels with public services (Petrovsky et al., 2017). This theory was also successfully used in a study investigating the satisfaction levels of the emerging middle class with a range of services ranging from hospitality to tourism. The study was done in two groups of countries: those with advanced economies (USA, Australia and Japan) and those with developing economies (Turkey and China) (Zhu et al., 2018). In Denmark, when the government merged local government structures to form bigger municipalities researchers used EDT to measure citizen satisfaction with those developments (Hansen, 2015).

Locally, EDT has also been used to investigate the reliability and durability of cellular phone usage as a study tool (Sofowora, 2015). Before the EDT came into being, public administration researchers used external determinants such as the characteristics of services as well as environmental factors to assess satisfaction. What came with EDT was innovation that drew attention to the determinants of satisfaction that are internal to the citizens (Petrovsky et al., 2017).

The Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory makes use of 2 variables, namely the expectation or desire of the service or product and experience or perceived performance of the service or the product, see with figure 2.1 below (Oliver, 1980). The desire or expectation is experienced before the services are rendered or before the purchase of the product and the experience or the perceived performance is experienced post purchase or post transaction. The resultant difference between the expectation and the desire is known as the disconfirmation between the experience and the expectation (Oliver, 1980).

The customer will be satisfied if the service or product exceeds their expectations and this is called positive disconfirmation. If the customer receives a service or a product less than they expected the customer will be dissatisfied. This is called negative disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980). According to Churchill and Suprenant (1982) the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory has four aspects namely expectations, performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction.

Expectations reflect anticipated behavior and are compared with the subsequent experience. Performance refers to the level of comparison by which to assess the disconfirmation. Disconfirmation is the difference between the anticipated expectation and the actual performance and satisfaction with the service or product. Satisfaction is then the customer's comparison of the rewards and the costs compared with the expectation (Churchill Jr and Surprenant, 1982).

Scholars constantly agree on the hypothesis which indicates that satisfaction levels are affected by disconfirmation; negative disconfirmation will lead to lower levels of satisfaction whilst the positive disconfirmation will lead to increased levels of satisfaction (Elkhani and Bharki, 2016).

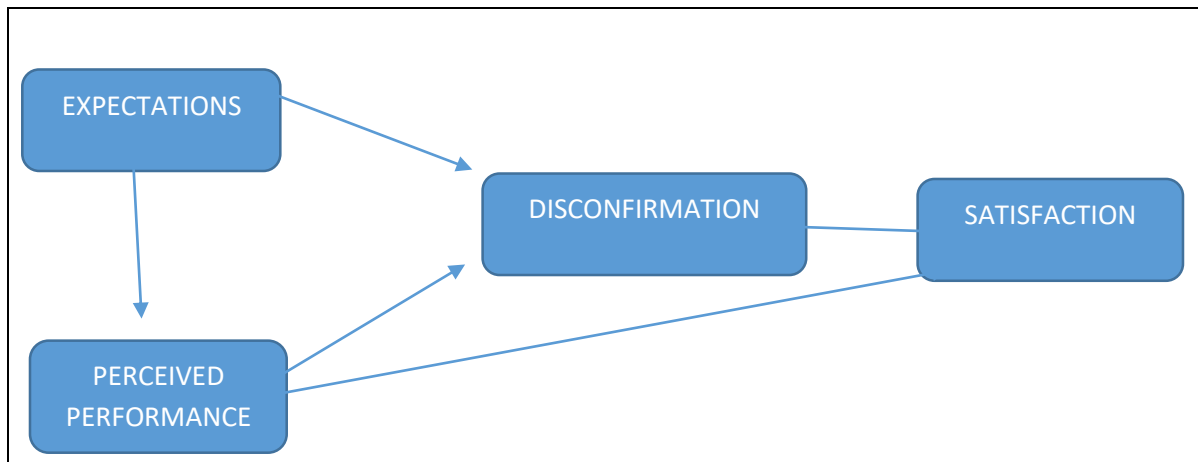


Figure 3.1: Expectancy-Discomfort Theory (EDT) Model

3.3 REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE (EMPIRICAL REVIEW)

The confirmation and or disconfirmation theories such as the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) assess the outcome as the consumer's satisfaction with the product or service rendered. The very same theory is used to assess the customer's service quality perception during the process of service delivery. In service industry and public service, service quality and customer satisfaction have become two of the most important pillars of business. This is because customers are more informed nowadays (Nair, 2013).

3.3.1 THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE

For the purposes of this study a service will be deliberated upon in three ways. Firstly, it is a process, a service is defined this way because it has been claimed that this service becomes a process with an output which is both the production as well as the consumption simultaneously. Mhlongo (et al., 2016) defines the service as an intangible product that one cannot touch nor feel involving an action, an effort or performance that one cannot physically achieve. Secondly, a service is the solution to the customer's challenges. Scholars have indicated that the aim of a service is to solve the problems of a customer.

From this position, service is understood as an activity of an intangible nature that in most instances takes place during an engagement between the customer and service officials with an aim of giving solutions to the problems faced by customers. Lastly, the service must have outcomes that will be of benefit to the customer (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

3.3.1.1 Service Characteristics

The concept of a service has proven to be difficult over a number of decades. There are many ways of defining and drawing similar characteristics. A number of scholars have given service four characteristics: inseparability, perishability, intangibility and heterogeneity (Mhlongo et al., 2016).

These different characteristics call for a different strategy in trying to improve service as they are very unique in nature (Moletsane, 2012).

3.3.1.1.1 Service Inseparability

This indicates that one cannot separate the production and the usage or consumption of the service. The development or production is done simultaneously with the consumption (Mhlongo et al., 2016). The extent of inseparability is dependent on the service type to be delivered as well as the service provider. Customers are said to be directly involved in the presentation of the service and are in a position to influence it.

Unlike a can of Coke manufactured and consumed at different sites, service is done at the same site as consumption. Customers can influence the quality of service in that customers can immediately raise dissatisfaction should it occur immediately. For this reason, it is also not possible for customers to be in a position to order a specific type of service experience. To try and have a similar experience, a customer in a restaurant can try to be serviced by a particular waiter (Moletsane, 2012).

The inseparability of the production and usage of the service industries also applies to the supplier or service provider developing and delivering the service at the same time. This situation makes it easy to identify errors and customers normally raise issues of quality, should there be any (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

3.3.1.1.2 Service Perishability

This refers to the fact that services cannot be stored and carried forward to be utilised in the future. This means that services are time dependant and perishable (Mhlongo et al., 2016). Services, unlike products, do not get the final quality checks. Perishability is created only by the producer's activity and how customers will view this.

Scholars have argued that it is useful to focus on the "tangibleisers". These will form evidence of the services that the customers will see (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). Services only exists in real time; they cannot be stored. Each and every service experienced is different from others and unique existing only during the time of that particular transaction. Perishability means that consumers have little access to recourse should there be dissatisfaction.

A customer who received a bad haircut cannot return it to the barber. The perishability of the services also indicates that it is not possible to implement quality control between the development and the usage of this service. It is also difficult to record delivery of these services (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

3.3.1.1.3 Service Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity refers to the possibility of high variability in the manner in which the service is being delivered. It is difficult to deliver services in a consistent manner. This particularly is the case in an organisation with a lot of employees as the customer service performance varies from day to day (Mhlongo et al., 2016). The degree of the heterogeneity of the service provided can also be influenced by different factors such as the behavior of the service supplier, knowledge of what the customer needs, as well the consumer's expectations and priorities during the usage situation.

Most Service providers have come to depend on the skills and competence of their personnel to understand the needs of their customers and respond in an appropriate and timely manner (Moletsane, 2012). Due to the fact that service is developed and utilized at the same time and consumers form part of that service (Moletsane, 2012) concludes that service occurs only once and is not repeated. This brings challenges regarding the quality of service and uniformity.

In accordance with Gabbott and Hogg (1998), the service heterogeneity can be attributed to the involvement of a person during the presentation and/or consumption of these services. Unique individuals deliver unique services, this indicate that each service delivered will differ by virtue of the participants, the time of performance or the circumstances in which the service is delivered. Each and every service cannot be the same when repeated.

Each service is taken as an all new and different occurrence. Service recipients never conduct their lives in a uniform manner; it is therefore fair to imply that a service rendered today may differ to service rendered tomorrow (Moletsane, 2012). There are various circumstances which may change and affect the service rendered. Heterogeneity can be influenced by a number of factors and the quality varies from one supplier to another (Moletsane, 2012).

For example, British Airways may only use experienced pilots on long haul flights and that quality cannot be matched with short domestic flights. To further understand the underlying causes of heterogeneity, Edvardsson et al. (2005) as cited by (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015) advise that the concept be examined from two perspectives. The first perspective is the ever changing nature of the processes as well as the service providers. The second perspective looks at the variation of the customer needs and demands. Like intangibility, scholars agree that it is difficult to achieve a standardization in heterogeneity (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

3.3.1.1.4 Service Intangibility

Service intangibility refers to the fact that customers cannot feel nor see the service. They also cannot possess the said service before purchase (Mhlongo et al., 2016). It further refers to the service that cannot be seen or assessed before it is received. The natural five senses assess and understand the results of a service rendered and not the actual service. The Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1996) defines intangibility as “that which is difficult to define or describe which cannot be touched or seen, and which cannot be easily understood mentally”.

The lack of physical attributes brings in problems for both the customer and the supplier. It is difficult for the supplier to describe and define the service whilst it is also difficult for the customer to assess potential benefits.

In this instance, customers will look for information elsewhere. This could be through word of mouth, physical appearance as well as any other available information. In the services industry word of mouth carries a lot of weight (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

Before buying, the services cannot be demonstrated as something to be delivered; on top of this it is very difficult to determine the price of a service. This is because it is difficult to explain the quality of the service to be rendered to the buyer before the actual act. This can be made easy by linking the price to tangibles like cleanliness of the waiting area, staff uniform and their professionalism (Moletsane, 2012).

3.3.2 CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service can be defined as a system of activities that consists of electronic customer support systems, complaint processing procedures, standards for processing of complaints, procedure for elevating a complaint and a compliment (Hanif et al., 2010). For municipalities, customer services become the means to deliver their services to the satisfaction of citizens.

The improvement of customer services is what municipalities strive for. They do this through the implementation of Batho Pele. To develop higher levels of satisfaction among citizens, municipalities need to be very intentional about the customer services they provide. Customer services must be packaged in a way that is responsive to the needs of customers.

3.3.3 SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is a concept that is long established and has been debated by researchers. Different definitions are available in literature; one commonly used being the degree to which the service will meet customers' needs or expectations. This means that the quality of the service becomes the difference between what the customers expect of that particular service and the perceived service Shahin and Samea ,(2010). Parasuraman et al. (1988) added this definition by arguing that service quality is a global judgment similar to attitudes towards the service and generally accepted as an antecedent of overall customer satisfaction.

3.3.3.1 Service Quality Models

Modern literature has over 25 service quality models. They were developed as far back as the 1980's and continue to be developed even today. Hereunder 6 have been isolated for relevance and will be discussed. One model will be chosen for the study because the same model has been utilised in a number of similar studies.

3.3.3.1.1 Model 1: Gap Analysis Model

The Gap Analysis model (see figure 2.2 below) focuses on the difference between what is experienced and what was expected (Moletsane, 2012). In measuring service quality, the following gaps are commonly used:

Gap 1: The gap between what the customers will expect and the management perceptions of what was expected by the customer.

Gap 2: The gap between the management's perceptions of what the customer expects as well as service quality specifications e.g. wrong quality standards.

Gap 3: The gap between the service quality specifications and the actual service rendered.

Gap 4: The gap between service delivery and what is communicated to the customers. This identifies whether the promises match what is being delivered.

Gap 5: The gap between what customers expect and the perceived service.

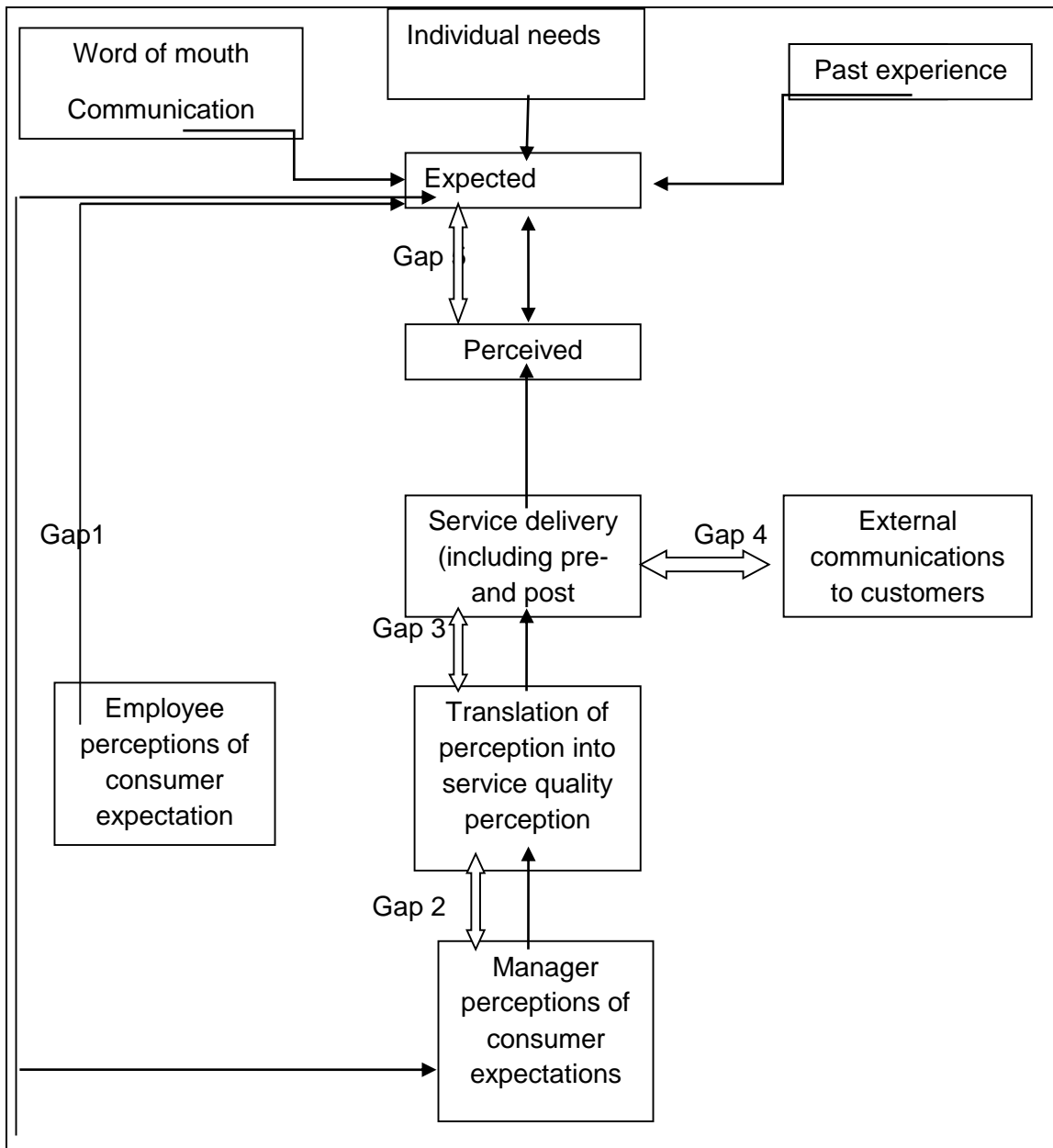


Figure 3.2 Model of service quality gaps

(Adapted from Parasuraman *et al*, 1985)

3.3.3.1.2 Model 2: SERVQUAL Model

The widely SERVQUAL model was first introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988); it is based on human interaction and intervention issues in the delivery of a service. This model proposed that the service quality can be measured by five unique dimensions: responsiveness reliability, tangibles assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988).

Some researchers have argued that SERVQUAL fails to deal with or measure other critical elements of the service quality, including the service product/core service, standardisation of service delivery. They also argued that this model excludes the social responsibility element of the service organisation.

Although Polyakova and Mirza (2015) argue that the generality of SERVQUAL still remains to be established even though it has been used in different cultures and settings. Saleh and Al-Marzouqi (2014) further indicate that SERVQUAL is likely to be influenced by culture. Parasuraman et al. (1988) argue that the SERVQUAL Model can be used in any organisation with minor adaptations.

3.3.3.1.3 Model 3: Information Technology Based Model

This model puts an emphasis on the importance of information technology based customer service options. Organisations are using IT based options to reduce costing as well add value to their offerings. The model establishes the consumer linked IT based service options as compared to the traditional service offerings. The model also focuses on the connections based on the service dimensions as measured by the SERVQUAL model.

