

UNIVERSITY OF KWA-ZULU NATAL

**RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS EXPECTATION AND PERCEPTION
OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY
ELECTRICITY CALL CENTRE**

BY

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for the degree of Master of Business Administration**

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College of Law and Management Studies

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DECLARATION

I **Zola Shabalala** declare that

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ABSTRACT

Customer service and customer satisfaction play a vital role in any business. The success of any organisation is largely dependent on how they satisfy their customers by ensuring that quality customer service is delivered across all levels of the organisation. Businesses and public service organisations, together with their employees need to understand the perceptions and expectations of their customers in order to provide optimum quality service to the customer. Focusing on Clare-Hills Ward 23 in eThekweni Municipality, the research investigated residential customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality using SERVQUAL model by focusing specifically on services provided by eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

A quantitative research approach was utilised for this study. The study adopted "stratified random sampling" to select 80 residential customers as participants from Clare-Hills Ward 23 with experience of service provided by eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre. Data was collected using a questionnaire, and analysed using descriptive statistics.

The study revealed that Clare-Hills residents had high expectations of a reliable and responsive service by eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre. More specifically, the highest expectations of residential customers were on eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre having the consumer's best interest at heart but also the expectation of EMECC "fulfilling the promise to do something by a certain time". The study also found gaps between Clare-Hills customers' expectations and their respective perceptions on all the dimensions of SERVQUAL, which were all negative and not met.

In conclusion, the overall negative gaps between customer expectations and perceptions obtained on all dimensions of SERVQUAL show that eThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit through call centre services have failed the residents of Clare-Hills Ward 23 in Durban by not meeting their expectations in terms of service quality as users of eThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit.

Recommendation on service quality improvements by eThekweni Municipality Call Centre are highlighted in this study. Areas for future research are also illuminated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter provides the inspiration and emphasis of this study. It correspondingly offers the research objectives, research questions, scope and the essential assumptions for the study.

In the present global business environment, the basic principles of customer service are ageless, but consumer expectations are not. Customers in this day and age are increasingly demanding. They are always seeking pleasant, efficient and reliable services. On a day to day basis, customers' desire quality and proficient services which makes them feel like the services rendered has been specially personalized for them. Quality products are good but high quality customer service is a major part of every customer's expectation (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). Even physical products like electronics, cars, etc. cannot gain a tactical competitive advantage on their own. This means that the feedback from customers after they have received the services of the vendor/seller, forms various perceptions that are very much part of the product. Delivering higher value to any customer is an ongoing challenge for businesses and various product marketers (Andreassen & Olsen, 2008). However, most businesses have a good understanding of the term customer perception and have gathered good archives of experience based on years of being in a particular business (Mmutle & Campus, 2017). Nevertheless, the customer expectations of a business may not match the perception of the customers after services are rendered to them (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). This variance amongst the expectations and the perceptions of a consumer is regarded as the customer gap (Roman, 2016). This gap is a very important gap because in an ideal world the customers would want their expectations to be almost identical to their perceptions.

This study focus on customer expectations and perceptions regarding services provided by EThekweni Municipality situated in the South African province of KwaZulu-

Natal. The study focused on the quality and services of eThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit. This unit is broken down into five departments that are managed by several deputy heads (Municipality, 2016-2017). These departments are High Voltage Operations, Medium Voltage/Low Voltage Operations, Customer and Retail Services, Technical Services Support, and Human Resources. The EThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit (EMEU) also have a call centre known as eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre (otherwise known as EMECC) (Municipality, 2016-2017). Electricity contribute a significant portion in the improvement of human life globally also in South Africa. Apart from its public benefits, electricity is also a driving aspect in the economy. Municipalities have an important role to distribute electricity nationally. EMEU provides further than 700 000 consumers in an area covering approximately 2 000 square kilometres (Mthethwa, 2016). This includes the area of the eThekweni Metropolitan Region and some adjacent areas. EMEU operates under the Regulation Act of Electricity 2006. Its procedures are regulated by the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) and also eThekweni Municipality. EMEU's primary objective is to supply good quality electricity that enables an uninterrupted supply in a safe and affordable manner.

The Sitaram and Imona informal settlement in uThongathi were the areas recognised as one of the City's hotspots for illegal connection (Mthethwa, 2016). These were successfully removed by EMEU's Multitask Joint Operation. The area was recognised as one of the City's hotspots for illegal connection and which was surrounded by a web of live wires that hung hazardously over wire fencing, trees, houses, washing lines and in pathways. The Municipality has constantly advised residents against cable and electricity robbery as it often leads to devastating and tragic penalties like loss of lives. These electricity thefts are also known to cost the Municipality around R230 million annually because of its impairment to infrastructures within the municipality (Mthethwa, 2016). These illegal connections create delays and limitations on the services provided by the EMEU operations team.

In providing electricity services, the call centre plays an essential role in receiving details about faults but also allocating these to EMEU for immediate response. According to Brophy, 2017 says a call centre is a centralised place of work utilised for getting or transferring a high capacity of requests by landline or handset. Within the contact centre at EMEU, important data about electricity faults are reported and assigned to the relevant sections to despatch the specific field staff. In this regard, it is interesting to understand expectations but also perceptions of customers of EMEU regarding services that are delivered by EMECC in Durban.

1.2 Motivation for the Study

Electricity interruptions no longer arise as a surprise or shock to the residents (i.e. customers) of areas such as the Clare-Hills in Ward 23, under eThekweni Municipality. These customers experience outages on a daily basis due to illegal connections (Mthethwa, 2016). In addition to their complaints about the outages, these customers are also known to complain about the poor responses of EMEU, due to the fact that they delay in fault logging calls that are made to EEMCC. Customer complaints on EMEU response and their perceptions on their services is not a new development. One customer complained that “their service delivery is very weak because he never received good feedback on logged issues” (Ngema, 2017). He further lamented that eThekweni Municipality is the heart of communication between the city and the customers and that their services require serious improvement (Ngema, 2017). The municipality also responded to the complaints, indicating that they were addressing calls in an orderly manner and that delay in response is due to high call volumes emanating from natural disasters (Mthethwa, 2017). EMEU also stated that they have begun putting comprehensive plans in place to provide a better and more efficient service. They therefore asked the customers with specific concerns regarding the services they need, to contact a specific number on EMECC lines (Mthethwa, 2017).

Given the above, this investigation seeks to understand the customers’ perceptions and expectations of services provided by the EMEU through EMECC. In this regard, the study focuses on the Call Centre. The study specifically focuses on views of

customers from Clare-Hills in Ward 23 regarding their experiences of EMEU services, and how to improve service delivery. It is envisaged that this study will identify gaps between expectations and perceptions and will point to areas whether customer perceptions of service are lower, higher or even equal to the expectations of the service provided by to EEMCC.

In this way, the challenge for EMEU management and staff will be to put interventions in place that will be aimed at bringing the identified gaps between expectations and perceptions closer together, thus improving customer satisfaction, which is one of the organisation's values.

1.3 Focus of the Study

This investigation focus was to understand residential consumer expectations and experiences of the services provided by the EMECC. In pursuit of this, the study assessed customers' perceptions of the services provided by the EMECC. The research was conducted on Clare-Hills residential customers in Ward 23 under eThekweni Municipality of Kwa-Zulu Natal province in South Africa. The study was limited to the residential customers who were in contact with EMECC and who were able to rate EMECC and EMEU's quality of service.

1.4 Problem Statement

Customers have expectations of service which they compare with their actual experiences in judging the quality of services received. The residential customers in Ward 23 under eThekweni Municipality are currently dissatisfied with the services offered by EMECC. Some of the challenges they encounter include long waiting time on EMECC fault lines and late response from their field operations team regarding logged calls (Mthethwa, 2016). This has resulted in very poor perception from the residential customers. Frustrations arise when expectations as customers are not being met. However, the range and variety of expectations and experiences by residential customers of EMECC is not known yet.

It is notable that a previous study was conducted on the service quality of eThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit. For example, a qualitative and quantitative study

conducted by Sibiya in 2013 focused on the customer satisfaction to improve the service delivery of eThekweni Municipality. While it is remarkable that past study on eThekweni Municipality Electricity Unit has also used the SERVQUAL instrument, the current study is distinct, because it the first time used at eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre. First, it focuses on residential customers and their expectations of service quality by eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre (otherwise known as EMECC).

Second, no study of customer perceptions has been conducted in Clare-Hills residential customers Ward 23 regarding services provided by EMEC. This has made the municipality to be more concerned and as a result, believe that their reputation is at stake. This study, therefore sought to investigate the expectations and perceptions of residential customers of Clare-Hills especially Ward 23 regarding the services provided by EMECC in Durban.

1.5 Aims of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative research was to assess expectations and perceptions of services provided by the EMECC in Durban according to residential customers from Clare-Hills residential ward 23.

1.6 Research Objectives

The research objectives remain as follows:

- a) To determine residential customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban.
- b) To determine residential customers' perceptions of services provided by EMECC in Durban.
- c) To assess gaps between residential customers' perceptions and their expectations of the quality of services provided by EMECC in Durban.

1.7 Research Questions

The research had the subsequent questions:

1. What are the residential customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC?
2. What are the customers' perceptions of services provided by EMECC?
3. What are gaps between residential customers' perceptions and their expectations of services provided by EMECC?

1.8 Research Methodology

The research used positivism paradigm and survey to collect data from residential customers of EMECC. Positivism was the best suitable worldview that formed the author's research design and information claims (Creswell, 2012). According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), positivism approach is usually associated with quantitative research. The research considered three types of research methodology which could either be quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. Quantitative method was selected because objective answers were obtained, this therefore provided suitable answers to the study questions and enabled the hypotheses to be tried. Quantitative design also has the ability to draw exact and succinct variables that can be measured, organised and employed (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This study employed descriptive study to gather of information that either defines the characteristics of a person or that of a circumstance (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

The study was conducted at Clare-Hills, Unit 23 eThekweni Municipality. Random sampling was used as it gives all the elements of the population like chance of being nominated as a subject (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). A primary data gathering approach was applied in the research and the tactics for data collection guaranteed that areas like confidentiality of data, protection of respondent's privacy, equal participation opportunity and no mandatory obligation were addressed. The research surveyed 80 participants from a population of 814 residential customers, using the random sampling technique. The sample size is small as it was difficult to

get residents to participate in the study. The research ensured that respondents' responded willingly with no coercion and maintained anonymity. Cronbach alpha coefficient was utilised to test the estimation scale for inward consistency. The data was coded and tested through SPSS software and the data analysis were free of researcher's interference (Abeyasekera, 2006).

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The study employed a quantitative method to collect primary data, hence limiting the research to only quantitative method and no qualitative approach of data collection. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), qualitative and quantitative approaches are very necessary in obtaining a broad outlook of service quality. Usually, both methods are highly encouraged during human behaviour research as they contribute valuable benefits to the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Future studies may use mixed method to understand expectations, experiences but also a gap between these. The use qualitative data collection is likely to be helpful to complement the small sample size.

1.10 Structure of the Study

This study is set into five chapters that comprise the subsequent details:

Chapter One: Chapter 1 covers an introduction to the study. It encompasses the inspiration and emphasis of the study, problem statement, research objectives and research questions. It moreover displays the scope and the structure of the study.

Chapter Two: Chapter 2 deals with the literature of the study. It covers definitions of customer expectations, perceptions and the gap amongst consumer expectations and perceptions. The chapter also discusses the SERVQUAL and other models of service quality.

Chapter Three: This chapter covers the research methodology. It presents the research philosophy, research design method, study location, population, sampling,

and collection approach. It also includes reliability, validity, and analysis of data and the administration of questionnaire.

Chapter Four: Chapter 4 presents findings of the study. This chapter also discusses findings of the study in relation with existing literature and theory.

Chapter Five: Chapter 5 provides recommendation and conclusions of study.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the framework of the study, motivation and focus of the study. It has also provided the problem statement, research objectives, research question, research methodology and the limitations of the study. Each business needs to understand the gap that exists between the customer expectation and perception of services that are provided such as eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre. Therefore, it is imperative for businesses and organisations to have good perception from their customers and in turn strive to satisfy their expectations as this improves service delivery and organisational ratings. This study assists in understanding the residential customer expectation and perceptions of services provided by EMECC. The following chapter presents the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter prepared the overview of the study. This chapter provide the literature associated to the study. It begins by presenting a summary on the definitions and different viewpoints on service, service quality, and characteristics of service quality, importance of service quality, customer service and importance of customer service. It also gives a background on the gap model, SERVQUAL model, dimensions of SERVQUAL model and its application to customer perceptions and services This chapter additionally explains the application of SERVQUAL model to the public sector.

2.1 Overview on Customer Expectation and Perception

As a business organisation, you are rated depending on each customer's expectation of you, your competitors, your industry and your business in general (Doerr, 2018). He also said that expectations are a summation of beliefs and assumptions regarding what is likely to happen in the future hence, it is vital in comprehending customer expectation. According to Roman (2016), customer expectations on what comprises great administration fluctuate starting with one business then onto the next. Expectations are too probable to differ not only in relation to various service suppliers in the similar industry, but as well since one industry to a different industry, and as of one country to a different country (Roman, 2016). A research by some salesforce (a foremost customer relationship management system) highlighted that today's customers expect quick answer, genuineness, etc. When you do not meet these expectations as an organisation, your business could be perceived negatively (Doerr, 2018).

According to Doerr (2018), perceived quality of service is an extensively studied concept. Perception is well-defined as the consumer's assessment of the inclusive supremacy or quality of a service (Doerr, 2018). According to Yusof, Joseph and

Shah (2017), it can also be defined as the customer's feel for the "quality" of the service. Perceptions measure those aspects of the service as actually provided or experienced and is a contrast to excellence in service by the customer (Yusof, et al., 2017).

2.2 Definition of Service

Service sector plays a crucial role in any economy and service is the strength of any economy. In any advanced or developing country, the focus is to advance the economy using various industries to produce services like in mining, agriculture, wholesale, retail, etc. According to Borat, Steenkamp, Rooney, Kachingwe and Lees (2016), the biggest portion of the South African economic system, accounts for about 71% of Gross Domestic Product in South Africa. According to Fourie (2015, p.25), service is defined as a procedure comprising of chains of added or less intangible activities that ordinarily, but not essentially to meet expectation and perception of customers. Service occurs in dealings among the customer and employee of service provider or goods and service provider has put in place systems that addresses customers' problems (Fourie, 2015, p. 25).

According to Rapp, Bachrach, Flaherty, Hughes, Sharma, and Voorhees (2017), service can be defined as the capability of an organisation to meet customer expectations. Some of the benefits of understanding and meeting customer expectations include that:

- They help the organisation to know what service levels it is expected to maintain in order to keep its customers happy and achieve higher customer satisfaction. This creates opportunities for exceeding expectations thereby creating raving promoters.
- They help to resolve customer complaints. By knowing the customer expectations, the organisation's employees are able to focus solely on fulfilling customers' expectations. Problems are fixed quickly hence; business retention is improved.

According to Bhorat, et al., (2017), without any doubt customers play a pivotal role in any organisation as without customers organisations cannot survive. Hence, service quality becomes very necessary, as it helps to single out a business from its opponents, which similarly assists as a basis of marketing (Bhorat, et al., 2016). A company can differentiate itself from the competitors by rendering an excellent service quality which can generate high profits (Rapp, et al., 2017). It is important to note that most times, service quality does bear fruit over a period of time in the business. However, organisations recognise the importance of how the service is provided to the customers.

