University of KwaZulu-Natal

"A SERVQUAL Investigation into Customer Expectations and Perceptionsof Service Quality at DTA College Pietermaritzburg during 2010"

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Declaration

I Zivai M. Machaka declare that

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Signed…Z.M……..

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Abstract

The marketisation of higher and further education institutions whereby education institutions adopt commercial practices to operate has led to increased competition in the education industry. Various sources of competitive advantage are being searched for aggressively by education institutions in the hope of securing customers and remaining competitive. Service quality has become one of the biggest sources of competitive advantage for higher and further education institutions as it enables the institutions to differentiate themselves from the competition. Development and Training for Adults (DTA) College in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa also faces similar challenges of the need to be competitive in an increasingly competitive environment.

The study investigated the customers' perceptions and expectations of service quality at DTA College in Pietermaritzburg in order to identify and assess any existing service quality gaps. The SERVQUAL instrument which consists of 22 statements on perceptions and 22 on expectations of service quality was utilised to collect data for the research study at DTA College. A sample size of 58 was used and it was selected through stratified random sampling to maximise representativeness of the sample. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. Statistical tools that include frequencies, meanscores and tabulations were utilised to present the data from findings. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was also utilised to further analyse the significance of the gaps.

The findings from the study indicated that, a negative service quality gap exists at DTA College. Reliability was the service quality dimension that had the widest gap which indicated that the respondents do not rely on the College as it does not deliver as per promise. Assurance was the service quality dimension which had the narrowest gaps. However, 3 of the 4 assurance gaps were significant according to statistical tests conducted which mean that DTA College has to pay attention to all the service quality dimensions regardless of the gaps being small. Frequent interaction between the college and the customers is recommended for DTA College as it provides the college with important information on customer expectations and perceptions. Continuous employee training to improve the existing skills is also recommended for the college's employees as it can have a good impact on meeting the customers' expectations of the service quality dimensions.

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Chapter 1
Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

The marketisation of education institutions globally has led to increased competition in the education sector which traditionally did not exist (Walker, 2009; 491: Gallifa, 2010; 156 and Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2008; 374). Education institutions are searching for different souces of competitive advantage in the hope of attracting customers (Walker, 2009; 491). According to Gallifa (2010; 156) and Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 374), "service quality has become one of the biggest sources of competitive advantage for higher and further education institutions." South African higher education institutions have been facing the same pressures that all the other institutions have been facing globally and have also been adopting more customer centric approaches (Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2008; 374). Developmental Training for Adults (DTA) College in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa faces similar challenges, which include the need to be competitive in an increasingly competitive environment.

Newman and Jahdi (2009; 1) also recognise the marketisation of education institutions and explain that the last two decades have seen an increased emphasis on the 'marketisation' of most tertiary education institutions. Education institutions that include colleges are now being run as business enterprises and are implementing the commercial sector's business concepts like the marketing concept. Several institutions now regard themselves as brands and compete for customers who are now faced with a wider range of choices (Cook, 2002; 14). The trend has led to a lot of competition and organisations (including educational institutions) are continuously looking for ways to differentiate themselves so as to attract customers and excel (Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2008; 374 and Oldfield and Baron, 2000; 85).

The adoption of the marketing concept by the organisations has led to an increased emphasis on customers and their needs (Walker, 2009; 491). Balachandran (2004; 98)

explains that good service quality has become a key issue in most of the organisations in an effort to meet customers' expectations. Good service quality is attained when customers perceive the organisation's service delivery to be meeting their expectations, if service quality is perceived as good it can be a source of competitive advantage for the organisation (Balachandran, 2004; 98). Service quality has become one of the most crucial issues in businesses today as it has become a source of competitive advantage, customer retention, improved financial performance and even contributes to employee satisfaction (Cook, 2002; 6 and Kasper, Helsidingen and Gabbot, 2006; 177).

However, the attaining of good service quality requires the organisation to evaluate the customers' needs and expectations first, and then work towards meeting them (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 177). Most organisations fail at providing good service quality due to the mere fact of assuming what customers want without knowing for certain (Palmer, 2001; 210). Evaluation of service quality is important as it provides insight to the expectations and needs of customers (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 177). The knowledge can then be used by organisations to meet and exceed the customers' expectations thus, gaining competitive advantage and excelling in business (Palmer, 2001; 210).

DTA College is a further education institution in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa that provides fundamental learning to adults. DTA College as a service provider has an obligation to provide good service quality to its customers (DTA, 2006; 4). DTA College is provisionally accredited as an institution of further education by the accreditation body Umalusi. Quality assurance is part of the Umalusi's requirements that education institutions should meet in order to obtain and maintain accreditation (Umalusi, 2010; para 2). Thus, it is imperative to continuously evaluate the service quality being provided and identify customer expectations and perceptions of DTA College's service.

DTA College had never formally embarked on a customer satisfaction and service quality survey prior to the study. It is hoped that the study provides invaluable knowledge in the area. The study aims to provide useful information that can be used in strategy formulation and presentation to relevant authorities.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the customer perceptions and expectations on service quality at DTA College. The study aims to provide important information on service quality which can be useful in identifying service quality gaps that might exist within the organisation and then lead to corrective action being taken. The research also aims to provide insights on customer expectations that might be useful for the development of strategies within the organisation.

The study will provide the organisation with a service quality evaluation report for a specified period of 2010 that can be used for various purposes including reports to clients and relevant accreditation bodies like Umalusi. The availability of accurate information on customers' expectations and perceptions will enable DTA College to make clearer decisions on service quality at the college. The information will aid DTA College in identifying the service quality gaps that exist and the dimensions that are most important and urgent to the college's customers. The availability of accurate information on customers' expectations and perceptions will aid the institution in appropriate strategy formulation and lead to the organisation's improved performance and possibly attainment of competitive advantage. The results of the study will also be used for comparison purposes with service quality results obtained through different measuring techniques that could be used by other colleges or accreditation bodies like Umalusi.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the customers' perceptions of service quality at DTA during 2010?
- What are the customers' expectations of service quality at DTA during 2010?
- What are the service quality gaps that exist at DTA during 2010?
- What are the most important service quality dimensions to DTA customers during 2010?

1.4 Objectives of the Research

- To investigate the customers' perceptions of service quality offered at DTA College during 2010
- To investigate the customers' expectations of service quality offered by DTA College during 2010
- To determine the most important service quality dimensions to DTA's customers during 2010
- To determine the service quality gaps that exist at DTA College during 2010.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The research aims to determine the customer expectations and perceptions of service quality at DTA College. The difference between the customer expectations and perception indicates the service quality gaps that exist at the college. If the customer expectations are higher than the perceptions then the gap is negative therefore indicating low service quality at DTA College. If the customer perceptions are higher than the expectations then it means that DTA College's customers consider DTA College's service quality as good. The following are the hypotheses proposed for the study;

H0: Service quality gaps exist at DTA College
H1: Service quality gaps do not exist at DTA College

1.6 Chapter Plan

The research report is to be prepared with a chapter outline as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a background of the increasing importance of service quality in higher and further education. The relevance of the research is also outlined including the research objectives and how the research was conducted.

Chapter 2 reviews Service Quality literature to provide a deeper understanding of the concept.

Chapter 3 consists of a discussion on Service Quality in Higher and Further education and outlines the relevance of service quality in the context of higher education.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology which includes how the data for the study was collected and analysed.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study. Graphs and tables were utilised to present the data.

Chapter 6 involves a discussion of the research findings. Reference to literature is also made in the chapter to aid in the discussion of the findings.

Chapter 7 consists of a discussion of the recommendations with reference to the literature reviewed.

Chapter 8 consists of a conclusive discussion on the study and recommendations for future research.

1.7 Conclusion

The study of service quality in higher education is relatively young and continuous research is being conducted to gain more insight. This study is aimed at investigating service quality at an education institution. The purpose of the study, how the study was conducted, the findings and the chapter plan were discussed in this chapter. The following chapter, chapter 2 consists of an in-depth discussion on the concept of service quality.

Chapter 2
Service Quality

2.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of a detailed discussion on service quality. A background on services and the characteristics of services is provided. The concept of Service Quality is defined and explained in detail. A discussion on the measurement of service quality with a particular emphasis on the SERVQUAL measuring instrument is included in the final part of the chapter.

2.2 Services Defined

A service is an activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in ownership of anything, its production may or may not be tied to a physical product (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong 1999 cited in Palmer, 2001; 2).

The service takes place in an interactive process aimed at creating customer satisfaction (Kasper, Helsidingen and Gabbot, 2006; 57). Various authors that include Nargundkar (2006; 2), Srinivasan (2004; 2) and Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2001; 6) do not provide a set of words as a definition for services but rather suggest that services are better explained through their characteristics which include tangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability.

Authors such as Andrews (2009; 5), Copon (2009; 272), Palmer (2001; 9) and Kasper *et al*. (2006; 54) highlight the growth of the service industry and agree that "the service sectors around the world have grown dramatically in recent years. Services are contributing about 70% of total employment and gross domestic product in developed countries."

It is important for a business to be aware of its customers' definition of service, which means that the business or an organisation has to know their customers' expectations and

perceptions of service quality first (Clarke, 2000; 14). After obtaining the information on customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, a business can then design a plan to fulfill the customer's needs (Clarke, 2000; 14).

2.3 Characteristics of Services

The characteristics of services include; **intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and inseparability** (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 177 and Hoffman and Bateson, 2001; 26).

2.3.1 Intangibility

Intangibility is a characteristic of services that means that one cannot touch, hear, smell or taste a service; rather a service is experienced (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; 269; Mudie and Cottam, 1999; 5). The intangibility nature of services also brings marketing challenges like pricing and patents for the services which businesses should always take into consideration (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001; 26). Nargundkar (2006;2) and Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2001; 6) point out that it is important for service organisations to note that services have tangible dimensions as well, for instance airplanes are tangible elements for flight services as books are tangible elements for education services, thus the challenges that include pricing could be planned for with the tangible components in mind.

Moeller (2009; 362) explains that the process of lecturing is the intangible aspect and not the teacher, the books and other tools that are used. The transformation of customer resources is the core of a service providing process which makes intangibility an important issue as the transformation is the most attractive aspect to the customer (Moeller, 2009; 362). Education is one of the services with the most intangible services, thus a measurement of service quality should always consider that the larger element of the service is intangible (Gallifa, 2010; 157).

2.3.2 Inseparability

Clarke (2000; 14) and Palmer (2001; 220) explain that services cannot be manufactured and then transported to another location or stored for consumption when required. Berry, (1980; 25) cited in Moeller (2009; 364) states that "inseparability refers to the simultaneous production and consumption of services which means that the service provider is often physically present when consumption takes place." Education, consultations of physicians, or concerts are some examples of services that are offered to customers (Moeller, 2009; 364).

Moeller (2009; 364) explains that the required customers' resources (for example customers themselves, their physical objects, their rights or their data) must be present for a transformation to occur. The apartment to be cleaned or the learner to be educated are the customer resources that are inseparably tied to their transformation (Moeller, 2009; 364). The characteristic of inseparability does not require that the customer necessarily be present during the entire transformation process but the customer's resources, which are to be transformed have to be present (Moeller, 2009; 364).

The inseparability nature of services reflects the interconnection among the service provider, the customer involved in receiving the service and other customers sharing the experience (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001; 27). It is imperative for organisations to ensure that the whole service delivery process is managed properly as it is interconnected (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 177).

2.3.3 Perishability

Services cannot be stored and carried forward for a sale at a later date, their unused capacity cannot be reserved (Shultz and Doerr, 2009; 5 and Andrews, 2009; 5). Moeller (2009; 364) explains that perishability is not only associated with the outcome of the service, but also with the service provider's capacity as the necessary facilities, equipment, and labour can be held in readiness to create a service. Hoffman and Bateson (2001; 26)

also explain that strategies to deal with uneven supply and demand peaks that include offering discounts during off-peak hours have to be put in place in order to improve the service quality. Nargundkar (2006; 2) agrees with Hoffman and Bateson (2001; 26) and emphasises that matching demand and supply depends a lot on the ability of a service provider to forecast demand correctly and provide the additional capacity during peak demand periods.

The necessary facilities, equipment, and labour can be held in readiness to create a service, but these simply represent productive capacity, but not the product itself (Moeller, 2009; 364). A service is a deed or performance rather than a tangible item that the customer keeps therefore; it is perishable and cannot be inventoried (Moeller, 2009; 364).

2.3.4 Heterogeneity

Services can never be exactly the same and the experience differs from one individual to the next (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 179, Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; 269 and Palmer, 2001; 209). According to Hill (1995) cited in de Jager and Gbadamosi (2009; 256), "service delivery and customer satisfaction in an education environment is dependent on personal interaction between students and staff. The personal interaction and labour-intensive nature of this service translates into a potentially highly heterogeneous quality service experience."

Kasper *et al*. (2006; 179) further explain that "the best way to deal with the problem of variances as a problem is implementation and standardisation of processes and services and to offer customised service to meet the different customers' needs where customers prefer tailored services." Some organisations have replaced customer service employees with machines to maintain uniformity and manage the heterogeneity characteristic of services for instance, the use of automated teller machines (ATM) in banks and on-line registration for academic institutions (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 373).

However, Grewal and Levy (2010; 373) point out that some customers do not embrace the idea of replacing humans with machines as performance of some machines may not be adequate like the ATM machine can run out of money and disconnection can occur with online and new media in education. On-line education for instance, lacks the human dimension of group interaction and the teacher or tutor relationship (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 373).

The characteristics of services present challenges to managerial situations and decision making as customers' perceptions are varied due to the characteristics (John, 2003; 43). According to John (2003; 43), "service managers should always view the characteristics of services as opportunities and challenges and analyse the consequences of the characteristics. In order to succeed, the services manager has to make decisions based on questions that include; what aspects can be standardised, what needs to be customised in the customer interactions, and what do the customers expect the frontline service staff to do."

2.4 Defining Service Quality

Service quality is a measure between service perceptions and expectations, ensuring good service quality involves meeting or exceeding consumers' expectations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985 cited in Weinstein and Johnson, 1999; 71). Hoffman and Bateson (2004; 324) define service quality as an attitude formed by customers after a long term evaluation of a firm's service performance. Palmer (2001; 210) and Brink and Berndt (2008; 62) agree and further explain that service quality refers to an organisation's ability to determine customers' expectations correctly and to deliver the service at a quality level that will meet the customers' expectations.

An argument on the complexity of defining service quality is brought up by various authors that include; Schneider and White (2004; 29), Hernon and Altman (2010; 5) and Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 160) as the authors define service quality differently.

Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 160) suggest that the usage of the model by Gronroos (1983) which relates the level of experienced quality to both technical and functional dimensions of service provision provides a clearer understanding of service quality. Technical quality refers to the result of the service or the question what has been provided whilst functional quality refers to the way the service has been delivered (Kandampully *et al*., 2001; 160).

However, Hernon and Whitman (2001; 15) and Gilmore (2003;40) disagree with Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 160) and suggest that service quality is typically defined in terms of gap analysis or the gap between customers expectations in general and the perceptions relating to the service. Authors such as Hernon and Altman (2010; 7) and Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) argue and suggest that service quality is better defined by the service quality dimensions, which are the factors customers consider in figuring out if the service was good or bad.

According to the various definitions of service quality, Schneider and White (2004; 29); Hernon and Altman (2010; 5) conclude that service quality is a complex construct to define and surrounded by a lot of debates. The general body of service quality literature as a definable discipline has existed for only a few decades, thus a statement of agreement on many issues presented has to review several different perspectives (Hernon and Altman, 2010; 5).

The DTA College service quality study reviews service quality in line with the gaps between customers' expectations in general and the perceptions relating to the service as it is the common basic principle mentioned by several authors that include Hernon and Whitman (2001; 15), Gilmore (2003;40), Kasper *et al*. (2006; 176); Grewal and Levy (2010; 386).

2.4.1 Service Quality Dimensions

Service Quality dimensions are characteristics of customer service that the customers deem most important and may vary from one customer to the next in terms of what they are and in importance (Engelbrecht, 2007; 15).

Schneider and White (2004; 30) explain service quality dimensions as the factors that customers consider in figuring out if a service was good or bad. Several authors agree on the definition but differ on what the service quality dimensions are. Gronroos (1990) cited in Palmer (2001; 208) explains that service quality comprises of two dimensions which are the **functional** quality which refers to how the service is provided and **technical** quality which refers to what type of service is being provided. The technical quality includes quantifiable aspects of a service like waiting time in queues whilst functional quality is more qualitative as it involves aspects like attitudes (Palmer, 2001; 208).

Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) cited in Kasper *et al*. (2006; 180) mention different service quality dimensions from those mentioned above by Palmer (2001; 208). The realised service quality dimensions that matter to customers include; **reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and tangibles** (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1985 cited in Kasper *et al*., 2006; 180). The service quality dimensions were later reduced to five overall factors which include: **reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles** (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 180).

Brady and Cronin (2001) cited in Suuroja (2003; 15) explain service quality dimensions differently and state that "service quality consists of three components which are **interaction, physical environment quality and outcome quality.** Interaction refers to the attitude, behavior and expertise of staff, whilst physical environment refers to presentation of the place and outcome quality refers to the tangibles of the service." Customers combine their evaluations of the three dimensions to form their perception of an organisation's service quality (Suuroja, 2003; 15).

Hernon and Altman (2010; 7) also introduce three other dimensions of service quality which include; **conformance, expectations and market perception.** These authors further explain that "conformance requires that standards for quality be set for many processes and functions. The intent is to reduce mistakes (shelving errors), streamline work flow (cut backlog), and establish required behaviours on the part of staff by always asking if

customers got what they desired. The downside of concentrating on conformance quality solely is that the focus is internal and may not match customers' expectations or preferences."

Chen and Ting (2002; 842) point out that researchers find it difficult to measure quality by a single dimension, showing that what composes quality is diversified. The different dimensions of service quality are worth noting as they allow service providers to understand how customers measure service quality thus allowing service providers to provide better service quality (Chen and Ting, 2002; 842). Despite the differences in the authors' theories on service quality dimensions, similarities exist in the explanations. The differences are mostly in the phrasing and the level of generalisations for instance Gronroos (1984) cited in Palmer (2001; 208) mentions two dimensions which are broader as compared to Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) cited in Kasper *et al*. (2006; 180) who mention five dimensions which are more specific. Customers' expectations and perceptions are also stated as the other dimensions of service quality by authors that include Hernon and Altman (2010; 7) and Palmer (2001; 227).

However, the use of more elaborative dimensions enables collection of more useful information for businesses and researchers (Suuroja, 2003; 15). A detailed discussion on service quality dimensions is provided below in section 2.4.1.1 to 2.4.1.7.

2.4.1.1 Customer Expectations

According to Boshoff and Du Plessis (2009; 40), "customer expectations are beliefs about the level of service that will be delivered by a service provider, and they are assumed to provide standards of reference against which the delivered service is compared." Palmer (2001; 227) and Hoffman and Bateson (2001; 313) explain that expectations serve as a benchmark against which present and future service encounters are compared. The authors further explain that "there are three levels of expectations which include; **predicted service** which refers to the level of service customers believe is likely to occur, **the desired service** which refers to the ideal expectation that reflects what the customers actually want and the

adequate service which is a minimum tolerable expectation and reflects the level of service the customer is willing to accept."

Hernon and Altman (2010; 7) suggest that expectations are part of the dimensions of service quality. They further explain that expectations are influenced by factors outside the control of management such as customers' prior experience, word of mouth and competitor behavior. Improvement of service quality if customer expectations are not being met can be done through training employees, improving technology or conformance standards (Hernon and Altman, 2010; 7). However, the authors interestingly point out that sometimes customers have unrealistic ideas about the service, in such cases; customers should be told why their expectations cannot be met.

Kasper *et al*. (2006; 185) and Balachandran (2004; 68) support Hernon and Altman (2010; 7) on the factors that influence expectations that customers' expectations are influenced by individual or environmental drivers. According to Balachandran (2004; 68), " individual drivers include personal beliefs, norms, values and wishes that customers might have whilst environmental drivers include explicit service promises from the organisation like advertisements, leaflets and personal selling and implicit service promises like appearance of offices, impression of sales staff and word of mouth."

However, authors such as Cook (2002; 14) and Brink and Berndt (2008; 55) emphasise that although an organisation's marketing message may influence customers' expectations, the organisation's own description of the quality of its services remains only the organisation's assumption of the service quality standards it possesses. Customers will always evaluate quality for themselves from their own experience (Cook, 2002; 14). Thus, it is important for organisations to understand customers' definitions of good service quality which means that the organisation has to understand its customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality (Cook, 2002; 14).

2.4.1.2 Customer Perceptions

According to Boshoff and Du Plessis (2009; 40), "perceptions is the processes by which individuals select, organise and interpret information from the environment." Hernon and Altman (2010; 8) describe customer perceptions as a dimension of service quality and explain that customers evaluate the organisation's performance and reputation in comparison to the competition's performance and reputation. Good service quality is associated with an organisation that has a better reputation than the competition and if the organisation is better than the competition then it is perceived to have good service quality (Hernon and Altman, 2010; 8).

However, various authors that include Balachandran (2004; 69), Cook (2002; 14) and Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 54) explain customer perceptions of service quality broadly and as not limited to comparisons with the competition as Hernon and Altman (2010; 8) suggest. The perception of the service is the customer's experience and observation of the actual service rendered (Balachandran, 2004; 69). Service Quality is satisfactory to customers only if the customers' expectations are exceeded (Balachandran, 2004; 69).

Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 54) agree with Cook (2002; 14) that customer perceptions are influenced by customer expectations of service and service standards. Expected services are the services the provider should offer in order to provide adequate services while service standards refer to the policies and performances of service procedures that service providers establish and are deemed comparable to the organisation's image and appropriate target market (Kandampully *et al.*, 2001; 54). These authors however, point out that service standards are only as good as the resultant performance. Setting high standards through policies and procedures that are not met by the service organisation diminishes the perceived service standards and image of the organization (Kandampully *et al.*, 2001; 54). Therefore, it is imperative for service organisations to deliver services that meet the set standards (Cook, 2002; 14).

Dean (2008; para 6) also supports the importance of understanding customer expectations and perceptions and reiterates the general perceptions of some adult learners in South Africa on the relevance of the skills they were acquiring. According to Dean (2008; para 6), "the drop-out rate of adult learners is high in South Africa as adult learners feel that literacy is not enough, but they would rather learn skills that can help them on how to start their own businesses or projects and earn money." The author further stresses that it is important for service organisations to know the perceptions of customers so that they can assess their service processes and work towards meeting expectations and improved customer perceptions. Student perceptions are a crucial component to successful program assessment (Duke,2002; 205).

Hamer (2006; 222) draws attention to the relationship between customer perceptions of previous service delivery and future customer expectations of service quality and explain that the quality perceptions held by consumers after any given service delivery (which is revised quality) result from revising the quality perceptions consumers held prior to a given service delivery (which is initial quality) (Hamer, 2006; 222). Initial quality is determined by past experience customers with a service provider, word-of-mouth, advertisements and tangible cues (Hamer, 2006; 222). Consumers use these same information sources to construct expectations of service providers (Hamer, 2006; 222).

Hamer (2006; 222) therefore, suggests that it is logical to conclude that expectations are equivalent to initial perceived service quality, high expectations of a service provider would indicate high prior perceptions of quality of the service provider. In other words, expectations are antecedents of service quality perceptions, and after service delivery the perceived service quality leads to a revision of consumers' expectations (Hamer, 2006; 222). This view of the relationship between expectations and initial perceived service quality is similar to Cronin and Taylor's (1992) conclusion that expectations and perceived quality are equivalent in the absence of perceived performance (Hamer, 2006; 222). Chen and Ting (2002; 842) support Hamer (2006; 22) and summarised the issue as follows: "customers' expectations will influence perceptions and perceptions will change the original expectations thus, creating an endless cycle."

Hamer (2006; 228) suggests that encouraging customers to have low expectations lowers the starting point for customers' evaluations of the service. If customers expect terrible service they will perceive (pre-encounter) the service firm as a relatively low quality service provider. Service providers could exceed customers' expectations and still be perceived as low quality providers of the service. On the other hand, if consumers expect great service (Hamer, 2006; 228).

2.4.1.3 Reliability

According to Kandampully *et al.* (2001; 54) and Kasper *et al.* (2006; 180), "through the years researchers have been on a quest to identify the most significant components of service quality and Parasuraman Zeithaml and Berry (PZB) *et al.*, (1988, 1994a) cited in Kasper *et al.* (2006; 180) are among the most recognised researchers in the area of service quality and listed five service quality dimensions which include: **reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles**."

Reliability reflects the service provider's ability to perform services dependably, completely and accurately Kasper *et al.* (2006; 180). Reliability refers to delivering services as promised, dependability in handling customers' service problems, performing services right the first time, providing services at the promised time and keeping customers informed about when services will be performed (KMAfrica, 2009; para 6).

Reliability includes doing things right the first time which is one of the most important service quality components for customers (Berry and Parasuraman cited in Kandampully *et al.*, 2001; 54). Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) suggest that reliability is considered the most important dimension as it is related to the care given to customers. Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99) agree with Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) and emphasise that it is important for service providers to take note of the promise they make to customers and therefore the expectations they create.

According to Robertson (2005; para 4), "under-promise and over-perform is a reliability slogan or rule that service providers should implement, as it provides guidelines that

reminds the organisations to set expectations with their customers at a reasonable level, and at a level which the organisation can consistently exceed their customers' expectations." If the organisation has a task to research a problem for a customer that can be completed in two hours, the organisation has to be disciplined and inform the customer that they will call back the customer in four hours (Robertson, 2005; para 4). The under-promising concept helps the organisation to account for those unexpected emergencies that might come up, yet still meet their customer's expectations (Robertson, 2005; para 4).

Bowie and Buttle (2004; 249) also explain that when companies make promises to the customers pre-encounter, the customers expect the company's product, service quality and price to match the promise. Companies that match their promise, are considered to be reliable by the customer (Bowie and Buttle, 2004; 249).

2.4.1.4 Responsiveness

According to Kasper (2006; 180), "responsiveness represents the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service." KMAfrica (2009; para 2) clearly points out that responsiveness refers to prompt service to customers, willingness to help customers, readiness to respond to customers' requests, and going out of the way to make customers happy.

Lamb *et al.* (2008; 353) and Bennekan (2002; 71) provide a more informative definition of responsiveness and state that responsiveness is the willingness and speed with which service personnel can complete the business at hand. Examples of responsiveness include calling the customer back quickly, mailing a transaction slip immediately or immediately attending to a query (Lamb *et al.*, 2008; 353). According to Bennekan (2002; 71), " the ultimate in responsiveness is offering service 24 hours a day, seven days a week and having on-line facilities that customers can access at all times." All the authors above further explain that responsiveness is difficult to maintain due to consideration of various factors that include temporary demand fluctuations for a specific service and limited human resources. In such cases of demand fluctuations a system should be considered that allows customers to receive attention as soon as requests are made (Bennekan, 2002; 71).

The financial success of an organisation in competitive markets characterised by variable demand is a result of the effective ability to match supply and demand. However, it is imperative that the cost of the system should be lower than that of competitors or at a higher standard of service delivery or both (Nwankwo and Aiyeku, 2002; 99). Verma (2008; 326) also explains that "companies have to understand the demand patterns for their services and apply interventions that include 'synchro-marketing' which refers to supply modification and demand modification through demand disaggregation in accordance with the company's capacity constraint." The author further explains that when demand patterns are predictable, for instance the demand for tutorial classes will be high towards and during exam months, it is wiser to modify supply through employing part-time staff and even use customers as resources by encouraging group discussions and tutorials to avoid short falls.

2.4.1.5 Assurance

Assurance can be defined as the service provider's knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the organisation's employees to reflect their credibility and reliability in their service provision (Gilmore, 2003; 38). KMAfrica (2009; para 3) provide a precise definition for assurance and state that assurance means employees who instill confidence in customers, making customers feel safe in their transactions, employees who are consistently courteous and employees who have the knowledge to answer customer questions.

Bennekan (2002; 71) explains assurance in three qualities which include; **courtesy** which refers to the politeness of the customer services agent**, competence** which refers technological knowledge of customer service agent and **credibility** which refers to the belief that the agent is being forthright. Skilled employees who treat customers with respect and show that they know their job and products make customers feel that they can trust the firm (Lamb *et al.*, 2008; 353). Informing customers in advance of the processes involved in order to perform service tasks is a good assurance technique (Robertson, 2005; para 12). This technique is called headlining, in the sense that a newspaper article's headline tells the reader what they are going to read before they read it (Robertson, 2005; para 12).

Robertson (2005; para 13) further explains assurance and suggests examples of improving on assurance that service providers should implement. It is very frustrating for a customer to deal with a service provider who does not tell the customer what the consultant is doing (Robertson, 2005; para 13). The silence that ensues confuses the customer and does not assure the customer of the service provider's competence. Headlining is the mark of a professional service provider as it is easy and quick to do, and pays off handsomely in satisfied customers (Robertson, 2005; para 13). The communication gives the customer the assurance that the services consultant is working on the customer's behalf (Robertson, 2005; para 13).

2.4.1.6 Tangibles

The physical facilities, equipment, communication materials and appearance of the employees are referred to as the tangibles (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 180 and Parsa and Kwansa, 2002; 83). Berry and Parasuraman (1991; 16) cited in Kandampully *et al*. (2001; 54) agree with the definition of tangibles but point out that although tangibles are usually rated the least important of the five service quality dimensions they should still be considered as a core service component. Oldfield and Baron (2000; 85) emphasise the importance of tangibles and point out that students spend much of their time in contact with the physical elements of their educational experience (in lecture theatres, libraries and computer laboratories) therefore, it is likely that they would be influenced by the physical facilities. Students who spend hours every day in a school are likely to have attitudes toward the school system that are strongly influenced by the physical facilities (tangibles).

Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99) who cite Kotler *et al*. (1996; 599) explain that it is important for organisations to always consider tangibles as tangibles reflect the service quality experienced by the customers. KMAfrica (2009; para 4) provides a more informative definition of tangibles and explain that "tangibles refer to modern equipment, employees who are neat and have a professional appearance, visually appealing materials associated with the service, convenient business hours and visually appealing facilities, uniforms and memory devices."

The appropriate dress-code and the introduction of staff uniforms are attempts to improve tangibility that have been successful in many service industry companies (Lamb *et al.*, 2008; 353). Grewal and Levy (2010; 371) provide an example of tangibles in education institutions and state the education institutions promote the quality of their services by touting their famous faculty and alumni as well as their accreditations. Education institutions often use images of happy students going on to lucrative careers of their own on the prospectuses and posters (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 371). The effective arrangement of physical evidence including the campus atmosphere, access to public transport and parking availability is also pointed out as indicative of a desirable institution of higher education as prospective students often look at the physical evidence that surrounds the service in forming their evaluation of the service (Gbadamosi and de Jager, 2008; 376).

2.4.1.7 Empathy

Empathy refers to the caring individualised attention the organisation provides to its customers (Williams and Buswell, 2003; 24: Parsa and Kwansa, 2002; 83). KMAfrica (2009; para 5) define empathy precisely and state that empathy refers to giving customers personal attention, employees who work with customers in a caring manner, having the customer's best interest and employees who understand and put the needs of their customers first. Empathy is a remedy for calming an emotional person (KMAfrica, 2009; para 5). According to Robertson (2005; para 17), " in order to get a customer out of the grip of the emotional brain and pass the power over to the analytical brain takes one of three things that include: the intervention of a skilled listener or customer service professional, a concerted effort on the part of the emotional person and or the passing of time." It is important for service employees to understand how to handle emotional, upset or angry customers, empathy simply acknowledges the emotion that the customer feels and it helps in absorbing the emotion (Robertson, 2005; para 17).

Bennekan (2002; 71) further explains that empathy is divided into two aspects which are communication skills and understanding the customer. Communication skills refer to the ability to communicate with the customer and understanding the customer refers to the

customer services agent's willingness to get to know the customer's environment (Lamb *et al.*, 2008; 353). Organisations whose employees recognise customers, call them by name and learn their customers' specific requirements score highly on empathy (Bennekan, 2002; 71). Firms can continuously ensure empathy through providing continuous and refresher customer care training to their employees (Lamb *et al.*, 2008; 353).