3.3.3.1.4 Model 4: SERVPERF Model

A number of scholars criticized the SERVQUAL Model (See figure 2.3) and this led to the introduction of the SERVPERF Model. SERVPERF is a model that only measures the performance of service quality; customer expectations were excluded because they perceive them as very high at all times. This model was tested in four industries and it was discovered that there was more variance in the overall measure of quality as compared to the SERVQUAL Model (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

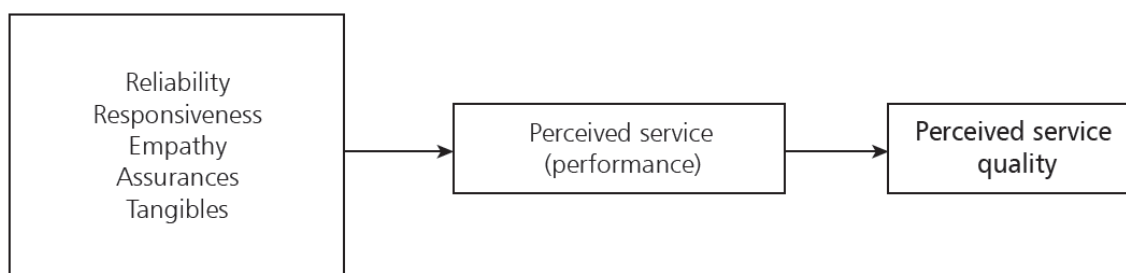


Figure 3.3 SERVPERF Model of service quality

3.3.3.1.5 Model 5: *Three-Component Model*

Researcher Bitner (1992) introduced the start of the three-component model (See figure 2.4). The fundamental basis was that a relationship exists between service quality, and customer satisfaction and the service value (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

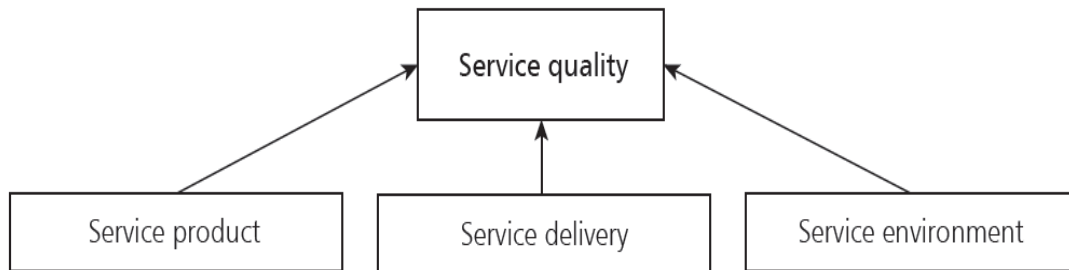


Figure 3.4 Three-Component model

(Source: Adapted from Rust and Oliver 1994)

The model introduced the three separate components being the service product, the service environment and service delivery. These were identified as the critical elements of the service quality. Service product element refers to the outcome of the service as well as the customer perception of the service rendered. The service delivery element gives an emphasis to the manner of delivery. Lastly, service environment element focusses on the indicates the internal and external environment wherein this customer service in rendered.

3.3.3.1.6 Model 6: *Technical and Functional model (Grönroos, 1984)*

Under this model three components are identified and used to define levels of quality: functional, technical and image. Functional quality refers to the outcome of the tools and the management philosophy which leads to the needs and expectations of the customers being met. Functional quality can be both inward and outward facing (Draai, 2012). The technical service quality is easily understood and tangible and is related to a product or a service. This type of quality covers the proximity of meeting the specified standards and quality.

Image quality refers to the projection of quality that is anticipated in the strategic framework of the organisation. It is the perception created by the company in the eyes of the customers (Draai, 2012).

3.3.4 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction can be defined in numerous ways; simply put it is the meeting of one's expectation on an service or a product (Bick et al., 2010). Customer satisfaction has been defined as the customer's fulfilment response and judgment that a product or service delivered an acceptable standard of consumption related fulfilment. Customer satisfaction can also be defined as the measure of how services or products are able to meet customer expectations. Customer satisfaction has also been defined as a state that a customer feels when he or she has experienced an excellent service which meets and even exceeds initial expectations (Mbise and Tuninga, 2016).

Customer satisfaction indicates the level at which the customer accepts that the indulgence in that product or service results in positive feelings. The satisfaction also indicates the psychological response of customers as compared to what was expected. Service quality and customer satisfaction are very different yet highly interrelated constructs (Kiumarsi et al., 2015). Customer satisfaction can also be how a customer evaluates the ongoing performance over a period of time (Hanif et al., 2010). Customer satisfaction research focuses on the interactions between companies and customers and the satisfaction levels perceived from these encounters (Saikkonen, 2012).

According to (Nguyen et al., 2018), the levels of customer satisfaction are measured by the comparison between the initial perception and the resultant experienced service. In many academic studies there has been a proven relationship that exists between customer satisfaction and service quality. This feeling of satisfaction by customers is viewed as an asset that should be carefully monitored and managed (Ako-Nai, 2007).

Literature has concluded that customer satisfaction has different dimensions addressing many aspects of customer care (Sowole, 2007). What determines customer satisfaction is the quality of services received by customers as much as these levels are viewed differently (Ako-Nai, 2007). Researchers have however not agreed on measuring customer satisfaction based on customer expectations and performance perceptions. Some researchers argue that the customer satisfaction concept is very similar to that of service quality.

This is because both are defined and compare customer expectations and performance of a service offering (van Tonder and de Beer, 2018). For this study, the customer satisfaction indicates the demand or the need of the Municipal services and how customers perceive the delivery of these services.

3.3.5 SERVICE QUALITY VERSUS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Service quality as referred to in the customer service has been one of the most researched and debated topics in marketing studies and theories. Many scholars argue that service quality is not a fixed goal but a moving target. Customer satisfaction on the other hand is viewed as a goal that organisations should seek to achieve. Organisations are therefore urged to focus on service quality as this leads to the delivery of a superior service compared to competitors.

Cook (2002) as cited by (Moletsane, 2012) believes that monitoring customer satisfaction is no use unless the organisation is prepared to act on the results. Bolton and Drew (1991) as cited by (Moletsane, 2012) warned and argued that the customer satisfaction and the service quality are two different and unique concepts. They cannot simply be assumed to be synonymous.

3.3.6 MEASURING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

All organisations that take customer satisfaction seriously should always have an indication of whether customer satisfaction is increasing, decreasing or there is no movement. To gain this information, customer satisfaction must be measured and analysed. This measurement gives detailed information on the satisfaction levels. Depending on how they are structured, they can also give an indication of challenges and propose solutions to improve customer satisfaction.

According to Sibiya(2013), surveys can be used to measure customer satisfaction levels. Their research looked into measuring product attribute as well as service attribute. Service attribute refers to the performance of that service as well as the consistency. Service attributes includes waiting periods, attitude, accountability and technical support.

Hayes (1992) argued that clients or customers are in a perfect locus to help organisations understand the critical-incident approach, which emphasises the use of customers in preparing the list of what the customers require. This is because they are the recipients of services provided by the municipality or any organisation. He further suggests that if the organisation rely and puts an emphasis on its standards in determining the needs of customers, this might lead to less than acceptable results because they may not give the best of what the customers require. Sibiya (2013) suggests that in line with an approach adopted by survey, a questionnaire for internal customers must also be introduced. This will make sure that there is no dissatisfaction from customers as a result of employees not knowing what they are supposed to do.

3.4 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

From the literature studied, the level of satisfaction from services received is affected by the quality of service received. Public service institutions are under pressure to deliver quality services. Municipal service has of late become very political and the public demands quality services. Service quality becomes a very important factor in the success of an organisation. If the customer satisfaction decreases in an organisation and this is identified as caused by poor or bad service quality, managers should be concerned and endeavor to put in place corrective measures.

In recent times, service quality has become a major area of interest for service practitioners, the managers as well as other scholars that conduct research in the field. This is because service quality has a significant impact on the performance of the organisation. EDT was discussed and found suitable to form the theoretical framework. Service quality also was discussed at length and it is central to this study.

3.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Through the review of literature, the SERVQUAL methodology was found to be the most widely used tool in different industries to compare the perceived quality and the actual service rendered (Luke and Heyns, 2017). Initially the SERVQUAL methodology measured ten dimensions of service quality; it was further developed and reduced the dimensions to five: *tangibles* (the facility, appearance of frontline staff, equipment that is visually appealing): *empathy* (individual attention, caring , deep understanding of what customer needs are), *reliability* (error-free information, service as promised), *responsiveness* (quick service, willingness to assist) and *assurance* (instilling confidence, people feeling secure about their engagement) (Twinomurinzi et al., 2012).

The study therefore adopted the same SERVQUAL Model to measure customer satisfaction with customer services. Specific quality dimensions were adopted from similar studies (Chetty, 2006, Madlala, 2006, Mhlongo, 2010 and Moletsane, 2014). In line with refined methodology, Chetty (2006), Madlala (2006), Mhlongo (2010) and Moletsane (2014) considered five dimensions when one is measuring service quality namely: assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility.

Scholars agree that the five stated dimensions characterize how customers categorize data about service quality in their own minds (Chetty, 2006, Madlala, 2006, Mhlongo, 2010 and Moletsane, 2014). As outlined in the conceptual model in figure 2.5 below, the performance of the five dimensions will affect the satisfaction of customers with the customer service of eThekweni Municipality.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

DEPENDANT VARIABLE

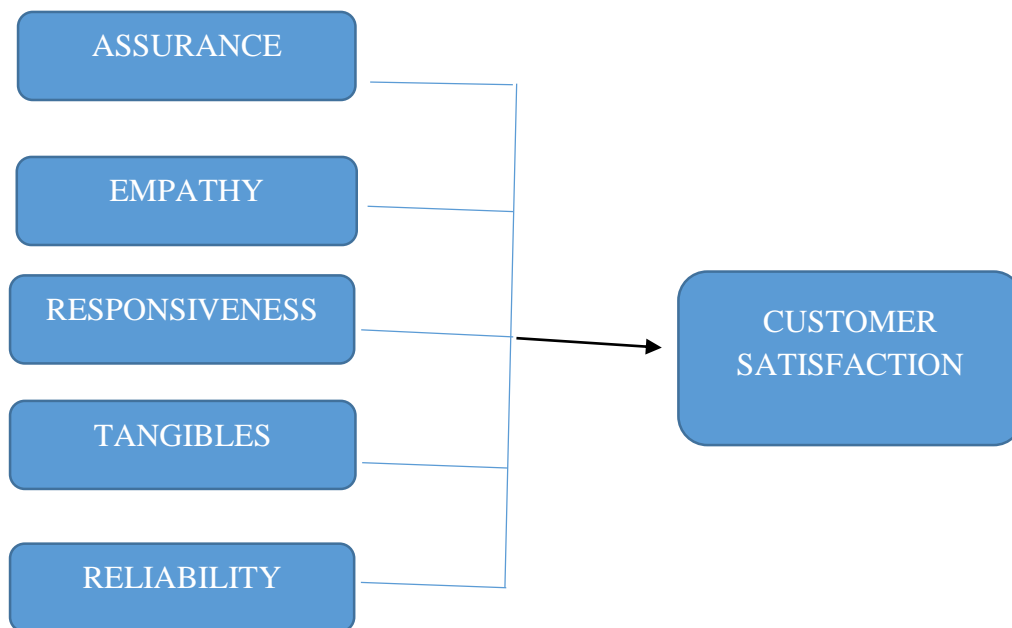


Figure 3.5 Conceptual Framework (source: adapted from Shahin, A.2002)

3.6 CONCLUSION

The chapter looked at how different researchers have defined the concept of service quality in the context of customer satisfaction. A number of theories were read and the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory(EDT) was selected to form the basis of the study. This theory has been used in a number of studies with one in Mexico and locally it was used to measure the satisfaction levels of consumers with cellphone usage. The chapter also discussed the theoretical framework in the form of SERVQUAL methodology. An outline and discussion on the five dimensions of service quality, as well as the five critical aspects of service quality were discussed in detail. A number of studies read for the study made use of this framework. The proposed service quality model used for this study was deliberated upon in this chapter. The chapter linked the theory, the framework with the study done. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology utilized for the study. It will explain why a particular methodology was used.

CHAPTER FOUR- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on research design and the methodology of the study. Areas that will be captured include the research design adopted, research philosophy, research methodology, targeted population, utilised sampling strategy and the research instrument chosen. Lastly, the chapter will explain how the interview process was conducted. This is inclusive of how the data analysis techniques were used during data gathering process.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is a broad plan for your research project of how you will answer your research questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). For this study, the quantitative research method was used. According to Creswell (2009), the research design also includes the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods used to collect data and how that data will be analysed. In research, the first decision to make is to choose a method that best fits the study; the choice is whether to follow qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research design (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). For this study, the quantitative research method was used.

The researcher used a survey which is a data collection method, utilising questionnaires to get responses from respondents. Creswell (2014) defines a survey design as that design that provides a description of trends, opinions and attitudes by studying the sample of that particular population in question. This design has been chosen for a number of reasons, one being the simplicity in developing and collecting questionnaires. For the study each participant is asked to respond to the same set of questions. The questionnaires therefore make available an efficient way of collecting responses since this is large sample. This is before the quantitative analysis is conducted (Saunders et al., 2016). This method an identified objective theory to be tested by examining the relationship among different variables.

4.3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy refers to the beliefs and assumptions about the formulation or development of knowledge. These assumptions shape how you understand research questions, the methods you use and the way you interpret your findings (Saunders et al 2016). This study employed the phenomenological philosophy. Phenomenological research is an approach of an inquiry where the researcher identifies the core of human experiences about a particular phenomenon as described by the respondents (Creswell, 2009).

4.4 STUDY SITE

The study was done at the customer service centers of the eThekweni Municipality in Durban, South Africa. These are known as the Sizakala Customer Service Centers. There are 35 of these centers distributed throughout the Municipality. All these offices will have an equal chance of being selected.

4.5. STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The target population for the study was all the customers that visit the Sizakala Customer Service Centers on a daily basis for various reasons. When planning to conduct research it is advised that a sampling strategy and a sample size be specified. This means that the study participants were the citizens of eThekweni Municipality. The participants that formed part of the study were not only the customers that receive and pay for the service but anyone who visited these centers. The study was an intercept survey carried out at the customer service centers.

4.6 SAMPLING STRATEGY

Sampling strategy is the plan that will be implemented to select the best possible sample from the study population. Researchers mostly agree that the sampling methods are mainly divided into two wide groups which are called the probability and non-probability methods (Creswell, 2008). On the other side, probability sampling techniques are attached in subjective judgment with an uncertain selection of elements into the study (Saunders et al., 2016).

This must be based on similar published studies (Guetterman, 2015). In similar studies conducted, a probability convenience sampling was used (Mhlongo, 2016 and Nair, 2013).

4.7 TOTAL POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

4.7.1 TOTAL POPULATION

EThekweni Municipality has approximately 70 customer service centers which are visited by an average of 500 000 customers per month. Sample size is dependent on the research and objectives. The researcher needs to decide what becomes credible within available resources (Saunders et al., 2016).

4.7.2 SAMPLE SIZE

A number of sampling techniques are used depending on the study. The most common approach is to use random, or probability samples. In a random sample the nature of the population is defined and all members have an equal chance of selection. For this study the probability convenience sampling method was used to select a sample of 25 centers to be included in the study.

Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study.

Within these centers a sample of 400 customers will be randomly selected to participate. For participation the random sampling was used and 60% of respondents were selected. A sample of 400 customers was selected as it was in line with previous studies, (Madlala, 2006) selected a sample size of 399 and (Moletsane, 2014) selected 400.

4.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection entails developing and identifying the parameters for the study, gathering data through published and unpublished documents, unstructured or semi structured observations and interviews as well as establishing protocol or approach for recording such data (Creswell, 2014).

In this study a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. This method was selected because it is line with a quantitative method and is the most economical and simple to administer. These questionnaires were administered at the customer service centers which formed part of the sample.

Saunders et al. (2016) advise that researchers can separate the process of probability sampling into 4 levels in the following manner:

- Firstly, one should identify an appropriate sampling frame based on the set research questions;
- Secondly, one should decide on the most appropriate sample size.
- Thirdly, there should be a selection of a suitable sampling technique and the actual sample;
- Lastly, researchers should confirm that the selected sample is represents the population of the group under study.

4.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are very critical in determining the trustworthiness and quality of research. Validity refers to appropriateness of the measures used whilst reliability refers to replication and consistency; if other researchers were to use similar design would the same results be achieved (Saunders et al., 2016). Creswell (2014) proposes a number of validity strategies researchers can employ in their studies. In this study two strategies will be employed.

Firstly, peer debriefing will be conducted. This strategy entails locating a person who is familiar with the field to ask questions and discuss the study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher. This person will not only be a researcher but a person who is familiar with the workings of service delivery within a Municipality. This person will be consulted as the project is implemented so that she can advise and corrections can be made immediately.