Organisations endeavour to cultivate and keep a maintainable competitive advantage environment by means of high-quality service (Lovelock & Patterson, 2015). Customer satisfaction is an essential element in any organisation interested in ensuring customer retention, loyalty and profitability (Eid, 2015). Indeed, customer satisfaction is at the centre not only of any competitive market, but also for many companies as it aids in improving the competitive advantage over a competitor. Therefore, to maintain customer loyalty, the service must be of quality while frontline employees become effective. Among other factors, service quality is very important to shape or model the way it provided with the aim of leaving positive impression, that the customer wants to buy again, and recommend the service provider to other people in need of the same service (Eid, 2015).

2.2.1 Definition of Customer Service

Although most organisations consider quality of customer service, just not very many really set up frameworks to guarantee it is given (Hill & Alexander, 2017). According to Scott (2015), it is vital to deal with the variety of meanings of the key concepts. For instance, a customer can be defined as any internal or external stakeholder of the company (Wicks & Roethlen, 2009). Customers can also be viewed as “the heartbeat of any organization; without no buyers, a company has no profit to make, no revenue, and no market value” (Yang, 2011). In the case of public service, beneficiaries or customers of such services involve several stakeholders

(e.g. taxpayers, employees, communities etc.) which need to be taken into consideration (Yang, 2011).

Within the electricity industry, a customer can be described according to their individual energy behaviour, by their dwellings (i.e. buildings), their appliances, their energy consumption patterns (e.g. small power user or large power user) and their production processes which could be industrial, agricultural or manufacturing (Environmental Protection Agency "EPA", 2017). EThekwini Electricity Department defines its customers according to the different market segments based on the customers' individual electricity consumption or the contracted Notified Maximum Demand (NMD) of the customer (Municipality, 2016-2017). The customers are classified as:

- Residential Customer (RC)
- Business Customer (BC)
- Larger Power Users (LPU)

It is important to highlight that this research is mainly on residential customers.

Conveying incredible customer benefit or fulfilling the customer combines comprehension of the consumer desires and in what way those requirements are to be encountered (Hill & Alexander, 2017). In the public sector, the administration structure needs to collaborate with other functions to maintain acceptable standard of service. The feedback from the customers can be utilised as a vital tool in any company to keep the customers happy. Work prepared by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry among 1985 and 1988 provides the base for the measurement of consumer fulfilment through the service rendered, by employing the gap amongst the consumer's anticipation of performance and whatever the consumer really acquires. This strategy furnishes the measurer with the applicable data to adjacent the gap.

2.2.2 Difference between Services and Goods

In order to fully appreciate the definition of a service, it is important to differentiate services from goods. Also it is vital to highlight key characteristics that organisations can capitalise on, in order to achieve higher service quality. There are five fundamental differences among services and goods; these are

- A service is an *insubstantial* procedure that could not be directly measured or gauged, whereas a good is a physical production of a procedure that has bodily dimensions. This dissimilarity has vital business insinuations since a service modernism unlike a product improvement unable to be unproved (Fong, et al., 2017).
- A service requires some level of coordinated effort with the customer for it to be a service. Goods are for the most part delivered in an office unmistakable from the consumer (Tseng & Wu, 2014).
- Services are inherently unrelated— they fluctuate day by day and even hourly as an element of the states of mind of the customer and the employees. Goods in distinction could be shaped to encounter tight conditions all the life long day with basically zero fluctuation (Yang, 2011b).
- Services as a technique are delicate and time subordinate, and dissimilar to products as such they can't be supplanted. Production and consumption of services occurs simultaneously, but there is also a time lag between production and consumption of goods (Zameer, Tara, Kausar and Moshin, 2015).
- The particulars of a service are all around characterized and evaluated as a bundle of highlights that influence the five detects (Zameer, et al., 2018). These features are:
 - Backing up facility (decoration, location, outline, architectural suitability, supplementary equipment).
 - Expediting goods (variation, steadiness, amount of the physical merchandise that run with the administration; for instance, the nourishment things that pursue a dinner benefit).

2.3 Customer Perception

Service excellence can be both an individual and an intangible experience to a customer (Mmutle & Campus, 2017). The opinion that an individual customer will have about the services provided by the service provider will rely on the consumer's anticipations. If the service that the consumer receives is improved than what was estimated previously, the service is outstanding (Andreassen & Olsen, 2008). If the service is fewer than what the customer anticipated, then the service is not good at all. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), recommend that service dynamic is very challenging in the municipal segment since it isn't only a matter of addressing expressed necessities, but of discovering allocated resources, establishing priorities, unexpressed needs and publicly validating and accounting for what has been done. Customer perception plays essential role in a company's capability to attract new customers and to maintain existing customers (Bailey, 2018). Perception can be seen as a marketing idea that covers a customer's impression and mindfulness about a business (Bailey, 2018). This can simply be defined as what a business customers and potential customers think of any organisation which directly influences the desirability of new customers and capability to retain good relationships with existing customers (Andreassen & Olsen, 2008). According to Bailey (2018), some of the factors that impact individual's perceptions include;

- Advertising: This deals with the promotions a company runs which can produce inferred perceptions about their product.
- Influencers: This deals with people that surround an individual that have an enormous influence on their decision. This could be a person, social media, news, press releases, etc. These influencers can form thoughts and opinions around the customer.
- Personal experience: This is seen as the biggest of all factors that influence customer perception. A first-hand experience affects the reaction and usefulness of a customer service channel. Thus, it will negatively or positively affect their perception.

2.4 Customer Expectation of Service

Consumers have different requests when it comes to service. According to Pride and Ferrell (2010), it is essential to regulate what consumers assume and then improve a service that meets or beats customer expectations. Therefore, it is vital to distinguish between the quality anticipated by a customer and the real quality of service that is delivered during a service progression and the customer's perception (Pride & Ferrell, 2014). There are many definitions of "customer expectations", According to Meirovich and Little (2013), customer expectation can be described as the variety of standards set by customers in order to assess the performance of the service provider. Customer expectations are considered as a key element of how the service interactions with service providers can be evaluated (Meirovich & Little, 2013). Customer expectations can also be definite as the needs or wants of consumers or forecasts made by consumers regarding what may occur during an exchange or transaction. Customer expectations are grounded on their expectations, and the buying of a product must contest their value-oriented procedures (Pride & Ferrell, 2014).

It is necessary to remember that customers have various types of expectations about services rendered to them. Lovelock and Patterson (2015) on service marketing, recognise anticipated service (maximum expectation) and adequate service (what the customer will accept). The variance or gap amongst the two levels is called "the customer's zone of tolerance" (Fourie, 2015). On the level of the desired service, they identified "derived service expectations, personal needs, lasting service intensifiers, and personal service philosophy", whereas on the level of acceptable service expectations, the authors recognised "perceived service alternatives, temporary service intensifiers, situational factors, customer self-perceived service role, and predicted service", as sources of influence (Fourie, 2015). According to the Fourie (2015), the Figure 1 below shows the factors that influence customers' service levels and clearly shows the zone of tolerance.

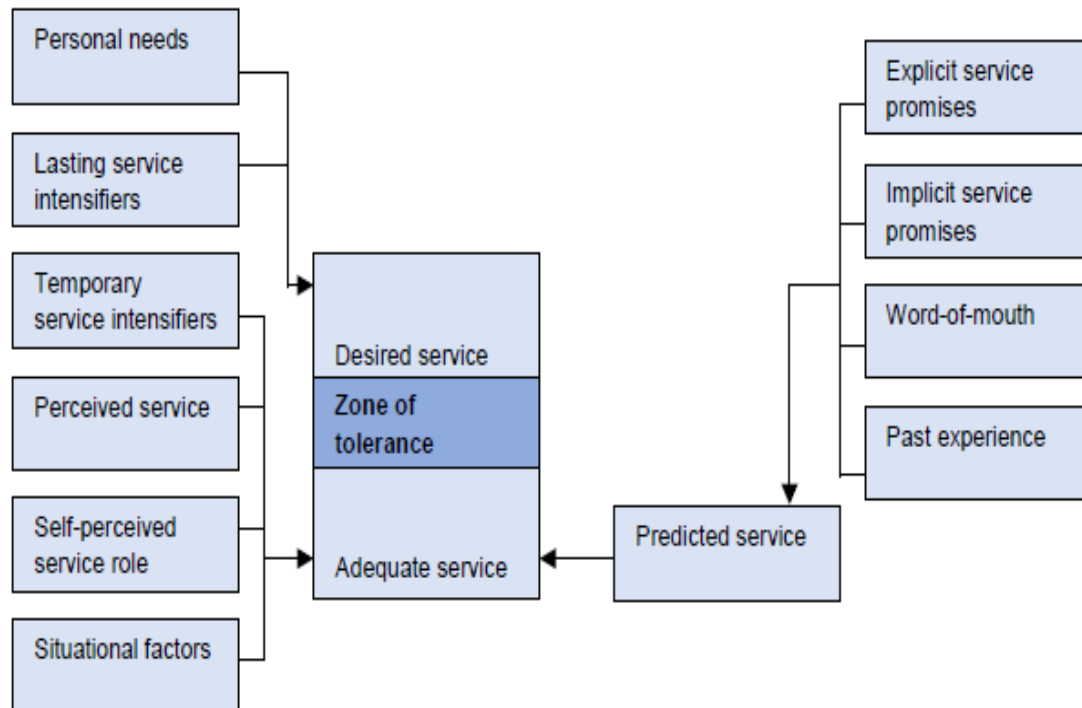


Figure 1: Factors that Influence Customers' Service Levels (Source: Fourie 2015, p. 33)

The study shows the expectations of customers have different characteristics, namely; what customers consider should be included in the service encounter; what they desire for; what they have faith for; and what they assume from a service provider (Fourie, 2015). Thus, customer expectations can be observed as terminologies of what they trust service providers should offer. In their work on handling customer expectations, Fourie (2009, p. 112) discovered that customers consider not only the purpose of getting a service, but also the likelihood that they will receive it. According to Phiri & Mncwabe (2013), the gap is amongst what they experience, what the customers expect and what will effect customer satisfaction. In addition, when customer's expectations are more than their experiences, they have a negative perception of satisfaction. When customer's expectations are lower than their experiences, they have a positive perception of satisfaction. Thus, customers' expectations of service quality have an effect on customer satisfaction and customer experience (Phiri & Mncwabe, 2013). According to Naik, Gantasala

and Prabhakar (2010), consumers' view of service quality radiate from a differentiation of their before-benefit desires with their genuine service encounter. The service will be measured outstanding, if perceptions are more than desires; it will be viewed as acceptable, if it only equals the desire; the service will be categorised as per lacking, if its perceptions are less than expectations (Naik, et al., 2010).

According to Luger and Sellen (2016), customer expectations can be achieved through precise and suitable communiqué. This can be realised by means of marketing (for example, advertisements), as no organisation can advance customer expectations above the level of organisational performance (Pride & Ferrell, 2014, p. 270). According to Fourie (2015), enriched service quality and improved customer satisfaction reduce the gap among customer expectations and their supposed level of performance. This is an endless mission for any company day by day.

2.5 The Gap Model

Parasuraman, et al, (1985) and subsequent studies did a thorough effort on service quality and established a prolonged model of service quality founded on the gaps amongst consumer expectations of service and what they tend to perceive. (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). This model is called the Gaps Model of Service Quality (Naik, et al., 2010). Murali, Pugazhendhi, and Muralidharan (2016) mentioned that the Gaps Model of Service Quality highlights that a consumer's perception of service quality be contingent on the four gaps that occur in any organisation/customer environment. According to Zeithaml, Bitner, Gremler (2006), customer gap is defined as the variance among consumer's expectations and what they perceive from the service provided from a management point of view. Service quality gaps model shows that it is a valuable approach to close gaps analysis (Fourie, 2015). As soon as a gap is acknowledged, a plan can be established to bridge the gap (internal analysis includes service design and also service delivery) and (external analysis involves communication with customers) (Murali, et al., 2016).

This research study utilised the Gap Model, which not only highlights perception of consumers' service quality, but also establishes the variance among what consumer expected of service, and what consumer perceived of the same service (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). In this regard, customer gap is defined as the difference between what customers expect and what they perceive from the service provided (Zeithaml, et al., 2006). According to Bailey (2018), a gap is produced when the perceptions of the delivered service differ from what the customer previously had expected. In support, Dudovskiy (2012) notes one of the common reasons for customer disappointment is the service gap. This gap is fundamentally saying that regardless of whether the executives effectively perceive customer desires, there are still probabilities of customer disappointment emerging from error in readiness quality administration as per customer desire (Dudovskiy, 2012). In pondering over this debate, Myoli (2010, p. 45) sees this gap as grasping how customers recognize the genuine service execution in contrast with what they recently anticipated. This is the difference amongst the qualities that a customer observes in a service delivery, compared to perception before receiving that particular service. If customer is not happy after receiving the service, then this is referred to as customer dissatisfaction, which is often a result of the difference between a customer's expectation and a customer's perception.

The Gaps Model of Service Quality contains two main classes, specifically the Provider Gap and Customer Gap. These Gaps occur contained by a service-providing organisation. According to Lovelock and Patterson (2015), the Customer Gap signifies the difference among a perception of a service encounter and the customer's expectation. The Provider Gap consists of four Gaps; namely the Services Design, Listening Gap and Standards Gap, the Service Performance Gap and the Communication Gap. These four Gaps, which occur within service organisations, are accountable for the Customer Gap that is Gap 5 Service Quality (Lovelock & Patterson, 2015).

The customer gap, which is the gap that exists between the customer expectation and perception of a service, is the fundamental basis of the Gaps model. According to Eastman, Teicholz, Sacks, and Liston (2011), this model is used by many

companies around the world and assists management in ascertaining information which ultimately results in providing a model of how service quality should work (Eastman, et al., 2011). Most companies who strive to maintain or create a sustainable competitive advantage know that the idea of customer service and customer satisfaction are at the forefront of its business strategy (Eastman, et al., 2011). The Figure 2 below shows the Gaps Model which were recognised by Parasuraman and his co-researchers in 1985.