2.5 The GAPS model

Various authors that include; Lamb *et al.* (2008; 353), Hernon and Whitman (2001; 15) and Verma (2008; 292) suggest that service quality is better defined in terms of gap analysis or the gaps between customers' expectations in general and the perceptions relating to the service. Grewal and Levy (2010; 371), Kasper *et al.* (2004; 193) and Palmer (2001; 225) agree and also suggest that the service quality GAPS model clearly explains the issue of service quality. The GAPS model is designed to highlight those areas where customers believe they are getting less or poorer services than they should. The GAPS model is designed to encourage the systematic examination of all aspects of the service delivery process and prescribe the steps needed to develop an optimal service strategy (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 371). Gilmore (2003; 40) agrees that the gaps on the GAPS model indicate the mismatch between expectations and perceptions of performance in services. The overall performance gap is made up of five gaps that contribute to the perception of service delivery and the gaps include;

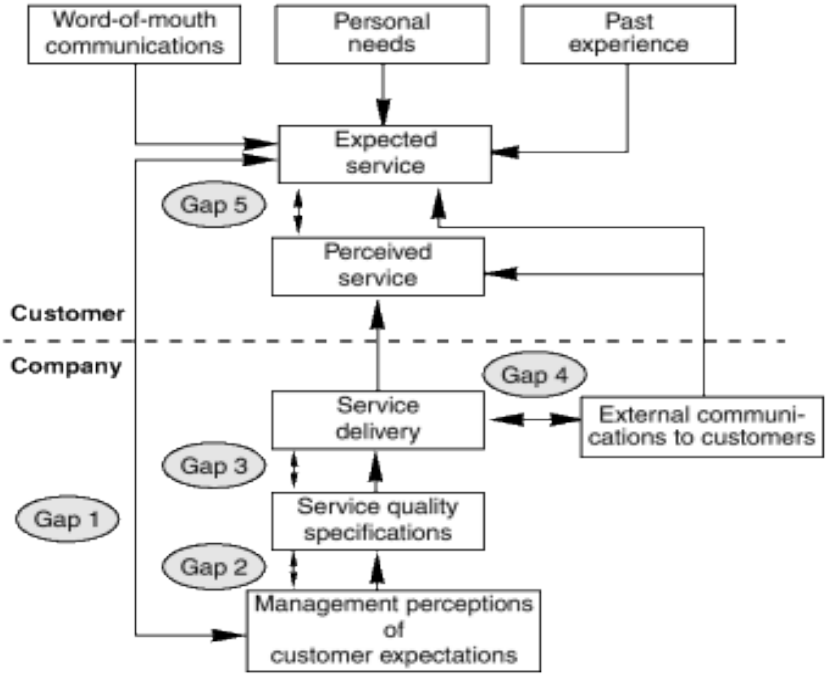
- Gap 1 - any differences between management perceptions and customer expectations
- Gap 2 - any discrepancies between management perceptions and the service specifications enacted
- Gap 3 - differences between service quality specifications and service delivery
- Gap 4 - variations between service delivery and external communications to customers

- Gap 5 - the overall difference between management perceptions of customer expectations and customers expected service gap.

(Gilmore, 2003; 40)

The gaps model is illustrated diagrammatically in fig 2.1

Figure 2.1: The Service Quality Gaps Model



E-TQM Quality digest (2010; para 16)

The GAPS model provides insights and propositions regarding customers' perceptions of service quality (Nguyen, 2005; para 7). The model helps predict, generate and identify key factors that cause the gap to be unfavourable to the service organisation in meeting customers' expectations (Verma, 2008; 292).

2.5.1 Gap 1- The knowledge gap

Gap 1 is also referred to as the knowledge gap (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 37: Gilmore, 2003; 40 and Palmer, 2001; 225). Grewal and Levy (2010; 373) and Gilmore (2003; 40) further explain that the knowledge gap reflects the difference between customers' expectations and the organisation's perceptions of those customer expectations. The authors point out that organisations can close the knowledge gap by matching customers' expectations with actual services through research.

Kasper *et al.* (2006; 193) agree with Grewal and Levy (2010; 373) and Gilmore (2003; 40) on the causes of gaps but provide a more detailed explanation on how the knowledge gap is created in service organisations. Kasper *et al.* (2006; 193) point out that the lack of investment in marketing research by management leads to organisations assuming what customers expect which is very dangerous in an ever-changing environment (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 193). Managers could be spending very little time gaining first-hand knowledge of their customers and may have very little contact, with the customers to obtain information on the customers' experiences (Boshoff and DuPlessis, 2009; 49). The number of layers of management between top management and customer service consultants might be too many such that by the time information gets to top management it will be less objective (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 193). Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 49) agree with Kasper *et al.* (2006; 193) and also add that lack of communication from front-line employees and inadequate attention to service quality recovery are some of the causes of the knowledge gap.

Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 49) suggests the establishing of learning systems that capture, organise and disseminate service quality information to support decision making in order to close the knowledge gap. The systems that could be used include; customer surveys, focus-group interviews and service reviews (Boshoff and DuPlessis, 2009; 49).

2.5.2 Gap 2-The standards gap

The standards gap pertains to the differences between the organisation's perceptions of customers' expectations and the service standards it sets (Grewal and Levy 2010; 373). The gap is caused by some reasons that include; **lack of management commitment to service quality, the lack implementation of clear guidelines and standards of service quality in the organization** (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 193). The authors further explain that the degree to which the service can be appropriately standardised is imperative to know. Some services do not standardise well (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 193). John (2003; 43) provides further explanations on the issue of some services that do not standardise well for instance customers do not embrace the idea of replacing humans with machines as performance of some machines may not be adequate like the ATM machine can run out of money and disconnection can occur with on-line and new media in education. On-line education for instance, lacks the human dimension of group interaction and the student-teacher or tutor relationship (John, 2003; 43).

In order to succeed, the services manager has to make decisions based on questions that include; what aspects can be standardised, what needs to be customised in the customer interactions, and what do the customers expect the frontline staff to do (John, 2003; 43). The understanding of customers' expectations will assist the services manager in setting standards that will ensure the best possible service delivery to the customer (John, 2003; 43).

Palmer (2001; 225) adds that the perception of feasibility has to be understood by service providers, there are times when the customers' expectations are not achievable. Proper communication with the customer is important to ensure that the customer understands the company's position regarding the service delivery process. However, organisations should always attempt to close the standards gap by meeting appropriate service standards and measuring service performance regularly (Palmer, 2001; 225).

2.5.3 Gap 3 -The delivery gap

The delivery gap is the difference between the organisation's service standards and the actual service it provides to customers (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel's, 2009; 354). The authors further explain that poorly trained and poorly motivated employees cause the delivery gap. Kasper *et al.* (2006; 193) provides a list of the reasons that might lead to the delivery gap below;

- Inadequate team work through lack of cooperation with colleagues and managers.
- The employee job fit lack refers to the employee's inability to perform the service adequately.
- The technology job fit lack refers to the appropriateness and adequacy of the tools or technology used.
- Perceived control refers to the extent employees feel that they are in control of their jobs and have the necessary flexibility to serve their job.
- Supervisory control refers to the output control systems often inappropriate for measuring employee performance.
- Role conflict refers to conflicting tasks like cross sell services to customers while the time to serve a customer is limited.
- Role ambiguity refers to uncertainty about what the manager expects from the employees with regard to their job and efforts and how to satisfy those expectations.

(Kasper *et al.*, 2006; 193)

In order to close the delivery gap Lamb *et al*. (2009; 354) suggest that management needs to ensure that employees have the skills and proper tools to perform their work. Training has to be management's priority so that employees know what management expects. Encouraging teamwork and hiring employees with the proper attitude also aids in closing the delivery gap. Grewal and Levy (2010; 373) agree with Lamb *et al*. (2009; 354) that organisations have to exceed customer expectations in order to close the delivery gap.

Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 50) point out that service organisations should be aware that even when guidelines exist for the performance of services and the appropriate treatment of customers, high quality service is not guaranteed. Even when standards accurately reflect customers expectations, if the organisation fails to provide support for employees and does not facilitate, encourage and require the employees' achievement the standards will not be maintained (Boshoff and DuPlessis, 2009; 50). Customer-based service must be supported by appropriate resources (that include people, systems and technology) and the implementation must be monitored to be effective (Boshoff and DuPlessis, 2009; 50). The authors further explain that employee performance in terms of the service standards of the organisation should be measured and front-line employees in should be rewarded on the basis of performance.

2.5.4 Gap 4 - The communication gap

The communication gap refers to the difference between the actual service provided to customers and the service that the organisation's promotion program promises (Palmer, 2001; 225 and Grewal and Levy, 2010; 376). Allen (2001; 58) explains the communication gap (gap 4) is mainly due to inadequate communication between organisational functions, sites and departments. The lack of consistent service from site to site contributes to the communication gap (Palmer, 2001; 225). If advertising, marketing and sales literature promises more than what can be delivered the communication gap also widens and can cause extensive damage to the organisation's reputation (Allen, 2001; 58). Wrong communications also causes conflict and dissatisfaction within the organisation and makes the job of front-line employees impossible which generates service quality problems and negatively affects employee attitudes and retention (Allen, 2001; 58).

In order to close the communication gap Allen (2001; 58) suggests that customer service employees need to be involved in decision making. Service managers should ensure that customer service employees are at least kept fully informed of marketingstrategy, information and any changes that are made (Allen, 2001; 58). Liaison between sales policy makers and customer service departments is essential as is consistency of service across

sites (Allen, 2001; 58). Palmer (2001; 255) also explains that organisations have to be more realistic about the services they can provide and at the same time manage customer expectations effectively in order to close the communication gap. Kasper *et al*. (2006; 196) agrees with Palmer (2001; 225) on closing of the communication gap and emphasise that it is imperative for employees to know and understand the image of the company that is to be portrayed in advertising campaigns before it is communicated to the customers. Allen (2001; 58) also recommends that service organisations must provide external communication and promises that the rest of the company can deliver.

2.5.5 Gap 5- The overall performance gap

Gap 5 is the overall performance gap as it measures the difference between the organisation's perceptions of customer expectations and customer's expected service (Gilmore, 2003; 43). Gap 5 is the difference between the service a customer expects, perhaps based on past experience, word of mouth communications or promises made by the company and the delivered service as perceived by the individual customer (Kossman, 2006; 21).

Boshoff and DuPlessiss (2009; 48) explain that the GAPS model is a good measurement tool of service quality. During the process of closing the service gap, service organisations might want to focus on knowing what customers expect, how to select the right service designs and standards, how to deliver service standards and how to match performance promises (Boshoff and DuPlessiss, 2009; 48). The GAPS model assists managers in all these areas thus; the model is beyond measurement but also a managerial tool (Kossman, 2006; 21).

2.6 Service Quality Recovery

Despite an organisation's best efforts, sometimes service providers fail to meet customer expectations thus, in such cases effective service quality recovery is essential (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 387). There is no service that is perfect all of the time for instance in higher education, exam questions are sometimes ambiguous, exam answers are sometimes misgraded and grades can be misreported (Naylor and Frank, 2000 cited in Iyer and Muncy, 2008; 21). Students can be given improper information and be misadvised as guest speakers can be brought in who might misinform students (Iyer and Muncy, 2008; 21). As teaching is carried out, mistakes will invariably occur, in the service industry, these errors are often called service failures, and how a firm responds to them to restore the relationship is called service recovery (Grewal and Levy, 2010; 387).

Service recovery entails listening to the customer, providing a fair solution and resolving customer queries urgently Grewal and Levy (2010; 387). One area where the application of marketing concepts to higher education has great promise is in the area of service failures and recovery (Desai, Damewood, and Jones, 2001; 136).

According to studies carried out by Magnini, Ford, Markowski and Honeycutt (2007; 221), "service failure recovery offers a unique opportunity to build customer satisfaction, the training of employees in this area of service recovery should be of reasonable importance, for instance, service firms could train their employees in the Listen, Empathise, Apologise, React and Notify (LEARN) process which could serve as a useful service recovery process because of the listening and empathising stages." Magnini *et al*. (2007; 221) further explain that post-failure satisfaction is more likely to increase if the customer perceives the service recovery effort as a genuine and sincere corrective action as opposed to a public relations effort only.

If managed correctly the failure redress procedures of a service firm can serve as a powerful tool in increasing customer loyalty (Magnini *et al*., 2007; 221). If recovery procedures are well-managed to the extent that the competition cannot easily duplicate

them, then it can be argued that a firm's failure recovery constitutes a core competency (Andreassen, 2001; 40 cited in Iyer and Muncy, 2008; 21). Satisfaction with service recovery sharply increases a customer's willingness to recommend the firm and significantly improves the customer's perception of overall service quality (Magnini *et al*., 2007; 221).

Kotler and Armstrong (2010;270) agree with all of the above authors and point out that good service recovery can turn angry customers into loyal ones, therefore companies should take steps to provide good service every time and also recover from service mistakes when they do occur.

2.7 Critiques of Service Quality

Service Quality as a construct has various critiques due to its complexity. Authors such as Schneider and White (2004; 29) and Hernon and Altman (2010; 5) agree that service quality is a complex construct to define and that there is still a lot of debate and change surrounding many of its concepts. Some of the arguments against service quality are discussed below.

2.7.1 The nature of Service Quality

Palmer (2001; 208) brings up an argument against the importance of service quality and states that service quality is highly an abstract construct. Consumers subsequently judge service quality as the extent to which perceived service delivery matches up to these initial expectations (Palmer, 2001; 208). In this way a service that is perceived as being of a mediocre standard maybe considered as of high quality when compared against low expectations (Cronin and Taylor, 1991 cited in Suuroja, 2003; 15). Service Quality is an attitude based conceptualisation and not an objective and specific evaluation (Palmer, 2001; 208).

2.7.2 The formation of Service Quality Conceptualisation

The use and adequacy of service quality dimensions is still debatable as different authors like Cronin and Brady (2001), Gronroos (1984) and Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) all cited in Gilmore (2003; 43) list and explain different service quality dimensions differently. According to Laws (2005; 89), "there are still arguments on the adequacy of the five service dimensions by Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) cited in Gilmore (2003; 43) regardless of the dimensions being the widely used."

Despite the criticism several authors that include; Grewal and Levy (2010; 387), Kotler and Armstrong (2010; 270), Kumar *et al.* (2009; 217), Kasper *et al*. (2006; 177) and Cook (2002; 6) state that "service quality is an important issue in business and studies are continuously being done to further validate and support previous findings that good service quality can be a source of competitive advantage, customer retention, improved financial performance and even contributes to employee satisfaction."

2.8 Measurement of Service Quality

Several models have been developed to evaluate service quality (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 182 and Laws, 2004; 89). Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 48) mention that service quality can be measured using the Importance Performance Approach (IPA) model. The IPA model compares the performance of a service with the importance of these elements to the customer (Laws, 2004; 89). The elements which are used to define measurement scales have to be derived through exploratory research. Kasper *et al*. (2006; 182) add that some of the models that can be used to evaluate service quality include; the Disconfirmation model, the Nordic Service Quality model and the Six Sigma model. The Disconfirmation model recognises that individuals approach events or interactions with the service providers with some expectation of what will occur (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 182).

The Nordic service quality model is a model that describes the different types of service quality attributes such as functional and technical quality (Laws, 2004; 89). The Six Sigma

model focuses on customer satisfaction rather than quality (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 182). Six sigma relates to the elimination of defects with an aim to achieve six sigma deviation from the mean which represents 3.4 defects per million (Kasper *et al.*, 2006; 182).

The SERVQUAL is a model that defines quality as the difference between customers' expectations and perceptions of the service delivered (Kasper *et al*., 2006; 182). Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 48) and Laws (2004; 89) explain that the SERVQUAL instrument is arguably the best-known instrument to measure service quality as it measures both customers' expectations and customers' assessment of the performance of the service provider.

2.8.1 SERVQUAL as a measuring instrument of Service Quality

SERVQUAL is an instrument for measuring service quality which was originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985 (Palmer, 2001; 210). The authors Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) cited in Gilmore (2003; 43) explain that SERVQUAL comprises of two sets of 22 questions and it measures both expectations and customer perceptions of the service encounter. Customers are asked to rate service quality dimensions on a Likert scale which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree Gilmore (2003; 43). The scale serves as a suitable generic measure of service quality, transcending specific functions, companies and industries (Gilmore, 2003; 43). SERVQUAL ratings are obtained from the scale when consumers compare their service expectations with actual service performance on distinct service dimensions. The distinct service dimensions include; **reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles** (Palmer, 2001; 210).

The SERVQUAL questionnaire can be modified to reflect the specific organisation or industry to be studied (Scheneider and White, 2004; 56). The layout of the SERVQUAL questionnaire whereby customers are asked to answer 22 questions on perceptions and then another 22 questions on expectations is the only feasible way of collecting information on both expectations and perceptions (Scheneider and White, 2004; 56).

Landrum *et al*. (2009; 18) agree that the SERVQUAL instrument is an appropriate measure of service quality and explain that accurate and reliable instruments that assess service quality are of interest to companies whose revenues come in whole or partly from service delivery. Currently the most popular and ubiquitous service quality instrument is SERVQUAL (Landrum *et al*., 2009; 18). The SERVQUAL model is based on the proposition that service quality can be measured as the gap between the service that customers expect and the performance they perceive to have received (Scheneider and White, 2004; 56). Respondents rate their expectations of the service from an excellent organisation, and then rate the performance they perceive they received from a specific organisation. Service quality is calculated as the difference in the two scores where better service quality results in a smaller gap (Landrum *et al*., 2009; 18).