Secondly, an external auditor will be used to review the whole project. This person will be engaged at the end before the final submission is made. The inputs or corrections made by this person will be included in the final submission. Nel et al. (1997) recommend that the SERVQUAL methodology be used using local vernacular since most studies were done in English and to mostly literate customers. This study also follows this recommendation and has translated the questionnaires into Zulu to ensure validity.

4.10 RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Reliability indicates consistency; respondents may interpret questions in a questionnaire in a different manner than what the researcher intended. Reliability therefore means the robustness of the questionnaire, meaning whether or not it will give similar results when utilised at different settings (Saunders et al., 2016). For one to test reliability, consistency will need to be tested. There are different methods used to test consistency but the Cronbach's Alpha method is used the most. This method consists of an alpha coefficient with a value of 0 and 1. Values of 0.7 and above indicate acceptable consistency (Saunders et al., 2016).

During this study the SERVQUAL questionnaire was made use of as an instrument and was administered to 368 study participants. Further to this a reliability test used was *Cronbach's Alpha*. As stated above the reliability coefficient is between 0 and 1. The closer this coefficient is to 1 the greater is the internal consistency of the items measured in the scale (Saunders et al., 2016). This means that the closer the coefficient is to 1 the higher the reliability of the instrument used.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.816	.854	25

Table 5.1. Cronbach's Alpha, Reliability Statistics

In the above table, 25 items were tested and gave the alpha coefficient as .85. In line with the above explanation of the Cronbach's Alpha tool, the items tested exhibit high internal consistency, since the number is very close to 1. It can therefore be argued that the study was reliable. This is because the items have a very high internal consistency.

4.11 PROCEDURES

The study will make use of interns to administer the questionnaires. These interns will be selected from the current group already in the employ of the Municipality. Their primary task will entail going to selected offices at different times, preferably non-peak times. They will explain the study to selected participants, get consent and administer the questionnaire.

Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, a training session will be held for all selected interns to avoid distortion. Once filled, questionnaires will be collected, quality assured, and sent for further analysis. These questionnaires will first be piloted and adjusted accordingly.

4.12 DATA / STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis is defined by literature as the collection, examination, preparation as well as the and interpretation of quantitative information in order to discover its hidden causes, pertinent patterns, relationships and relevant trends. Statistical analysis plays an important role in reporting patterns found in the data.

Within that analysis, this data will support or reject the theory which forms part of the study. The data collected through questionnaires will be coded and analysed with the use of a statistical software package for social sciences known as SPSS. The data will be coded to enable it to be analysed. Thereafter, the 06 steps method below will be used to analyse the data;

Step 01 – Report on the responses and non-responses.

Step 02 – Elimination of the bias will be done by comparing the number of responses and non-responses.

Step 03 – Description analysis of data will include the calculation of mean and the median. The highest and lowest scores will be captured. These will apply to all variables.

Step 05 – Conduct statistical tests.

Step 06 – Present results in tables and charts.

4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics can be defined as the appropriateness or accuracy of the researcher's approach in acknowledging and respecting the rights of participants, the organisation and the public as subjects of the study (Saunders et al., 2016). For this study, the first effort to ensure ethical considerations was started by getting the permission from eThekweni Municipality to conduct the study. This was granted and the Gatekeepers Letter is attached. A report will be availed to the Municipal management on completion of the study.

Secondly, the study was sent to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethical Clearance Committee for approval before the study commenced. This ensures that ethical considerations are catered for. Consent will be sought from participants through a consent letter explaining that participating is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time. This letter also explains that the participants will remain anonymous.

CHAPTER FIVE- PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide an explanation and description of the population sample. At the beginning there will be a discussion on the population size and demographic details such as age, gender, and education level. The number of visits to the centers will also be discussed. The raw data will be presented in the form of bar charts, pie charts, figures and tables. This data is also analysed in terms of descriptive statistics analysis by the examination of the mean, variance, and standards deviation.

The results are presented in relation to the study objectives as well as the previous studies as discussed in the literature review. The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to collect the data and five quality dimensions were covered namely, assurance tangibles, reliability, empathy and responsiveness

5.3 DATA GATHERING

Permission in order to conduct the study was requested and received from eThekweni Municipality through the Head of Sizakala Customer Service Unit and the training Unit eThekweni Municipal Academy. The study targeted 400 customers from various Sizakala centers. A total of 368 respondents were obtained. This number was deemed appropriate to be a representative of the population and in accordance with similar studies. To get the required sample size of 400, customer questionnaires were administered by trained interns at various Sizakala Customer Service Centers.

The study targeted a sample size of 400 respondents, of these 368 were fully completed and received back. This is an indication that 92% respondents' questionnaires were returned. Classification data pertaining to the sample group follows. Demographical information, also known as classification information, consists of the socio-economic characteristics and demographic information used to classify and categorize the study participants.

This classification will allow further understanding of the results. The biographical information of the sample, represented by pie charts and tables is set out below. Section A of the research instrument(questionnaire) consisted of the demographic data of the customers of Sizakala Customer Service Centers including the following:

- gender
- age
- level of education
- number of visits to the Sizakala Center.

5.4 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

5.4.1 Gender Analysis

The analysis of gender revealed that the majority of respondents were females at 195 respondents making 52.98% of the sample. The males were at 170 and there were 03 spoilt questionnaires. One can conclude that the total population is dominated by females. Figure 4.1 below illustrates this.

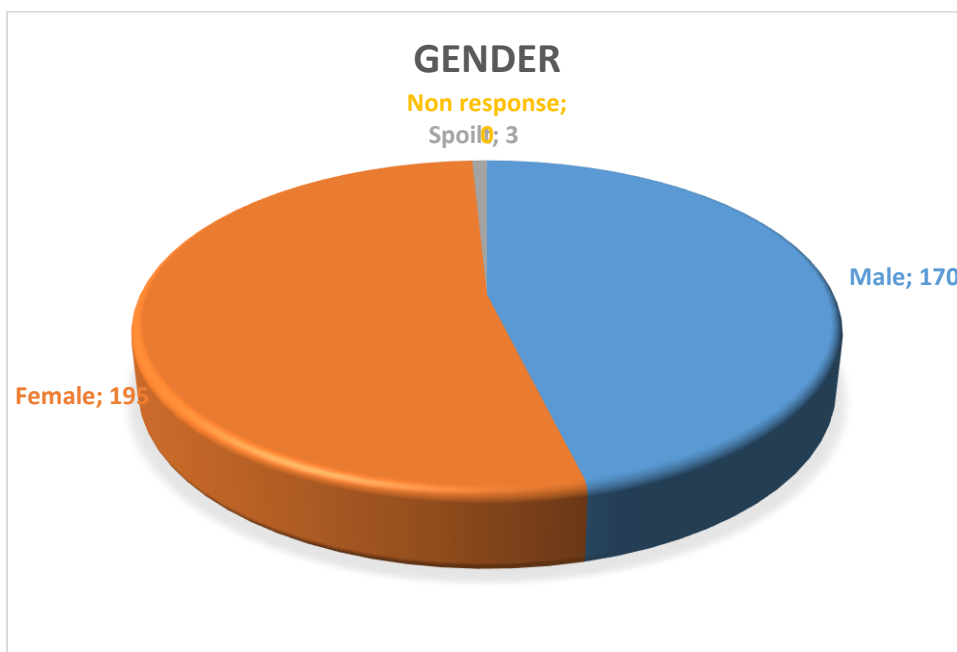


Figure 5.1 Gender Analysis

5.4.2 Age

The nominal scale was utilised to record the respondents' age; the groupings were separated by 10 years. The scale was separated into decades covering age groups from those younger than 25 up to age above 60 years of age. It has been established that 55% of the sample fell under the age of 35. One can deduce that a significant number of the population is relatively young.

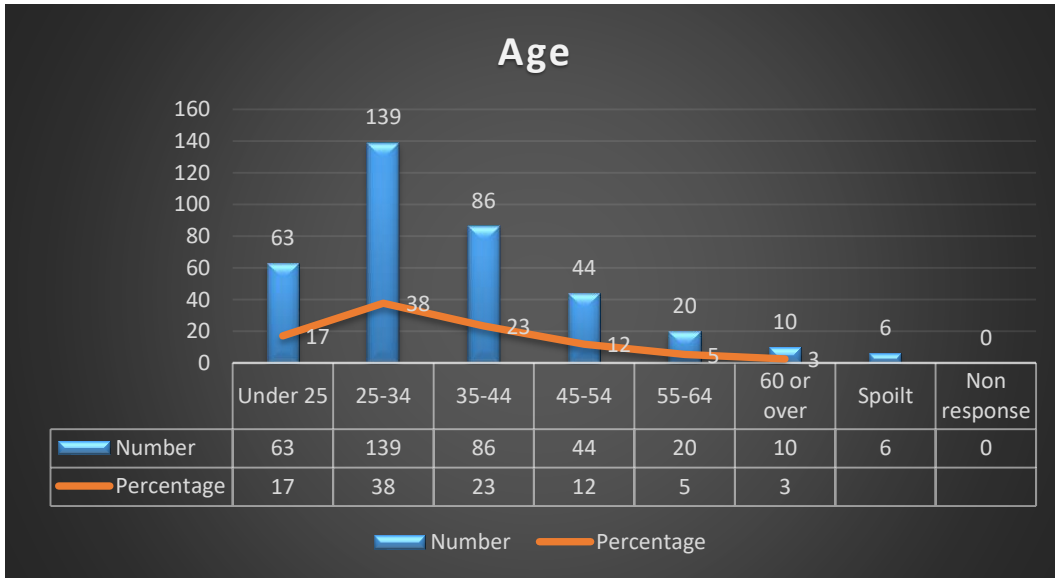


Table 5.2 Age Distribution

5.4.3 Level of Education

The table below outlines the level of education possessed by the study participants. With 01 non response and 05 spoilt questionnaires, 120 (33%) of them possess tertiary qualifications, over and above this 37(10%) of them are in possession of post graduate qualifications. This information tells us that a large proportion of customers of Sizakala Customer Service Centers are in possession of tertiary qualifications.

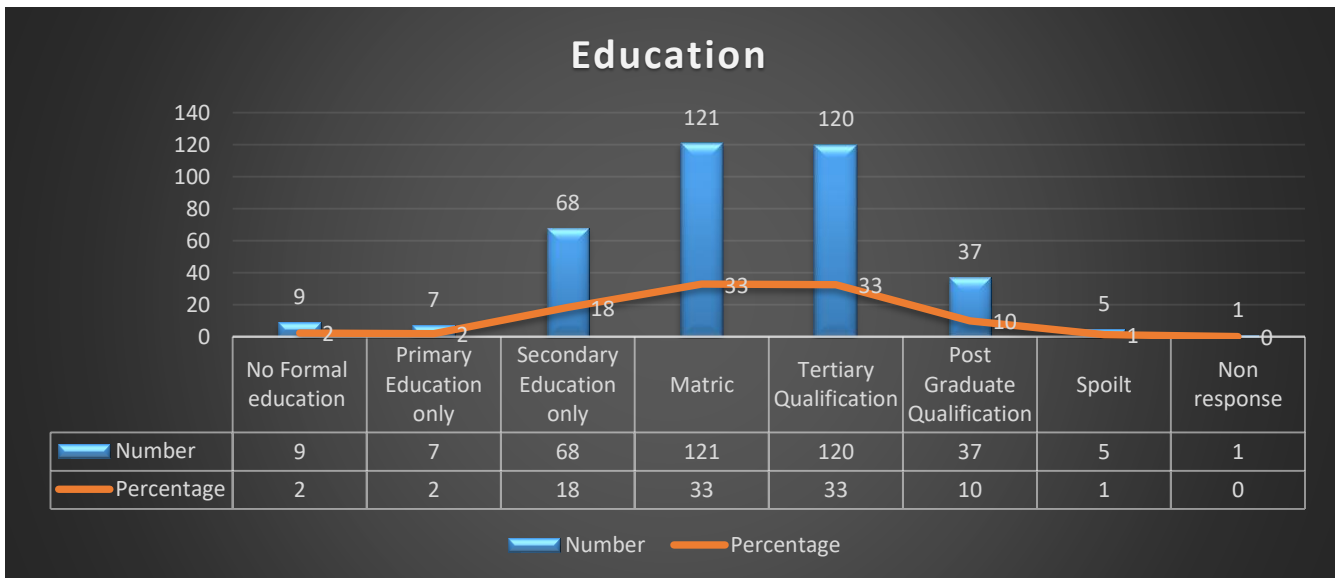


Table 5.3 Level of Education

5.4.3 Center Visits Frequency

Table 5.4 below illustrates the number of visits the respondents make to the Sizakala centers. A large percentage of the sample (77%) indicates that they made visits to the centers occasionally; this includes less than a month and once a year. The conclusion is that not many people visit the centers regularly.

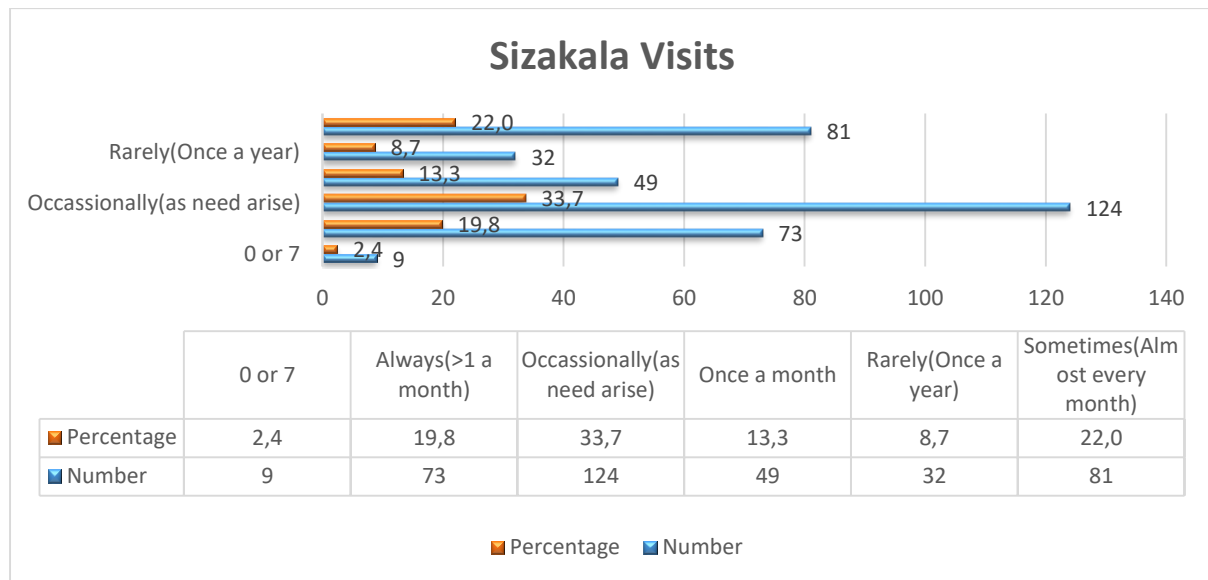


Table 5.4 Frequently of visits to a Sizakala Customer Services Center

5.5 CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTER IS PERFORMING

The study covered the 05 service quality dimensions as outlined by current research. These five service quality dimensions are responsiveness, assurance, reliability, empathy and tangibility. Below is the illustration of the responses as given by the respondents. This is the perception they hold on how they view the service quality of the Sizakala Customer Service Centers.

5.5.1 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is described as performing the services promptly and quickly. This is offering help to the customer and being available when a customer requires this help. Simply stated, it is the willingness to assist a customer and give prompt service (Nel et al., 1997).

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, responsiveness was covered by questions 7 and 9:

- Sizakala Customer Service Center insists on error free service.
- The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you prompt service.

5.5.1.1 Sizakala Customer Care insists on error free service

Table 5.5 below illustrates that out of 368 study respondents with 2 spoilt and 12 non respondents, 78% agree and strongly agree with the statement. The responses also reflected that 15% were neutral and only 07% disagreed with the statement. From the responses it can be argued that Sizakala Customer Services Centers insist on error free service.