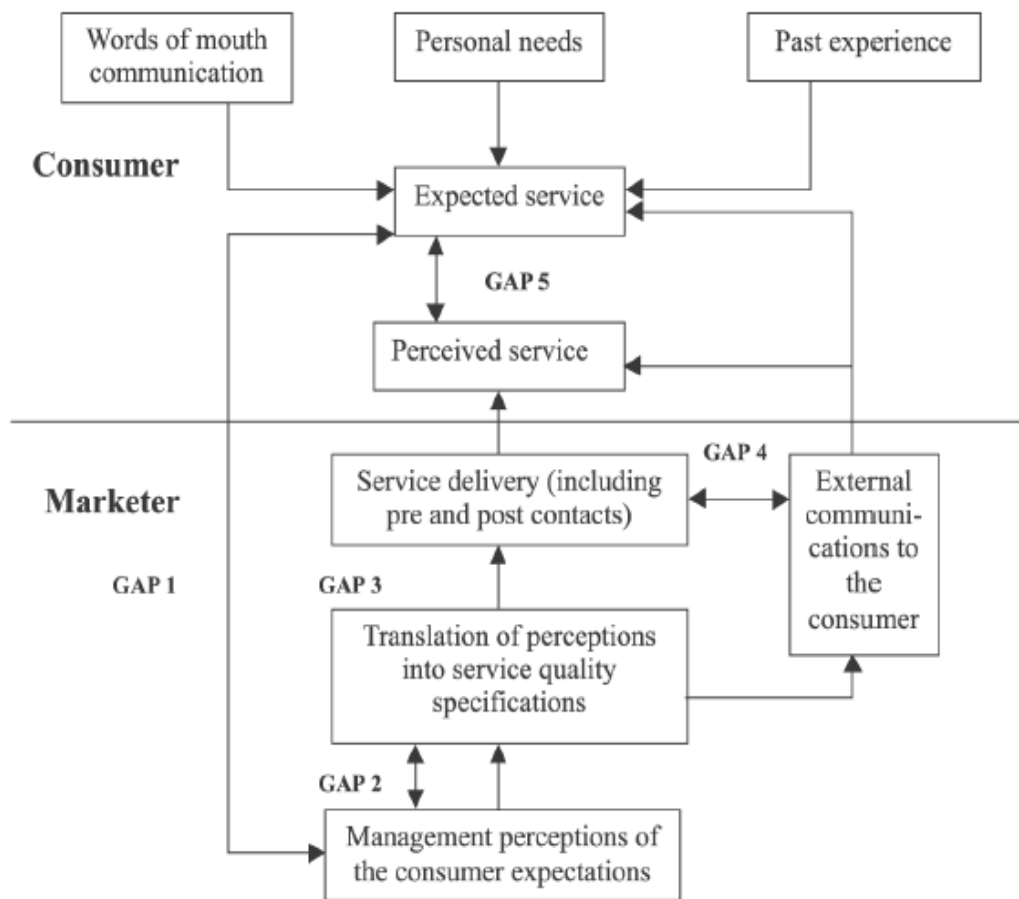


Figure 2: The Gap Model (Source: Naik, et al., 2010, p. 240)

The five gaps that were identified by the above study are described below. They include;

Gap 1: Consumer Expectations – Management Perception Gap

This gap refers to a discrepancy between top management or company perceptions and consumer expectations (Myoli, 2010). Business executives in this case may not continuously comprehend what features represent high quality to consumers, what features a service must possess in order to meet these customers' needs and at what level the features which are required to provide high quality service will be accomplished (Myoli, 2010). The outcome of this discrepancy may activate a chain of wrong decisions and suboptimal resource allocation that result in perceptions of poor service quality (Dudovskiy, 2012). In order to go beyond customer expectations and in order to ensure customer fulfilment, management of service businesses must have a sound and precise perception about customer expectations. The deficiency of such knowledge produces a gap that might possibly be the key reasons for service consumers' unsatisfactory (Dudovskiy, 2012).

Gap 2: Management Perceptions – Service Quality Expectations

Naik, et al., 2010, state that this gap includes the difference between management's understanding of consumer expectation and the development of customer-driven service designs and standards. This gap basically confirms that customer dissatisfaction are triggered by insufficient planning to meet customer expectation (Dudovskiy, 2012). A study by Dudovskiy (2012) points that there should be no limitations of resources or lack of commitment management that can deprive the consumer to be rendered a service quality that the consumer requests (Dudovskiy, 2012).

Gap 3: Service Quality Specifications – Service Delivery Gap

This gap involves the differences among the enlargement of customer oriented standard of service and real service performance (Dudovskiy, 2012). The argument set forth here is that there could be complications in standardising employee performance despite existence of guidelines for execution the service well and handling customers correctly (Myoli, 2010, p. 44). This could be especially so with a service oriented business where performance is intangible compared to a tangible

product. According to (Dudovskiy, 2012) Dudovskiy, (2012) customer displeasure is usually a result of poor work ethic and working conditions.

Gap 4: Service Delivery – External Communications Gap

The gap comprises of the difference between the actual service performances as well as what is communicated, which can influence consumer expectations (Myoli, 2010). Media advertising and other forms of communication can influence customer expectations (Batra & Keller, 2016). However, once there is a gap between the message communicated and actual performance, perceptions are either lower or higher (Myoli, 2010, p. 45). Difficulty may occur when a campaign that promises exceptional services is not communicated to the staff who deals with those customers. This may result in a distortion of the message and low perceptions of that service (Batra & Keller, 2016). For example, EMECC may promise the residential customers a response after twenty-four hours the fault was reported, while the servicing of the fault will depend on the number of faults reported before that consumer. The promise is not fulfilled and then the consumer is frustrated as to why they were not given a realistic information. According to Dudovskiy (2012), the external factors have the ability to cause poor customer satisfaction even though requisite skills and attitude are in place.

Gap 5: Expected Service – Perceived Service Gap

This gap embraces what way customers distinguish the actual service performance in comparison from what they anticipated (Myoli, 2010, p. 45). The perception of the quality differs from customer to customers on basis of the enormity of the gap (Myoli, 2010, p. 45). Service quality as perceived by customers is dependent on the number of encounters they have with the service and is a function of their needs and desires (Dudovskiy, 2012). Satisfaction of consumers is also a function of their expectations and the perceived gap is between what they expect and actual performance (Myoli, 2010). In addition, the fundamental causes for dissatisfaction lie in perceived gap between expectation and service (Dudovskiy, 2012).

2.6 The Customer Gap

According to Fourie (2015, p.39), the Customer Gap, also called “Gap 5” is the fundamental emphasis of the Gaps Model and can be presented as “the distance we have with our customers, a measure of the degree of disconnection we have with them”. In addition, the more the disconnection, the more the Customer Gap will be. This Gap signifies the difference among what customers assume and what they perceive (Fourie, 2015). This research focused on Gap 5, where customers were given opportunities to measure customers’ expectations and perceptions at EMECC. A study pointed out that the Customer Gap can be written as “*Expected quality by a customer = perceived quality – expected quality*” (Dudovskiy, 2012). Customer dissatisfaction is often a result of the gap between a customer’s expectation and perception. This gap can be addressed by exceeding customer expectation which will lead to improved competitive advantage. Fourie (2015), indicates that the outcome of the resultant customer gap can be projected in that it was discovered that customer loyalty and dissatisfaction is directly linked to a higher customer gap.

2.7 Service Quality

In the present competitive scene, one of the critical influences that competitive advantage is providing a quality service is that it will please the consumers (Chuang & Lin, 2017). According to Eid (2015), customer satisfaction is an essential element in any organisation for customer retention, customer loyalty and profitability. In any competitive market, customer satisfaction is at the centre of focus for many companies as this ensures a competitive advantage over a competitor. The other key variables in maintaining customer loyalty are service quality and effective front line employees (Eid, 2015). When these three aspects are combined, the effect is customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention. Ultimately this will ensure long term company benefits such as continued organisational existence and brand recognition. The utmost significance of service quality for consumer satisfaction and loyalty is lengthily captured in literatures as well as its connection with service

provider's success (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). Yuen and Thai (2015), state that there is enough evidence that validate relationship between service quality and customer behaviour.

According to Lovelock and Patterson, (2015), services marketing has shown that the customer attempts to provide the customer the best services, thereby only making promises that can be kept. Marketing is all about sustaining the wants and desires of the customer. Consequently, the success of providing a quality service depends on the hands of managers and front-line employees (Rahi, 2016). Organisational managers encounter increasing stress to determine a customer-focused service whereby customer expectations are met in order to establish approaches of closing service-quality gaps (Rahi, 2016). Due to the improved opposition among businesses, management is forced to focus on the quality of services provided to their customers (Lovelock & Patterson, 2015). Therefore, it is of utmost importance for organisational management team to understand the importance of a service culture that will enhance and inspire customer retention, development and loyalty towards their business, and enhance their market performance.

According to Rahi, (2016), the eThekweni Municipality's Electricity provides electricity to all types of customers to satisfy their needs while still continuing business by supplying public lighting, domestic and businesses. EThekweni Municipality may be considered as the sole provider of electricity, which contributes to the domination regarding the supply of electricity. The Figure 3 below shows the Service Quality.

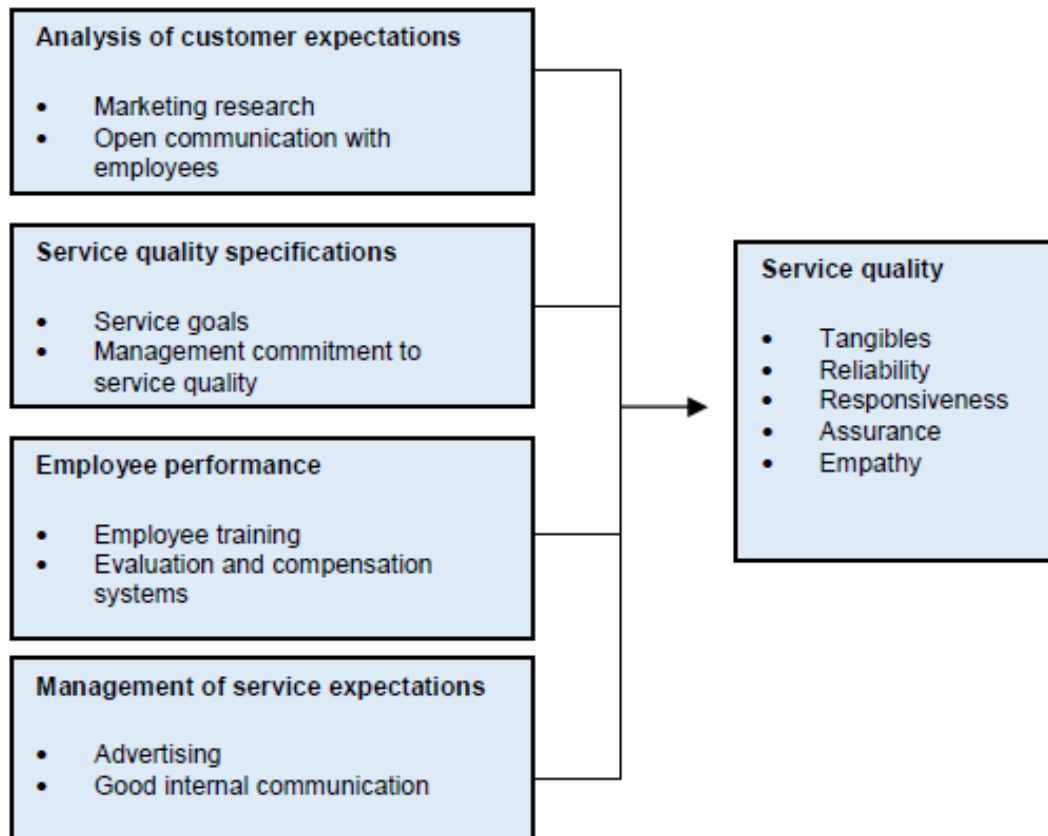


Figure 3: Service Quality (Source: Fourie, 2015, p. 31)

Research by (Fourie, 2015, p. 31) indicates that management of organisations must pay closer care to service processes. The study demonstrated that apparent service is directly influenced by service delivery, and that service delivery is as a result of employee's performance (Fourie, 2015). The difficulties of catering for various customers' makes quality service particularly perplexing, as all customers have practised poor service at some point in time. It is crucial that organisations take relevant steps to growth their service quality by considering the four factors that affect service quality, namely; an exploration of customer expectations, service quality specifications, employee performance, and management of service expectations (Fourie, 2015, p. 31).

2.7.1 Importance of Service Quality

Lee, et al., (2016) state that both manager and academic scholars have prioritized attention to quality and customer service in their different fields. According to Abedin, Rahman and Mohiuddin (2016), managerial decision is largely influenced by service quality and relevant contacts in any system. The understanding and knowledge of service quality, service and customer service have increased nowadays through publication dedicated to these topics. Organizations should pay more attention to improving service quality and its dimensions and keep on providing the high quality service to meet customer expectation. The customers will remained to the organization although there is a competition because of the excellent customer service they received (Fong, et al., 2017).

Lee, Wang, Chien, Wu, Lu, Tsai and Dong (2016), are of the opinion that poor performance in a service organisation can often be accredited to lack of understanding of the customers' needs from the company and their subsequent expectation of that service. Providing quality service has therefore become a challenging and dynamic task for many managers (Lee, et al., 2016). The measure between the service provided and the customer's expectation of the level of service is denoted as service quality (Abedin, et al., 2016). Fong, et al., (2017) are of the view that conforming to customer expectation regularly is what service quality is all about. Others propose that different customers want different levels of service from the same organization and want to at least meet their desires, if not exceed them (Lee, et al., 2016). For this reason, service quality is determined by the difference between the levels of service customers receive compared to the level of service which they desire (Lee, et al., 2016).

2.7.2 Measuring of Service Quality

Two key attributes are present among the distinctive administration quality models accessible. First, these models are assembled on customers' perceptions regarding the performance of service delivery, instead of an unbiased assessments of quality items (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). A second characteristic that is current in the

existing quality models is the multidimensional nature of service quality (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). Businesses provide consumers with a combination of consequences, such as: direct process results (e.g. readiness of necessary items in a retail store, on-time arrival to a flight destination in transportation services, etc.) alongside with other results related to the process experience originating from consumers' contact and participation in the service process (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). According to Lovelock and Patterson (2015), it is essential to measure service quality because of the common belief of what is not measured is not managed. If service quality cannot be measured, managers will have doubt whether service quality gaps exists, where they exist, which gap should be closed, and what possible action should be taken (Lovelock & Patterson, 2015).

The service quality is not easy to measure and it is difficult to obtain. Dissimilar product where there are detailed provisions such as color, length, width, depth, weight, etc. a service can have many insubstantial or qualitative specifications (Abedin, et al., 2016). There is an expectation from the consumer with concerns to the service, which may differ noticeably based on a range of aspects such as personal needs, previous knowledge and what other people influence with (Fong, et al., 2017). According to Naik, et al., (2010), SERVQUAL is one of most used instrument for measuring service quality which is discussed in details later.

Another key element to be kept in mind while looking to sustain service quality should be to have measures in place (Naik, et al., 2010). Any type of business depends on what service business model is applied and the customer expectations. For EMEU, the metric could be how long it takes for a call to be attended and how long it will take for the electricity to be restored. As soon as a system is set up for service quality measure, a standard service quality can then be established for the organization is looking for to preserve (Sibiya, 2013).

2.7.3 Maintaining Service Quality

After reaching an expected service level, the service providers should make sure that the correct service standard quality is maintained at all times (Management

Study Guide "MSG", 2017). The organization should be able to set up standards and policies of customers' service quality at the first time (Sarrico, et al., 2013).

Yuen and Thai (2015) propose that companies should provide their staff suitable training and expansion after they are employed. The employees need to acquire the skills and abilities essential for the trades offered. The more accomplished specialists have skills for a specific employment, the less preparing they will require (Yuen & Thai, 2015). As expertise is getting more progressive, an incredible organization will be devoted to continually retraining and instructing its representatives with the goal that the workers will have the reasonable front line information of the work (Yuen & Thai, 2015). According to Sarrico, et al., (2013), service quality is the extent to which an organisation is able to fulfil the desires of customers. The crucial expectation of any customer is to get the top and cost saving service, which can only be delivered by a well-trained workers (El Saghier, 2015).

Yuen and Thai (2015) further recommend organisations retain their knowledgeable employees and use their decision, which can assist in managing cost. This outcome can only be accomplished by well-trained employees, as an organisation is assessed by how swiftly it can answer to customer needs and problems (Yuen & Thai, 2015). The customers can easily assess a company by the employees who are answering the phone at the office or call centres, greeting them and answering to their grievances (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). In general, public demand the best service and require it quickly. Therefore, the significance of creating an encouraging environment for the staff or employees working in the organisation; and the staff need an organisational structure that is not limited to only what an employee is employed for, but to allow them to be the best employee (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). Lack of accurate information which is a direct result of poor training will lead to substantial customer dissatisfaction (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015). At eThekwini Electricity, it is perceived that there is gap with regards to front-line employees with regards to proper skills. EThekwini Electricity has not done many surveys in order to get customer's expectations and perceptions. Bakti and Sumaedi (2013), recommends that front-line employee should be provided with suitable training for new staff; early training and also follow-up training within 90 days. Secondly, the

implementation of refresher course that will be done after every 90 days. This refresher course will be applicable to all front-line employees or staff that interact with customers. This suggestion may not be applicable to all organisation but each organisation is expected to come up with what will fit the current gap in their operation. Thirdly, after a negative evaluation on any customer relations, solutions to such incident not repeating itself should also be in place (Batra & Keller, 2016).