Various authors that include; Laws (2004; 89), Antony and Preece (2002; 24), Palmer (2001; 222) and Weinstein and Johnson (1999; 71) support the use of the SERVQUAL instrument that SERVQUAL is one of the most used tools for measuring service quality as it serves as an effective diagnostic tool for uncovering broad areas of an organisational's service quality shortfalls and strengths which can then be corrected. SERVQUAL results can be used to monitor service quality over time and to compare performance with that of competitors or a particular service industry which makes it an important measuring instrument (Verma, 2008; 295).

2.8.2 Limitations of SERVQUAL

Several authors that include Kasper *et al*. (2006; 198), Schneider and White (2004; 39), Hernon and Whitman (2001; 356) and Palmer (2001; 227) have indicated some limitations of the SERVQUAL model which include the following;

- The question of whether it is important to measure expectations at all is an argument that has been brought up against the SERVQUAL model. Customer expectations are ambiguous thus, they are difficult to define and measure (Carman 1990 cited in Antony and Preece, 2002; 22).

- The adequacy of the service quality dimensions in measuring service quality is arguable (Antony and Preece, 2002; 24). The five dimensions of SERVQUAL, originally developed by Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) cited in Gilmore (2003; 48) may not be applicable universally as the number of dimensions comprising SERVQUAL may differ from context to context (Kumar *et al*, 2009; 212). It can also be argued that SERVQUAL is applicable to contexts that are close to its original setting like appliance repairs and retail banking (Robinson, 1999 cited in Laws, 2004; 89).

- The length of the SERVQUAL questionnaire is an area of concern as customers have to answer 44 questions which might result in rushed responses and some of the questions being skipped (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001; 339).

However, despite the limitations of SERVQUAL, several authors that include; Grewal and Levy (2010; 387), Kasper *et al*. (2006; 198) and Palmer (2001; 227) agree that the SERVQUAL instrument remains an effective diagnostic tool for measuring service quality and is continuously being revised and improved by its originators.

2.9 Conclusion

An in-depth discussion on the concept of service quality has been provided in this chapter. The characteristics of services and various definitions of service quality are provided in the chapter. The measurement of service quality and the use of SERVQUAL as a measuring instrument of service quality are issues discussed in detail. The following chapter, chapter 3 is a contextual chapter that discusses the concept of service quality in the context of education services.

Chapter 3

Service Quality in Higher and Further Education

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the concept of service quality in higher and further education. A discussion of Service Quality in South African education institutions and the measurement Service Quality is also included in the chapter.

3.2 Marketisation and Service Quality in Higher Education

The last two decades have seen an increased focus on the 'marketisation' of higher and further educational institutions (Newman and Jahdi, 2009; 1; Gallifa and Batalle 2010; 157). Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 115) interestingly point out that higher education institutions have found themselves using terms that was mainly found in business disciplines, such as value-added and competitive advantage due to the adoption of customer-centric approaches by the education institutions. The adoption of the marketing concept referred to as 'marketisation' by organisations (including higher education institutions) leads to a more customer-focused approach whereby organisations strive to find out what customers need and continuously look for ways of meeting the needs better than all the competitors (Clarke, 2000; 18).

Various authors attempt to explain why marketisation is being adopted by higher education institutions. Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 2) state that the higher education sector has been changing rapidly. The changes have been due to the dynamic national, regional andglobal developments. Reduced government subsidies in many countries and increased global competition are some of the main reasons which have led to the 'marketisation' of higher education institutions (Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2008; 2). Joseph (1997; 15) also attempts to explain the reasons for the changes in the education environment and explains that different reasons have been given to explain educational changes, citing Gordon (1992) who explains that the main themes or explanations used by various nations involved in this process are the issues of accountability, efficiency, managerialism, and the arrival of

monetarist economic policies which advocate the commodification of education. Education institutions have to be transparent in their activities and good management is required since the education sector if operated efficiently can contribute to the nation's economy like any other service industry (Joseph, 1997; 15). Saarinen (2010; 55) explains the reasons for marketisation differently and states that "the quality revolution in the academic community was facilitated by national policy makers like the government rather than the academic community itself." The academic community only reacted to the revolution in an attempt to survive and understand quality in the academic context (Saarinen, 2010; 55).

Authors such as Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 115), Oliviera (2009; 11) and Walker (2009; 491) agree on the main reasons that have led to the marketisation of education institutions, that higher education institutions were and are still facing pressure to improve value in their activities as the rising tuition costs, globalisation and the development of the newer generation students who are considering themselves more and more as customers are dominant. Therefore, customer-centric approaches are becoming more recognisable to education institutions in relation to attracting customers (Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; 115).

The 'marketisation' of most education institutions has led to the institutions operating like businesses from the private sector and regarding themselves as brands who compete for customers (Walker, 2009; 491 and Newman and Jahdi, 2009; 1). As more customer-focused approaches are being adopted and marketing of the institutions has become intense, competition levels have risen within the industry as customers are now faced with a wider range of choices (Cook, 2002; 14). Clarke (2000; 18) explains that the marketisation of education institutions has led to a situation whereby the institutions are continuously striving to meet the needs of the customers better than their competitors and differentiate their institutions in order to attract more customers and excel. Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 116) agree with Cook (2002; 14) and Clarke (2000; 18) and point out that the increased competition that has emerged within higher education mirrors the competition found within the service sector in general, which has made service quality a key differentiating factor for the education institutions.

Rao (2007; 22) and Iyer and Muncy (2008; 21) acknowledge that some educationalists disregard the concepts of considering students as customers and state that some educationalists are against the adoption of commercial concepts that include referring to students as customers. Some of the educationalists prefer the use of the terms pupil or learner to customer (Rao, 2007; 22). Brown and Oplatka (2006; 319) also note that opponents of the introduction of market forces in education believe that the business world morally contradicts the values of education; therefore educationalists ought to oppose any form of marketing at their institutions. However, Desai, Damewood, and Jones (2001; 136) cited in Iyer and Muncy (2008; 21) argued that those who work in higher education are in a service business. Teaching in a higher educational setting is similar to service delivery in the business sector. Students, as consumers of professorial output, have needs and wants, which, if better understood, should result in an improved educational experience (Iyer and Muncy, 2008; 21).

3.2.1 The importance of Service Quality in Higher and Further Education

Increased competition in the educational environment has contributed to the growing importance of service quality at higher education institutions (Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2008; 2). Higher education institutions are facing pressure to improve value in their activities as the competition is rising, thus education institutions are adopting customer-centric approaches which include good service quality (Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; 115; Walker, 2009; 491 and Oliviera, 2009; 11).

Despite the different explanations from authors on the reasons for the increasing presence of service quality in academic institutions, the common factor is that service quality has become an important aspect in education institutions. Cheung and Tsui (2010; 170) mention that quality assurance in higher education has become a prominent issue globally and many initiatives that include the UNESCO (2009) World Conference on Higher Education featured the issue of quality assurance. There is an increasing emphasis on incorporating key concepts such as; value for money, fitness for purpose, professionalism

and internationalisation of values in the education institutions in order to deliver quality service (Cheung and Tsui, 2010; 170) .

Sahney, Banwet and Karunes (2004; 143) also acknowledge the impact of the global transition on the education sector in India where they carried out studies on service quality. The authors explain that education is becoming more of a product with students as customers. Students now demand a quality experience and the resultant behaviours are exhibited in terms of an attitude towards consumption behavior (Sahney *et al*., 2004; 143). The observations have led researchers and analysts to regard quality as the single most important factor for long term success and survival for education institutions (Sahney *et al*., 2004; 143).

Recognition of the transition of the education sector in South Africa is also noted by Ivy (2008) cited in De Jager and Gbadamosi (2009; 256) who explain that South African universities like universities in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia (that have similar educational systems to South Africa), are experiencing a decline in government subsidies and an increase in student fees which has resulted in a higher need for strategies to survive for the institutions.

Ignorance of the competitive nature of attracting students, alongside the importance of measuring the service quality, will ultimately be at the disadvantage of the institution (Angell, Heffernan and Megicks, 2008; 237). It is time for educational institutions to face the fact that they are in a competitive battle for students, and the students are customer (Duckworth, 1994; 2 cited in Angell *et al*., 2008; 237).

Pratasavitskayaa and Stensakera (2010; 43) point out the importance of understanding quality in the higher education context and explain the concept of quality in higher education, with reference to the quality development model. The authors state that balancing improvement and accountability is a central theme in the quality development model that was proposed by (Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001; 11). According to the quality development model a quality system is a system that not only performs a regulatory

function but one that functions to improve the quality of the educational experience and one that provides a developmental function as well (Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001; 11). The dilemma causes some tension in higher education institutions between offices responsible for quality assurance and educational development. Thus, the important issue is then to create links between curriculum development and quality assurance by creating a collegial environment where quality is assured during the development of the curriculum (Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001; 11). Moreover, it can also improve students' learning development. The linkage between learning development, academic development and quality development brings the expertise of each area into the educational process (Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001; 11).

Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002; 219) cited in Pratasavitskayaa and Stensakera (2010; 46) also point out that the improvement of a student's learning experience could be achieved if it is based on critical dialogue between the learners and teachers about the nature and style of their learning, and also between the teachers about the teaching and learning process, as well as on communication with the external partners. The senior management has to encourage and ensure the transformative process which is possible through senior management commitment, the continuous improvement culture and the team interaction (Pratasavitskayaa and Stensakera, 2010; 46).

Dobrzański and Roszak (2007; 224) also provide an explanation of quality in the education services industry and state that education is a process that involves providing a service in an environment which a lot of subjects participate. The participants of the education process include; students, teachers, employers, government and the community (Dobrzański and Roszak, 2007; 224). The authors further explain that considering the quality of education as a service, one can describe it as follows: there is a close association between a provided service and a person who provides it, the lecturer has proprietary rights to the realised service and quality is possessed by the service which was done according to the expectations of the customer.

Gallifa and Batalle (2010; 156) agree with Dobrzański and Roszak (2007; 224) and Pratasavitskayaa and Stensakera (2010; 43) on the importance of quality in education and add that quality in education has been mainly focused on academic quality at the expense of non-academic aspects of quality. Quality is more than the teaching part, but rather the whole experience and suggested that institutions should consider both elements (Gallifa and Batalle, 2010; 156). Some of the benefits of good service quality in higher education are discussed below in section 3.2.1.1 to 3.2.1.3.

3.2.1.1 Competitive advantage

According to Oldfield and Baron (2000) cited in Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 115), "creating a competitive advantage was once a concept largely foreign to higher education but has become a driving force in recent years as various stakeholders are seeking evidence of institutions' effectiveness of achieving goals and increase student satisfaction." Brink and Berndt (2008; 55), Palmer (2001; 207) and Weinstein and Johnson (1999; 74) agree that good service quality can lead to better customer satisfaction, customer retention and the continuous development of systems and processes. Cook (2002; 2) and Balachandran (2004; 98) agree and explain that in organisations that are adopting the marketing concept, the purpose of all organisational activities is to win the customer and keep them in the business. Good service quality can be a key distinguisher in business that will allow an organisation to attract even the competitors' customers and retain them (Cook, 2002; 2).

3.1.1.2 Yardstick in the selection process of institutions by customers

Higher education institutions are also in search of ways to improve on service quality in order to meet the expectations of their students and the market (Oliviera, 2009; 11). Service Quality has become one of the yardsticks parents and students are using when selecting education institutions to join (Cheung and Tsui, 2010; 170). It has been found in numerous studies that when making the uncertain and high-risk decision of choosing a university, the student will look for evidence of service quality thereby confirming the importance of

service quality in an education institution like in the university's function (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; 349 cited in Angell *et al*., 2008; 237).

Increasingly, quality as a component of service delivery dominates as one of the prime aspects impacting students' decision making regarding the education institutions to join (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007 cited in Gbadamosi and De Jager 2010; 3). Students' decisions on education institutions is also based on personal reasons, previous experiences by acquintances and the location of the institution (Gbadamosi and De Jager 2010; 3). The importance of experiences by acquaintances implies that experience by alumni translates into an important marketing tool and serves as an image builder outside the realm of the institution (Angell *et al*., 2008; 237). Thus, it is clear that education institutions have to build and protect both the institution and program images to maintain their competitive position in the industry (Gbadamosi and De Jager, 2010; 4).

3.2.1.3 Improved financial performance

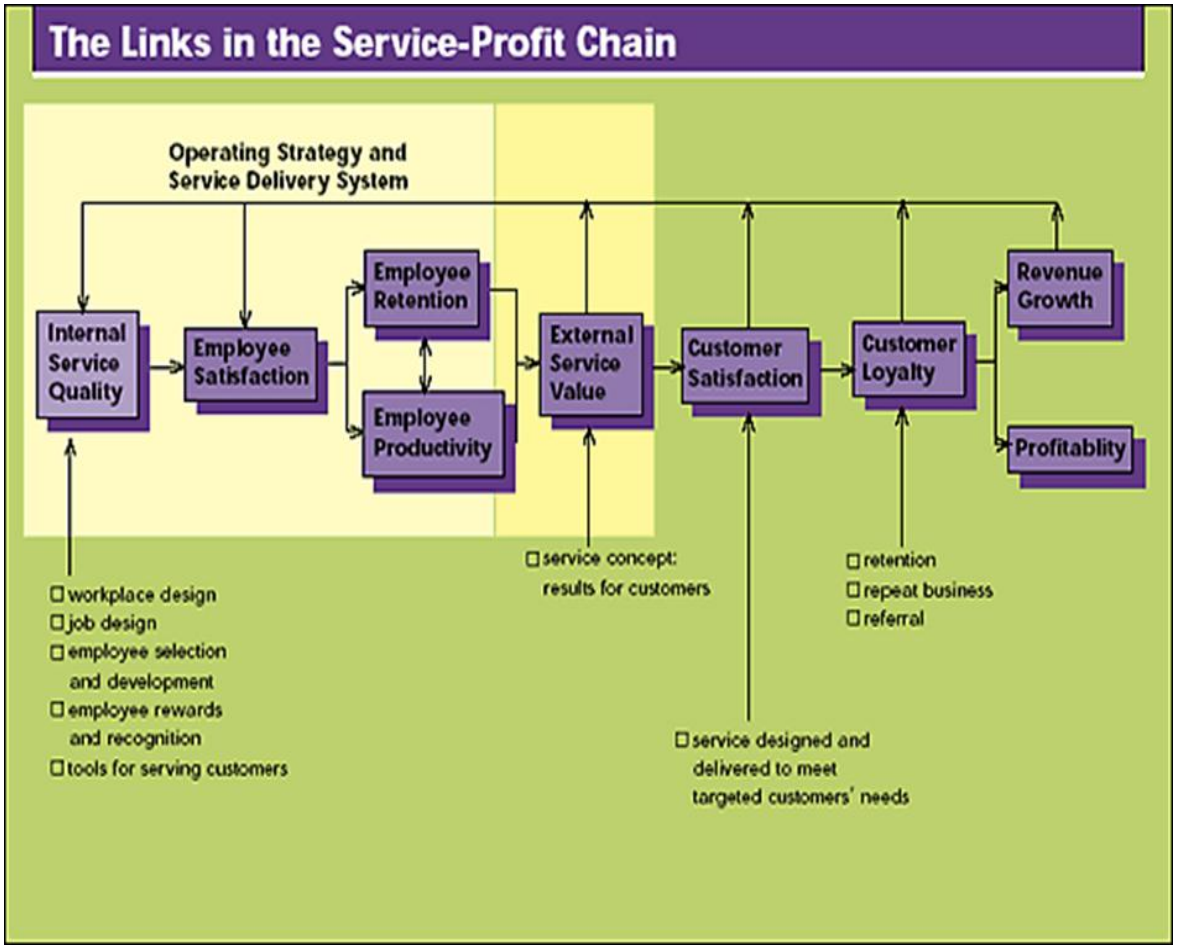
Brink and Berndt (2008; 55) point out that improved financial performance is a natural corollary of increased customer loyalty as satisfied customers can recruit more customers through positive word of mouth. They further explain that satisfied customers will remain in the business and recruit more customers therefore, financial performance improves. The key linkages of the services profit chain provide a summary of how good service quality leads to improved financial performance of an organisation (Davis, 2006; 163). The linkages are as follows:

- Profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty;
- Customer loyalty is a direct result of high level customer satisfaction;
- Customer satisfaction is mostly influenced by the value the customer derives from services or products provided;
- Product and service value is created by loyal, satisfied and productive employees
- Employee satisfaction, loyalty and productivity are the result mainly from high quality support services and policies that enable them to delight customers.