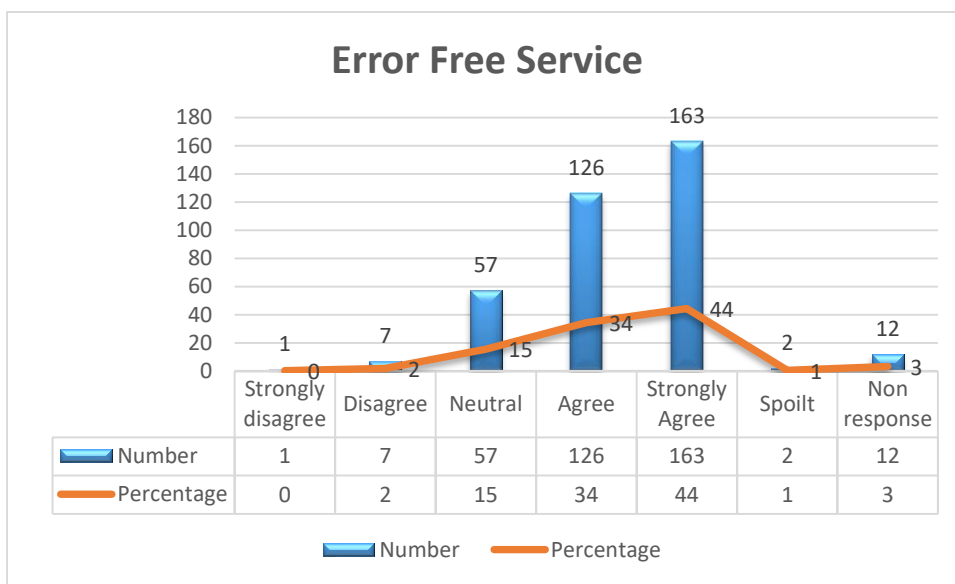


Table 5.5 Perception 7

5.5.1.2 The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you prompt service

Table 5.6 below illustrates that 89% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement made that the Sizakala Customer Service Centers give prompt service. Out of the responses only 1% disagreed and 7% chose neutral. The majority of those that responded agreed with the statement made. The responses gave an indication of a perception that Sizakala Customer Service Centers give prompt service.

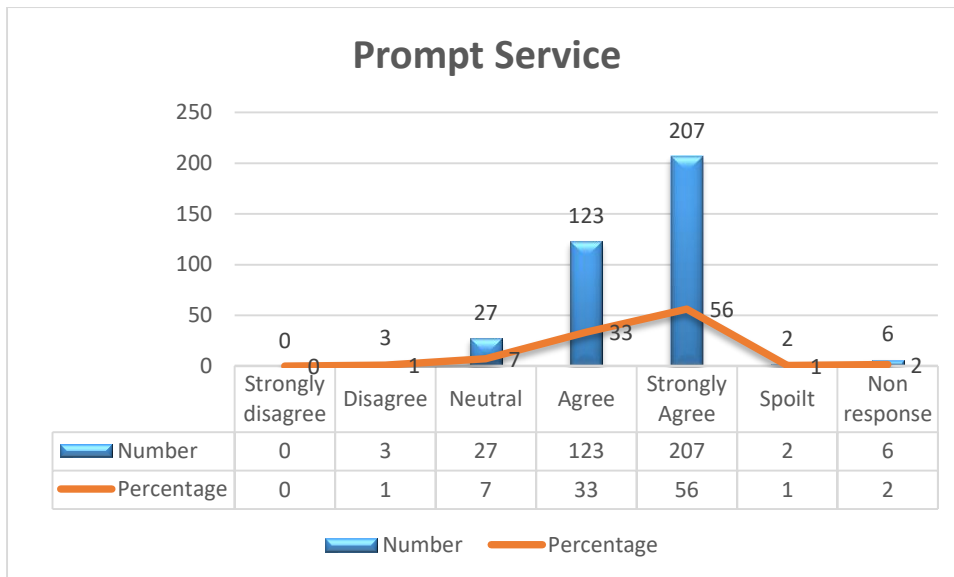


Table 5.6 Perception 9

5.5.2 Assurance

Assurance is described as the knowledge and the courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in performing the service (Nel et al., 1997). Assurance also includes the competence of staff members (Moolla and Du Plessis, 1997).

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, assurance was covered by questions 8 and 10. The responses are explained below:

- The behaviour of staff at Sizakala instils confidence.
- The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Centers are knowledgeable.

5.5.2.1 The behavior of staff at Sizakala instils confidence

The table below illustrates that 90% of study participants responded in agreement and also strongly agreed with the statement made that the Sizakala's Customer Service Centers staff behaviour instils confidence. Out of the responses only 1% disagreed and 7% chose a neutral response. A large proportion of the respondents were in agreement with the statement made. This indicates that the perception is that Sizakala Customer Service Centers' staff behaviour instils confidence.

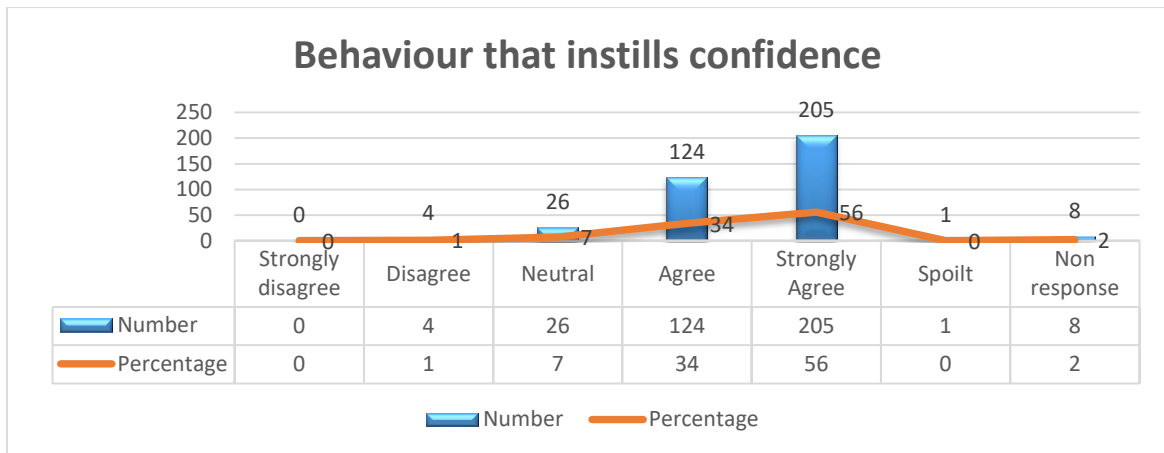


Table 5.7 Perception 8

5.5.2.2 The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable

The table below illustrates that 94% of respondents were in agreement and also strongly agreed with the statement made that Sizakala Customer Service Centers staff are knowledgeable in their performance. Out of the responses only one respondent gave a response of being in strong disagreement and 5% remained neutral. A large proportion or percentage of respondents agreed with the statement made. This indicates that the perception is that Sizakala Customer Service Centers' staff are knowledgeable in the performance of their duties.

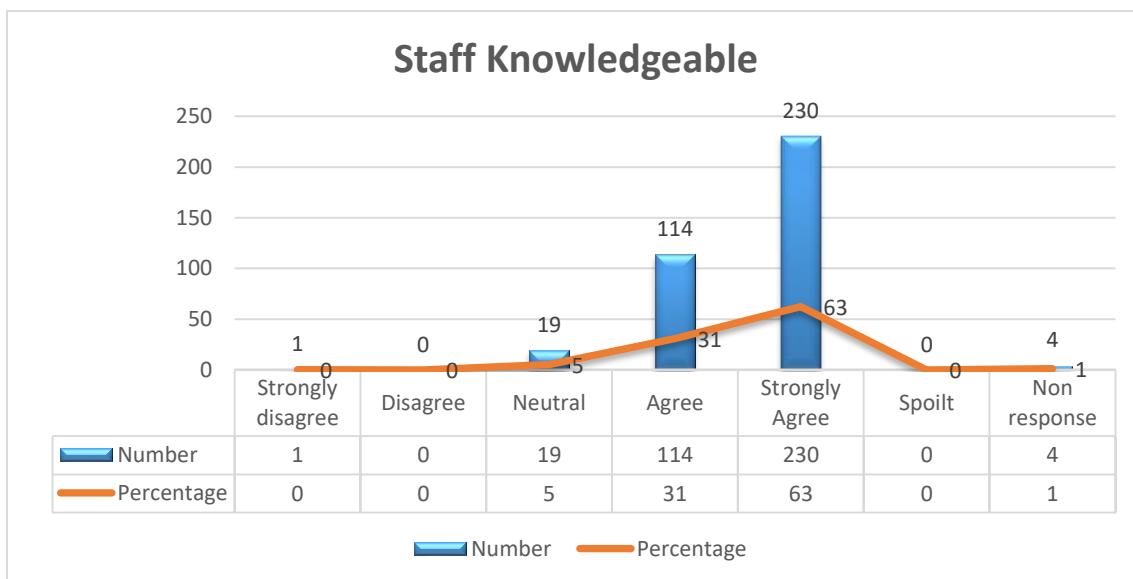


Table 5.8 Perception 10

5.5.3 Empathy

Empathy can be referred to as the display of a caring attitude and the individual attention the organisation gives to its customers. This can be further defined by the caring behaviour displayed by staff and the attention to detail exhibited (Nel et al., 1997).

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, empathy was covered by questions 4 and 6:

- When you have a problem staff show sincere interest in resolving it.
- Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard all the time.

5.5.3.1 When you have a problem staff show sincere interest in resolving it

A large portion of the majority of the respondents in the table below illustrates that 90% of respondents agreed and also strongly agreed with the statement made that the Sizakala Customer Service Centers' staff show sincerity in resolving problems should they arise. Out of the responses, only 1% disagreed and 7% remained neutral. The larger portion of respondents agreed with the statement that was made. This indicates that the perception is that Sizakala Customer Service Centers' staff display a sincere interest in resolving problems should they arise.

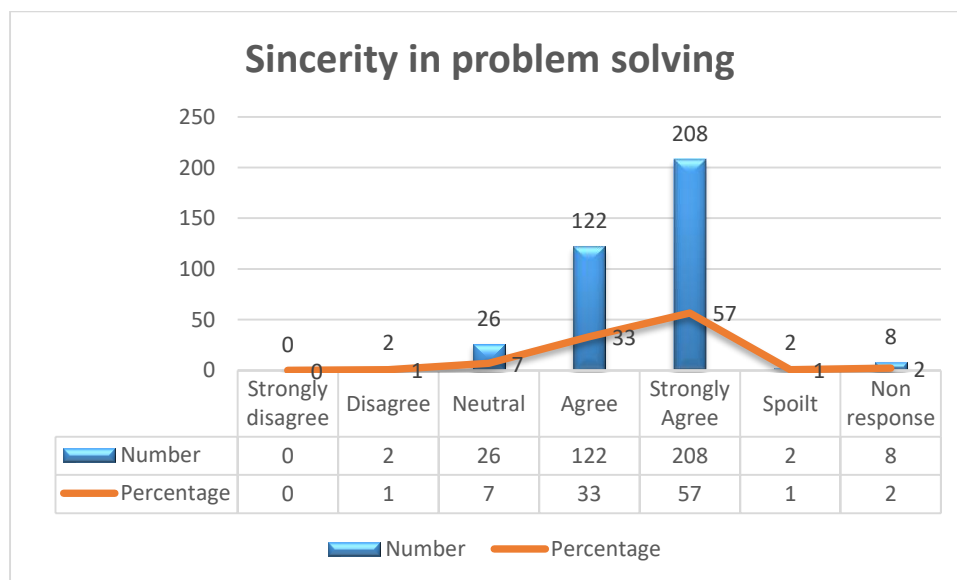


Table 5.9 Perception 4

5.5.3.2 Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard all the time

A greater proportion at 86% of the respondents indicated that they agreed and strongly also agreed with the study statement made that the Sizakala Customer Service Centers staff keeps the service levels almost at the same service standard throughout the day all the time. 10 % of the participants remained neutral and only 1% disagreed. This indicates that the perception is that staff at Sizakala Customer Service Centers keep customer service rendered service levels at the same standard throughout the day which is indicated as all the time.

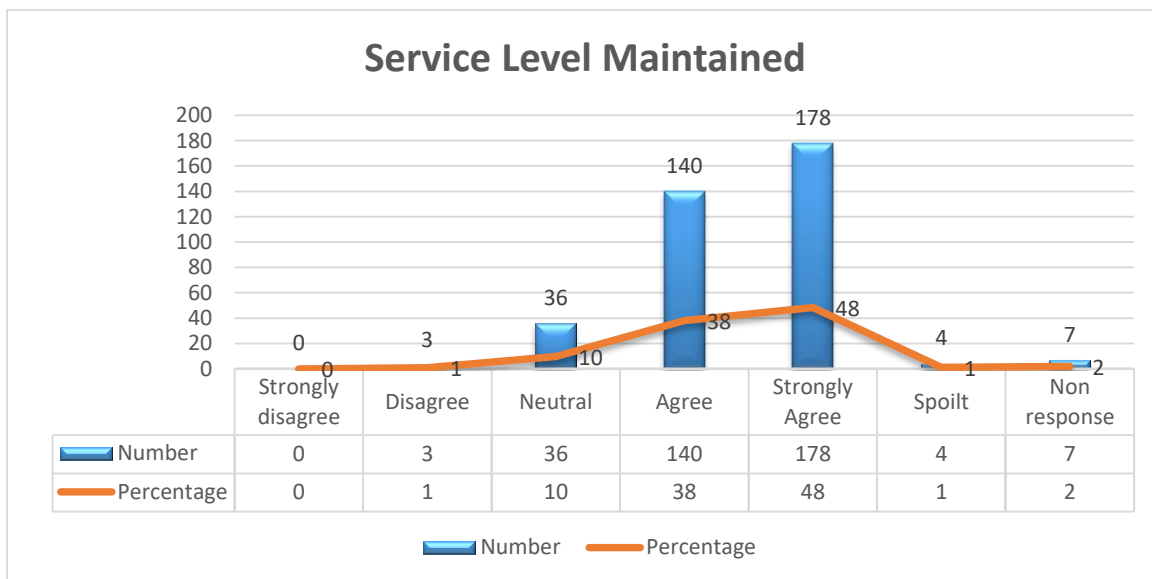


Table 5.10 Perception 6

5.5.4 Reliability

Reliability refers to an organisation’s ability to deliver the promised service. The agreements in terms of price and other commitments must be fulfilled, times agreed and the service should be delivered accurately from beginning to end (Moolla and Du Plessis, 1997). It also refers to the delivery of the service promised dependably and correctly (Nel et al., 1997).

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, reliability was covered by questions 3 and also 5:

- Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its promised response time.
- Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time.

5.5.4.1 Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its promised response time

The majority of the respondents at 82% indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed with the statement made, that the Sizakala Customer Service Centers keep promised response time. 13 % of the respondents remained neutral and only 1% disagreed. This indicates that the perception is that Sizakala Customer Service Centers keep their promised response time.

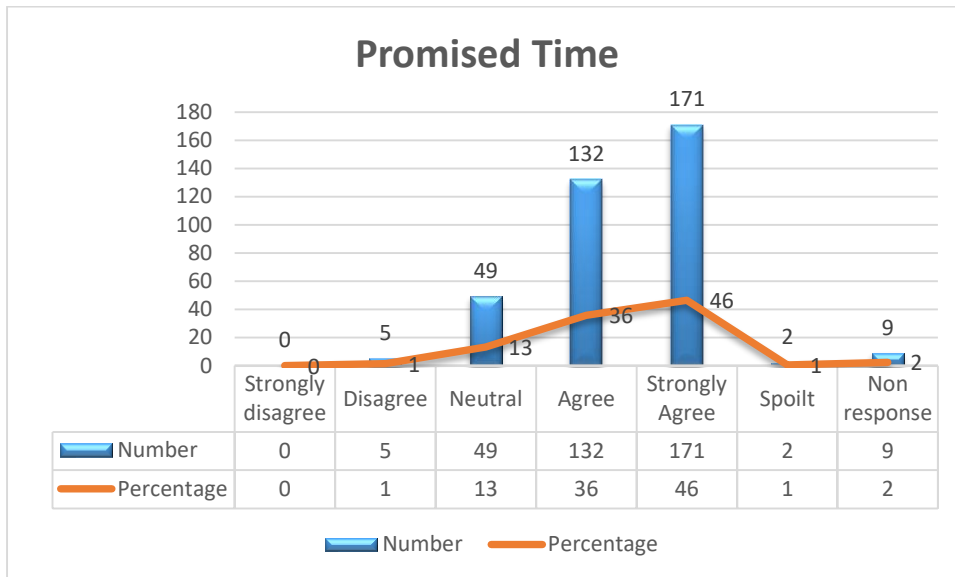


Table 5.11 Perception 3

5.5.4.2 Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time

Most of the respondents at 81% indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed with the statement made which said that the Sizakala Customer Service Centers perform the service right the first time. 13 % of the respondents remained neutral and only 2% disagreed. This indicates that the perception is that Sizakala Customer Service Centers perform service right the first time.