2.8 SERVQUAL MODEL

SERVQUAL (SQ) is unique when compared to most generally used scales within practice that measures consumers' impression of service quality. SQ has been established to be relevant for an extensive variety of administration commercial projects (Naik, et al., 2010). SQ is focused on carrying out a gap analysis and investigation of five separate business and five measurements structure tools namely, Reliability, Tangibles, Assurance, Responsibility and Empathy (Naik, et al., 2010).

SQ, formed by Parasuraman is generally employed by both scholars and experts (Naik, et al., 2010). SQ is concentrated around the gap model of service quality, which characterises service quality as a capacity of the whole between desires of a specific service and impression of the actual service experienced by the customer. According to Chuang and Lin (2017), the verbal communications; the personal needs; previous experience and exterior communications can sway the customer's expectations. A gap is formed when the perceptions of the service delivered is not the same as what the customer expected (Bailey, 2018). This gap is reviewed by recognising and executing approaches that affect perceptions, or expectations, or both (Naik, et al., 2010). Parasuraman, et al., (1985) states that SQ had been considered to be "applicable across a broad spectrum of services" and the format could be adapted to fit specific needs, and that it would be most valuable when utilised to track service quality trends occasionally. They suggested that the SQ model could be prolonged to measure gaps in quality and could therefore be used as a diagnostic tool to empower management to identify service quality shortfalls (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). The gap score is achieved by the perception

proclamations being taken from the expectation statements. If any gap scores is positive, then this implies that expectations are actually being exceeded (Hofmans, et al., 2013). The service managers have an opportunity to allocate their resources to areas that are not doing well or underperformance. The SQ instrument ascertains the level of service quality based on the five key dimensions and also identifies where gaps in service exist and to what extent (Yuen & Thai, 2015).

2.8.1 Strengths and Weakness of the SERVQUAL Tool

SQ questionnaire and its structure have been widely exploited and recognised. Through numerous studies, a number of paybacks have been drawn from using this survey to measure service quality (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014);

1. It is a recognized standard for evaluating service quality of the multidimensionality
2. It has been statistically confirmed to be reasonable in a variety of service situations
3. It has confirmed to be consistent
4. It has a standardized analysis procedure
5. The questionnaire sets a quantity of closed questions that it is simple and easily completed

Although SQ addresses the gap amongst expectations and perceptions, actual service criticism is applied to the validity of the five dimensions (Yuen & Thai, 2015). The criticism applied to this gap model is the fact that there is little evidence that proves that service quality is viewed by customers as gap between perceptions and expectations (Yuen & Thai, 2015). Some review on the SQ also debate on the context of the conceptual and operational differences between service quality and customer satisfaction (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). This view argues that these two constructs may be related to each other or different to each other, or may be conceptual companions whose connections may be dependent on a number of other considerations (Sarrico, et al., 2013) . Other views also claimed that the model is generic and can be applied invariantly across all contexts, of which there have

been rising contentions that the understanding of SQ varies across businesses, customer groups and cultures (Yuen & Thai, 2015). For example, in the perspective of shipping, a study uncovered that SQ suffer from both discriminant and convergent soundness when it was applied to samples comprising of shippers and freight forwarders (Yuen & Thai, 2015). Another view perceived the lack of consistency in defining and differentiating these two constructs from each other in literature (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). Some researchers asserted that Parasuraman, et al., 1985 erred in defining perceived service quality in attitudinal terms although they initially claimed that service was in more ways similar to an attitude (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015, p. 92). Other views also believe that Parasuraman et al., (1985) collect service quality data using ordinal scale (Likert scales), but yet perform analyses with interval-level data methods (factor analysis) (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015). Bakti and Sumaedi (2015) found the use of gaps pleasing but doubted that differences in scores do not provide more information than what is already contained in perceptions. This they understood to be true since expectations by their very nature are typically rated higher in general terms and that the only prevailing contributor to the gap scores will be your perceptions (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015). The method has also been condemned with regards to equally exclusivity of dimensions and statements that it imports will yield dependable and valid results (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015). A further criticism of SQ is that it fails to capture the crescendos of evolving expectations since customers learn from experiences (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014).

Sarrico, et al., (2013) also question SQ's long term results and the general applicability of its five dimensions. In terms of the 22 attributes in the original instrument, it was believed that not all of these attributes accurately describe all aspects of a given service (Sarrico, et al., 2013). SQ as an instrument is widely used both in business and academics. Service business especially use it to develop service delivery and also for the improvement of an understanding of the perceived needs of target customers (Sarrico, et al., 2013). In the tourism sector in particular, SQ although highly criticised still continues to thrive in respect to its focus on the centrality of quality in service research and management, and its emphasis on the

complexity of managing service experiences (Famiyeh, et al., 2018). Since of the insubstantiality, service quality is an abstract idea which is difficult to measure exactly. In this study, the researcher choose this model to assess the gaps between customer expectation and customer perception (i.e. Gap 5).

2.8.2 The Five Dimensions of SERVQUAL DEFINED

According to the SQ model by Parasuraman et al., (1985), when measuring perceived service there are ten factors for assessing service quality (including accessibility, courtesy, tangible, reliability, responsiveness, credibility, security, communication and understanding the customer). These factors were cut down and shrunken into five factors. These five dimensions are indicated as follows; reliability, empathy, assurance, tangibles and responsiveness.

2.9 Dimensions of Service Quality

Assessment of service quality centers precisely on scopes of service such as assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). For example, service quality of a wellbeing fitness club is evaluated on characteristics such depends on availability of equipment to be used, number of people at that specific time, and how many trainers are available at that time and also space to accommodate how many people (Yusof, et al., 2017). The service “dimensions represent how consumers organize information about service quality in their minds”. Shandiz and Jones (2015) highlighted that model of service quality is called the RATER model, and the importance of this model is that a business can use the dimensions for differentiation and positioning (Shandiz & Jones, 2015).

Applying service quality within the electricity industry, one can mention that when customers purchase electricity, they are purchasing a service with a number of different qualities. The main quality is that electricity supply is available on request for the customer, whenever it is required. There are as well other dimensions, including reliability of the supply, timely response to requests, time taken to repair a

fault and accurate billing. In this view, the attributes of the product together make up the level of service quality that the customer receives (Lovelock & Patterson, 2015). The Figure 4 below shows the five dimensions of service quality.

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY



Figure 4: Five Dimensions of Service Quality (Source: El Saghier, 2015)

2.9.1 Reliability Dimension

This can be seen as the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately (El Saghier, 2015). This dimension relates to what the service provider does in terms of delivery of service to its customers as assured or expected and what it does when problems impact negatively on their promises (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). In terms of providing customer services, each of the statements relating to the reliability dimension reflects how EMEU is capable of meeting its customers' expectations by providing on time what it promised as perceived in the value chain performance indicators. An instance would remain that

of a customer “Mr V Naidoo whose electricity supply went off on Tuesday 29 November 2011. He phoned EMECC to report the fault. There was no follow up to his grievance. Mr Naidoo made several calls and got the similar response, ‘You are in a queue and we do not know when you will be attended to’. After a long delay, a contractor was dispatched and they identified a cable fault. Mr Naidoo was told that someone had been sent and would be at the premises to repair the problem. Nobody came at the time that he was promised; the employees at EMECC and EMEU simply failed to keep their promises” (Sibiya, 2013, p. 13).

The customers expect appropriate response and support from EMEU employees on matters like faulty meter, and restoration of supply after an outage or any other problem that has to do with electricity network. These problem areas have a lot to do with how employees of EMEU handle these service enquiries from taking the calls (EMECC team) and forwarding them to dispatchers (Low Voltage Control) who assign to those that are to action them in the field or at the residential customers’ premises (Fault man). This impacts to a large extent their satisfaction with the quality of service. The key value chain indicators and their relevant milestones on delivery of customer services in Municipality Regulations, should be adhered to by the eThekweni Electricity Department as these milestones strengthens consumers’ relationships which then leads to consumer satisfaction.

2.9.2 Responsiveness Dimension

This can be seen as the extent to which service providers are eager to assist customers and provide rapid service (El Saghier, 2015). This dimension communicates how the employees of service-oriented businesses react to queries about services and how rapidly they resolve such problems (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). This has more to do with the motivation of these employees to alleviate or provide solution to problems. They have to interact "when service will be provided and follow up with action, be willing to assist and also give themselves sufficient time in other to react to those queries and ensure prompt response (Myoli, 2010). For instance, if a query captured by an EMECC agent is managed inadequately, the whole chain will perform the job based on the information received (i.e the field staff

can go and attend to wrong things). This will have a negative impact on response to fix faults and will be a waste of eThekweni Electricity resources that could have been used better. The promptness of service is not only when the enquiry is taken by EMECC but also entails the speed count by which the service is attended to, restored or supplied. Consumers feel good when their complaints are managed efficiently by the call centre agents and resolved by the response team (Sibiya, 2013).

2.9.3 Assurance Dimension

This can be seen as the degree to which service providers are well-informed, well-mannered, and capable to inspire trust and confidence (El Saghier, 2015). This dimension relates to the trust relationship among customers and service providers' employees (Famiyeh, et al., 2018). This is more of a transactional relationship between the businesses as represented by its employees and the customer. The customer wants to be assured that the highlighted problem will be resolved by whomever it is assigned to provide the service (Famiyeh, et al., 2018). Also the customer need not to fear when permitting field staffs into their houses to fix faults. Customers need the service personnel to be well-mannered, professional, and experienced and also to maintain honesty. The EMEU field staff should first present a job card and produce their employment cards before doing any repairs. The condition is that the customer should to be informed and should fully understand the process. Communication in this case implies knowledge of what these agents are doing. The reputation of the service company does not constantly transfer to its staff and vice versa, as both need to be earned from a customer's viewpoint (Myoli, 2010, p. 71).

2.9.4 Empathy Dimension

This can be seen as the degree to which the customers are presented with a kind and personalised attention (El Saghier, 2015). This implies understanding and appreciating the particular circumstances of the customers and how best to handle them from a humane perspective (Bhorat, et al., 2016). Firstly, the service provider

needs to give these customers personalised attention instead of dealing with them as a statistic in their customer database. The service provider also needs to have operating hours that are suitable to the particular situation of its customers (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). It also needs to give personal attention to the problem raised by its customers and in executing its obligation to these customers, show that he or she has their interest at heart.

In dealing with residential customers, there is need for EMEU team to be well-informed about the particular circumstance of the residential customer and to also deal with them with a sense of empathy while delivering their service. For example, if there is an area-wide fault and customers flood the call centre with calls probing and logging faults complaints, such situation must be handled confidently but courteously and politely. A typical trend for instance, is for employees when faced with such high call volumes and complaints to reduce their perception of these customers as creating a nuisance thereby showing cold response, which may simply be interpreted as a public sector that is not caring for its customers' welfare (Sibiya, 2013). These customer service situations need a clear understanding by EMEU in order to effectively address the problems.

2.9.5 Tangibles Dimension

This can be seen as the extent to which physical facilities, apparatus, and appearance of workers are adequate (El Saghier, 2015). The physical facilities, equipment and communication materials of the EMECC must be appealing to customers, up to date and well advanced technology in order to provide an excellent service. Customers want to know while they are still on the queue how long it will take for their calls to be answered and get what they require since these tools will be utilised by customers to evaluate service quality (Famiyeh, et al., 2018).

2.10 Legislations Applicable to Municipalities to Supply Electricity

Municipal service is defined as a service that a municipality offers or may provide in terms of its powers and roles to or for the advantage of the area for which it is

accountable, regardless of whether such a service is delivered through an internal or external mechanism (Gqwede, 2018, p. 31). In terms of the constitution, municipalities have a responsibility to make sure that all citizens obtain the services they require to satisfy their basic needs (Van der Waldt, 2014, p. 45; Gqwede, 2018, p. 31). The service delivery directive of local government is set out in Section 156 of the Constitution. Van der Waldt, (2014, p. 45); Gqwede(2018, p. 31), list the tasks of local government as listed in Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which requires that the local municipalities should:

- Provide answerable and democratic government for local communities;
- Make sure the provision of services to the public in a sustainable manner;
- Encourage the participation of people and community organisations in the affairs of local government.
- Promote a healthy and safe environment; and
- Promote economic and social development

In terms of Section 156, Schedule 4B and 5B of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa deliver the mandate for local government and that command states that electricity and gas reticulation is the competence of local government.

2.11 Importance of Service Quality at eThekwini Municipality

In order for EMECC to continue to improve service delivery, it is vital to evaluate the perceptions of customers and to understand what their expectations are of the services provided by EMECC. EThekwini Municipality Customer Care Policy, which was adopted on 30 July 2014 (Ethekwini Municipality, 2014), as an internal measure or guide, provides a guideline on how to interact how will interact with our customers. As indicated below, these company values are:

- Respect – We value our relationship with our customers and citizens
- Good Customer Care
- Service Excellence
- Integrity and Professionalism

- Mutual trust and Understanding

In drafting the customer care policy, the Municipality complied with the legal and national policy environment that compels the municipalities to ensure sound relations with its citizens and customers, thereby guaranteeing effective participation and involvement in municipal affairs (EtheKwini Municipality, 2014).

2.12 Improving Service Delivery

“The former Minister of Public Service and Administration, the late Zola Skweyiya, presented the White Paper in 1997, in order to advance service delivery” (Sibiya, 2013, p. 23). In the White Paper the eight principles of ***Batho Pele***, which says preference the people first was encompassed. These values if recognised, will grow service delivery and improve consumer satisfaction. The community cannot be proud to claim that they have accomplished independent in this country, except the public sector converts these goals to service delivery (Sibiya, 2013). The National Conference on community service delivery that took place in the University of Fort Hare in 1997, strong-minded that *‘Batho Pele’* cannot be educated immediate. The tactics of the community service must be adapted and geared for *Batho Pele*. The institutionalization of the *Batho Pele Principles* is intended to assist the transformation of local government and the change of mindset among staff and citizens. The *Batho Pele* principles are as follows:

2.12.1 Consultation

According to Sibiya (2013), discussions must be executed among all administration institutions and the general public. Consultation should not only be about regarding services currently provided excluded, the consumers (users) when the decisions are taken that will affected consumers in future. As a result, the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is drawn up such that stakeholders of eThekwini Municipality must have engaged the community by (eThekwini Municipality "IDP", 2017) means of consumer surveys, consultation with groups, interviews with individual users, and

holding meetings with 24 customer representative bodies, to mention a few, in order to have an all-inclusive plan (Sibiya, 2013).

2.12.2 Service Standards

The EMEU should recognise standards that are quantifiable so that the consumers of electricity can be able to evaluate whether the service offered is up to standard or not (Ethekewini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). Standards need also be evaluated against those used by other local municipalities in order to make eThekewini Municipality Electricity nationally competitive; for example, find out how many times the customers consulted with EMEU before the problem was resolved. If the complainant called five times for what should ordinarily have taken first call the problem resolved, then eThekewini Municipality Electricity has no competitor around Durban. The service standard should be enriched to match the similar government institutions or municipalities; not complying failing then the people have a full right to log the complaint at any given time, criticise or request service quality.