(Davis, 2006; 163)

The service-profit chain illustrates relationships between profitability, customer loyalty, and employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity (Hesket *et al*., 1994; 166). The service profit chain is illustrated in fig 2.2.

Fig 2.2: The service-profit chain links



Heskett *et al.* (1994; 172)

Good service quality can lead to higher revenue and profits as illustrated by the authors of the Service Profit Chain model (Schneider and White, 2004; 147). Researchers that include Silvestro and Cross (2000) observed and tested the Service Profit Chain model in retail grocery stores in the United Kingdom and discovered, the service quality, customer

satisfaction and profitability linkage emerged in the studies (Schneider and White, 2004; 147).

Good service quality leads to the retention of existing customers and the attraction of new ones, reduced costs, an enhanced corporate image, positive word-of-mouth recommendation and ultimately enhanced profitability (Ladhari, 2005; 172).

3.3 Customer Expectations in Higher Education

Most adult learners willingly decide to learn and they are usually goal-oriented in comparison to young learners (Cravett, 2007; 10). It is imperative for education institutions to provide maximum attention to adult leaners' expectations of service quality as their expectations are largely shaped by their previous experiences (Cravett, 2007; 10 and Rogers, 1993; 20).

A conducive learning climate is expected by learners and it should be constantly be created and recreated by attending to physical climate, affective-social climate and intellectual components (Cravett, 2007; 45). Hyland and Merrill (2003; 54) agree on the importance of physical climate and state that learners expect up to date equipment and facilities. The authors above suggest that learners are concerned about the tangibles (physical climate) which is in contrast to some of the literature on tangibles by authors that include Kandampully *et al.* (2001; 54) who state that tangibles are typically the least important of the five service quality dimensions. Customer expectations on tangibles are also stated by De Jager and Gbadamosi (2009; 256) who suggest that the expectations of South African customers due tohigh unemployment rates and lack of sufficient funds include; more accessible locations, access to public transport and the atmosphere of the campus.

Dobrzański and Roszak (2007; 224) agree with the above authors and suggest that there are more issues that shape customer expectations in education services and point out that looking for discrepancies between expectations and experience has to serve to search the directions of improvement in the sphere of quality. Senior management in education

services has to ensure that customer expectations are met on the following; effective organisation of the education process, variety of educational offer, determining the requirement to the students, competences of the people conducting the classes, quality of the relation with lecturers and managing personnel, and access to the infrastructure supporting the education (Dobrzański and Roszak, 2007; 224).

Rao (2007; 6) explains that learners' expectations and perceptions of quality change as they progress through the institution and as their experience and confidence grows. It is important for institutions to look at what their students want and not to collect data based upon what the institution perceives its students find important (Oldfield and Baron, 2000; 85).

3.4 Service Quality in South African Higher Education

South African higher education institutions have been facing the same pressures that all the other institutions have been facing globally and have also been adopting more customer-centric approaches Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 374). As in many other countries, the higher education sector in South Africa is a unique and complex system, because in addition to the universal change driving forces affecting the country's education institutions, a different environment for change exists (Mapesela and Hay, 2006 cited in De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2009; 256). The authors further explain that the historical background of racial and gender inequality are the main reasons why the higher education system is undergoing major restructuring to become unified, responsive and accommodative of all the people of the country, regardless of colour, race and religion (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education, 1997; cited in De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2009; 256).

Authors such as De Jager and Gbadamosi (2009; 256) also point out that in South Africa, traditionally, technikons and universities competed indirectly whereas now they compete directly, for the same market. The impact of technology and the demand for a

technologically literate workforce has also created a third stream of private educational institutions that not only compete for school-leavers, but also at post-graduate level (De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2009; 256). The increased level of competition in the education environment has led to institutions of higher education employing efficient management techniques to improve the efficiency and quality of services (Naude and Ivy cited in de Jager and Gbadamosi, 2009; 256).

Sohail, Rajadurai and Rahman (2003) cited in Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 374) point out that in the context of higher education many college administrators see implementation of quality practices, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) as a way to reassure that institutions of higher education perform well and that the customers of higher education are being served well.

In line with the above authors' explanations of the quality practices in higher education in South Africa, there are several bodies that are responsible for ensuring quality in South Africa. Scarrott (2010; 3) explains the existing quality councils in South Africa and states that the ministers of education in South Africa put three quality councils in place to manage three sub-frameworks in the country. The sub frameworks include higher education qualifications, general and further education and the occupational frameworks. The three sub frameworks fall within a single National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and are managed in collaboration with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education and training (Council on Higher Education in South Africa, 2010; para1). The CHE has a quality committee that is responsible for quality promotion and quality assurance in quality education and according to the Higher Education Act of 1997 the functions of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) include promoting quality in higher education, auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions and accrediting programmes of higher education (CHE, 2010; 2).

Umalusi is also a statutory organisation which sets and monitors standards for general and further education and training in South Africa (Umalusi, 2010; para 1). The purpose of Umalusi is to continually enhance the quality of further education and training in South Africa. The five key functions of Umalusi include; evaluating qualifications and curricula to ensure that they are of the expected standard, moderating assessment to ensure that it is fair, valid and reliable, conducting research to ensure educational quality, accrediting educational and assessment providers and certifying learner attainments (Umalusi, 2010; para 2).

Quality in education institutions in South Africa is emphasised and is of high importance as evident in the formulations of the quality councils. The HEQC (2004b; 26) cited in Bender *et al*. (2006; 147) points out the importance of quality management in educational institutions and explains that quality management should include the institutional arrangements for assuring, supporting, developing and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Quality is a useful concept to link changes at the macro-level of systems and policies of higher education with changes at the micro-level concerned with curricula, teaching, student learning and assessment (Bender *et al.*, 2006; 147). The micro level quality assessment is about student experience and achievement (Bender *et al*., 2006; 147). The HEQC has ensured that South African institutions have internal quality assurance systems in place and can be seen to be meeting its procedural requirements (Luckett, 2010; 71).

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) which is the world's largest developer and publisher of agreed standards that also include quality standards, has specific guidelines for organisations in the education sector wishing to benefit from the implementation of the ISO certifications (ISO, 2011; para 2). The guidelines are intended for all organisations at all levels, providing all types of education, including: elementary, medium and higher education as well as special and adult education and or distance and e-learning (ISO, 2010; para 1).

3.4.1 DTA on Service Quality

Developmental Training for Adults (DTA) is a Further Education Institution in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa that provides fundamental learning to adults (DTA, 2006; 3). DTA as a service provider has an obligation to provide good service quality to its customers. Thus, it is imperative to continuously evaluate the service quality being provided and identify customer expectations and perceptions of DTA's service. The implementation of quality practices administered by the various quality councils' bodies like Umalusi and ISO can aid organisations like DTA to set quality standards that are world standard (ISO, 2010; 1).

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a strategy that focuses on continuous improvement which organisations like colleges can implement to reduce the variability of the human inputPalmer (2001; 234). TQM is a principle where measures are put in place that every member of the organisation contributes meaningfully to doing things right the first time and is aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness (Palmer, 2001; 234).

3.5 Measurement of Service Quality in Education

Additional service quality dimensions that should be considered in measurement of service quality in higher education institutions are suggested by several authors. According to Oldfield and Baron (2000) cited in Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 2), "there are three underlying factors of higher education service quality namely: requisite elements (encounters which are essential to enable students to fulfil their study obligations acceptable elements (which are desirable but not essential to students) and functional elements (which are of a practical or utilitarian nature)."

Brady and Cronin (2001) cited by Suuroja (2003; 15) also explain service quality dimensions differently and state that "service quality in higher education consists of three components which are, **interaction, physical environment quality** and **outcome quality**.

Interaction refers to the attitude, behavior and expertise of staff, whilst physical environment refers to presentation of the place and outcome quality refers to the tangibles of the service." Customers combine their evaluations of the three dimensions to form their perception of an organisation's service quality (Suuroja, 2003; 15).

Cheng and Tam (1997) cited in Gbadamosi and Jager (2008; 2) concluded that based on different conceptions of education quality and the different concerns about achievement of education quality, various people may use diverse indicators to assess education quality and miscellaneous strategies to achieve education quality. It may result in not including all aspects of the input, process and outcome of an education institution.

Gallifa (2010; 156) points out that "quality in education has been mainly focused on academic quality at the expense of non-academic aspects of quality." The author further explains that quality is more than the teaching part, but rather the whole experience and suggested that service quality measurement should include both teaching quality and student satisfaction.

There has been considerable research on learning which utilised validated instruments. Some of the measuring instruments used include; the classroom environment scale (CES), my class inventory (MCI), and the individualised classroom environment questionnaire (CSEQ) (Hattie and Watkins cited by Cuthbert, 1996; 2). However, Gallifa (2010; 156) is of the view that all these questionnaires only measured the student learning experience and not the overall student experience. The use of a measure of service quality that is the difference between expectations and perceptions (SERVQUAL) was seen as a better way to measure satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service delivery of the institution as it measures the overall student experience (Gallifa, 2010; 156).

Studies at a United Kingdom University were successfully carried out by Oldfield and Baron (2000; 85) using the SERVQUAL scale to assess service quality. Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 128) also support the use of the SERVQUAL scale as measuring instrument of service quality in education institutions. The SERVQUAL scale focuses on the

behavioral aspects of the classroom rather than solely on many of the structural elements of the classroom experience as many student assessment scales do (Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; 128). In addition to trying to improve structural components such as the syllabus, outlines, handouts and exams instructors can use the SERVQUAL assessment scale to understand the behavioral traits that might need to be improved (Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; 128).

3.5.1 SERVQUAL Use in Higher Education Institutions

The SERVQUAL measurement tool has been successfully adopted by a wide range of industries including hotels, car servicing, dental services, travel and tourism, higher education and professional services such as accounting firms and architects (Buttle, 1996 cited in Gilmore, 2003; 22).

Authors that include Joseph (1997; 15) after a study with business students at University of Waikato in New Zealand suggest that SERVQUAL is not appropriate for education research on service quality as the service quality dimensions are questionable. However, there are several authors that agree that SERVQUAL is an approriate tool as discussed below.

According to studies by some researchers such as Oliviera (2009; 11), Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 115) and Tan and Kek (2004; 2) the SERVQUAL scale has been effectively adapted for use in education institutions around the world and has proved to be an appropriate and highly reliable approach. According to Stodnick and Rogers (2008; 115), "the SERVQUAL scale was used to measure service quality at South Western University in America and proved to be high in reliability and validity and out-performed traditional scales as the SERVQUAL could explain significant amounts of variances in student related outcome variables such as satisfaction and learning." The study indicates that it is an approach to measuring service quality that can be of great use to all stakeholders in the delivery of higher education (Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; 115). The utilisation of the SERVQUAL scale at Production Engineering program at São Paulo State University in

Brazil to study service quality was appropriate and tested high in reliability and validity (Oliviera, 2009; 11).

Singh and Khanduja (2010; 3302) conducted a study using SERVQUAL instrument at a higher education institution in India to assess service quality also endorsed the SERVQUAL instrument as an appropriate measuring instrument. The SERVQUAL instrument benefits from being a statistically valid instrument as a result of the extensive field testing and refinement that has been conducted on the instrument (Singh and Khanduja, 2010; 3302). As a generic and universally applicable instrument, SERVQUAL can also be administered on a repeated, regular basis and used for comparative benchmarking purposes (Singh and Khanduja, 2010; 3302). The authors add that in order to appreciate fully the benefits of using SERVQUAL, surveys should be conducted every year, for the following reasons; to allow yearly comparisons, to determine how service improvements have affected customers' perceptions and expectations of the service over time and to determine the effectiveness of service development and improvement initiatives in targeted service quality dimensions.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an explanation of the concept of marketisation and Service Quality in education institutions. The importance of service quality in education institutions including in South African institutions is pointed out in this chapter. The use of SERVQUAL as an instrument of measuring service quality in the education sector was also discussed. The next chapter, discusses the research methodology that was utilised for the study.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the research objectives, data collection and data analysis methods that were utilised. In the final section of this chapter the ethical considerations are also discussed.

4.2 Objectives of the Research

- To investigate the customer perceptions of service quality offered at DTA College during 2010;
- To investigate the customer expectations of service quality offered by DTA College during 2010;
- To determine the most important service quality dimensions to DTA customers during 2010 and;
- To determine the service quality gaps that exist at DTA College during 2010.

4.3 Research Design

The research design constitutes the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Cooper and Schindler, 2001; 134). A research design is the master plan that specifies the methods and procedures of collecting and analysing needed information (Zikmund, 2003; 58).

A descriptive research design was utilised for the study. Descriptive research is usually designed to provide a summary of some aspects of the environment when the hypotheses are tentative and speculative in nature (Kumar, 2002; 529). According to Cant, Nel, Nel and Kotz'e (2003; 31), "descriptive research describes aspects such as the market potential of a product, demographics and the attitudes of consumers or behavioural information."

The researcher made use of descriptive research to determine customers' perceptions and expectations of service quality at DTA College.

The descriptive research design was selected as it allows the findings from the study to be generalised as the opinions of the DTA College population. According to Aaker *et al*. (2004; 75), "some of the benefits of a descriptive research design include the use of larger samples which is normally a good representation of target populations especially if statistical methods are utilised to select sample sizes. Generalisability of results and inferences about facts and estimates of relationships is also possible."

A descriptive research design with the use of statistical methods allows the researcher to obtain results that can be projected to the whole population and can be of great use to DTA College for various activities that include presentations and decision making.

4.3.1 Sampling

Probability sampling was utilised for the study. Probability sampling refers to a sample in which every element of the population has a known, non-zero probability of selection and its main advantage is that it eliminates the bias inherent in non probability sampling as the process is random (McDaniels and Gates, 2001; 333).

Simple random sampling is the probability sampling technique that was utilised for the sample selection. The researcher assigned a single number to each element in the list of the sampling frame, then a table of random numbers was used to select elements for the sample (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009; 211). A computer generated table of random numbers (with all the student numbers) was used for the sample selection. A copy of the random selection table is attached in the appendices section of the research report.

Simple random sampling is simple to understand and allows the researcher to obtain unbiased estimates of the population's characteristics (Shiu, Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2008; 470). Despite the limitation that probability sampling techniques take more time to design,

the use of simple random sampling allows generalisability of the results (McDaniels and Gates, 2001; 333). The use of a computer derived list from DTA College allowed the sampling design process to be faster for the researcher.

4.3.2 Sample size

A sample size of 58 was used for the research. A statistical sample size calculation to come up with an appropriate sample size was utilised. A population of 68 with a margin of tolerated error of 5% and a level of confidence of 95% gives an appropriate sample size of 58 (Raosoft, 2004; para5). The sample represented DTA college learners that managed to be placed during 2010.

4.3.3 Questionnaire Design

The SERVQUAL survey which was utilised for the research comprised of pairs of 22 questions in five service quality dimension categories which are briefly discussed below:

- **Tangibles** consisted offour questions on dimensions such as appearance of facilities and personnel (questions 1 to 4)
- **Reliability** consisted of five questions (questions 5 to 9)
- **Responsiveness** consisted of four questions (questions 10 to 13)
- **Assurance** consisted of four questions on dimensions such as competence, courtesy, credibility and security (questions 14 to 17)
- **Empathy** consisted of five questions on dimensions such as ease of access or contact, communication and customer understanding (questions 18 to 22).

(Kumar *et al*., 2002; 690)

The questionnaire used for the study comprised of questions that covered all the five service quality dimensions. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in the appendices section of the dissertation (Appendix 2). The SERVQUAL instrument consists of structured questionnaires with closed ended questions, which require the respondent to

choose from a predetermined set of options. The SERVQUAL questionnaire utilises the Likert scale which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Palmer, 2001; 210). According to Shiu *et al*. (2008; 330), "the Likert scale is argued to counter the concerns over the length of the questionnaire as the amount of thinking and effort is reduced on the respondents." These authors further state that the design of the SERVQUAL instrument reduces interviewer bias as the respondent simply circles an answer in response to the question. Therefore, the use of the SERVQUAL instrument was appropriate as it provided the researcher with adequate data to answer the research questions.

4.3.4 Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which measures are free from random error and therefore yield consistent results whilst validity refers to the ability of a scale to measure what was intended to be measured (McDaniels and Gates, 2001; 254). The study utilised theSERVQUAL instrument which is a tried and tested instrument in terms of reliability and validity. According to Whitlach (2000; 143), "the SERVQUAL scale has been rigorously tested and has been considered high in validity and reliability." The five SERVQUAL dimensions possess adequate reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha across different service industries (Antony and Preece, 2002; 149 and Gilmore, 2003; 133).