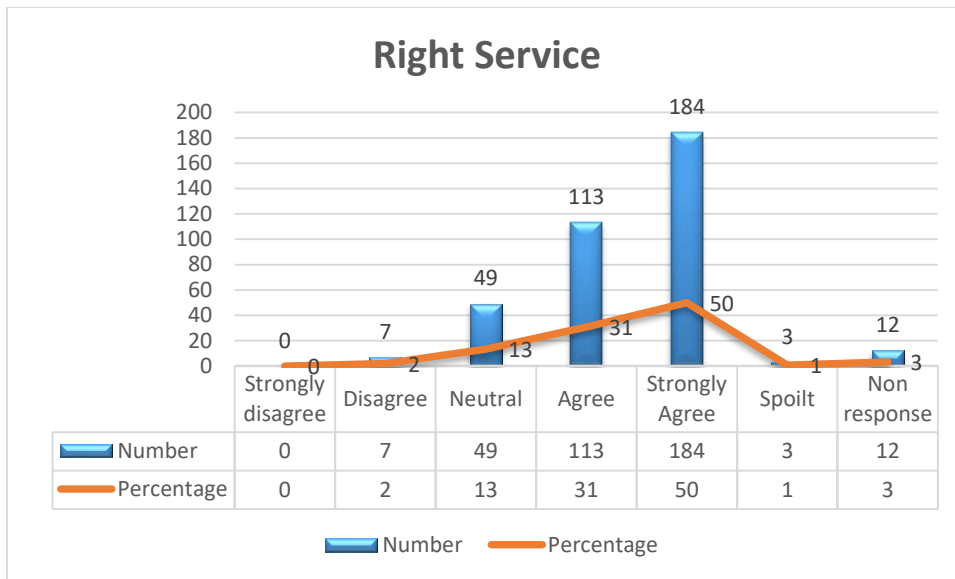


Table 5.12 Perception 5

5.5.5 Tangibility

Tangibility refers to those things that service recipients can feel and touch such as the physical facilities, the appearance of personnel, their dress code and the equipment in areas where the services are delivered (Nel et al., 1997). Tangibility can also be explained as the concrete objects which the customer can easily observe (Moolla and Du Plessis, 1997).

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, tangibility was covered by questions 1 and 2:

- The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing.
- Materials associated with the services are visually appealing.

5.5.5.1 The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing

84% of the respondents indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that the physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing. 13 % of the respondents remained neutral and only 1% disagreed. This indicates that the perception is that physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing.

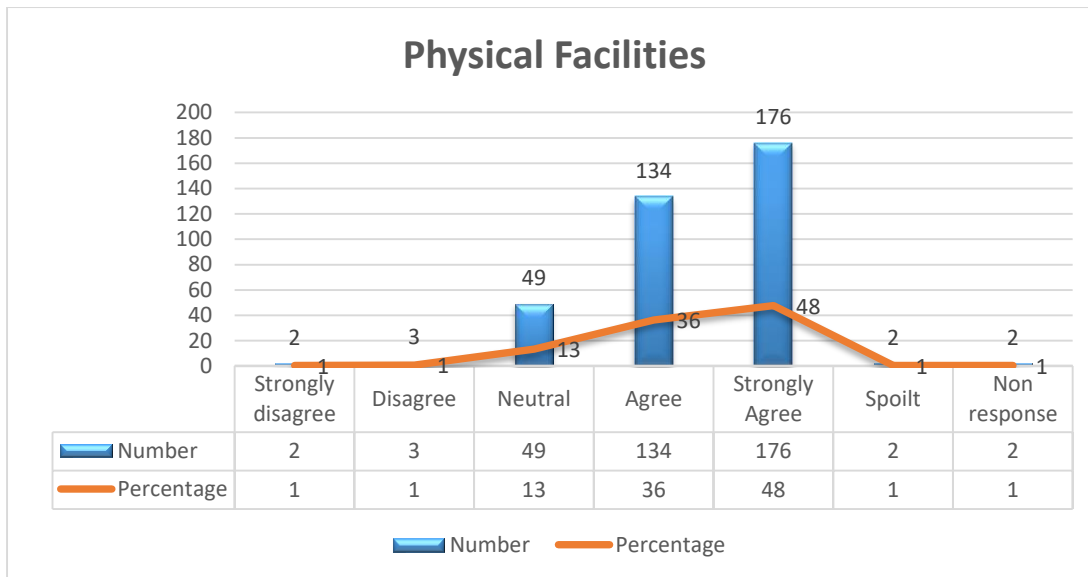


Table 5.13 Perception 1

5.5.5.2 Materials associated with the services are visually appealing

Most of the respondents at 86% indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed with the statement made, that the materials associated with the services are visually appealing. 10 % of the respondents remained neutral and only 2% disagreed. This indicates that the perception is that materials associated with the services are visually appealing.

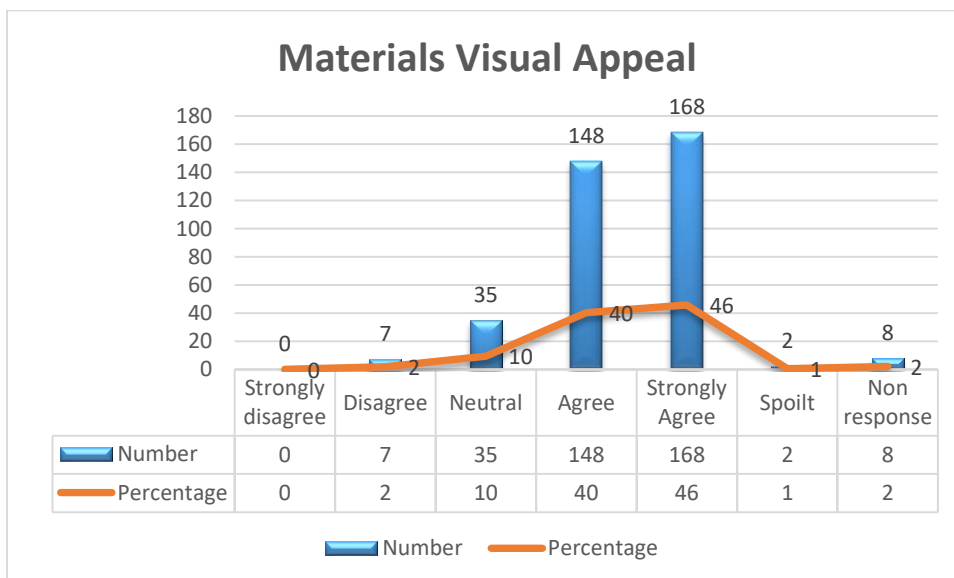


Table 5.14 Perception 2

5.6 CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS OF HOW THE SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTER WOULD DELIVER SERVICE QUALITY

Customer service expectation can be described as the desires of the customer on the level of service they wish to receive. Other researchers argue that customers' expectations of services to be rendered are the customer's normative beliefs about the level of service that will be delivered in a specific service encounter (Moletsane, 2012).

The study covered the 05 service quality dimensions as outlined by current research. These five service quality dimensions are responsiveness, assurance, reliability, empathy and tangibility. Below is the illustration of the responses as given by the respondents. This is the expectation that customers hold on how they expect the service quality of the Sizakala Customer Service Centers to be.

5.6.1 Responsiveness

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, responsiveness was covered by questions 7 and 9 and the responses are explained below:

- Sizakala Customer Service Center insists on error free service.
- The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you prompt service.

5.6.1.1 Sizakala Customer Care insists on error free service

The table below illustrates that out of 368 study respondents with 5 spoilt and 6 non respondents, 85% agree and strongly agree with the statement. The responses also reflected that 9% were neutral and only 3% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. From the responses it can be argued that the customers visiting the Sizakala Customer Services Centers had high expectations with regards to error free service.

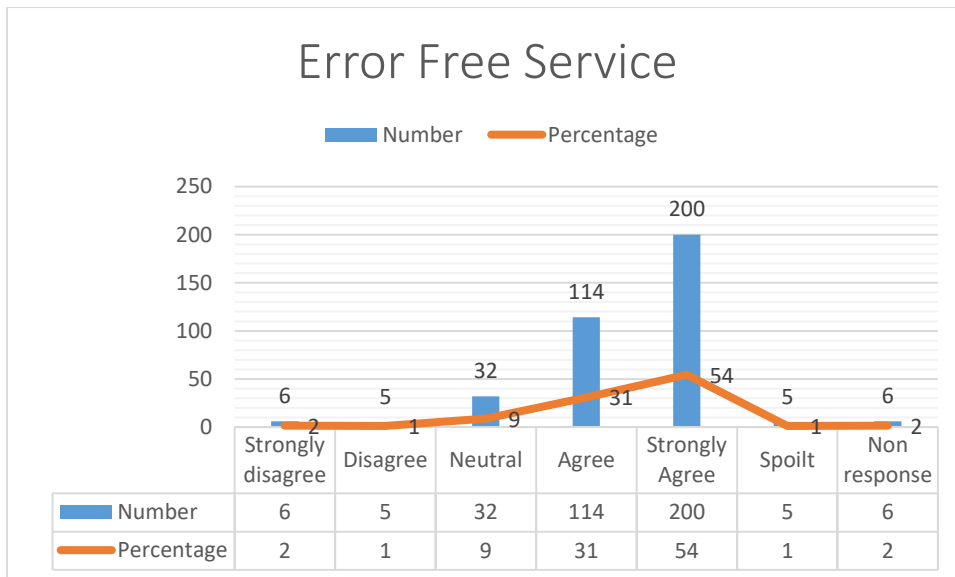


Table 5.15 Expectation 7

5.6.1.2 The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you prompt service

An overwhelming majority of the respondents at 94% agree and strongly agree with the statement. The responses also reflected that 5% were neutral and only 1% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. It can be argued that the customers visiting the Sizakala Customer Services Centers had a high expectation with regards to error free service. One can therefore argue that customers highly expect to receive a prompt service.

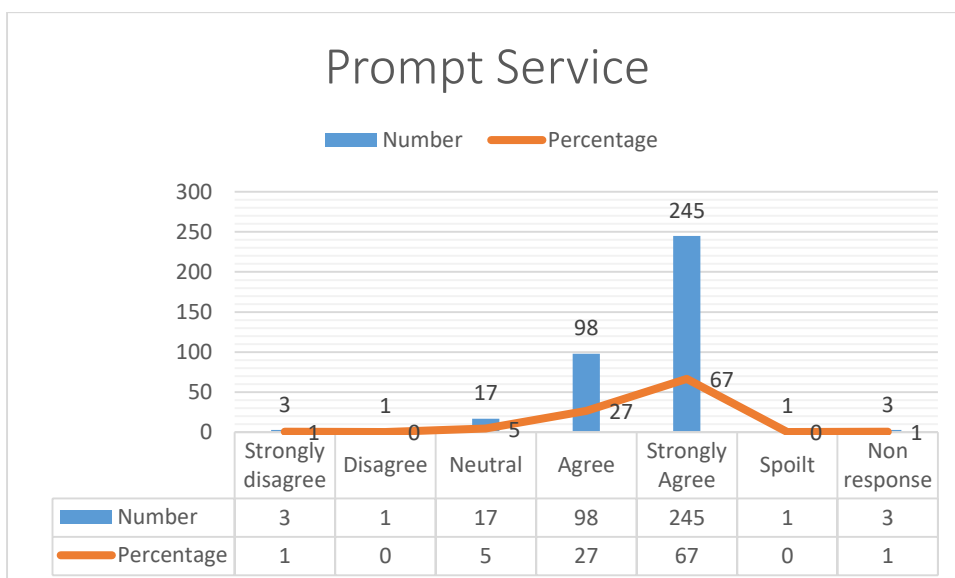


Table 5.16 Expectation 9

5.6.2 Assurance

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, assurance was covered by questions 8 and 10. The responses are explained below:

- The behaviour of staff at Sizakala instils confidence.
- The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable.

5.6.2.1 The behavior of staff at Sizakala instils confidence.

A very large proportion of the study participants at 90% agree and also strongly agree. Received responses also reflected that 6% were neutral and only 2% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. It can be argued that the customers visiting the Sizakala Customer Services Centers expect the behaviour of staff to instil confidence.

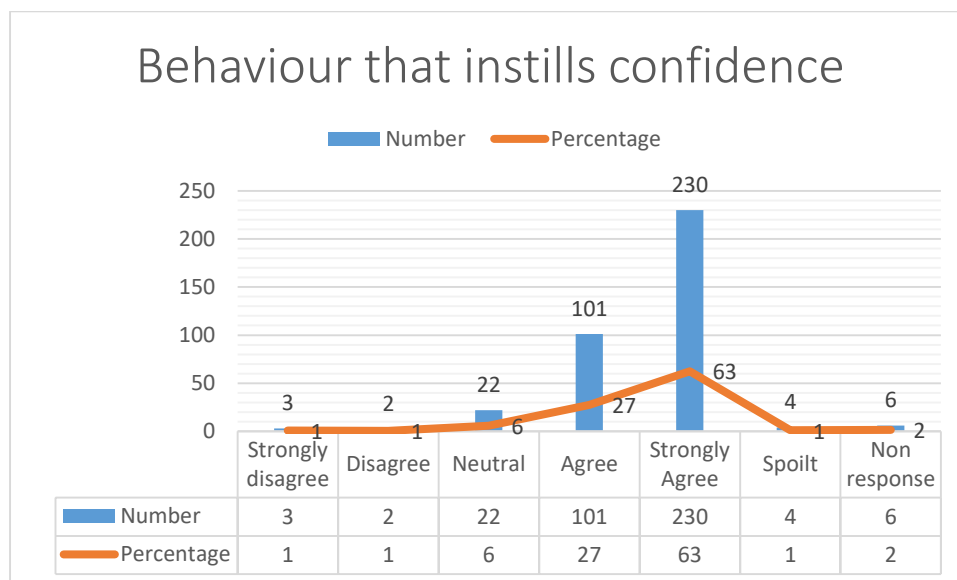


Table 5.17 Expectation 8

5.6.2.2 The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable

A bigger proportion of the respondents (94%) agrees and strongly agrees with the statement that the staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable. The responses also reflected that 5% were neutral and only 1% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. It can be argued that the customers making use of the Sizakala Customer Services Centers expect the officials providing a service at Sizakala Customer Service Center to be informed and knowledgeable about their work.

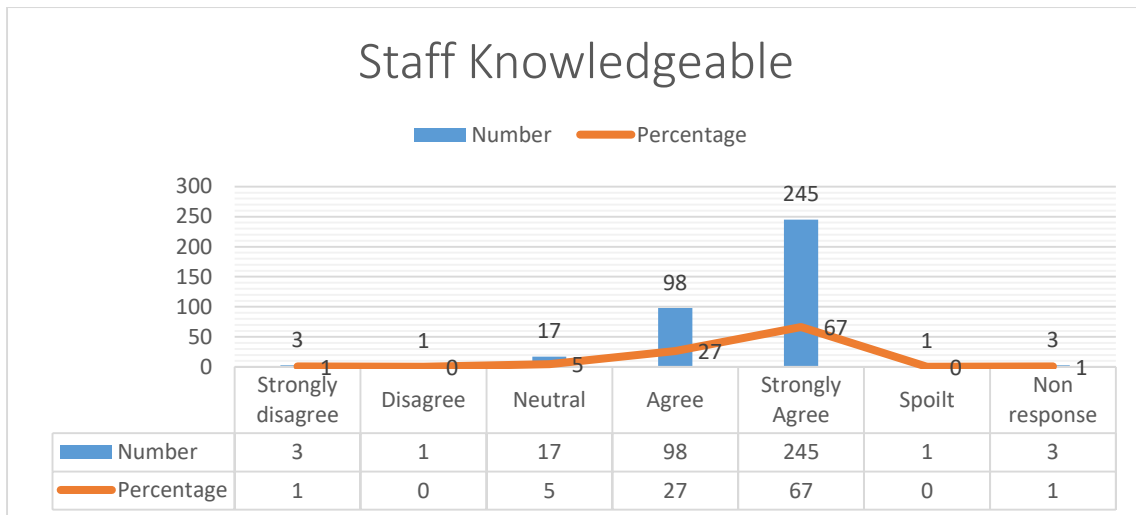


Table 5.18 Expectation 10

5.6.3 Reliability

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, reliability was covered by questions 3 and 5. The responses are captured below.

- Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its promised response time.
- Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time.

5.6.3.1 Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its promised response time

Most of the respondents at 89% agreed and strongly agreed that they expected the Sizakala Customer Service Center to keep to the response time promised. 9% were neutral and only 2% gave an indication that they disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement. It can then be argued that customers visiting Sizakala centers expect Sizakala Customer Service Center to keeps its promised response time.