2.12.3 Access

This principle states that all citizens do have the equivalent right to access to all service that they are permitted (Ethekewini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). Furnishing an outline for making decisions about providing community services is the main key objectives of *Batho Pele*. According to Sibiya (2013, p. 23), “many South Africans are still lacking the basic needs, namely, accommodation and water”. The eThekewini Municipality workers should not deny the citizens to have the right to service quality provided. *Batho Pele* is also an objective in resolving the inequalities in the distribution of existing services.

2.12.4 Courtesy

This principle states that all citizens should be approached with politeness and consideration (Ethekewini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). Electricity service is a unique of the most important basic requirements. Hence, it needs service offers to display

understanding to the residents if there are complaints. The employees of EMEU (and EMECC) must treat the public with uprightness, reverence, and transparency when collaborating and be very considerate regardless of the social rank of the person involved. Any difficulty that could deprive the community to obtain services due to an unreasonable standard should be detached. If this principle of *Batho Pele* is applied properly, all the bad perceptions that the community has with the public employees, can be detached (Sibiya, 2013).

2.12.5 Information

This principle states that all citizens should be given sufficient and accurate information about the public services they are permitted to obtain (Ethekewini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). The citizens of South Africa are allowed to keep correct and time line to be stated regarding service to be attended. If there are any complications or challenge for not deliver on time, then the people must be informed on time (Sibiya, 2013). In the case of EMEU, if there are to be scheduled power interruptions, the community must be informed prior switching off the power. The community should be informed and keep updated about the progress of their complaint when is going to be repaired. The internal consumers, that are the executives and the employees at EMEU, would also be well informed about what is happening in the organisation (Sibiya, 2013).

2.12.6 Openness and Transparency

This principle indicates that all citizens should be educated on how the Clusters and Service Units of the Municipality are operated, how much they cost, and who is in charge (Ethekewini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). Openness and transparency is demonstrated as soon as a resident comes to the office building. There remain three photos: firstly, that of the National Government symbolised by the President's photo, then that of the Minister of Minerals and Energy and, that of the Member of Executive Council (MEC). This is the key characteristic of honesty and clearness; that the community must know who the responsible person and be granted adequate info of

how resources are managed and controlled. The people can leverage on this honesty and transparency by suggesting positive ideas on how to advance the service delivery devices (Sibiya, 2013).

2.12.7 Redress

This principle indicates if the acceptable standard of service was not rendered to the community an apology to be offered and the reason stated and also corrective action taken if the community log a complaint (Ethekwini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). Sibiya (2013, p. 25) it was also suggested that the government workers should be attentive, be quick and correct any mistake that happens to maintain a good relationship. If the employee make a mistakes, he or she must be able to take accountability and apologise to the citizens before the consumers take action or protest against poor services from the municipality (Sibiya, 2013). Criticisms from the consumers would serve as a chance for the eThekwini Municipality Electricity to develop their services, ascertain the gaps and close them.

2.12.8 Value of Money

This principle states that community services should be rendered for, the value of money should be equivalent of what community are being provided (Ethekwini Municipality, 2014, p. 3). The great value that the consumers paying for eThekwini Municipality Electricity require an excellent service which means uninterrupted supply from EMEU, the value of money will be equivalent with service. Usually, the people are not happy to have a service that will cost extra to pay the eThekwini Municipality; hence, all that the people need is effective, efficient, and economic service (Sibiya, 2013). The *Batho Pele* principles assist as a roadmap of how to handle community problems and to address them in adequate manner. All government institutions are the face of the government to represents and deliver services to people. It is imperative that municipalities should have financial control and administration policies to avoid the abuse of fund and irregular expenditure. Therefore, the importance of adherence to the *Batho Pele* principles.

The customers must be provided with service quality, which means that competence must be applied in service delivery. Sibiya (2013, p. 25), defines professionalism as a person who is competency, integrity, tactful, customer focused and proactive. The staff of EMEU and EMECC need to be customer driven, customer focused, positive attitude, polite, etiquette and passionate, in order to interact with all customers and also keeping good relationships with them. (Sibiya, 2013). The management of the EMEU as a Government Institution, should make sure that there is answerability and responsibility in the implementation of duties. The Government institutions, are pleased to provide a decent service to the community. The community has a privilege to basic needs which includes power (Mthethwa, 2016).

2.13 Application of SERVQUAL Model

SQ model is a multidimensional scale which is also adopted to measure the customers' perception about service quality; furthermore, it established the practicality in evaluating the gap amongst expected service and perceived service (Gap 5). This model has been generally approved and it is used worldwide to measure the perception of customer service quality in a spectrum of service industries.

According to Soares, Novaski and Anholon (2017), this study aimed at evaluating the application of the SQ model in a public institution since the student body's perspective, in order to evaluate the quality of administrative services. The use of the SQ method to assess services provided by education institutions is not trivial, thus their analysis can cooperate with managers in organising the unit strategic planning as well as demonstrating that the method can be utilised by other institutions wishing to assess the quality of services presented to their students (Soares, et al., 2017).

Another study by Asogwa, Ugwu, Ezema, Asadu and Ugwuanyi (2014) was carried out which applied the SQ model in the evaluation of the quality of services in the academic libraries in Nigeria. The population of the study was on the whole users that registered in seven university libraries in Nigeria during the 2012/2013 school

session. Questionnaire was the key instrument for data collection and data was analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency tables and simple percentages. The paper discovered that all the services delivered in academic libraries in Nigeria were below the users' expectations. The paper suggested that university and library management should be attentive to users' desires and strategize toward the provision of the desired needs of users in modern library services (Asogwa, et al., 2014).

A study by Krsmanovic, Horvat and Ruso (2014) was applied towards the application of SQ model in higher education with focus on determining the service quality at the faculty of organisational sciences (FOS) and to compare the results of such research to other faculties. The study was carried out using questionnaire based on SQ model, which comprised of two subscales of items, one for students' perception then one for their expectation of the service quality. The major finding obtained from data analysis was that service quality of FOS had a negative value without variances among sample groups, where the characteristic with the highest quality was tangibility and the characteristics of the lowest quality was reliability (Krsmanovic, et al., 2014). The current study adopts SERVQUAL to understand expectations and experiences of residential customers from Clare-Hills Ward 23 in Durban, South Africa.

2.14 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on customers' expectations and perceptions of services. It started with customer service, concepts, the Gap Model, measuring and maintaining service quality. It also discussed the SQ model, strengths and weaknesses of SQ model, dimensions of the model. It then reviewed the importance of service quality in the public sector with focus on eThekweni Municipality and their customer care policy. The next chapter shows the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology focusing on the research design, the sampling of respondents and the adopted strategy of collecting primary data used by the researcher to answer the study questions. This is in line with (Quilan, 2011, pp. 130, 142) who argues that the 'methodology should focus on the overall research process in a study which include sampling, data collection and data analysis. Specified the above, the part examines the distinctive phases of the procedure including the reason for the examination, issue proclamation, explore targets, system, moral contemplations and synopsis. However, data analysis is covered in chapter four.

3.2 Research Objectives

The research objectives remain as follows:

- a) To determine residential customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban.
- b) To determine residential customers' perceptions of services provided by EMECC in Durban.
- c) To assess gaps between residential customers' perceptions and their expectations of the quality of services provided by EMECC in Durban.

3.3 Research Focus

In pursuit of the research goals, the study sought to find the difference of assessing service from the customer perspective rather than from the standpoint of the provider of service at Clare Hill. This required assessing the difference between the levels of service that were perceived and to that which was expected of EMECC from the perspective of residential customers at Clare Hill, Durban. Cooper and Schindler (2011, p.665) indicates that the investigation question can be observed as the favourite assumption that greatest states the concepts of the investigation.

3.4 Research Design

Research design is a well-crafted strategy outlining the overall plan of executing the study as well as specific choices data collection and analysis. Babbie and Mouton (2007, p.74) regards research design an arrangement orderly used by the investigator to successfully carry out a research in which answers are objectively achieved as directed by the research problem. Mouton (1996. p.107) elaborates on study design which can be described as a set of instructions and guidelines which are to be closely monitored when addressing research problems. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), research design forms the master plan which clearly stipulates the procedure and methods that is utilised when evaluating and gathering research data. Similarly, Creswell (2014) argues that the research design provides a road guide encompassing three things, namely; philosophical assumptions, inquiry strategies, and specific methods. This roadmap also states the techniques and processes for gathering and evaluating data. Quantitative research therefore relies on the collection of original data with a primary focus on examining this information in line with stated objectives (Mouton, 1996). This compares numerical data analysis with statistical methods.

This study adopted a quantitative approach in which respondents were randomly selected from the study population with a view to arrive at unbiased findings. This quantitative research approach also includes the collection and analysis of numerical data derived from the administration of a standardised questionnaire and the application of statistical tests (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Quantitative method allows numerical manipulation and representation of observations with the aim of clarifying and describing perceptible phenomena (Sarantakos, 2005) (Neuman, 2000, p. 21) weighs in on this debate by elaborating on the purpose of research which is to explain, explore or describe occurrences which cause valid results. This is also supported by Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2008, p. 89) who witness the use of a quantitative approach to research which permits the use of statistical processes to interpret data collected from the sample populous by the researcher. However, numerous influences must be put into consideration when selecting the design of an investigation including the aim or goal, setting, unit of

analysis, amount of participation of the researcher, research approach is important either quantitative or qualitative and the data should be collected as a certain time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013)

Statistical methods were used to test predetermined hypotheses regarding the relationship between specific variables. This is supported by the scientific research approach, which underscores the importance of understanding data analysis reasonably than the exact nature of the measurable methods (Neuman, 2000). Statistical methods if used in a severely objective way that contain short explanation of appropriate variables that have been organised, characterised, measured and converted (Blanche, et al., 2008). This positions quantitative research design, as the more suitable design to achieve the study objectives listed below to permit greater objectivity of accuracy results. Thus, a correct and appropriate research design must be absolute upon, before employing of a research study. Hence, the motive of carrying out such investigation was to explore the residential customers' expectation and perception of the services provided by EMECC and EMEU with focus on Ward 23. Thus, a quantitative research technique is nominated with the objective of analysis a theory rather than emerging one, and appearances to confirm or disconfirm theory based on the results and/or hypothesis testing.

Based on the specific objectives, the study is expected to measure the gap between customers' perception and expectation. In many instances, customers' expectations sometimes do not match their perceptions of service. As a result, this creates a disparity, referred to here as the consumer or customer gap. Observe the gap between customers' expectation and perceived services, Parasuraman et al., (1985:44) observes:

A set of main differences or gaps exist concerning executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks connected with service delivery to consumers. These gaps can be major hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which customers would perceive as being of high quality. (Parasuraman, et al., 1985, p. 44).

Thus, the study utilises the Gap Model, which not only highlights service quality of consumers' perception, but also establishes the variance among consumer expectations of service, and consumer perception of similar service (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). In this regard, customer gap is defined as the difference between what customers expect and what they perceive from the service provided (Zeithaml, et al., 2006). According to Bailey (2018) a gap is produced while the perceptions of the provided service differ from what the consumer previously had expected. In support, Dudovskiy (2012) notes one of the collective reasons for customer frustration in service sector as relating to the gap between what customers expect from the service and what they consider they have anticipated. This gap is essentially saying that even if management correctly recognise customer expectations, there are possibilities of customer unhappiness rising from the discrepancies in planning the quality of the service that meets the customer's expectation (Dudovskiy, 2012). In weighing into this debate, Myoli, (2010, p. 45) sees this gap as embracing how customers distinguish the actual service performance in comparison to what they previously expected. This is the difference between the qualities that a customer observes in a service delivery compared to perception before receiving the service in particular. If customer is not happy after receiving the service, then this is referred to as customer dissatisfaction, often a result of the variance amongst a customer's expectation and perception.

This model is relevant to this study. It is important to note that when customers purchase electricity, they are purchasing a service with a number of different qualities. However, the main quality expected by customers is the availability of electricity whenever requested. Other equally important dimensions include reliability of the supply, timely response to requests, time taken to repair a fault and accurate billing. Equally important is the attitude of the frontline employees and their respective capacity to inspire confidence to customers. The Table 1 below describes the gaps between expected and perceived service, and some possible causal factors.

Table 1: Gap Analysis on Perception and Expectation: Gap analysis on perception and expectation

GAP	Description	Possible factors leading to the GAP
1. Gap between customer expectation and management perception	This may result from lack of understanding what customers expect from a particular service	Not knowing what customers expect can be due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient or inadequate market research; • lack of management communication with customers; • focus on transactions rather than relationship with customers; and • inadequate service recovery strategy
2. Gap amongst management's opinion and quality service conditions	This happens while there is inconsistency amongst what management recognises to be the customers' expectations, and the actual approved quality service specifications	Poor service design due to vague or undefined, absence of customer-driven standards and inappropriate physical evidence and servicescape design which does not meet customer and employee needs
3. Gap between service quality specifications and service delivery	When guidelines of specifications exist for performing excellent service, delivery may not be up to standard due to poor employee performance	Deficiencies in human resource policies, could be as a result of ineffective recruitment etc., consumers who do not fulfil their roles, difficulties with service intermediaries and failure to match supply and demand

4. Gap between service delivery and external communication	Customer anticipations are recognised by possibilities prepared through service providers' promotional messages. This gap measures the constancy among the quality image portrayed in the advertising activities and the real service offered.	Lack of integrated services marketing communications, ineffective management of customer expectations, over promising in advertising or personal selling and inadequate horizontal communications e.g. insufficient communication between sales and operations departments or differences in policies and procedures across branches or units
5. Gap between perceived service and delivered service	This gap will result when more than one of the prior gaps occur.	Could be as a result of a combination of the abovementioned factors

3.5 Location of the Study

The study was located at Clare-Hills, Ward 23 which falls under eThekweni Municipality in the Kwa-Zulu Natal. The choice of Clara-Hills was motivated by the challenges that the residents have been facing over the past couple of years with regards to outages due to illegal connections. The study therefore aimed at evaluating provisions of electricity from the customers' perspective rather than from the perspective of EMECC and EMEU, the provider of service. The study also sought to establish if there was a known variance that existed between expected and perceived service delivery levels by the service provider from the residential customers at Clare-Hills in Durban. Meanwhile, Clara-Hills residents' customers have been reporting frequently and poor service from EMEU through EMECC.

3.6 Study Target Population

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013) the population can be viewed as the entire group of society who the investigator requires to acquire information from. The target

population refers to the sub-groups of the overall who make up of units from numerous subgroups that investigator is particularly interested in interacting with

(Creswell, 2012). A sample, therefore refers to a portion of a population considered to be a representative of the entire population. Thus, the study was conducted at Clara-Hills Ward 23 of eThekweni Municipality, targeting residential customers who are registered on eThekweni Electricity billing database, as well as those who had signed the Electricity Supply contract with eThekweni Electricity. Thus, Clara-Hills area's population in terms of registered business customers, registered residential customers and those residents alternatively connected to other sources of electricity are shown in Figure 5 below.