Cronbach alpha was calculated to test reliability by the researcher to confirm the reliability of the SERVQUAL questionnaire to the particular study carried out at DTA College in Pietermaritzburg. Table 4.1 below indicates the Cronbach' alpha results

Table 4.1: Reliability test- Cronbach's alpha results

Service Quality Dimension	Cronbach's alpha
Tangibility	0.805
Reliability	0.879
Responsiveness	0.850
Assurance	0.861
Empathy	0.889

Cronbach' alpha results close to 1 indicate high levels of reliability (Gilmore, 2003; 133). The results for all the five service quality dimensions were high in reliability as the results were very close to 1 as shown on table 4.1.

4.4 Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed to respondents immediately after lectures in their classrooms. The class room facilities were convenient as they allowed the respondents to complete the questionnaires comfortably. According to Aaker *et al*. (2004; 236), "the facilities should be considered in choosing a data collection mode in order to execute a professional data collection effort."

4.4.1 Pilot Test

It is crucial for a researcher to pre-test the questionnaire for ambiguity and omissions and make the necessary corrections (Cant *et al*., 2003; 36). A pilot test was carried out first, with ten possible respondents to assess the clarity of the questions and make corrections before the final distribution of questionnaires. The respondents indicated full understanding of the research questions. Reviewing the questions with a sample of the customers before the main study is conducted allows any wording problems with the questions or directions to be clarified (Schneider and White, 2004; 58).

4.5 Data Analysis

Calculations of the SERVQUAL survey scores were carried out to provide the real scores that can be interpreted into meaningful data. Statistical measures of central tendency that include the mean, median and mode were utilised to analyse the data. Calculating mean values and comparing meanscores is preferable because it summarises the data into simpler form (Jarboe, 1999; 190 andPalmer, 2001; 210). The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was also

utilised to test the significance of the service quality gaps. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test is a non-parametric test that compares two paired groups of data, calculates the differences between each set of pairs and analyses the list of differences (McDonald, 2009; para3). The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was an effective test as the data from the study was paired in the form of perceptions and expectations. The test provided a good indication of the significance and differences between perceptions and expectations of the service quality dimensions. Tabulations, frequency tables and use of pie charts were also utilised to clearly present the data. SPSS computer software package was utilised for data analysis and computation of all the statistical measures and tests.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

An ethical clearance application with a consent form for respondents was forwarded to the ethics committee before commencement of the research. The ethical clearance form is attached in the appendices section of the dissertation (Appendix 3). According to Cant *et al.* (2003; 11), "researchers have general ethical obligations to participants who provide data in their marketing studies. The obligations include that participants should be comfortable, should not be deceived, should be willing to participate, should be informed and that the data should be held in confidence." The researcher's obligation to be truthful and accurate in presenting results was obeyed and the results were also closely monitored by the supervisor throughout the research.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a description of the research methodology utilised for the research. The sample selection, data collection methods and data analysis that was conducted in the study is fully explained in the chapter. The following chapter, consists of a presentation of the research findings.

Chapter 5
Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from a 3 part questionnaire that was distributed to 58 students at DTA College. The findings are presented and described in three sections. The demography of the respondents was described to provide a clear profile of the sample. As discussed in earlier chapters the questionnaire was adopted from the SERVQUAL measuring instrument. The SERVQUAL instrument consists of two sets on 22 statements on service quality expectations and perceptions (Antony and Preece, 2002; 24). Section 2 consists of thefindings from Part A of the questionnaire which focused on the expectations and from Part B which focused on the customers' perceptions. The third section consists of a full description of the findings on the service quality gaps for each service quality dimension as it pertains to DTA College.

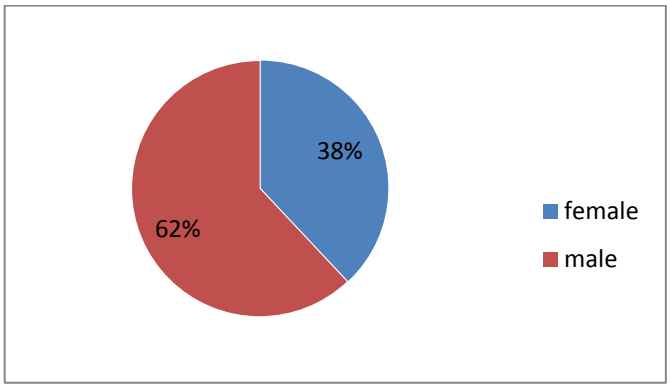
Frequency tables were used to present clear findings and percentages were utilised to describe the frequencies. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used to assess the significance of the gaps that exist between the perceptions and the expectations of service quality. A clear break down on the five dimensions of service quality is provided and illustrated through the use of bar graphs and tables indicating the gaps in service quality at DTA College. Frequency tables with the exact number of respondents, statistical tests and average scores are also attached in the appendices section of the dissertation (Appendix 3).

5.2 Section 1: Demography

A computer list on Microsoft Excel with information on 2010 DTA registered/placed learners was obtained from DTA College by the researcher and utilised for the proportionate stratified random sample selection. The gender and the level of study were the 2 variables that were utilised for the strata. Thus, the demographic profile of the respondents is proportionate to the population.

Part C: Question1: Respondents' Gender

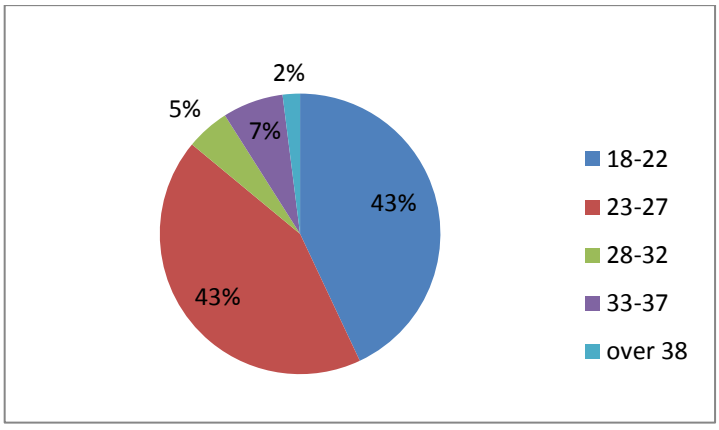
Fig 5.1: Frequency of Respondents' Gender



Male respondents were 62% of the respondents whilst 32% were females. The gender profile of the student population at DTA College is proportionate to the sample's gender profile. Gender is one of the variables that was utilised as a basis for proportionate stratified random sampling.

Part C: Question 2: Respondents' Age

Fig 5.2: Frequency of Respondents' Age

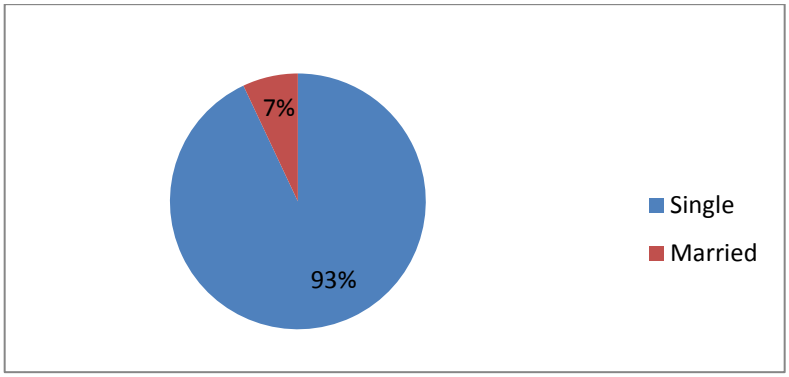


The age groups 18 to 23 and 23 to 27 were the most frequent age groups for the respondents as they consisted of 43% each. 7% of the respondents fell in the age group of

33 to 37 whilst 5% of the respondents fell in the age group of 28 to 32. Only 2% of the respondents indicated that they were over 38 years of age.

Part C: Question 3 Respondents' marital status

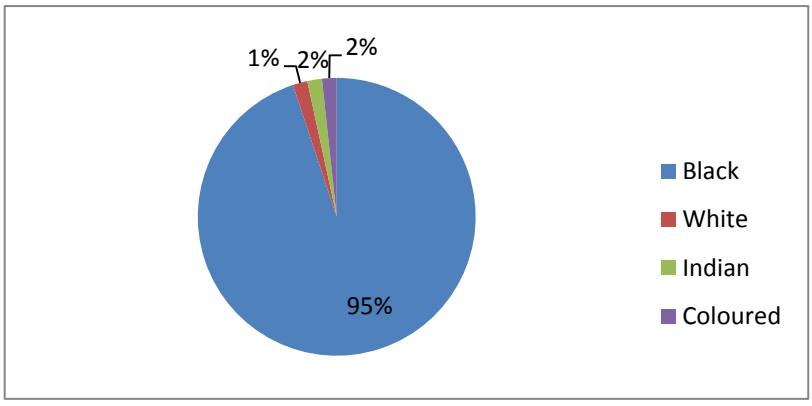
Fig 5.3: Frequency of Respondents' marital status



The majority (93%) of the respondents indicated that they were single. Only 7% of the respondents indicated that they were married.

Part C: Question 4 Respondents' Race

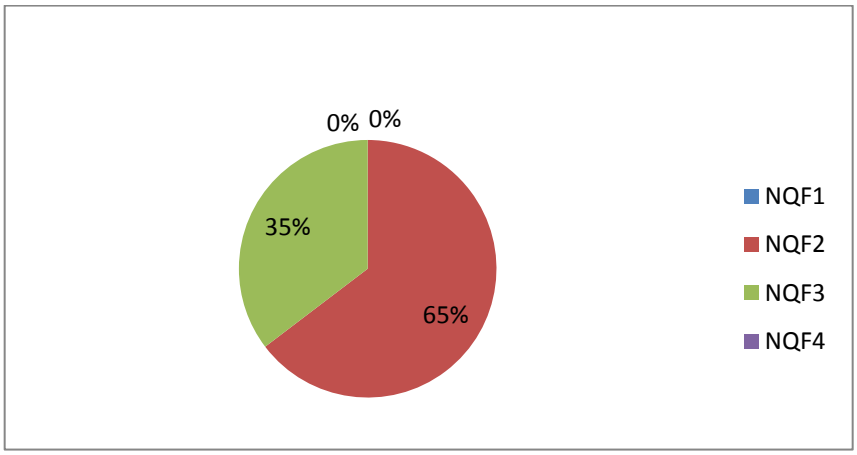
Fig 5.4: Frequency of race of respondents



The majority (95%) of the respondents indicated that their race was Black. Indians and Coloureds consisted of 2 % each whilst, 1% of the respondents belonged to the White race.

Part C: Question 5 Respondents' level/year of study

Fig 5.5: Frequency of Respondents' level/year of study

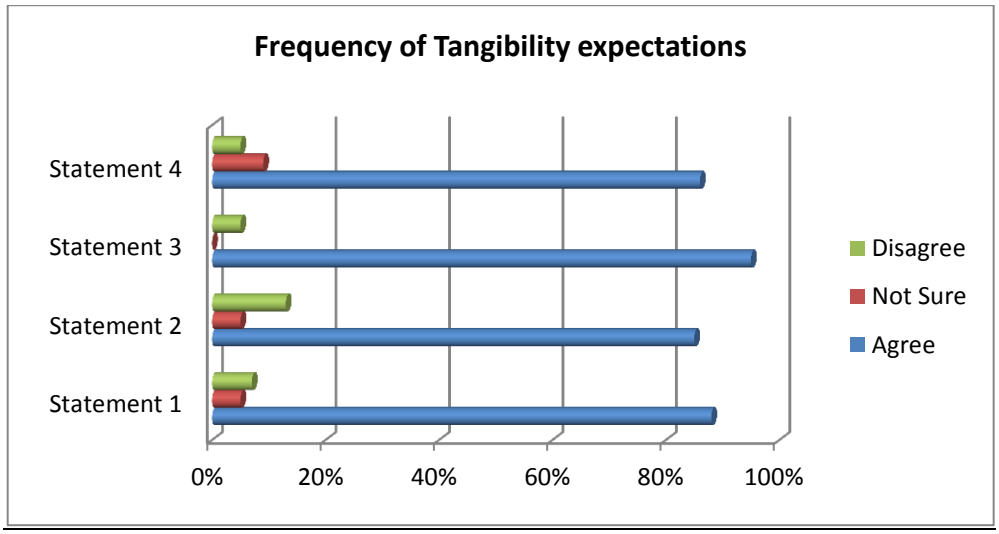


The majority (65%) of the respondents indicated that they were NQF level 2 learners. 35% of the respondents indicated that they were NQF level 3 learners. None of the respondents indicated that they were NQF level 1 and 4 learners. The level of study of the sample is proportionate to the population as it was also a variable that was used for the stratification during sample selection. DTA College could not place NQF level 1 and 4 learners for the second half of 2010 thus, the student population at the time of the study only consisted of NQF level 2 and 3 learners.

5.3 Section 2: SERVQUAL Findings

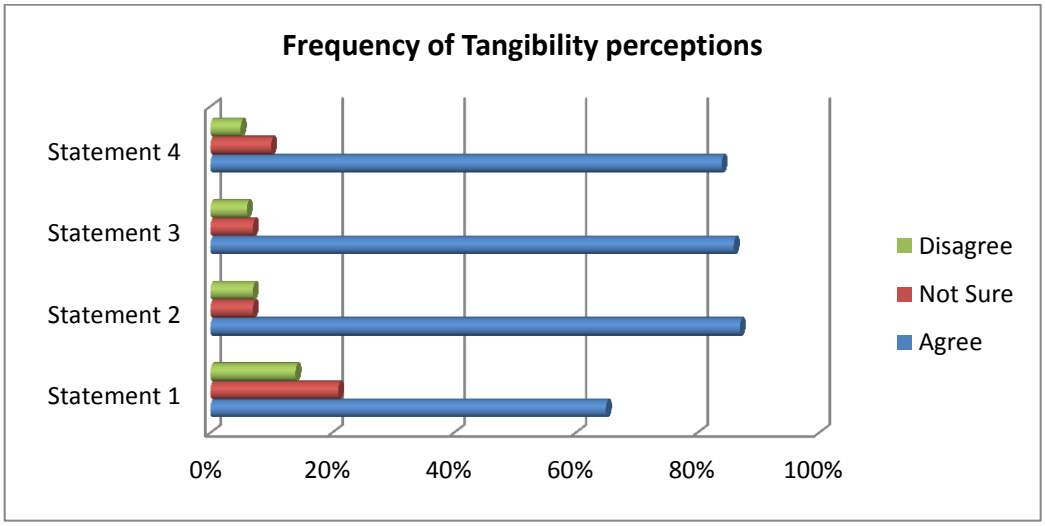
This section presents the findings resulting from the administration of the SERVQUAL instrument. Column and bar graphs are used to illustrate the level of agreement to each of the statements on the importance of the needs to students and the perceptions on whether DTA College is meeting the service quality needs.

Fig 5.6: Frequency of Tangibility Expectations



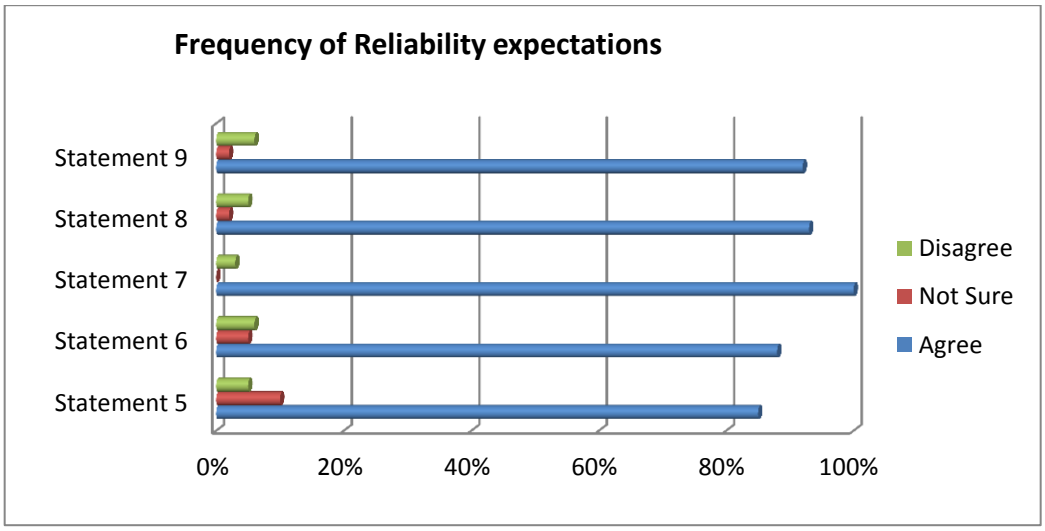
The respondents' level of agreement on the importance of tangibles was over 80% for all the four tangiblity statements. 10% of the respondents were not in agreement with statement two stating that visually appealing facilities are important for colleges.