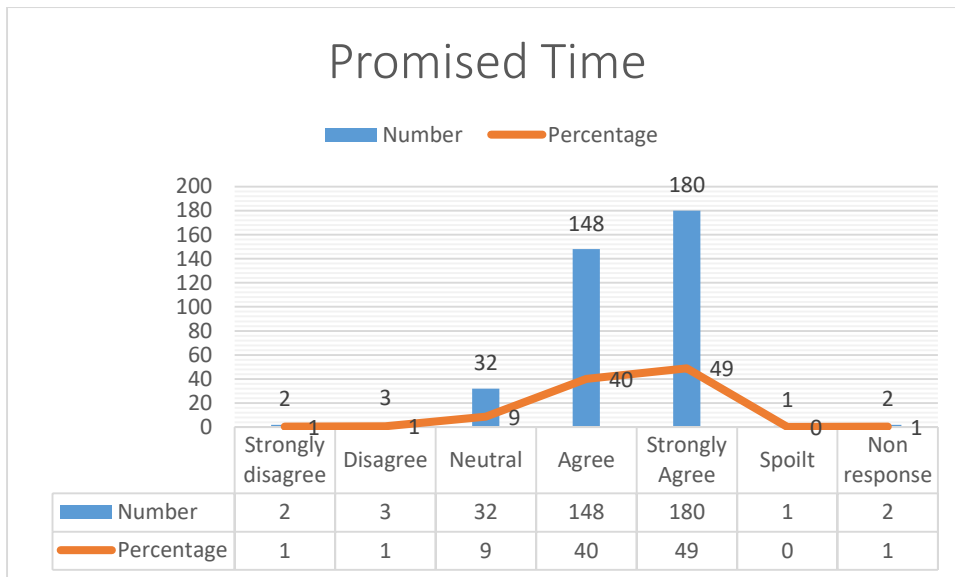


Table 5.19 Expectation 3

5.6.3.2 Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time

As illustrated in the table below, a greater proportion of the respondents at 85% agreed and strongly agreed that they expected the Sizakala Customer Service Center to perform the service right the first time. 11% were neutral and only 2% gave an indication that they disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement. It can then be argued that customers visiting Sizakala centers expect Sizakala Customer Service Center to perform the service right the first time.

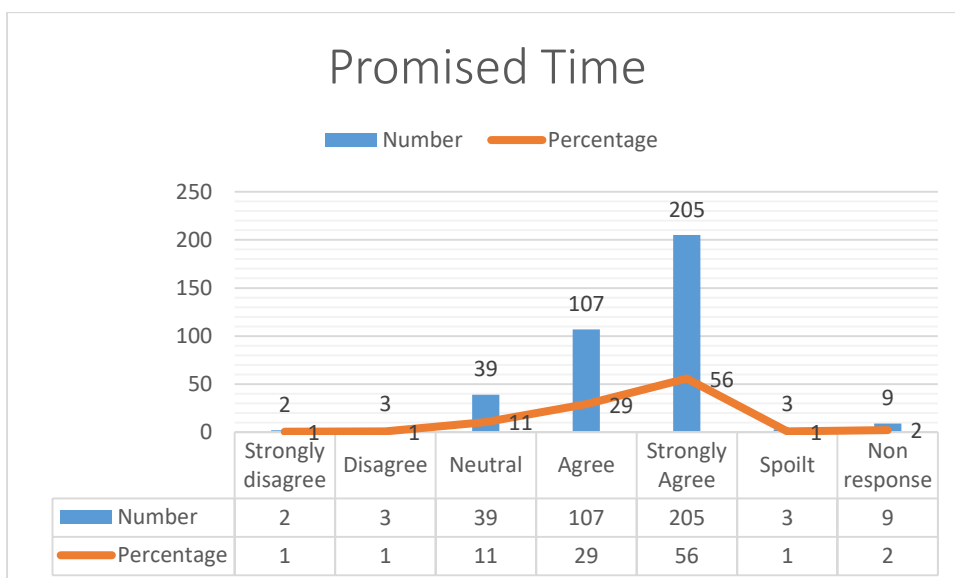


Table 5.20 Expectation 5

5.6.4 Empathy

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, empathy was covered by questions 4 and 6. Responses are explained below:

- When you have a problem staff show sincere interest in resolving it.
- Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard all the time.

5.6.4.1 When you have a problem staff show sincere interest in resolving it

Received responses indicated that a greater number of study respondents (90%) stated that they agreed and also strongly agreed with a statement that “when you have a problem staff show sincere interest in resolving it”. 1% respondents disagreed with the study statement, it was also captured that 8% remained neutral on the above statement. It can be argued that customers expect staff to show a sincere interest in resolving problems should they arise.

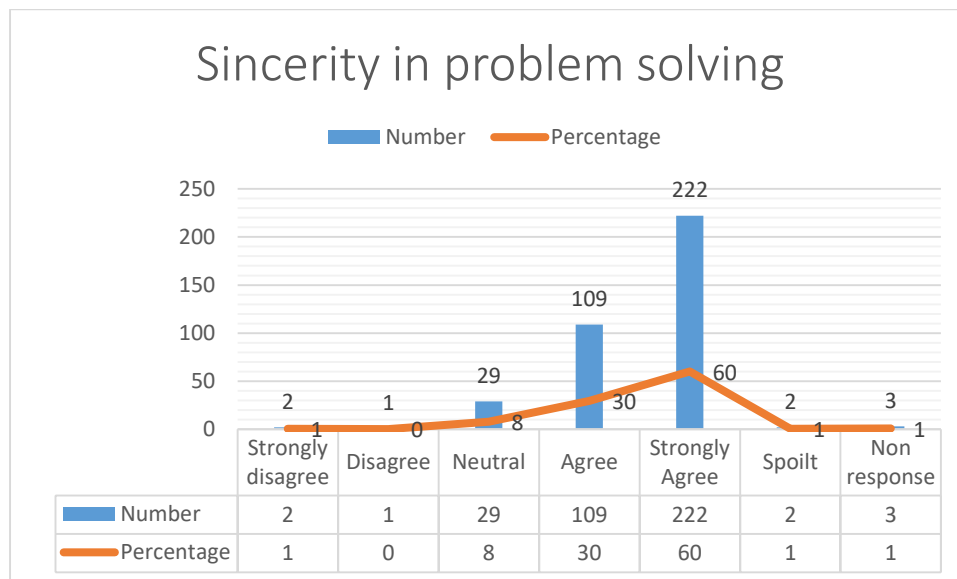


Table 5.21 Expectation 4

5.6.4.2 Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard all the time.

Out of the 368 participants with 2 spoilt and 4 non responses, 87% stated that they agree and strongly agree with the statement for the study which stated that Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its customer service levels at the same standard throughout the day, all the time. Of that total, 2% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement and 10% chose the neutral response about the statement.

These responses indicate that customers expect Sizakala Customer Service Center to keep its service levels at the same standard all the time.

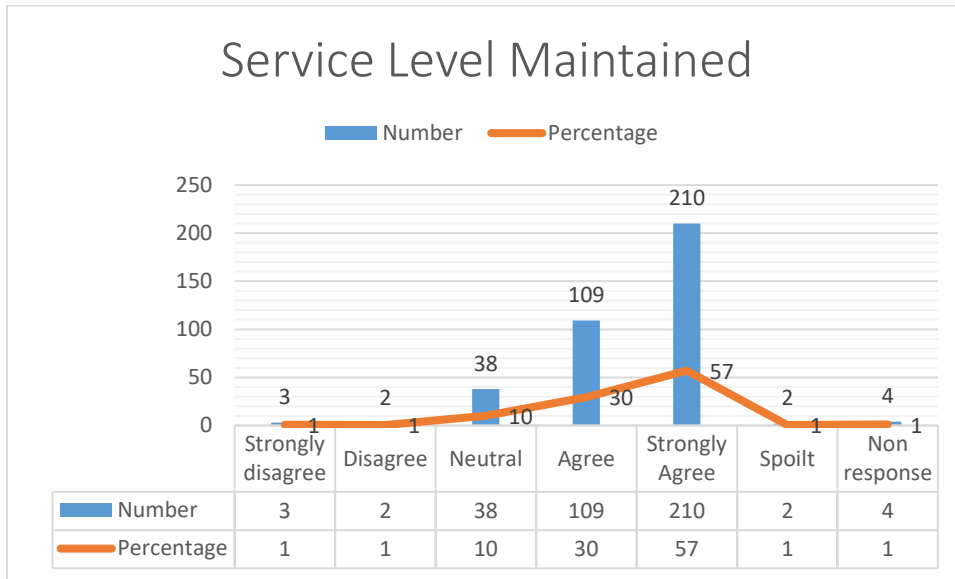


Table 5.22 Expectation 6

5.6.5 Tangibility

In the SERVQUAL questionnaire used for the study, tangibility was covered by questions 1 and 2. The results are explained below:

- The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing.
- Materials associated with the services are visually appealing.

5.6.5.1 The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing

The results show that a greater number of respondents (87%) stated that they agree and strongly agree with the statement that the physical facilities available at the Sizakala Customer Service Center should be visually appealing to the customer, 2% disagreed and 9% remained neutral about the statement. It can be argued that customers expect that the physical facilities available in the Sizakala Customer Service Center to be visually appealing.

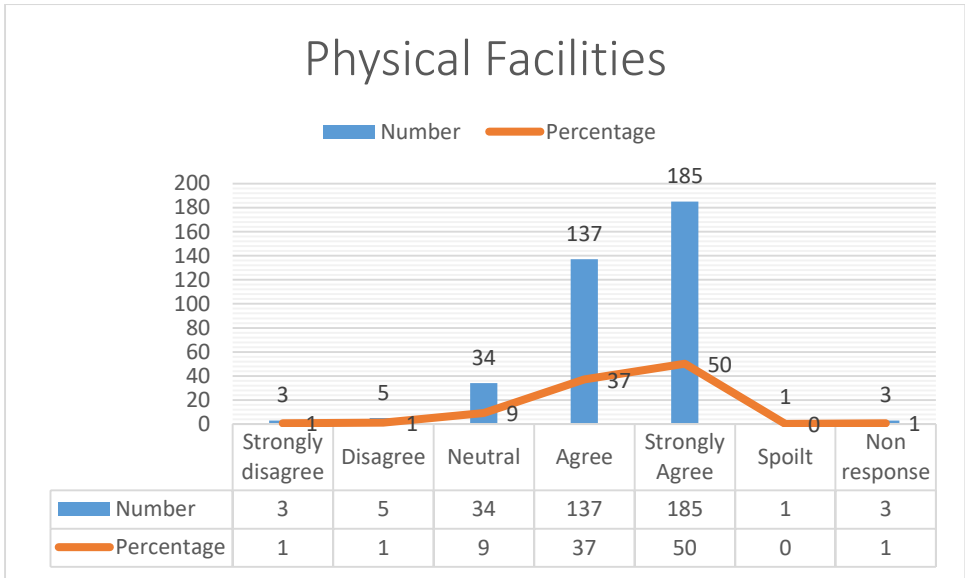


Table 5.23 Expectation 1

5.6.5.2 Materials associated with the services are visually appealing

As one can expect, the responses are the same as for the expectations of physical facilities above. The results show that 87% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement made that materials associated with the provided services should be visually appealing, 2% disagreed and 9% were neutral about the statement. It can be argued that customers expect the materials that are associated with the services rendered to be at the level where they are visually appealing.

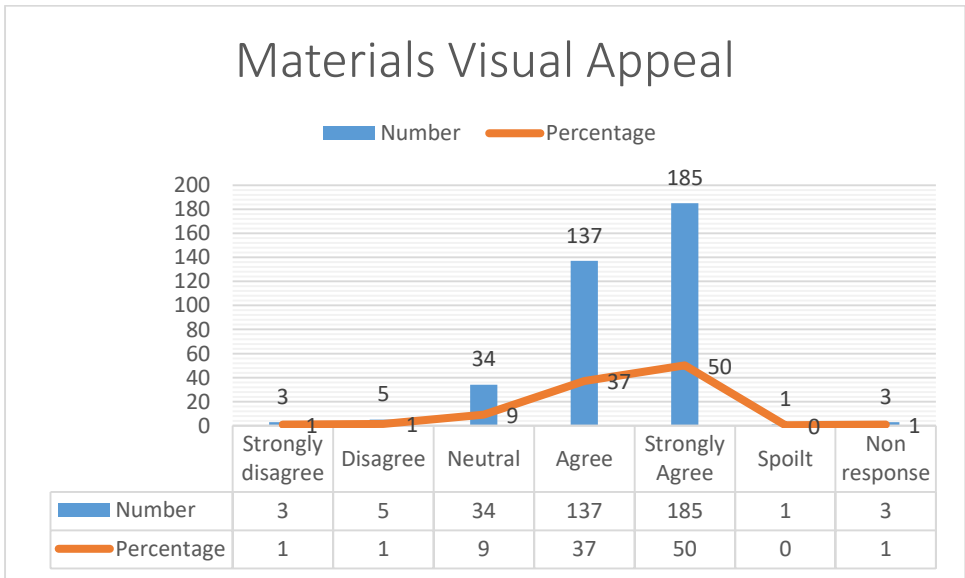


Table 5.24 Expectation 2

5.7 GAP ANALYSIS

To further analyse customer perceptions, the gap analysis model will be used as a tool. The Gap Analysis model focuses on the difference between what is experienced and what was expected. In measuring service quality, the following five gaps are commonly used (Moletsane, 2012):

Gap 1: The gap between what customers expect and management perceptions of what was expected by the customer.

Gap 2: The gap between the management's perceptions of what the customer expects and service quality specifications eg. Wrong service quality standards.

Gap 3: The gap between the service quality specifications and the actual service rendered.

Gap 4: The gap between service delivery and what is communicated to the customers. This is whether the promises match what is being delivered.

Gap 5: The gap between what the customers expect and what the perceived service is.

For the purposes of the study gap 5 will be used to determine the expectation gap and what the customers expect and what the perceived service is. To ascertain this gap the average score for the mean was computed for both the expectation and the perception. Should the end score be negative, this means that expectations are not met and this is an indication therefore that customers are not satisfied. Should the computed means be positive, this means that the customers are broadly satisfied with the customer service they receive from the Sizakala Customer Service Centers. Table 4.7.1 below illustrate the results. The formulae used was:

SERVQUAL Score = Perception – Expectation

GAP ANALYSIS				
No	SERVQUAL Statements	Perception Mean	Expectation Mean	Difference Mean
TANGIBILITY				
1	The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing	3,16	4,77	1,62
2	Materials associated with the services (such as information brochures) are visually appealing	4,31	4,36	0,05
RELIABILITY				
3	Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps to its promised response time	4,29	4,38	0,09
5	Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time	4,41	4,50	0,10
EMPATHY				
4	When you have a problem, staff show sincere interest in resolving it	4,20	4,45	0,24
6	Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day	4,21	4,37	0,16
RESPONSIVENESS				
7	Sizakala Customer Service Center insists on error free service	4,32	4,43	0,11
9	The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you a prompt service	4,37	4,49	0,12
ASSURANCE				
8	The behaviour of staff at Sizakala instils confidence	4,13	4,48	0,35
10	The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable	4,41	4,50	0,09

Table 5.25 GAP Analysis

Upon analysis, the means found for expectations all came to above 4.3; this illustrates that customers expect a high level of service from Sizakala Customer Service Centers. Statement 01 had the highest mean at 4.77. This statement means that customers expect Sizakala Customer Service Centers to be visually appealing. Interestingly, the perception mean for statement 1 is the lowest meaning the current status is not achieving the desired result. The SERVQUAL score means are positive, this means that customer expectations have been met and staff are performing to the satisfaction of customer.

Statement 1 (The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center are visually appealing) showed the biggest gap (1.62), which shows that customers expected Sizakala Customer Service Centers facilities to be visually appealing yet this expectation is not met. Statement 2 indicated the lowest statement gap score at 0.05; this indicates that the customers are most satisfied with the visual appeal of materials associated with the service. With the above scores one can argue that customer expectations are high as they are all above 4. The perceptions are also high since all the scores are above 4. Sizakala Customer Service Centers are currently performing to the satisfaction of their customers.

5.8 THE SERVQUAL INDEX

The service quality (SERVQUAL) index identified the average gap scores for all five service quality dimensions. For the study this score was 0.293. Table 5.26 below outlines the average expectations, average perceptions as well the difference between these scores.

	SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE PERCEPTIONS	AVERAGE EXPECTATIONS	AVERAGE GAP SCORES
1	TANGIBILITY	3,735	4,565	0,835
2	ASSURANCE	4,27	4,49	0,22
3	EMPATHY	4,205	4,41	0,2
4	RESPONSIVENESS	4,345	4,46	0,115
5	RELIABILITY	4,35	4,44	0,095
	TOTALS	4,181	4,473	0,293

Table 5.26 SERVQUAL Index

The tangibility dimension showed the largest difference of (0.835) between the perceptions and expectations. Secondly the assurance dimension followed at 0.22, empathy followed at 0.2, responsiveness came next at 0.115 and reliability came last at 0.095. This positive difference in values between the expectations and perceptions indicate that the customer perceptions have exceeded the customer expectations meaning customers are generally satisfied.