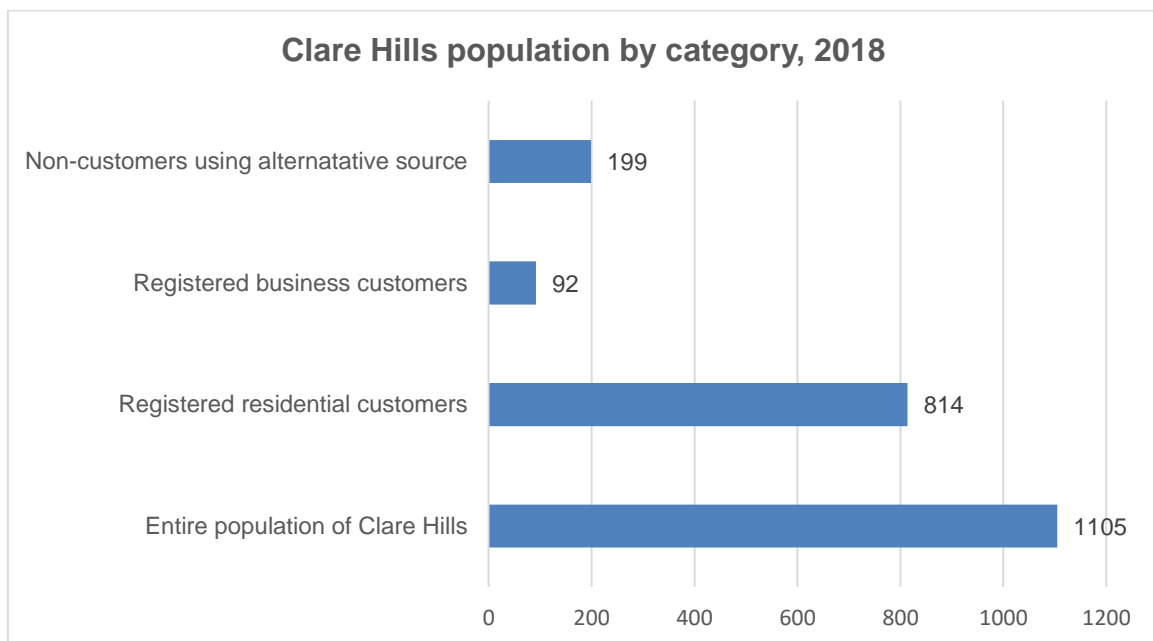


Figure 5: Clare-Hills Population by Category, 2018

3.7 Sampling and Sampling Size

During formulation of one's research design, it is crucial to sample the respondents in a clear and methodological manner ensuring the representativeness of information findings, with respect to non-respondents residing in the surveyed geographical area(s). This means that a sample of precise number of participants should have to be drawn from the entire targeted population. In this study,

participants are drawn from further than 700 000 consumers in an area cover approximately 2 000 square kilometres who are supplied with electricity by EMEU of eThekweni Municipality. The above area includes also the eThekweni Municipality district and approximately adjacent areas. The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling, a 'sampling technique' in which a researcher categorized participants into residential customers who are different from large power users. Participants were then randomly chosen within this strata of residential customers to participate in the study. Within the strata, participants had an equal chance of participation in the study.

The study sample size as shown in Figure 5 above were registered residential customers, estimated at 814, of whom a total of 80 participants responded. The stratified sample size is small because respondents were unwilling to participate. The sample therefore comprised of registered 'residential customers' who are registered on eThekweni Electricity billing database, as well as those who had signed the Electricity Supply contract with eThekweni Electricity. In this way, the study excluded large power users (LPU).

3.8 Questionnaire Design and Data Collection Method

"Business research-oriented questionnaires are generally regarded as the simplest but most widely used technique for obtaining information from subjects" (McMillian & Schumacher, 1993, p. 123). This implies that "survey development is crucial so as to suitable research questions with an opinion to collect correct data for statistical analysis". Sekaran and Bougie (2013) justify that the design of a questionnaire is mandatory to endorse that accurate research questions were posed so that correct and suitable information for statistical analysis could be composed. The surveys were made up of closed ended questions, which edited the marginal of misinterpretation during the completion process. The questionnaires were a version of the SERVQUAL instrument designed to capture consumer expectations and perceptions of a service along the five dimensions that are believed to represent service quality. The researcher administered the questionnaire

The study questionnaire comprised of two sections, namely, Part B and Part C, whose questions solicited customer expectations and customers' perceptions respectively. However, Likert-scale questions had the following advantages:

- Twisted into statements (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).
- Statements delivered in a list as they could be kept shorter and simpler (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).
- Additional points in the scale enabled the collection of more information (Quinlan, 2011).
- Likert-scale questions were applied to capture customers' expectations and perceptions regarding service delivery;

Using Likert scale, the study questionnaire had five dimensions and their relevant statements were as shown on Table 2 below:

Table 2: Five Dimensions of the Service Quality

Reliability	Statements 1 – 5	Caring, individualized attention that the organization provides its customers
Responsiveness	Statements 6 – 9	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Assurance	Statements 10 – 13	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Empathy	Statements 14 – 17	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Tangible	Statements 18 – 22	Condition of facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel

3.9 Data Analysis

The composed data was evaluated using a computer statistical analysis programme, namely, "SPSS Version 17.0" for social sciences. The study therefore sought to investigate Clara-Hills residential customers' expectation and perception of the services provided by EMECC with focus on Ward 23. Raw or Actual data gathered from the completed questionnaires were reviewed, cleaned, edited,

coded, transformed, entered into a computer and documented (Blair & Sudman, 2002, p. 414). This shows that data analysis is the best essential part of the whole research (Abeyasekera, 2006). The study data was presented in the form of frequency tables and different types of charts. The statistical t-test was used to determine the degree of difference between the residential customer's perception and their related expectation by means five tangible dimensions.

In this regard, the Chi-squared is usually employed for testing relations amongst unconditional variables. Though, the null hypothesis of the Chi-square test shows no relationship between categorical variables in the population. Besides, the statistical analysis instructions the degree of freedom (df), based on the probability (p-value) of the test results. A p-value of < 0.05 or lower is considered significant, hence symbolises a statistically significant relationship. Such an outcome implies rejection of the null hypothesis or acceptance of the hypothesis.

Van Elst (2013) says that the term descriptive statistics employed during data analysis, supports in defining or succinct or descriptive huge volumes of data in a way that it is significant to the researcher. Descriptive statistics contribution in visualising raw data thereby simplifying data interpretation as well as in providing information about group of data.

3.10 Pilot Test and Pretesting

The pilot test study was done using ten residential customers, to assess the unwavering quality and legitimacy of the research questionnaire. A pre-testing in most instances refers to a small-scale 'try out' of specific component of research that allows for the identification of impending issues with the instrument. Thus, the pilot study was aimed at identifying and correcting any errors in the research instruments. This is done by using a few participants to assess the relevance and suitability of the questions. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) states that the pre-test ensures that the questions are understood by the respondent and that there is no ambiguity in the questions. This is supported by Kumar (2014) who notes that pre-testing benefits the researcher to regulate whether the research instrument

measures what it purports to measure. The exercise sought to test for the following in the survey.

- Clarity of questions to the participants.
- Comprehensiveness of the questionnaire.
- The length of time to finish the questionnaire.

Lastly, pre-testing was employed to recognise complex questions that the respondents would be not comfortable answering. As a result, the investigator or researcher established that the questionnaire was comprehensive and relevant, and randomly sampled ten respondents from the population without any difficulty to participate in the pilot study.

3.11 Research Validity and Reliability

As research is frequently reliant on measurement, it is therefore imperative to ensure that the measuring instrument is both reliable and valid. These are employed in minimising misunderstanding of data, and subsequently enabled the researcher to reduce errors when analysing data. Based on this, the validity and reliability of questionnaire-based data warrants an elaborate discussion as below.

3.12 Validity

Validity is the degree to which an idea, finish or measurement is well-founded and probable fits accurately to the actual world based on probability. This says that validity refers to the degree through which an apparatus measures what it is intended to quantify (Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2009). For example, a survey designed to discover depression nevertheless which essentially measures anxiety would not be considered valid. As a key notion in assessing the quality of research, validity refers to how well a research design delivers correct, clear and clear-cut evidence with which to answer the research problem. It is also a multivariate and an interdependence technique (Zikmund, et al., 2009). Given the above, this study embraced measures aimed at ensuring validity of the results. Firstly, the questionnaire administration was constructed on a well-known customer satisfaction measuring model, called 'SERVQUAL', which has been validated by

various studies (Baron & Harris, 2003, p. 141). Secondly, the study certifies that the set of questions were founded on the literature review and frame of mention to authorise the validity of the result.

3.13 Reliability

The measure of quality in a quantitative study is reliability, or the accuracy of an instrument. Reliability is the degree to which a measuring device is steady in measuring whatever it measures (Cargan, 2007). Cronbach Alpha was employed to quantify reliability or internal consistency. In this regard, the Cronbach's alpha test was calculated to measure the consistency of the factors comprised or used in the questionnaire. To this conclusion, a trial study of the questionnaire was recognised with a view to ensure that all questionable criteria were both applicable and well understood; questionnaire administration ensured the secrecy of the respondent and the use of Cronbach Alpha to calculate the dependability of the measurement

3.14 Confidentiality

Morals, profound quality, and qualities have never been more detectable than they are nowadays. This implies moral issues frame an indispensable part of present day inquire about on this topic. The main need for human participants in research is to assist as sources of data, it is the responsibility of the researcher to secure the life, health, self-respect, honesty, right to self-determination, privacy and secrecy of personal information of research subjects' (Quilan, 2011). Hence, the investigator applied these three moral principles;

- Respect for persons – this is the necessity to concede self-sufficiency and secure those with decreased self-rule
- Benevolence – this principle requires that no harm is done, amplify conceivable advantages and limit conceivable damage
- Fairness – this is based on single and societal level.

3.15 Ethical Issues

Academic research demands the researcher to thoroughly consider ethical issues prior to commencement of the research (Crabtree, 2006). Several issues were considered during questionnaire design, collection of data and interviews. The researcher adhered to the UKZN's research ethics policy, for an example, the researcher secured ethical clearance (see Appendix 3) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the following ethical issues amongst others were considered:

The questionnaire was also accompanied by a consent form in order to ensure that the respondent's anonymity would be upheld coupled with space to individually and freely express willingness to receive feedback via email. Their feedbacks were maintained private as the researcher's purpose was to share the responses with the employer, EMECC of eThekweni Municipality. The participants were given a clear indication of their choice to participate or not and they had liberty to withdraw from the participation without any intimidation

- Informed the participants that participating in the study was voluntary.
- Informed the participants that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

The researcher also ensured that there was no risk of exploitation, and violation of participant's self-esteem by sharing with respondents: -

- Informed consent letters.
- Gatekeepers letters

3.16 Conclusion

In this chapter the methodology employed in the study was presented. Sampling and data collection techniques employed in this study are outlined. The questionnaire employs an itemised rating scale format. A brief description of how the questionnaire was planned, pilot tested and administered was also given. The chapter

has also discussed data analysis and ethical concerns in this study. The following chapter presents the outcomes of the study and discussion of findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presents the main findings of the research from the main data collected and evaluated. In line with the study objectives, the results are presented to (1) reflect customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban; (2) residential customers' perceptions of services provided by EMECC in Durban; and lastly (3) the gaps between residential consumers' perceptions and their expectations of the quality of services provided by EMECC in Durban.

4.1 Statistical Analysis and Discussion of Findings

In this section, the focus is first on customer expectations of service from EMECC

4.1.1 Customer Expectation and Perceptions

Objective 1: To determine residential customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban

Thus, Table 3 below shows the average scores of customers' expectations on a variety of items on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL relating service by EMECC. Results reveal that customer expectation were all above 4, implying that the residential customers had high expectations of services. In terms of dimensions, customer had highest expectations that the service by EMECC was reliable and responsive. The residential customers had a least expectation on two dimensions of tangibles such as equipment and also assurance by EMECC.

At the level of items in the various dimensions, the residential customers expressed highest expectations on EMECC "having the consumer's best interest at heart (4.52) which is about empathy. The second highest expectation of residential customers regarding services was about EMECC "fulfilling the promise to do something by a certain time" (4.51) which is part of reliability. The other expectations of customers regarding EMECC are summarised in table 3 below.

Table 3: Expectations Mean Scores per Statement (n=69)

EXPECTATIONS		
Question	STATEMENT	MEAN
RELIABILITY DIMENSION		
1	When Call Centre promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	4.51
2	Call Centre will supply accurate and correct information to consumers.	4.43
3	Call Centre employees shows sincere interest on solving consumers' problems.	4.42
4	Call Centre will perform their service right the first time.	4.45
5	Call Centre will provide their service at the time they promise.	4.42
	Dimension average	4.45
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION		
6	Employee of Call Centre will always be willing to assist consumers.	4.39
7	Employee of Call Centre will inform consumers exactly when services will be provided.	4.41
8	Employee of Call Centre will never be too busy to respond to consumers' requests.	4.36
9	Employee of Call Centre will give prompt service to consumers.	4.43
	Dimension average	4.40
ASSURANCE DIMENSION		
10	Consumers can trust Call Centre.	4.32
11	The behaviour of employee of Call Centre will instil confidence in consumers.	4.20
12	Employees of Call Centre will be consistently courteous to consumers.	4.22
13	Employees of Call Centre will have the knowledge to answer consumers' questions	4.38
	Dimension average	4.28
EMPATHY DIMENSION		
14	Employee of Call Centre will understand the specific needs of their consumers.	4.30
15	Call Centre will give consumers individual attention.	4.30
16	Call Centre will have employees who give consumers personal attention.	4.38
17	Call Centre will have convenient operating hours, to suit their consumers.	4.46
18	Call Centre will have the consumer's best interest at heart.	4.52
	Dimension average	4.39
TANGIBLES DIMENSION		
19	Employee of Call Centre will be neat in appearance.	4.01
20	In Call Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.	4.00

21	Call Centre will have modern equipment.	4.03
22	Statements are issued by Call Centre are visually appealing.	4.01
	Dimension average	4.01

It is basis of argument that reliability is key in service as it reflects the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately (El Saghier, 2015). It is most noticeable that reliability does not only focus on what the service provider does in terms of delivery of service to its customers as expected but also what is done when problems occur to mitigate or reduce negative impact (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). In terms of providing customer services, each of the statements relating to the reliability dimension reflects how EMEU is capable of meeting its customers' expectations by providing service on time as promised.

In terms of high expectation of responsiveness, the results concur with the views of many scholars. For example, it is key that EMECC is eager to assist customers and provide rapid service (El Saghier, 2015). It is interesting that high expectations of service by EMECC hinge on how employees of service-oriented businesses react to queries about services and how rapidly they resolve problems (Amorim & Saghezchi, 2014). More importantly, promptness of service is not only when the enquiry is taken by the call centre, but also entails the speed by which the service is attended to, restored or supplied. Consumers feel good when their complaints are managed efficiently by the call centre agents and resolved by the response team rapidly (Sibiya, 2013).

At the item level, results show that residential customers expected EMECC to "have convenient operating hours to suit their consumers" (4.46). Other scores reflecting high expectations of residential customers relate to EMECC "performing its service right the first time" (4.45); supplying accurate and correct information to consumers, and giving prompt service to consumers" (4.43); "employees showing sincere interest on solving consumers' problems, and providing their service at the time they promise" (4.42); and "informing consumers exactly when services will be provided" (4.41).

Furthermore, residential customers of EMECC from Clare-Hills customers have moderate expectations on a variety of issues regarding service quality. These include willingness of employees to assist consumers” (4.39), “giving consumers personal attention, and having knowledge to answer consumers’ questions” (4.38). They also held the view that employees of EMECC were too busy to respond to consumers’ requests” (4.36), “give consumers individual attention”, and “understand the specific needs of their consumers” (4.30). This category also included “consumers trusting the Call Centre (4.32). Lastly, marginal expectations revealed by residential customers included “employees being consistently courteous to consumers” (4.22), “employees instilling confidence in consumers” (4.20), “Call Centre having modern equipment” (4.03), “neat in appearance, and visual appealing of Call Centre (4.01), and “visual appealing of physical facilities” (4.00).