Fig 5.7: Frequency of Tangibility Perceptions



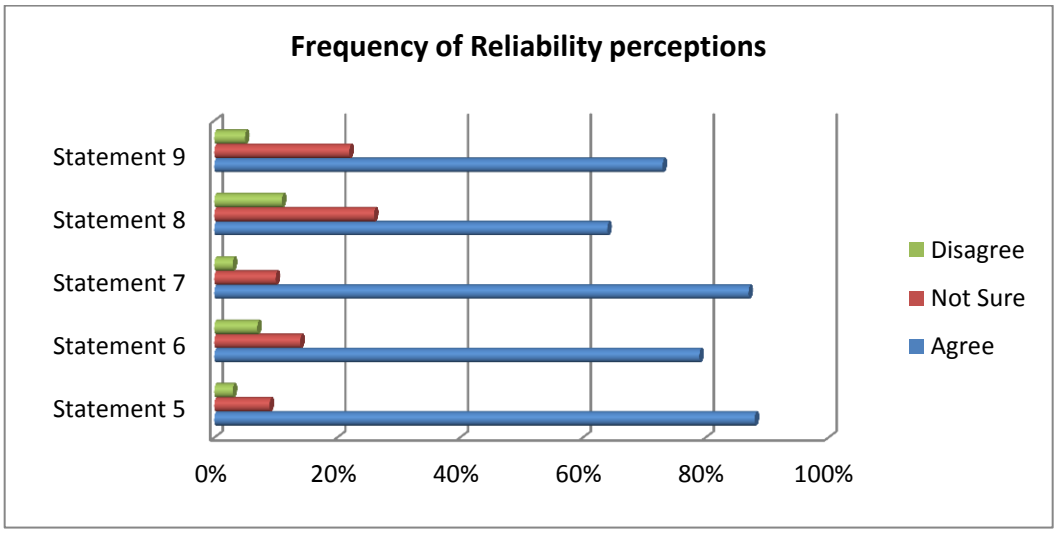
A large proportion (84%, 86% and 87%) of the respondents were in agreement with statements two to four on the tangibles offered by DTA. Statement 1 had the least (65%) level of respondents in agreement with the statement that DTA College's equipment is up to date.

Fig 5.8 Frequency of Reliability Expectations



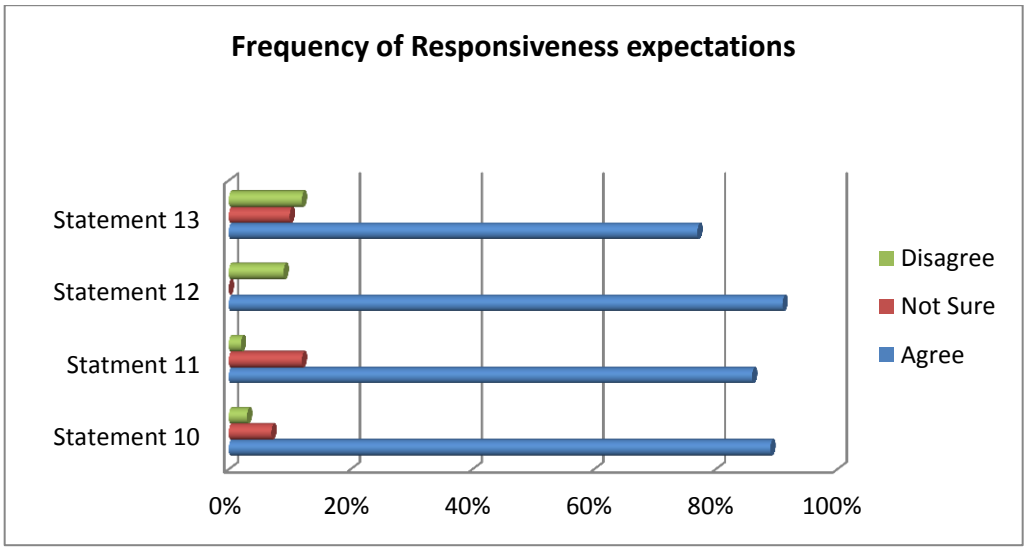
The majority (80% to 97%) of the respondents indicated that reliability is an important service quality dimension. The largest proportion of the respondents (97%) agreed with statement 7 that it is important for colleges to keep accurate records.

Fig 5.9 Frequency of Reliability Perceptions



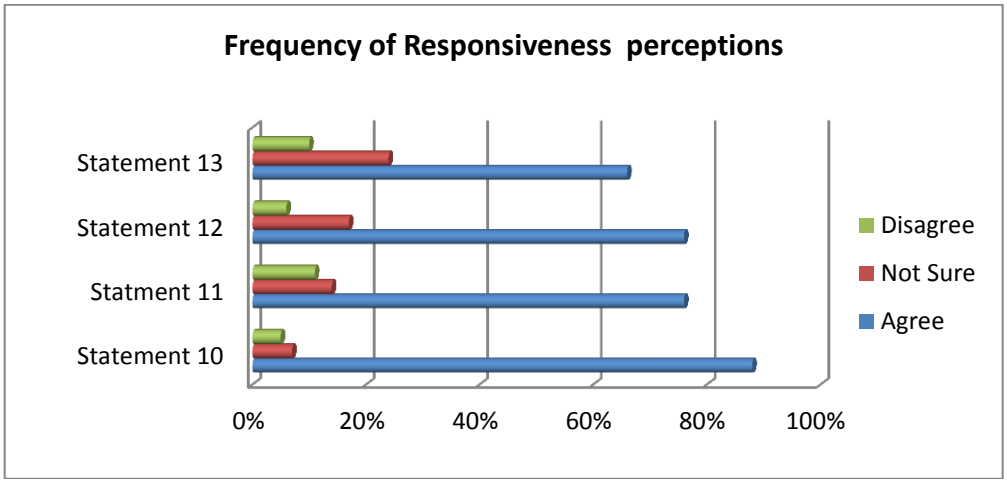
A large proportion (88% and 87%) of the respondents were in agreement with the reliability statements five and seven on availability of assistance and accuracy of records at DTA College. The respondents in agreement with statement eight on the provision of assistance within promised time were 64% which was the least for all the reliability statements.

Fig 5.10: Frequency of Responsiveness Expectations



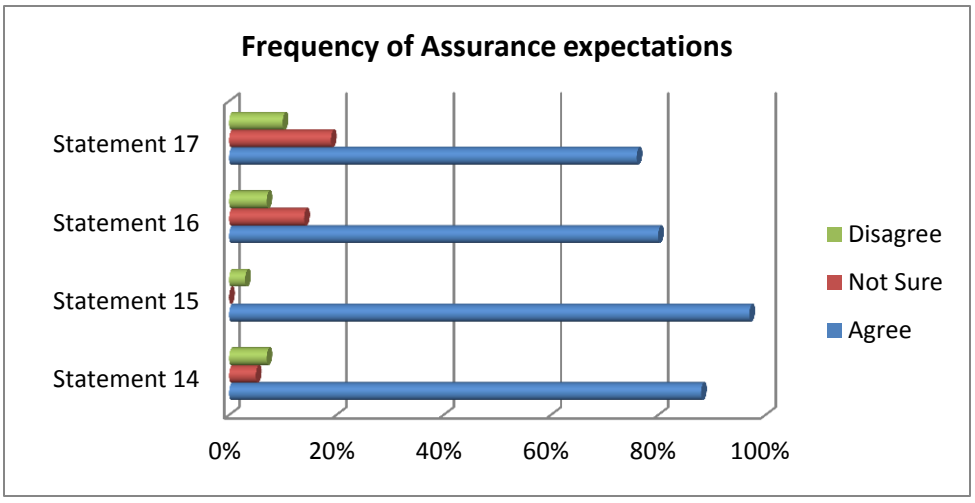
As indicated on Fig 5.10, a large proportion (91%) of the respondents agreed that it is important for colleges to always provide assistance to students (statement 12). The least (77%) agreement responses were on statement 13 that college employees should never be too busy.

Fig 5.11 Frequency of Responsiveness Perceptions



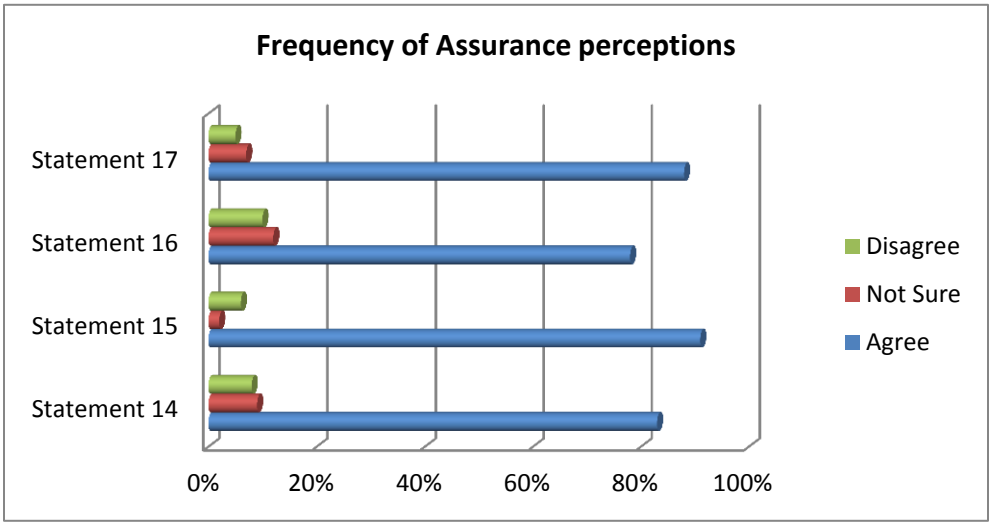
The majority (89%) of the respondents were in agreement with statement 10 that DTA College informs students of the services available at the college. The respondents that were in agreement with the statement (statement 13) that DTA College employees are never too busy to provide assistance to students were 66%.

Fig 5.12 Frequency of Assurance Expectations



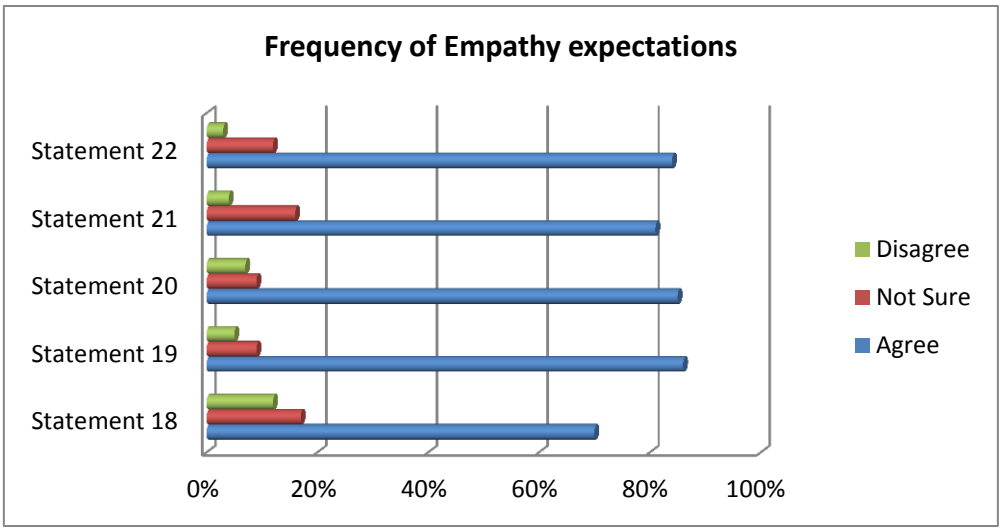
The importance of assurance in colleges is high according to the responses. 97% of the respondents were in agreement with statement 15 that safety in interactions with college employeesis important. 70% of the respondents agreed with statement 17 that it is important for colleges to provide individual attention.

Fig 5.13 Frequency of Assurance Perceptions



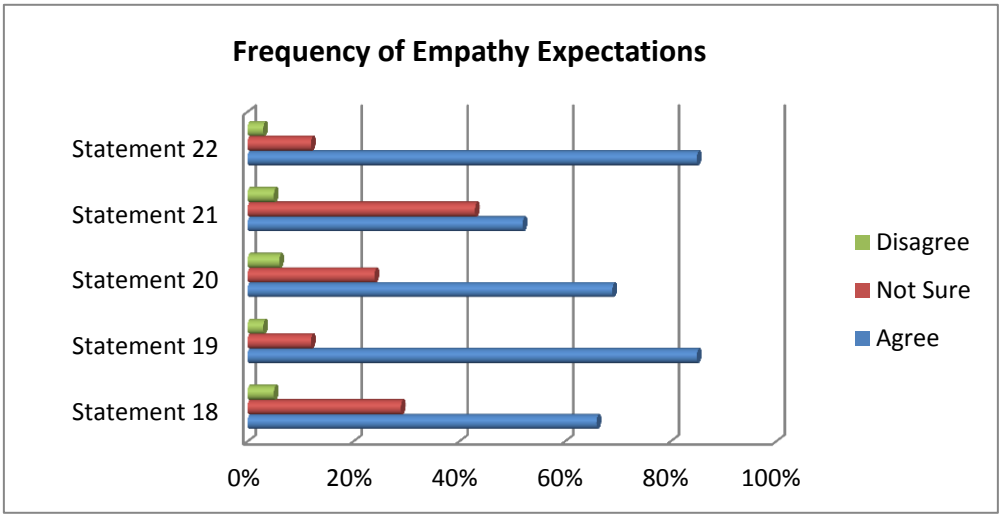
The majority of the respondents (78% and above) agreed that DTA College was meeting the needs of the students on providing assurance. A large proportion (91%) of therespondents agreed with statement 15 that students feel safe when interacting with DTA College's employees.

Fig 5.14 Frequency of Empathy Expectations



The majority (78% and above) of the respondents were in agreement that empathy is an important dimension of service quality in colleges. A large proportion (86%) of the respondents were in agreement with statement 19 that it is important to have competent staff at colleges.

Fig 5.15: Frequency of Empathy perceptions



A large proportion (84%) of the respondents agreed that DTA College understands the needs of the students (statement 22). However, less respondents (66%) were in agreement that DTA College offers personalised attention (statement 18) and 52% were in agreement that DTA College put students' needs first (statement 21).

5.4 Section 3: SERVQUAL gap identification

This section reports the identification of service quality gaps. The mean scores for the perceptions were subtracted from the mean scores from the expectations (P-E) to calculate the gaps. The significance tests for the gaps are also presented in the section. The calculated mean scores and gaps are tabulated below on table 5.1.