5.9 TESTS FOR CORRELATION

The data collected was also tested for the probability of a pattern or hypothesis; this is the testing of the relationship between variables to indicate if this occurs by chance alone. This is known as significant testing. For this study a few variables were selected and the SPSS Data Analysis Software was used to test the relationship, the results are discussed below (Saunders et al., 2016).

Pearson's correlation was used to explore the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables. This correlation was done because the data is scaled. The results will give an indication of the negative or positive strength of the relationship. Should there be a positive correlation, this will indicate that as one variable increases the other variable will also increase. The negative correlation tells us that when one variable increases the other one in return decreases. During this study correlation was done for the following statements:

Correlations			
		Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps to its promised response time	Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time
Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps to its promised response time	Pearson Correlation	1	.291**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	368	368
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 5.9.1 Correlation between expectation 3, Sizakala Customer Service Center keeping to its promised time, and expectation 5, Sizakala Customer Service Center performing service right the first time

The above table above represents a strong and positive correlation between statements "Sizakala Customer Service Center will keep to its promised response time" and "Sizakala Customer Service Center will insist on error free service" ($r = 0.291$; $p < 0.01$).

This correlation means therefore that the more Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps to its promised response time to the customers, the more they will demand a service that is free of errors. This means that customers will be expecting that the service provided is also free of errors if the emphasis is put on Centers to keep to committed turnaround time.

Correlations				
			Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time	Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day
Spearman's rho	Sizakala Customer Service Center performs service right the first time	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.493**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	368	368
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 5.9.2 Correlation between expectation 5, Sizakala Customer Service Center performing service right the first time and expectation 6, Sizakala Customer Service Center keeping same service standards all the time

The above table indicate a strong and positive correlation between the statements “Sizakala Customer Service Center perform service right the first time” and “Sizakala Customer Service Center keep its service levels at the same standard all the time” ($r = 0.493$; $p < 0.01$). This correlation is an indication that that the more Sizakala Customer Service Center delivers the expected service right the first time, the more the service level will be kept at the same standards all the time.

This is also important for the study because it means if the Sizakala Centers perform right service the first time, customers will expect service levels to be kept at the same standard all the time throughout the day.

Correlations				
			Sizakala Customer Center keeps its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day	Sizakala Customer Center insists on error free service
Spearman's rho	Sizakala Customer Center keeps its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.571**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	313	313
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 5.9.3 Correlation between expectation 6, Sizakala Customer Service Center keeping same service standards all the time and expectation 7, Sizakala Customer Service Center insisting on error free service

The table reflects a positive and strong correlation between the “Sizakala Customer Service Center will insist on error free service” and statements “Sizakala Customer Service Center will keep its service levels at the same standard all the time” ($r = 0.571$; $p < 0.01$).

The correlation captured indicates that customers will insist on error free service the more Sizakala Customer Service Center keeps its service levels at the same standard all the time. This is an indication for Management to pay attention, it is an indication that should Sizakala Customer Service Centers keep their service levels at the same standard all the time, lesser errors will be made in these Centers by staff.

Correlations			
		Sizakala Customer Center insists on error free service	The staff at Sizakala Customer Center are knowledgeable
Sizakala Customer Center insists on error free service	Pearson Correlation	1	.525**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	363	363
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 5.9.4 Correlation between expectation 7, Sizakala Customer Service Center insisting on error free service and expectation 10, the staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center being knowledgeable

The table above represents a strong and positive correlation between the statement “Sizakala Customer Service Center insists on error free service” and “The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable” ($r = 0.525$; $p < 0.01$).

This correlation gives an indication that customers expect that the more officials at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable about their business, the more they will expect the service to be free of errors at all times. This is an indication for those that hold management function at Sizakala to ensure that staff are knowledgeable about their business.

Correlations			
		The staff at Sizakala Customer Center give you prompt service	The staff at Sizakala Customer Center are knowledgeable
The staff at Sizakala Customer Center give you prompt service	Pearson Correlation	1	.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	368	368
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 5.9.5 Correlation between expectation 9, Sizakala Customer Service Center giving prompt service and expectation 10, the staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center being knowledgeable

The table above represents a strong and positive correlation between the statements “The staff at Sizakala Center are knowledgeable” and “The staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center give you prompt service” ($r = 0.532$; $p < 0.01$).

This correlation implies that customers expect that if staff at Sizakala Customer Service Center are knowledgeable, they will expect quick service also. In a study by Mhlongo,(2016) there was also coloration between prompt service as well as knowledgeable staff.

5.9 SUMMARY

This chapter presented all the findings of the study from the demographic information to correlation analysis of the data. Out of 400 questionnaires issued, 368 were completely filled and returned. The reliability of the tool utilised was tested and found to be reliable. Customer perceptions were established and these were compared with customer expectations to identify the gap. The service quality (SERVQUAL) index was also established and identified the average gap scores for all five service quality dimensions. For the study this score was 0.293.

CHAPTER SIX- DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the results received and presented in chapter 04. The chapter will include in the discussion similar studies and shall be cited accordingly. These discussions will be in line with the study questions informed by the study objectives in the form of narration as well as tables and other figures. The statistics will be discussed further and points argued; this will inform recommendations made in the last chapter.

The problem statement of the study indicated that as much as the Customer Care and other customer service interventions were implemented, changes were not felt on the ground. Further to this the study was motivated by a similar study by Belinda Mhlongo, (2016). This study also considered recommendations for future studies as captured by Mhlongo in 2016. It is therefore important to also contrast the findings of this study with that of the 2016 study by Ms. Mhlongo. This will highlight the changes in customer service between the 2016 study and this current study. This will also indicate whether there have been any improvements after the first study.

6.2 PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS ON THE SERVICE QUALITY THEY RECEIVE AT THE SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTERS

The first objective of this study was to investigate satisfaction levels of customers that use the eThekweni Municipal customer service centers. These centers are the Sizakala Customer Service Centers. For a customer that visit the center to be satisfied, the product or service rendered should either meet or exceed expectations of that customer. Should the product or service not meet expectations, then the consumer is dissatisfied with the service rendered (Moolla and Du Plessis, 1997).

To obtain these satisfaction levels, perceptions of the satisfaction levels of customers that use the eThekweni Municipal customer service centers were investigated. The results gave us an average mean of 4.181 for the five service quality dimensions as perceived by the customers of Sizakala Customer Service Centers. From the current study the reliability dimension had the highest perception score of 4.35.

This is the statement that said the customers perceive that staff at Sizakala Customer Service Centers keep to the promised time and perform the service right the first time. The results indicate that the customers perceive that staff at the Centers do keep to the promised time as well as perform the service correct the first time.

This is very important for Management as this is a customer service environment, standards and timelines are crucial. This is indicated in Table 6.1 below. From these means one can argue that the customers in general have a very high perception as the score is at above 4.

In the study by Mhlongo et al.(2016) mentioned above which was conducted in 2010 and published in 2016, an average mean of 3.66 for the five dimensions of service quality was reported. This indicates a move upwards of 0.521 in the average perceptions of customers. For all the five service quality dimensions, there has been an upward trend in the perceptions.

With this information it can be argued that customer perceptions over the years have increased, this is indicated in Table 6.2 below (Mhlongo et al., 2016). This indicates that Sizakala Management should be commended as perceptions have increased; it means they are doing something good for their customers. Customers view the services provided in a better condition.

SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE PERCEPTIONS
Tangibility	3,735
Assurance	4,27
Empathy	4,205
Responsiveness	4,345
Reliability	4,35
Total	4.181

Table 6.1 Perceptions Average Mean Scores 2018

SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE PERCEPTIONS
Tangibility	3.78
Assurance	3.86
Empathy	3.58
Responsiveness	3.48
Reliability	3.58
Total	3.66

Table 6.2 Perceptions Average Mean Score 2016 (Mhlongo et al., 2016)

6.3 EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMERS ON THE SERVICE QUALITY THEY SHOULD RECEIVE AT THE SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTERS

To obtain this, the expectations of the satisfaction levels of customers that use the eThekweni Municipal customer service centers were investigated. At the end of the study and as stated in table 6.3. below, the results gave us an average mean of 4.473 for all the five dimensions as expected by the customers of Sizakala Customer Service Centers. From this score it is clear that the Sizakala Customer Service Center's customers have very high expectations.

	SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE EXPECTATIONS
1	Tangibility	4,565
2	Assurance	4,49
3	Empathy	4,41
4	Responsiveness	4,46
5	Reliability	4,44
	Total	4,473

Table 6.3. Expectations Average Mean Scores 2018

	SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE EXPECTATIONS
1	Reliability	4.21
2	Responsiveness	4.21
3	Assurance	4.38
4	Empathy	4.14
5	Tangibility	4.19
Total		4.23

Table 6.4 Expectations Average Mean Scores 2018 (Mhlongo et al., 2016)

In the study mentioned above (Mhlongo et al., 2016) mentioned above and which was conducted in 2010 and published in 2016, an average mean of 4.2.3 for all the five dimensions of service quality was reported. This indicates a move upwards of 0.243 in the average expectations of customers. As with the perception service dimensions, all the dimensions reflected an upward trend in expectations.

This information tells us that there has been a constant increase in customer expectations over the years. See Table 6.2 above (Mhlongo et al., 2016). To the Management of Sizakala this is significant because their customers expect better service from them. Management should therefore improve on their offering, this will ensure that the customer expectations are met and continue to be met.

For this study, tangibility dimension had the highest expectation score at 4.56. This is the statement that said customers expect the physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Service Center to be visually appealing and that the materials associated with the services (such as information brochures) should also be visually appealing.

6.4 INVESTIGATE GAPS IN CUSTOMER SERVICE PERCEPTIONS AND CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS USING THE SERVQUAL MODEL

It has been indicated that through literature that the difference between the expected and perceived service quality is a gap between the customers' expectations of the service and the service they eventually receive, as stated this is known as Gap 5 (Nel et al., 1997).

The study measured this gap and presented the results in Table 5.25 The results indicated a positive gap. The average gap for all service quality dimensions was 0.293.

The average scores for all dimensions of customer service quality expectations were compared with perceptions. Positive gaps were identified and this means that the expectations of the customers were met and even exceeded. These positive gaps identified were in all five dimensions as indicated in Table 6.5 below. In the study by Mhlongo et al.(2016) negative gaps were identified for all five dimensions as outlined in Table 6.5 below.

The average total of these negative gaps was -0.57. This means that the expected service quality was not met and customers were not satisfied with the customer service quality they received. The current study score for this gap is 0.293 and the score is positive. This means that gap 5, which is the difference between what customers expect and what they received moved up from -0.57 to the current 0.293. This is a positive move that indicates that in the past 8 years the service quality at the Sizakala Customer Service Centers has improved by a score of 0.863 calculated using the SERVQUAL index.

	SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE GAP SCORES (2010)	AVERAGE GAP SCORES (2018)	DIFFERENCE
1	Tangibility	-0.41	0.835	1.245
2	Assurance	-0.52	0.22	0.74
3	Empathy	-0.56	0.20	0.76
4	Responsiveness	-0.73	0.115	0.845
5	Reliability	-0.63	0.095	0.725
		-0.57	0.293	0.863

Table 6.5 Average Gap Scores

6.4.1 Tangibility

This dimension refers to the physical facilities at the center, the equipment and other items: it also refers to the appearance of officials, how they are dressed. For this study this dimension also covered the materials on display at the centers such as brochures and personnel.

The overall gap score for the tangibility dimension was 0.835 and it was the largest of all 5 dimension gaps recorded. The score is also positive and this means that customers find the Sizakala Customer Service Centers visually appealing. This also applies to the material found at the centers. As much as this score is positive, it is the largest gap in all five dimensions. This is an indication that as much as the customers were satisfied with the facilities they still expected them to be more visually appealing.

The average gap score for the tangibility dimension for the 2010 study was -0.41. At the time of this study the dimension recorded the lowest gap score. There has been an improvement of 1.245 gap score. This gap moved from -0.41 in 2010 to 0.835 for this 2018 study. This means that there has been a big improvement in the physical facilities of the Sizakala Centers as well as the presentation of personnel. As much as there is a positive gap, there is still room for improvement and Management should note this and continue to improve the facilities.

6.4.2 Assurance

This dimension indicates the courtesy of officials and whether they are able to inspire trust and confidence. For this study this dimension was covered in a statement that said Sizakala Customer Service staff instil confidence and staff are knowledgeable when it comes to their work. This also covered the materials on display at the centers such as brochures and personnel. The average gap score for this dimension was at 0.22. This was the second largest average gap score out of the five service quality dimensions.

This recorded score is an indication that customers were satisfied with the assurance part of the Sizakala Customer Centers; this is because the perception exceeds the expectation. As much as the score is positive and indicates satisfaction, the score is very close to dissatisfaction where the expectation exceeds the perception. This is an indication that Sizakala management should put in place measures to improve the assurance dimension of service quality.

The gap score for the assurance dimension for the 2010 study was -0.52. This was the second lowest gap score. There has been an improvement of 0.74 in the gap score. This gap moved the most from -0.52 in 2010 to 0.22 for this 2018 study.

This means that there has been an improvement in this dimension; customers currently view officials as better knowledgeable and instilling more confidence than in 2010. Although there is a positive gap, there is still room for improvement and Management should note this and continue to improve the capacity of staff through training and other capacity development programmes.

The correlation tests above indicate that there is a significant correlation between staff being knowledgeable and the confidence instilled in customers. This is an indication to Management that to instil confidence in their customers, staff must be trained and knowledgeable.

6.4.3 Empathy

This dimension refers to deep caring and the personal attention that the Sizakala staff provide its customers. For this study this dimension was covered in a statement that said Sizakala Customer Service staff show sincerity in solving the customer's problems should they arise. It was also covered by the statement that said the Sizakala Customer Service Unit keeps the service standard the same throughout the day.

The average gap score for this dimension was 0.20. This was the third lowest average gap score out of the five service quality dimensions. At positive this score indicates that customers are satisfied with the empathy part of the Sizakala Customer Centers, this is because their perceptions exceed their expectations. As much as the score is positive and indicates satisfaction, the score is not far from dissatisfaction. This is an indication that Sizakala management should put in place measures to improve this dimension. This can be done by putting standards in place and ensuring that they are kept the same throughout the day.

The gap score for the empathy dimension for the 2010 study was -0.56. There has been an improvement of 0.76 in the gap score. This gap moved the most from -0.56 in 2010 to 0.20 for this 2018 study. This means that there has been an improvement in this dimension in the way customers currently view the Sizakala Centers as keeping the same standards at all times. As much as there is a positive gap, there is still room for improvement and Management should note this and continue to enforce the maintenance of standards throughout the day.

The correlation tests above indicated that there is a significant correlation between staff rendering a service at the same standard and the provision of an error free service. Again this is an indication to Management that to have an error free service, customer service must be provided at the same standard throughout.

6.4.4 Reliability

This dimension captures the official's ability to deliver the promised customer service in the promised time and accurately. For this study this dimension was covered in a statement that said Sizakala Customer Service staff keep to their promised response time and perform the service right the first time.

The average gap score for this dimension was 0.095. This was the lowest average gap score out of the five service quality dimensions. At positive this score indicates that customers were satisfied with the reliability of the Sizakala Customer Centers, this is because their perceptions exceed the expectations. The score is positive and indicates that customers are satisfied; however, it is dangerously close to dissatisfaction. This is an indication that Sizakala management should urgently put in place measures to improve this dimension. This can be done by ensuring that staff keep to the promised time and deliver exactly what was promised.

The gap score for the reliability dimension for the 2010 study was -0.63. There has been an improvement of 0.725 in the gap score. This gap moved from -0.63 in 2010 to 0.095 for this 2018 study. This means that there has been an improvement albeit slight in this dimension, which is the way customers currently view the Sizakala Centers as keeping to the promised time as well as delivering the promised service.

6.4.5 Responsiveness

Responsive dimension refers to the Sizakala Customer Service official's willingness to help customers and provide prompt customer service. During this study this dimension was covered by a statement that said Sizakala Customer Service staff insists on an error free service and that they give prompt service.

As indicated in Table 6.5 above, the average gap score for this dimension was 0.115. At positive this score indicates that customers are satisfied with the responsiveness of the Sizakala Customer Centers, this is because their perceptions exceed the expectations. The score is positive and customers are satisfied but there could be improvement. This is an indication that Sizakala management should put in place measures to also improve this dimension.

The gap score for the empathy dimension for the 2010 study was -0.73. There has been an improvement of 0.76 in the gap score. This gap moved from -0.73 in 2010 to 0.115 for this 2018 study. This means that there has been an improvement in this dimension in the way customers currently view the Sizakala Center officials as insisting on error free customer service as well as giving this service promptly. Although there is a positive gap there is still room for improvement and Management should note this and continue to capacitate the employees in customer care.