Concisely, the expectations of residential customers were highest on reliability of service (4.45); responsiveness (4.40); empathy (4.39), assurance (4.28) and tangibles (4.01). Residential customer from Clare-Hills customers highly expected “care and individualised attention” followed by “ability to perform dependably and accurately promised service”; “employees having knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspires trust and confidence”; “willingness of employees to help customers and provide prompt service”; and the “prevailing physical condition of facilities”. While the expectations of residential customers of EMEU from Clare-Hills varied regarding the dimensions and items of SERVQUAL, it is clear that they signal what they customers want which EMEU needs to understand clearly (Rapp, Bachrach, Flaherty, Hughes, Sharma, and Voorhees, 2017). It is helpful for an organisations such as EMEU to know what service level are predictable by consumers keep them happy and achieve higher customer satisfaction. By knowing the customer expectations, the organisation’s employees are able to focus solely on fulfilling customers’ expectations. Problems are fixed quickly hence; business retention is improved.

Customer satisfaction is an essential element in any organisation but begins with understanding customer expectations (Eid, 2015). It is imperative for EMEU to

recognise which aspects of the service have high but also low expectations among residential customers and devise strategies to ensure that actual service meets or exceeds customer expectations.

Objective 2: To determine residential customers’ perceptions of services provided by EMECC in Durban

Based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, the study reveals that Residential customer from Clare-Hills in ward 23 had very low perception of the reliability of service by EMECC in Durban. More specially, the low perception on reliability were due to in failure to “fulfil promises to do something by a certain time” (1.70), not “supplying accurate and correct information to consumers” (1.78), failure to “provide service at the time they promise” (1.80), and failure to “perform service right the first time (1.97). It is also notable that perceptions of residential customers from Clara-Hill ward 23 were very low regarding the dimension of assurance. To be precise, the low perception on the dimension of assurance was due to the behaviour of employees of the call centre, which could not instil confidence in customers (1.97), and also that customers could not trust the call centre. Additionally, customers perceived employees of the call centre as not having the knowledge to answer their questions. In this regard, Table 4 shows the responses of customers with respect to their level of perceived service from EMECC on each of the dimensions and items of SERVQUAL.

Table 4: Perceptions Mean Scores per Statement (n=69)

PERCEPTIONS		
Question	STATEMENT	MEAN
RELIABILITY DIMENSION		
1	When Call Centre promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	1.70
2	Call Centre will supply accurate and correct information to consumers.	1.78
3	Call Centre employees shows sincere interest on solving consumers’ problems.	2.04
4	Call Centre will perform their service right the first time.	1.97
5	Call Centre will provide their service at the time they promise.	1.80

	Dimension average	1.86
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION		
6	Employee of Call Centre will always be willing to assist consumers.	2.45
7	Employee of Call Centre will inform consumers exactly when services will be provided.	2.16
8	Employee of Call Centre will never be too busy to respond to consumers' requests.	2.10
9	Employee of Call Centre will give prompt service to consumers.	2.04
	Dimension average	2.19
ASSURANCE DIMENSION		
10	Consumers can trust Call Centre.	1.97
11	The behaviour of employee of Call Centre will instil confidence in consumers.	1.96
12	Employees of Call Centre will be consistently courteous to consumers.	2.52
13	Employees of Call Centre will have the knowledge to answer consumers' questions	2.01
	Dimension average	2.12
EMPATHY DIMENSION		
14	Employee of Call Centre will understand the specific needs of their consumers.	2.22
15	Call Centre will give consumers individual attention.	2.36
16	Call Centre will have employees who give consumers personal attention.	2.22
17	Call Centre will have convenient operating hours, to suit their consumers.	3.13
18	Call Centre will have the consumer's best interest at heart.	2.09
	Dimension average	2.40
TANGIBLES DIMENSION		
19	Employee of Call Centre will be neat in appearance.	3.09
20	In Call Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.	3.09
21	Call Centre will have modern equipment.	3.14
22	Statements are issued by Call Centre are visually appealing.	3.10
	Dimension average	3.11

It is also interesting that the perceptions of residential customers of EMEU services reveal a lowest mean score on the dimension of reliability. Among all the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, residential consumers had the highest perception on the

tangibles. To be specific, the statement issued by the call centre were seen as visually appealing, while employees were seen as neat. According to the findings, the tangibles dimension is the only dimension where the overall mean scores for the customer perceptions are above 3 for all of the service items within the dimension. The tangibles dimension refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials (Buttle, 1996:9). However, it is very important the tangible service aspects of EMEU service are perceived positively not simply to contribute to the “look and feel” of the organisation, but also the actual electricity service itself.

Objective 3: To assess gaps between residential customers’ and their expectations of the quality of service provided by EMECC in Durban

At dimension level, results show that largest variance amongst the customer expectations and perceptions was about the reliability of service, whose dispersion averaged -2.57 scores. This reflect that there is a huge gap among what customers anticipate and what they actually get in terms of the reliability of the services provided by EMECC in Durban. Similarly, the second highest customer gap relates to assurance (2.17). This is followed by the customer gap of responsiveness (2.16). It is notable that the lowest gap between customer expectations and perceptions was on the tangible dimension (-0.85) followed by that of empathy (-1.96). According to Caza (2015), a negative gap implies that customers’ expectations of the service attribute are more than their perceptions. On the contrary, a positive gap indicates that the customers’ perceptions exceed their expectations of the service. In the light of this, the expectations of the residential customers on the dimensions of SERVQUAL in this study are higher than their perceptions of the service. In other words, the customer gaps were all negative.

This reflect that customers had higher expectations of reliability, responsiveness, and assurance of services than actually delivered by EMECC. Table 5 below

presents the variance amongst the customer expectations and customer perceptions reveal the consumer gaps and their magnitude.

Table 5: Service Quality Gap between Perceptions and Expectations (n=69)

EXPECTATIONS (E) AND PERCEPTIONS (P)				
Question	STATEMENT	E MEAN	P MEAN	GAP (P-E)
RELIABILITY DIMENSION				
1	When Call Centre promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	4.51	1.70	-2.81
2	Call Centre will supply accurate and correct information to consumers.	4.43	1.78	-2.63
3	Call Centre employees shows sincere interest on solving consumers' problems.	4.42	2.04	-2.39
4	Call Centre will perform their service right the first time.	4.45	1.97	-2.45
5	Call Centre will provide their service at the time they promise.	4.42	1.80	-2.56
Dimension average				-2.57
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION				
6	Employee of Call Centre will always be willing to assist consumers.	4.39	2.45	-1.87
7	Employee of Call Centre will inform consumers exactly when services will be provided.	4.41	2.16	-2.12
8	Employee of Call Centre will never be too busy to respond to consumers' requests.	4.36	2.10	-2.26
9	Employee of Call Centre will give prompt service to consumers.	4.43	2.04	-2.39
Dimension average				-2.16
ASSURANCE DIMENSION				
10	Consumers can trust Call Centre.	4.32	1.97	-2.35
11	The behaviour of employee of Call Centre will instil confidence in consumers.	4.20	1.96	-2.24
12	Employees of Call Centre will be consistently courteous to consumers.	4.22	2.52	-1.70
13	Employees of Call Centre will have the knowledge to answer consumers' questions	4.38	2.01	-2.37
Dimension average				-2.17
EMPATHY DIMENSION				
14	Employee of Call Centre will understand the specific needs of their consumers.	4.30	2.22	-2.08
15	Call Centre will give consumers individual attention.	4.30	2.36	-1.94

16	Call Centre will have employees who give consumers personal attention.	4.38	2.22	-2.16
17	Call Centre will have convenient operating hours, to suit their consumers.	4.46	3.13	-1.26
18	Call Centre will have the consumer's best interest at heart.	4.52	2.09	-2.34
	Dimension average			-1.96
TANGIBLES DIMENSION				
19	Employee of Call Centre will be neat in appearance.	4.01	3.09	-0.82
20	In Call Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.	4.00	3.09	-0.82
21	Call Centre will have modern equipment.	4.03	3.14	-0.85
22	Statements are issued by Call Centre are visually appealing.	4.01	3.10	-0.89
	Dimension average			-0.85

4.1.2 Reliability of the Findings

Table 6 below presents Cronbach alpha test (Reliability test) demonstrating positive inside consistency of over 0.60 for every one of the measurements for both the expectation and perception variables. From the table, the overall score for expectation was 0.772 indicating that the research instrument was reliable. The table further reveal that individual reliability scores for each all dimensions was higher than that of the overall above. Similarly, the overall score for perception was 0.865 indicating that the research instrument was reliable. This finding reaffirmed the stability and consistency of the research instrument.

Table 6: Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Results

Dimensions	Expectation		Perception	
	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Reliability	0.836	5	0.698	5
Responsiveness	0.813	4	0.730	4
Assurance	0.804	4	0.711	4
Empathy	0.827	5	0.662	5
Tangibles	0.891	4	0.832	4
Overall	0.772	22	0.865	22

After presenting and discussing results on the customer expectations and perceptions of residential customers from Clare-Hill, the next section presents and discusses each of the dimensions of the SERVQUAL used in this study to provide details on the findings.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics per Dimension – Expectations

Dimensions (Expectation)	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Reliability	69	3	5	4.426
Responsiveness	69	2	5	4.335
Assurance	69	3	5	4.288
Empathy	69	2	5	4.360
Tangibles	69	1	5	3.950

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics per Dimension – Perceptions

Dimensions (Perception)	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Reliability	69	1	4	1.858
Responsiveness	69	1	5	2.188
Assurance	69	1	4	2.115
Empathy	69	1	5	2.404
Tangibles	69	1	5	3.105

The Table 9 below reveals the results of the paired sample t-test that was conducted to establish whether there is a noteworthy difference amongst the average values of a sample of matched pairs of similar elements. Thus, each overall expectation's dimensions' score was matched with the corresponding overall perceptions score.

Table 9: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Gap
Pair 1	Expectations – Reliability	4.426	69	-2.568
	Perceptions – Reliability	1.858	69	
Pair 2	Expectations – Responsiveness	4.335	69	-2.148
	Perceptions – Responsiveness	2.188	69	
Pair 3	Expectations – Assurance	4.288	69	-2.173
	Perceptions – Assurance	2.115	69	
Pair 4	Expectations – Empathy	4.36	69	-1.956
	Perceptions – Empathy	2.404	69	
Pair 5	Expectations – Tangibles	3.95	69	-0.845
	Perceptions – Tangibles	3.105	69	

4.2.1 Tangibility Dimension

As shown in table 9, the tangibles dimension refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials (Chuang & Lin, 2017). Again, from Table 8, the overall mean perceptions score is 3.105 and that of expectations is 3.95, giving a gap score of **-0.845**. This is the smallest gap out of all five dimensions. This small negative gap finding concurs with a dissertation study by (Caza, 2013), where a very small negative gap was found between customer perceptions and expectations. This gap is negative, implying that the customers' expectations have not been met. This may possibly imply that the customers do not attribute much value to the aspects related to the "look and feel" of the organisation or maybe there are more concerned about the actual electricity service itself. The researcher attributed this to customers attaching more importance to the delivery aspects of the service, rather than to aesthetics (Bryslund & Curry, 2001, p. 392).

4.2.2 Reliability Dimension

Lonial, Menezes, Tarim and Tatoglu and Zaim (2010), describe reliability as the ability to perform the promised services dependably and accurately. This dimension is important in the context of electricity services. From Table 9 above, the findings revealed that the customers in the study rated their expectations within the reliability dimension at 4.426 and their perceptions at 2.1858, thereby giving a gap score of **-2.148** between the customers' expectations and their perceptions. The negative gap scores of -2.568 was found between customer perceptions and expectations, implying that the customers' expectations have not been met. This is reliable with outcomes by (Lonial, et al., 2010), which established that customers have always chosen reliability as the most important of the five dimensions. The study findings is also supported by (Fenrick & Getachew, 2012) who found out that the benefits of reducing electricity outages are felt by the customers while the cost of this reduction is borne by the electricity utility or service provider. Operation Khanyisa (2015), observed that electricity theft contributes to frequent power outages, interruptions of electricity supply services to customers, and causing interruptions to customers' business operations. The theft of electricity increases the cost of providing the service to customers since more often, replacement and maintenance costs are

passed on to end-users (Operation Khanyisa, 2015). In many informal settlements, theft of electricity occurs through illegal connections, tampering and/or bypassing of meters and the selling of illegal prepaid electricity token (Ngema, 2017). This gap between respondents' customers' expectations of the reliability aspects of the service provided by EMECC and their perceptions is the largest gap in this study. This dimension had the biggest gap for those residential consumers who participated in the study, thereby indicating the implications of the number of outages which end up affecting customers. Therefore, to change the existing perception EMEC has to reduce outages as well as improve its notification to customers about outages which are planned as part of routine maintenance. In some instance, poor communication has created the impression to customers that the outages are unplanned, thereby creating a poor perception on the services provided.

4.2.3 Responsiveness Dimension

From Table 9 above, the residential customers in the study rated their expectations within the responsiveness dimension at 4.335 and their perceptions at 2.188 thereby giving the gap between the two scores of **-2.148**. This implies that Clara-Hills customers in Kwa-Zulu Natal have very high expectations that EMECC within the responsiveness dimension must adhere to service delivery timeframes, ensure provision of prompt service, show willingness to assist customers, and be available to customers. Factors of this dimension are considered as 'basics in the servicing of customers', hence the wide gap shows what Clara-Hills customers expect from EMECC and what they perceived they were receiving as a service. However, the easy solution to this challenge is the change of attitude of frontline staff within the organisation to customers (Roman, 2016). Yusof, et al., (2017) argue that 'attitudes of public servants have a negative effect on the cooperation and coordination required amongst stakeholders internal to the organisation and can affect the responsiveness and effectiveness of a public service'.

4.2.4 Assurance Dimension

The findings revealed that a large gap exists between the customers' expectations (4.288) and their perceptions (2.115) within the assurance dimension, as shown in Table 9. This gives a gap between perceptions and expectations of **-2.173**. This gap means a failure by the EMEU to provide basic service requirements to Clara-Hills customers in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province. El Saghier (2015) relates assurance dimension with the efficiency with which a service is being provided and this involves the functional interaction between employees and customers. It is therefore imperative for customers to be assisted by employees within EMEC who are knowledgeable, coupled with the ability and commitment to deliver services in a manner where customers will gain trust and confidence in the organisation.

4.2.5 Empathy Dimension

Zameer, et al., (2018) define Empathy as "the caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers". From Table 9 above, the study findings showed that Clara-Hills customers rated their expectations within the empathy dimension at 4.36 and their perceptions at 2.404, thereby generating the gap between the perceptions and expectations of **-1.956**. This large gap in service delivery implies that Clara-Hills customers' needs are not being met in the manner expected and this implies that customers are dissatisfied with the service being provided by the municipality. This reflects badly on EMECC and EMEU staff. The dimension expected members of staff to be dedicated. Soares, et al., (2017) study revealed that whilst dependability is viewed as the most vital measurement in living up to consumers' desires, the procedure measurements (particularly assurance, responsiveness and empathy) are most vital in beyond customer expectations.

4.3 Conclusion

Overall, there are gaps between the customer expectations and perceptions on all the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model regarding services provided by EMECC to residential customers of Clare-Hill in ward 23 in Durban. This Chapter has

presented and discussed key results of this study in line with the objectives of the study. The results have been discussed in relation to existing studies and literature. The next chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter has presented and discussed results of this quantitative study. The current chapter includes the conclusions and recommendations of the study based on the research questions and specific objectives. It also highlights the recommendations and opportunities for further study.

5.1 Description of Respondents and Study Objectives

This section provides a summary of the entire study and its objectives.

5.1.1 Target Population and Sample Size

The study targeted Clare-Hills residential customers who are registered in eThekweni Electricity billing database, as well as those who had signed the Electricity Supply contract with eThekweni Electricity. From a randomly selected sample of 80 participants, 69 responded and results were analysed and presented in the previous chapter. Related literature review and further analysis of the Gap Model based on primary data was also presented in the previous chapter.

5.1.2 Study Objectives

The study aimed to understand customer expectations and perceptions of services provided by the EMEU through EMECC. Three research specific objectives which guided this study were:

- a) To determine residential customers' expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban
- b) To determine residential customers' perception of services provided by EMECC in Durban.

- c) To assess gaps between residential consumers' expectation and their perception of the quality of services provided by EMECC and EMEU in Durban.

5.2 Findings from Primary Data and Conclusions

First, the results focused on customer expectations. In this regard, the study has found that the expectations of customers regarding service provided by EMEC varied. However, customer expectations were all above 4, implying that the residential customers had high expectations of services. In terms of dimensions, customer had highest expectations than the service by EMECC was reliable and responsive. On the other hand, residential customers had a least expectation on two dimensions of tangibles such as equipment and assurance by EMECC. In a summary, the expectations of residential customers were highest on reliability of service (4.45); responsiveness (4.40); empathy (4.39), assurance (4.28) and tangibles (4.01).

At the item level, results show that residential customers expected EMECC to “have convenient operating hours to suit their consumers” (4.46). Other scores reflecting high expectations of residential customers relate to EMECC “performing its service right the first time” (4.45); supplying accurate and correct information to consumers, and giving prompt service to consumers” (4.43); “employees showing sincere interest on solving consumers’ problems, and providing their service at the time they promise” (4.42); and “informing consumers exactly when services will be provided” (4.41).

Lastly, marginal expectations revealed by residential customers included “employees being consistently courteous to consumers” (4.22), “employees instilling confidence in consumers” (4.20), “Call Centre having modern equipment” (4.03), “neat in appearance, and visual appealing of Call Centre (4.01), and “visual appealing of physical facilities” (4.00). It is in this way that the study has actually achieved its first objective to determine the residential customers’ expectations of services provided by EMECC in Durban.

It is helpful for an organisations such as EMEU to know what service level are expected by customers keep them happy and achieve higher customer satisfaction.

Second, the results of this study focused on the customer perceptions of residential customers from Clare-Hills. Based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, the study reveals that Residential customer from Clare-Hills in ward 23 had very low perception of the reliability of service by EMECC in Durban. The low perception on reliability were due to the failure by EMEU and EMECC to keep promises to by a specific time, not supplying accurate and correct information to consumers but also failure to provide service at the time they promise. Other issues that affected perceptions of reliability include failure to perform benefit right the first run through. It remains also notable that perceptions of residential customers from Clare- Hill ward 23 were very low regarding the dimension of assurance. Among all the five dimensions of SERQUAL, residential customers had the highest perception on the tangibles.

Lastly, results from this study reveal that there are negative gaps between the expectations and perceptions of residential customers from Clare-Hills regarding the services by EMECC. Thus none of the expectations of these residential customers was met or exceeded by EMECC. In this respect, the gap amongst Clare-Hills consumers' perceptions and their respective expectations were all negatives, with the highest gap evident between expectations and perception of reliability at -2.568. The second largest gap was between expectations and perceptions of responsiveness, followed by the gap between expectations and perceptions of assurance. However, it is interesting that a narrow gap was evident between expectations and perceptions of tangibles at -0.85.

Objective 1: To Determine Residential Customers' Expectations of Services provided by EMECC in Durban.

To be more specific, the overall mean expectations score for all the five dimensions, ranged from 3.95 for tangibles to 4.426 about reliability. Overall, residents of Clare-Hills had higher expectations of EMECC. They have long been complaining about

EMEU's slow response to their outcry of electricity outages. Furthermore, these high expectations were driven by known challenges on each dimensions. They include; the look of physical facilities, availability of equipment, character of employees and communication resources (tangibles); employees to keep promises at agreed time (reliability); enthusiastic to assist customers and to deliver excellent service (responsiveness); professionalism of employees and accountable to assure customers (assurance); and provision of caring, individualised kindness to consumers (empathy).

Objective 2: To Determine Residential Customers' Perception of Services provided by EMECC in Durban.

Under this objective, the majority of respondents expressed low perceptions that EMECC would improve their services regarding the supply of electricity. Low levels of perceptions were observed, as the overall mean perceptions score for all the five dimensions, ranged from 1.858 for reliability to 3.105 for tangibles. As noted under objective 1 above, the features of each dimensions coupled by the slow response of EMECC naturally diminish the zeal of residents to perceive more than they would have under normal circumstance.

Objective 3: To Assess Gaps between Residential Customers' Perceptions and their Expectations of the Quality of Services provided by EMEU through EMECC in Durban.

Results of this study reveal negative gaps between expectations and perceptions of residential customers from Clare-Hills regarding all the five dimensions in this study. In terms of the tangible dimension, the negative gap score implied that EMECC failed to satisfy Clare-Hills resident customers' expectation with respect to, physical appearance of facilities, office equipment, personnel attitudes and attributes, and communication materials. With regards to the reliability dimension, the negative gap score implied that EMECC did not meet Clare-Hills resident customers' expectation with respect to performing the promised services dependably and accurately. There was also a negative gap score for responsiveness dimension. This outcome inferred that the customers' expectation

with regards to the readiness of EMECC toward assist customers and deliver quick service was not realised. In terms of assurance dimension, the negative gap implied that EMECC had not satisfactorily met the expectations of Clare-Hills residents as it relates to hiring employees with adequate courtesy, knowledge, and capacity to convey certainty and trust for the benefit of customers. Lastly, the negative gap on empathy dimension showed that Clare-Hills resident customers were not happy with the service provided by EMEU through EMECC. The outcome showed that EMECC failed in terms of caring for the customers and demonstrating individualised attention to customers. In the light of the above, it is clear that the study has met the three objectives that were set out in chapter one of this thesis.

5.3 Study Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following are the key recommendations:

- As the expectations of residential customers are higher than the perceptions of residential customers, it is important that EMECC focus on these dimensions to improve quality of service. A discussion with the residents themselves may be fruitful in two ways. This can be helpful for EMECC to understand in-detail these expectations and also to ensure that residential customers also have realistic expectations.
- There is need to ensure that staff at EMECC are trained properly to deal with customers in ways, which inspire confidence and demonstrate knowledge. EMEU needs to focus on ensuring that all call centre staff and frontline staff are adequately trained to understand and respond to customer requests. This is key enhance perceptions of reliability and empathy.
- The customer gaps identified in this study needs to be addressed through various strategies. One such strategy is to provide customer service training to staff at EMECC and ensure teamwork and effective coordination with those to whom faults are allocated. Thus, an improvement in communication systems and strategies with respect to service delivery is necessary.
- The only dimension with an overall small customer gap was the tangibles dimension. Despite this a small gap, it is recommended that EMECC direct

effort to close this gap as well through interventions that focus on physical features, equipment, personnel and communication materials of EMEU.

EMEU needs to conduct regular assessments of customer service quality to residential customers to ensure that management has an ongoing understanding of customer views and needs. These assessments can be done through research surveys at the different points of contact with customers on a daily basis. In this way, gaps that exist can be addressed and closed proactively.

5.4 Scope for Further Study

This study has focused on residential customers of EMECC. However, future research needs to focus on the inter-departmental collaboration and interaction between EMECC staff and faults men as they expectations and perceptions are affected by how these work together as a cohesive team.

It would also be interesting to investigate how residential customers form their expectations, which were consistently higher than perceptions in this study. This is key to gauge if residential customers have unrealistically high expectations or the communication by EMEU is creating wrong expectations which are not achievable.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the closure and recommendations were exhibited constructed on the objectives of the study drawn from chapter one. This study pursued to understand customer expectations and perceptions of services provided by the EMEU through EMECC. The study has revealed a variety of customer gaps which require attention to improve service quality by EMECC in Durban.

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APPENDICES

Informed Consent Letter 3C

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Dear Respondent,

MBA Research Project

Researcher: Zola Similo Shabalala (082 334 7475)

Supervisor: Dr. M. Kanyangale (Office Telephone number)

Research Office: Ms. P Ximba 031-2603587

I, **ZOLA SIMILO SHABALALA**, an MBA 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 **Consumers Expectation and Perception of the level of Service Provided by EThekwini Municipality Electricity Call Centre**. The aim of this study is to ascertain the levels of satisfaction of EThekwini Electricity consumers.

Through your participation I hope to recognize the areas of dissatisfaction highlighted with the quality of the service provided by eThekwini Electricity Call Center. The results of the survey are planned to add value to improve the quality of service provided by eThekwini Electricity Call Centre.

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 survey/focus group. 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 completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The survey should take you about **10 – 15 minutes** to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely

Investigator's

Signature _____ Date _____

QUESTIONNAIRE – PART A

CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

I am currently enrolled as a Masters student in Business Administration at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), Westville Campus. I am required to perform research on a value-adding topic in order to fulfil the requirements to obtain my Masters in Business Administration (MBA) qualification. I have chosen customer service quality at eThekwini Municipality Electricity Call Centre as my field of research. The study is intended to evaluate the service provided by eThekwini Municipality Electricity Unit Call Centre to the customers of Ward 23, Clare Hills in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. You have been selected to participate in this study in your position as a residential customer.

The purpose of this survey is to obtain information from residential consumers of eThekwini Municipality Electricity regarding their expectations and perceptions of the quality of service provided by Call Center. The information and ratings will assist eThekwini Electricity Call Centre to identify areas where need to be addressed and to improve customer service. Please note that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any questions. The questionnaire comprises of two sections, Part B asks questions related to customer expectations and Part C relates to perceptions. Both sections have five statements with 22 questions each, making a total of 44 questions. The questionnaire should take 15 – 20 minute to complete and feel free to make any comments on the booklet itself, if you wish to do.

All information will be treated great confidentially and no individuals’ names will be declared. The feedback that will be provided online has limited viewing only the researcher will have a direct access. This feedback outcome will be also shared

with eThekweni Electricity Senior Management. Please note that your participation is voluntary. Thank you for participating.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

MBA Research Project

Researcher: Zola Similo Shabalala (082 334 7475)

Supervisor: Dr. M. Kanyangale (Office Telephone number)

Research Office: Ms. P Ximba 031-2603587

CONSENT

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and 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.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

This page is to be retained by researcher

Enquiries: Zola Shabalala

Telephone: (031) 311 6539

Email: shabalalaz@elec.durban.gov.za



College of Law and Management Studies

Supervisors Permission to Submit Thesis/ Dissertation for Examination

Name: Zola Similo Shabalala	No: 214580907	
Title: Residential Customers Expectation and Perception of Services Provided by eThekwini Municipality Electricity Call Centre		
Qualification: Master of Business Administration	School: Graduate School Of Business & Leadership	
	Yes	No
To the best of my knowledge, the thesis/dissertation is primarily the student's own work and the student has acknowledged all reference sources	Yes	
The English language is of a suitable standard for examination without going for professional editing.	Yes	
Turnitin Report %		
Comment if % is over 10%:		
I agree to the submission of this thesis/dissertation for examination	Yes	
Supervisors Name: Dr MacDonald Kanyangale		
Supervisors Signature:		
Date:		

Co- Supervisors Name:	
Co- Supervisors Signature:	
Date:	

EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY FROM CALL CENTRE – PART B

What would you expect from Call Centre as a customer when evaluating excellent service below are the following statements. Please indicate each statement using the scale below what **CALL CENTRE** should perform by placing a tick or circle in the appropriate box.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Not Sure
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

RELIABILITY DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1) When Call Centre promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	1	2	3	4	5
2) Call Centre will supply accurate and correct information to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
3) Call Centre employees shows sincere interest on solving consumers' problems.	1	2	3	4	5
4) Call Centre will perform their service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5

5) Call Centre will provide their service at the time they promise.	1	2	3	4	5
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disa- gree	Disa- gree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
6) Employee of Call Centre will always be willing to assist consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
7) Employee of Call Centre will inform consumers exactly when services will be provided.	1	2	3	4	5
8) Employee of Call Centre will never be too busy to respond to consumers' requests.	1	2	3	4	5
9) Employee of Call Centre will give prompt service to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5

ASSURANCE DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disa- gree	Disa- gree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
10) Consumers can trust Call Centre.	1	2	3	4	5
11) The behaviour of employee of Call Centre will instil confidence in consumers.	1	2	3	4	5

12) Employees of Call Centre will be consistently courteous to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
13) Employees of Call Centre will have the knowledge to answer consumers' questions.	1	2	3	4	5
EMPATHY DIMENSION					
	Strongly Dis- agree	Dis- agree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
14) Employee of Call Centre will understand the specific needs of their consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
15) Call Centre will give consumers individual attention.	1	2	3	4	5
16) Call Centre will have employees who give consumers personal attention.	1	2	3	4	5
17) Call Centre will have convenient operating hours, to suit their consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
18) Call Centre will have the consumer's best interest at heart.	1	2	3	4	5
TANGIBLES DIMENSION					
	Strongly Dis- agree	Dis- agree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
19) Employee of Call Centre will be neat in appearance.	1	2	3	4	5
20) In Call Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
21) Call Centre will have modern equipment.	1	2	3	4	5

22) Statements are issued by Call Centre are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
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PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY ELECTRICITY CALL CENTRE – PART C

What was your perceptions/actual experience regarding service provided by Call Centre?

Please indicate each statement using the scale below should perform by placing a tick or circle in the appropriate box.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Not Sure
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

RELIABILITY DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1) When eThekwini Electricity Call Centre promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so.	1	2	3	4	5

2) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will supply accurate and correct information to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
3) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre employees shows sincere interest on solving consumers' problems.	1	2	3	4	5
4) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will perform their service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5
5) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will provide their service at the time they promise.	1	2	3	4	5
RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
6) Employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will always be willing to assist consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
7) Employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will inform consumers exactly when services will be provided.	1	2	3	4	5
8) Employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will never be too busy to respond to consumers' requests.	1	2	3	4	5
9) Employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will give prompt service to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
ASSURANCE DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

10) Consumers can trust eThekwini Electricity Call Centre.	1	2	3	4	5
11) The behaviour of employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will instil confidence in consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
12) Employees of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will be consistently courteous to consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
13) Employees of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will have the knowledge to answer consumers' questions.	1	2	3	4	5
EMPATHY DIMENSION					
	Strongly Disa- gree	Disa- gree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
14) Employee of Electricity Centre will understand the specific needs of their consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
15) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will give consumers individual attention.	1	2	3	4	5
16) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will have employees who give consumers personal attention.	1	2	3	4	5
17) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will have convenient operating hours, to suit their consumers.	1	2	3	4	5
18) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will have the consumer's best interest at heart.	1	2	3	4	5
TANGIBLES DIMENSION					
	Strongly	Disa- gree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

	Disa- gree				
19) Employee of eThekwini Electricity Call Centre will be neat in appearance.	1	2	3	4	5
20) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre physical facilities are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
21) EThekwini Electricity Call Centre will have modern equipment.	1	2	3	4	5
22) Statements are issued by eThekwini Electricity Call Centre are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5

Addition Comments (If any)

.....

Should you need a feedback regarding collated stats please provide email address

.....

.....



9 January 2017

Mr Zola Shabalala 214580907
Graduate School of Business & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Shabalala

Protocol reference number: HSS/2134/016M

Project title: Residential customers Expectation and Perception of Services Provided by eThekweni Municipality Electricity Call Centre

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 13 December 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr MacDonald Kayangale
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr M Hoque
cc. School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