The correlation tests above indicate that there is a significant correlation between staff rendering an error free service and staff being knowledgeable. For Management this means that staff should be trained and knowledgeable so that they can provide error free service.

6.5 IDENTIFY AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE.

	SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS	AVERAGE PERCEPTIONS	AVERAGE EXPECTATIONS	AVERAGE GAP SCORES
1	TANGIBILITY	3,735	4,565	0,835
2	ASSURANCE	4,27	4,49	0,22
3	EMPATHY	4,205	4,41	0,2
4	RESPONSIVENESS	4,345	4,46	0,115
5	RELIABILITY	4,35	4,44	0,095
	TOTALS	4,181	4,473	0,293

Table 6.6 SERVQUAL Index Results

For this study and as indicated in Table 5.25 the average scores between the customer perceptions and expectations illustrated that customers are generally satisfied with the quality of service they currently receive at Sizakala Customer Centers.

The computed average scores of all dimensions give a positive score which is an indication that customers are satisfied. Even though the scores are positive, they need not be kept at positive but also improved. Firstly, from the results, the tangibility dimension needs to be prioritised. Sizakala Management should as a matter of urgency invest on the physical layout of the centers; the materials displayed as well the presentation by officials.

The way they dress and carry themselves could have positive effects. Secondly, the assurance dimension showed the second largest average gap. This dimension covered the statement that said officials are knowledgeable. This indicates that staff require training. Management should invest in training and coaching for the staff. Thirdly, Management needs to pay attention to a prompt and error free service. This will be taken care of by training as established above.

6.6 SUMMARY

For this chapter data that was collected by the SERVQUAL questionnaire was discussed in detail. This was compared to another study and this was also discussed using the SERVQUAL theory. The average scores were discussed as well as their implications for management. The areas where improvements can be done were also highlighted. It was indicated that for quick changes for the better, Management should invest in their facilities as well as the training of staff.

CHAPTER SEVEN-RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The dawn of democracy in 1994 created an expectation in the citizens of South Africa, an expectation that things will get better and that customer service will improve. The masses expect customer service to be better and more responsive to their needs. When the White Paper on Transformation was adopted in 1997, another expectation was created through the *Batho Pele* Principles; the public expected more. One of the principles addresses service standards and communities expect services to be rendered within certain standards and rendered accurately.

This chapter brings in measures that Management of eThekweni Municipality's Sizakala Customer Centers should implement to improve quality of customer service that they can provide to the customers visiting their centers. This study has made comparisons with regards to the Sizakala Customers' expectations and the perceptions of the service quality as offered by eThekweni Municipal Customer Service Centers. The results were presented in Chapter 04.

In chapter 05 there was an elaborate discussion on the findings of this research study on the five different dimensions of service quality. This chapter will cover the objectives of the study, comment on whether these were met. The areas of future research opportunities will also be outlined. This chapter will also highlight the contribution made by the study in the research and customer service environment.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Broadly the study made a comparison between the customer expectations and the perceptions on the quality of customer services rendered at the Sizakala Customer Service Centers. These were presented in Chapter 04 and discussed in Chapter 05.

The overall purpose of this study was to establish customer expectations and perceptions of the quality of customer service that is delivered by the eThekweni Municipality through their Sizakala Customer Service Centers.

This was done to identify the gaps that exist and recommend intervention measures. The study collected data using the SERVQUAL questionnaire to identify the actual expectations and perceptions of the customer service.

7.3 STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study investigated the customer perceptions on customer service quality in the Sizakala Customer Services Centers of eThekweni Municipality. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To investigate the satisfaction levels of customers that use the eThekweni Municipal customer service centers.
- To investigate the difference between customer expectations and the level of services rendered at eThekweni Municipal customer service centers.
- To investigate areas of improvement.

The study had three objectives as indicated above. All of these objectives were achieved. The satisfaction levels were investigated, recorded and discussed. Secondly the difference between the services rendered and what the customers expect was investigated and discussed. Lastly areas of improvement were also investigated and presented. As indicated all three objectives of the study were met.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research study makes a contribution to the body of literature in the customer service field of Public Service. As much as the theory and principles are the same, the contribution is unique for the Local Government. It supported some knowledge that existed but also added deep insight to improve the understanding of Municipal business.

The research makes a sizeable contribution by giving an indication which of the five service quality dimensions has an effect on customer satisfaction. The study also provided recommendations on how eThekweni and other Municipalities can improve their efforts by developing and implementing a better business. This will ultimately lead to an improved customer service and better service delivery.

If the customers' expectations and perceptions are better understood, municipalities and other organs of state will be in a better position to make improvements to the customer service quality. The study indicated the service quality gaps, by doing so the study made a meaningful contribution to assisting in the reduction of those identified gaps. The study develops information that can be used to improve the customer service and ultimately be used for policy formulation.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

Knowing what your customers expect and want is the first and critical step in improving customer service. From the study, the expectations of customers can be understood. From the expectations, Management should put in place measures to meet and exceed these expectations. To improve on the customer service, the Management of Sizakala should consider the following recommendations in line with the five service quality dimensions:

7.5.1 Tangibility

Although this dimension was positive, it recorded the biggest gap. It refers to the facilities and other tangibles at the Sizakala Centers. Measures should therefore be put in place to improve the perceptions customers have. EThekwini Municipality as an organisation has a brand in the form of a dome and other relevant colours.

Sizakala Management should develop a branding strategy for all their centers used to brand them accordingly. This strategy should be implemented to ensure that all the centers are at the same level as far as the facilities are concerned. All the centers should look and feel the same, irrespective of which center it is. This should also inform the office layout, decisions on what type of furniture and whether the offices should be open plan or close should be taken and implemented.

7.5.2 Responsiveness

The responsive dimension captures the staff's willingness to assist customers as well as proved a quick service. As a start the Municipality needs to recruit officials with the right attitude, officials who care for customers. Training can go a long way but it does not assist when dealing with someone who just does not care.

It is also recommended that officials be given a chance should they wish to be transferred to positions where they will not be dealing with customers. In doing so only officials that care will remain. The Management should forge ahead and implement customer service standards and hold officials accountable, should those officials not meet the standards. Through *Batho Pele*, office Management should reward excellent customer service and punish non-compliance.

7.5.3 Reliability

This dimension is the organisation's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. To achieve satisfaction in this dimension, the capacity of officials will need to be improved. Capacity cannot be achieved alone but Management must put in place systems and procedures to achieve this. Management is therefore advised to develop customer centric procedures to manage customer service. Customers should be consulted before such measures are implemented.

7.5.4 Assurance

This dimension indicates the knowledge and courtesy of employees as well as their ability to inspire trust and confidence. In the SERVQUAL questionnaire the statement about staff being knowledgeable was used.

This dimension forms the basis for the need for staff to be trained. It is recommended that Management develop and implement a continuous development programme, there should be ongoing training that all front facing officials go through. Training is not enough; management should ensure that officials are motivated at all times. To achieve this there must be programmes to specifically target the motivation of staff.

7.5.5 Empathy

This is the caring and individualised attention given to customers. In the study this was the statement on standards. As mentioned above there must be processes and procedures in place. This will ensure that standards are not only kept the same but there are no errors in the ways the service is delivered.

7.5.6 General

7.5.6.1 Customer Service Standards and Customer Service Charter

EThekwini Municipality has recently adopted municipal wide Customer Service Standards and Customer Service Charter. The aim is to ensure that there are standards when it comes to customer service. Customers will be informed of what to expect and how to expect it. It is recommended that these standards be publicised so that customers will not only know what to expect but also hold officials accountable.

The Municipality should also put measures in place to monitor these standards and hold officials accountable should they not meet them. All Municipal officials sign performance contracts; it is recommended that a customer service clause be included as compulsory for all officials especially those that directly deal with the public.

7.5.6.2 Customer Relations Management Strategy

EThekwini Municipality has a Customer Relations Management Strategy (CRMS) in place; this strategy was adopted by Council in 2013 (EThekwini Municipality, 2013).

Its purpose was to:

- To eliminate Customer service, the Municipality and Customers
- To align services to Customer needs
- To coordinate Customer services

The ultimate outcome is to improve customer service quality. The Municipality should review this strategy to incorporate the recommendations as stated above such as training, implementation of standards, integrate the customer service functions and implement consequence management for those who violate Customer Relations Management Strategy as well as the Customer Care Policy.

7.5.6.3 Integration of Customer Services

The Municipality is going through an integration process; all customer services will be integrated into one. With this background, it is recommended that this process be fact tracked as it will improve the level of satisfaction. Management should ensure that the employees are part of the process and own it. Full consultations should take place and the views of the employees be incorporated into the final model to be implemented.

7.5.6.4 Training

The Municipality through the eThekweni Municipal Academy has a customer service offering. This course should be revised and taken to a relevant SETA for accreditation. The review should include current customer service practices to ensure that the officials are kept abreast of best practice. It is further recommended that all officials go through this course and that it is considered for any promotion opportunities.

7.5.6.5 Batho Pele Programme

This programme which was given effect by the White Paper on Transformation is not fully exhausted within the Municipality. It is recommended that the current *Batho Pele* programme be reviewed and projects be included that will specifically respond to the gaps identified. Through the *Batho Pele* office all officials, especially customer service, should attend at least 03 *Batho Pele* programmes per annum.

7.5.6.6 Customer Satisfaction Monitoring

The Municipality has programmes to monitor customer satisfaction, like the annual Mystery Shopper, the Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire programme as well as the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. It is recommended that these surveys be done at least once a quarter. It is recommended that these surveys be reviewed and included in the measurement of the five service quality dimensions.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research study was undertaken as a result of a previous study. Researchers continue to search for ways of doing things more effectively, easier, faster and cheaper. Research is used as a tool to get answers. Customer service and service quality in general can be further studied and the following is advised for future research and studies:

- Future studies should include other Municipalities so that comparisons can be made and conclusions drawn.
- The studies should also include questions directed to those that can afford to pay a certain premium should they prefer a quicker service.
- Future studies can also include surveys in the private sector and conduct comparisons.

- Another similar study is recommended after the full integration of the customer service function.

7.7 CONCLUSION

The citizens of our country expect this democratic government to deliver the better life for all they promise. It is unfortunate for local government that should a citizen require a service; they go to their local municipality irrespective of whether that service is a local government competence or not. The citizens of our country deserve good customer service at all times. This study has unearthed information that can and should be used to improve customer service. Government can never have enough resources and we should make do with what is available.

Municipalities including eThekweni Municipality often focus on projects; they put an emphasis on the tangible products and ignore the package that delivers those products. The focus needs to shift from what is delivered to how it is delivered. It is strongly recommended that the Management of eThekweni creates an environment where these recommendations can be met. They are urged to not only consult customers when developing programmes but regularly engage them to ensure that the delivery is in sync with their needs. This will ensure that customers are satisfied. It is through this paradigm shift to a customer centric approach that this democratic government can ever deliver a better life for all.

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APPENDIX 1 – GATEKEEPER’S LETTER

APPENDIX 2 – INFORMED CONSENT(ENGLISH)

Informed Consent Letter



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Masters Research Project
Researcher: Mavuso Tshabalala (082 776 2150)
Email: HssrechHumanities@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Respondent,

I am, **Mavuso Tshabalala**, a Master of Business Administration student, at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: **“Customer perceptions towards eThekweni Municipality customer services, Durban, South Africa.** The main aim of this study is to investigate the customer perceptions towards eThekweni Municipality.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this interview. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the interview or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The interview should take about 45 minutes to an hour. I hope you will take the time to participate.

Sincerely

Researcher’s signature_____ Date_____

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

Masters Research Project
Researcher: Mavuso Tshabalala (082 776 2150)
Email: HssrecHumanities@ukzn.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr. Rosemary Sibanda (031 260 1479)

CONSENT

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document, the nature of the research project and that audio recording will be used during interview. I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

APPENDIX 3 – INFORMED CONSENT(ZULU)

Informed Consent Letter



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Masters Research Project

Researcher: Mavuso Tshabalala (082 776 2150)

Email: HssrecHumanities@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Respondent,

Igama lami ngingu, **Mavuso Tshabalala**, umfundi weMaster of Business Administration eGraduate School of Business and Leadership, eNyuvesi yaKwazulu-Natal. Uyamenywa ukuba ube ingxenye locwaningo olubizwa nge **“Customer perceptions towards eThekwini Municipality customer services, Durban, South Africa.** Lolucwaningo luhlose ukuthola kabanzi ngokwaneliseka kwamakhasimende ngokusebenza koMkhandlu weTheku.

Awuphoqelekile ukuba yingxenye yalolucwaningo. Unganqaba futhi uphinde uhoxe nakuliphi izinga locwaningo noma seluqalile futhi lokho ngeke kwaba nemiphumela emibi kuwena. Angeke kube khona inkokhelo ngokuba yingxenye yalolucwaningo. Imininingwane yakho izogcinwa ngokuyimfihlo yiGraduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

Uma unemibuzo mayelana nalolucwaningo, ungaxhumana name noma umeluleki wami wezocwaningo. Ukuba yingxenye kuzokuthatha imizuzu engama shumi amane nanhlanu kuya ehoreni. Ngiyathemba uzoba yingxenye yalolucwaningo.

Ozithobayo

Umcwaningi _____ Date _____

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

Masters Research Project
Researcher: Mavuso Tshabalala (082 776 2150)
Email: HssrecHumanities@ukzn.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr. Rosemary Sibanda (031 260 1479)

CONSENT

Mina..... (Amagama aphelele aloyo ozoba yingxenyeyocwanningo) ngiyavuma ukuthi ngiyakuqonda okuqukethwe ilencwadi, Ngiyawuqonda umnyombo wocwanningo. Ngiyavuma ukuba yingxenyeyalo lolucwanningo. Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngingahoxa nakuliphi izinga locwanningo noma seluqalile futhi lokho ngeke kwaba nemiphumela emibi kimi.

Ngiyavuma/Angivumi ukuthi kuqoshwe imisindo.

Ozoba yingxenyeyocwanningo

Usuku

SECTION B: YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE SIZAKALA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTRE IS PERFORMING

The following set of statements relate to your opinion about the Sizakala Customer Service Centre you have just visited. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement. Please circle the number you feel is appropriate, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Centre are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Materials associated with the services (such as information brochures) are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Sizakala Customer Centre keeps to its promised response time.	1	2	3	4	5
4	When you have a problem, staff shows sincere interest in resolving it.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Sizakala Customer Centre performs service right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
6	Sizakala Customer Centre keeps its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day	1	2	3	4	5
7	Sizakala Customer Centre insists on error free service	1	2	3	4	5
8	The behavior of staff at Sizakala instills confidence	1	2	3	4	5
9	The staff at Sizakala Customer Centre give you a prompt service	1	2	3	4	5
10	The staff at Sizakala Customer Centre are knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: YOUR EXPECTATION OF A CUSTOMER CENTRE THAT WOULD DELIVER EXCELLENT QUALITY OF SERVICE

Based on your experience as a customer at a Sizakala Customer Centre, please think about the kind of customer center that would deliver excellent quality of service. Please indicate the extent to which you think such a customer center would possess the features described by each statement. If you feel a feature is *not at all essential* for an excellent customer center such as the one you have in mind, circle the number '1'. If you feel a feature is *absolutely essential* for an excellent customer center, circle number '5'. If your feelings are less strong, circle one of the numbers in the middle.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The physical facilities in the Sizakala Customer Centers will be visually appealing	1	2	3	4	5
2	Materials associated with the services (such as information brochures) will be visually appealing	1	2	3	4	5
3	Sizakala Customer Centre will keep to its promised response time	1	2	3	4	5
4	When you have a problem, staff will show sincere interest in resolving it	1	2	3	4	5
5	Sizakala Customer Centre will perform service right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
6	Sizakala Customer Centre will keep its service levels at the same standard for all times of the day	1	2	3	4	5
7	Sizakala Customer Centre will insist on error free service	1	2	3	4	5
8	The behavior of staff at Sizakala will instill confidence	1	2	3	4	5
9	The staff at Sizakala Customer Centre will give you a prompt service	1	2	3	4	5
10	The staff at Sizakala Customer Centre will be knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D

Listed below are five features pertaining to Customer Centers and the service offered therein. Please rate the level of priority in each feature you consider a priority to evaluate the service offered in each center.

		Not a priority	Low priority	Medium Priority	High Priority	Essential
1	The appearance of the Sizakala Customer Centre's physical facilities, equipment, staff and communication materials	1	2	3	4	5
2	The Customer Centre's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	1	2	3	4	5
3	The Customer Centre's willingness to help visitors and provide a prompt service	1	2	3	4	5
4	The knowledge of the Sizakala Customer Centre's staff and their ability to convey trust and confidence	1	2	3	4	5
5	The information provided at the Sizakala Customer Centre is relevant and updated.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 5 – ETHICAL CLEARANCE

APPENDIX 6 – TURNITIN REPORT