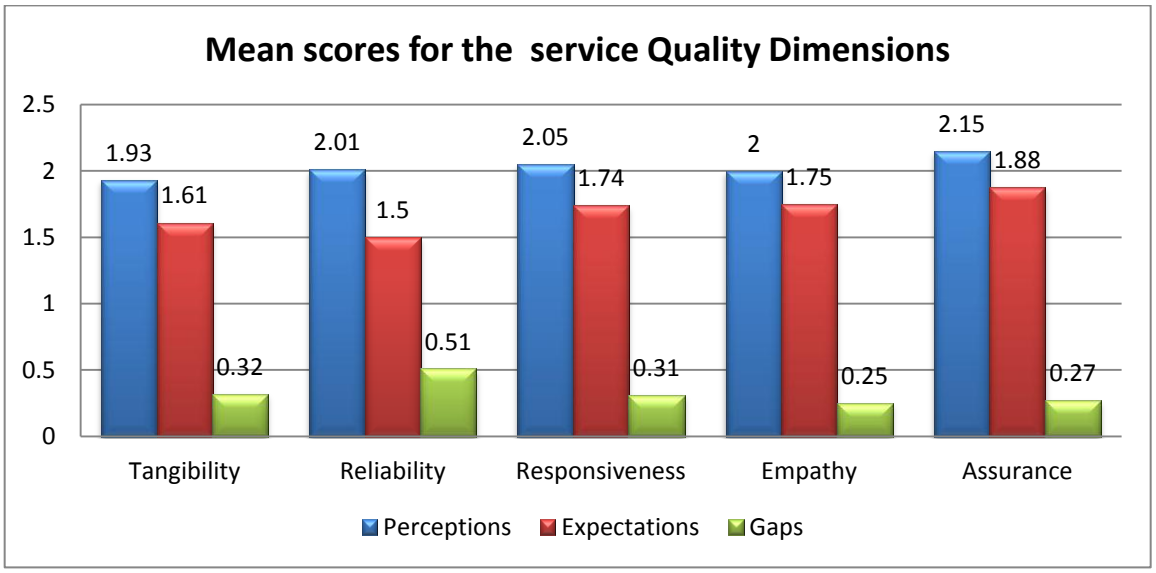
Table 5.1: Mean Scores and gaps

Statement	**Perception mean scores**	**Expectation mean scores**	**Gaps**
Tangibles			
1.Equipment	2,1379	1,500	0,6379
2.Visually appealing	1,9483	1,8621	0,0862
3.Neatly dressed	1,7069	1,4655	0,2414
4. Appealing course materials	1,9138	1,6034	0,3104
Total	7,7069/4 = 1.927	6,4310/4 = 1,608	1,2759/4= 0.32
Mean score	**1,93**	**1,61**	**0,32**
Reliability			
5.Employees always assist	1,8621	1,6552	0,2069
6.Genuine interest	1,9828	1,6034	0,3794
7.Keep accurate records	1,8103	1,3448	0,4655
8.Assist within promised time	2,3103	1,4483	0,862
9.Assists as per promise	2,1034	1,5517	0,5517
Mean score	**2,01**	**1,50**	**0,51**
Responsiveness			
10.Informs students	1,8621	1,6379	0,2242
11. Provides prompt service	2,1207	1,7414	0,3793
12.Assistance is always available	2,0345	1,6379	0,3966
13.Employees never too busy	2,1724	1,9310	0,2414
Mean Score	**2,05**	**1,74**	**0,31**

Assurance	P	E	Gap
14.Appropriate staff behaviour	2,0345	1,7069	0.3276
15.Safe interactions with staff	1,8793	1,5172	0,3621
16.Employees kind and courteous	2,1034	1,8103	0,9231
17.Individual attention	2,0000	1,9828	0,0172
Mean Score	**2,004**	**1,754**	**0,28**
Empathy			
18.Personalised attention	2,2586	2,2069	0,0517
19.Competent staff	1,8793	1,7931	0,0862
20.Operating hours	2,1724	1,7759	0,3965
21.Putting students needs first	2,3966	1,9483	0,4483
22. Understanding needs	2,0172	1,6897	0,3275
Mean score	**2,15**	**1,88**	**0.26**

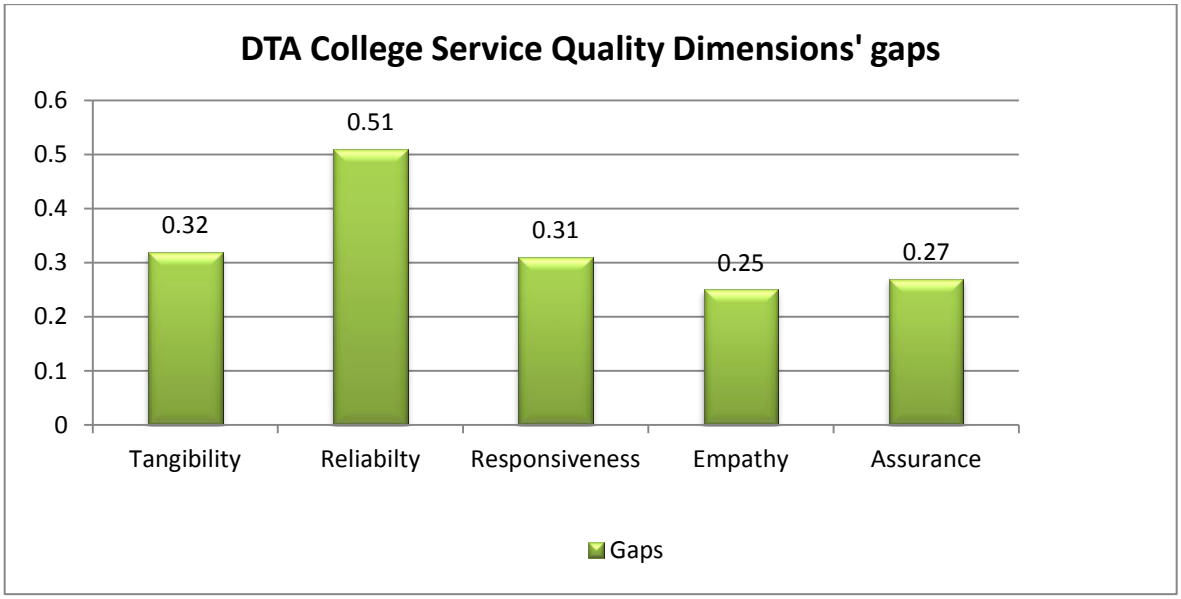
Table 5.1 illustrates the average perceptions and expectations' scores of the 22 statements of the SERVQUAL instrument. The gaps in service quality are identified by calculating it using the formula (P-E), whereby P stands for the average perception score and E stands for the average expectation score. The difference between the perceptions and expectations is interpreted as the gap in the service quality. A higher mean score in perceptions than in expectations indicates a negative gap. The results in table 5.1 indicate negative gaps for all the statements as all the expectation scores are closer to 1 (strongly agree) on the Likert scale, in comparison with the perception scores which are further from 1. A detailed mean score analysis from SPSS is also attached in the appendices section of this dissertation.

Fig 5.16: Mean scores for the five Dimensions of service Quality



The mean scores of the perceptions and expectations of the five service quality dimensions indicate the gaps that exist in the service quality at DTA College. Fig 4.17 below further illustrates the gaps in the service quality.

Fig 5.17: DTA Service quality dimensions' gaps



According to fig 5.17 Reliability is the dimension with the widest gap (0.51). Tangibility is second widest gap (0.32) followed by Responsiveness with a gap of0.31. Empathy had a gap of 0.27 and Assurance is the service quality dimension that had the narrowest gap (0.25). All the Gaps are negative as the expectation scores were inclined towards 1 (which refers to strongly agree on the Likert scale in comparison with the perception scores.

5.4.1 Tangibility Gaps

Fig 5.18: Tangibility gaps

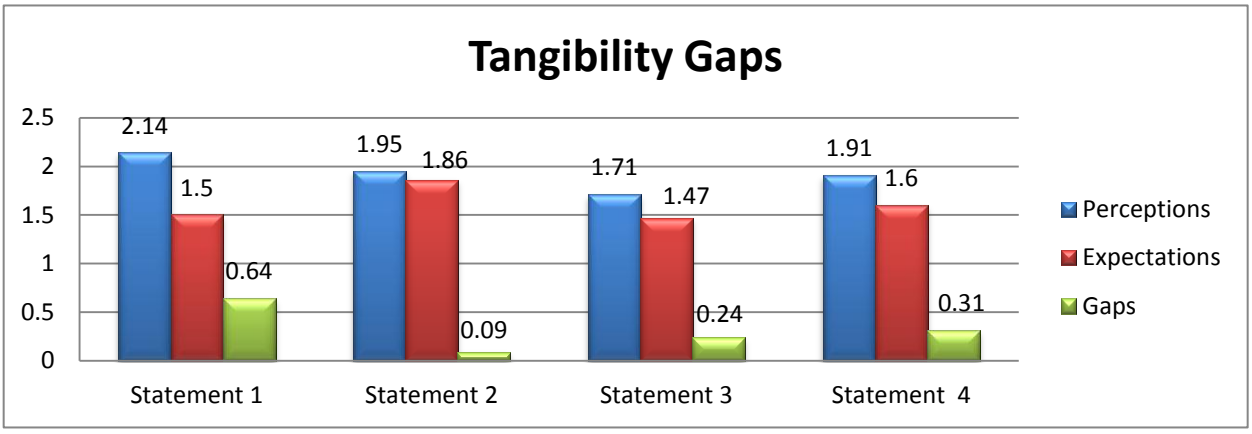


Table 5.2 Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for Tangibility statements (1-4)

Statement	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2tailed)
1	-4.103 (a)	.000
2	-1.147 (a)	.252
3	-3.041 (a)	.022
4	-2.713 (a)	.007

(Significant gap = or less than 0.05)

The widest gap (0.64) was ***on the importance of equipment at colleges*** (statement 1). The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the statement's gap is .000 which is significant, as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the customers' expectations on a crucial need of its customers.

Statement 4 was on the importance of appealing materials and if DTA is meeting the expectation. The statement had the second highest gap (0.31). As shown on table 5.2, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the statement's gap is 0.007 which is significant indicating that DTA College is not meeting the customers' expectations on an important need. ***Statement 3 was on the importance of neatly dressed employees*** and if DTA is meeting the expectation. The statement had a gap of 0.24. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the statement's gap was 0.002 which is significant, meaning that DTA College is failing to meet the expectations of the customers regarding the issue of employee dress.

Statement 2 was about the importance of visually appealing facilities and if DTA is meeting the expectations. The statement had the least wide gap of 0.09. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the statement's gap is 0.252 which is **not significant** as it is bigger than 0.05 indicating that DTA College is meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the issue of visually appealing facilities.

5.4.2 Reliability Gaps

Fig 5.19 Reliability Gaps

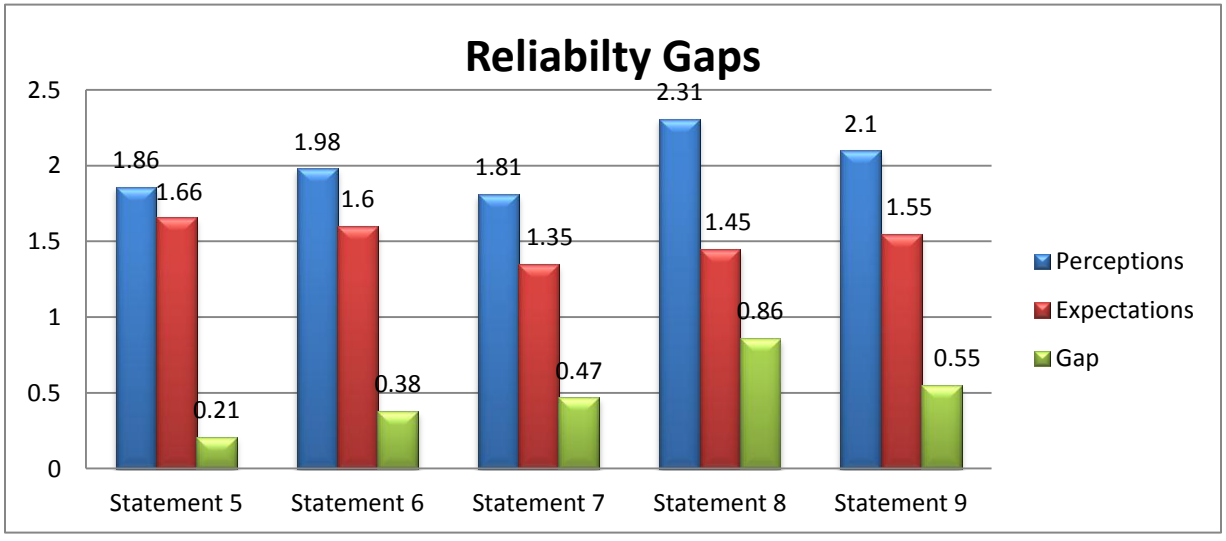


Table 5.3: Wilcoxon sign ranks test results for Reliability statements (5-9)

Statement	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2tailed)
5	-2.373 (a)	.018
6	-3.104 (a)	.002
7	-4.234 (a)	.000
8	-5.092 (a)	.000
9	-4.269 (a)	.000

According to fig 5.19, statement 8 has the widest gap (0.86) in the negative between perceptions and expectations of service quality. ***Statement 8 was on whether assistance is provided within promised time.*** As shown on table 5.3, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 8's gap is .000 which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding a need that is of great importance to the college's customers.

Statement 9 questioned if assistance is provided as per promise. Statement 9 has the second widest service quality gap for reliability (0.55). As indicated on table 5.3, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 9's gap is .000, which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the needs of the customers when it comes to providing assistance within promised time.

Statement 7 questioned if accurate records are kept. A service quality gap of 0.47 is shown in fig 5.19 for statement 7. The Wilcoxon signed ranks rank test result for statement 7's gap is .000 which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that the need is very important to DTA College customers and that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the college customers.

Statement 6 questioned if genuine interest is shown by the college employees when interacting with students. Statement 6 had a gap of 0.38 in the negative between perceptions and expectations of service quality. The Wilcoxon signedranks test result for statement 6's gap is .002, which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the

gap means that DTA College is not meeting the needs of the customers as the customers feel that the college employees do not show genuine interest towards students.

Statement 5 questioned if college employees always assist students. Statement 5's results indicated the narrowest gap for Reliability (0.21). As shown on table 5.3, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 5's gap is 0.018, which is larger than for all the other reliability statements but still significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap indicates that DTA College is not meeting the needs of its customers although the need is the least important of all the Reliability needs.

5.4.3 Responsiveness Gaps

Fig 5.20: Responsiveness Gaps

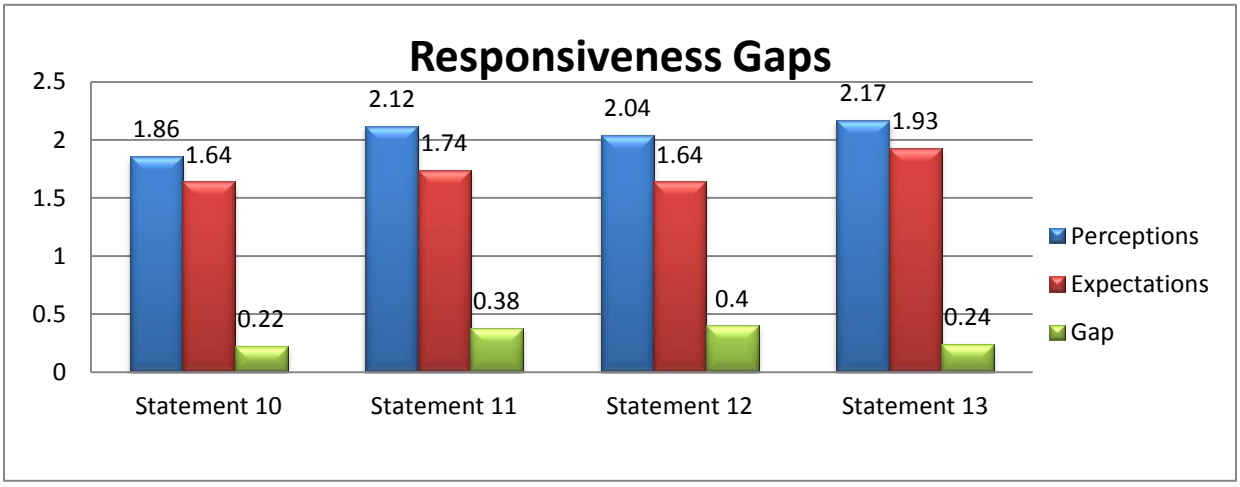


Table 5.4: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test results for Responsiveness statements (10-13)

Statement	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2tailed)
10	-2.194(a)	.028
11	-2.916(a)	.004
12	-2.816(a)	.005
13	-1.282(a)	.200

According to fig 5.20, statement 12 had the widest gap (0.40) for the Responsiveness service quality dimension. ***Statement 12 was on whether assistance should always be available.*** As shown on table 5.4, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 12's gap is 0.005, which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap indicates that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding an important need.

Statement 11 had the second widest gap (0.38) for responsiveness. ***Statement 11 was on the importance of providing prompt service*** and if the need was being met by DTA College. As shown on table 5.4, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 11's gap is 0.004, which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap shows that DTA College is not meeting the needs of the customers regarding a need of great importance to their customers.

Statement 13 had a gap of 0.24. *Statement 13 questioned if employees should and are never too busy to assist.* The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 13's gap is 0.2, which is not significant as it is bigger than 0.05. The insignificance of the gap means that the need is not of great importance to DTA College customers. However, the size of the gap shows that the college's customers expect the College to avail employees to students.

Statement 10 had a gap of 0.22 which is the narrowest for the responsiveness dimension. ***Statement 10 was on the importance of informing students of services available.*** As shown on table 5.4, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 10's gap is 0.028, which is significant meaning that DTA College is not meeting their customers' expectations regarding the need.

5.4.4 Assurance Gaps

Fig 5.21 Assurance Gaps

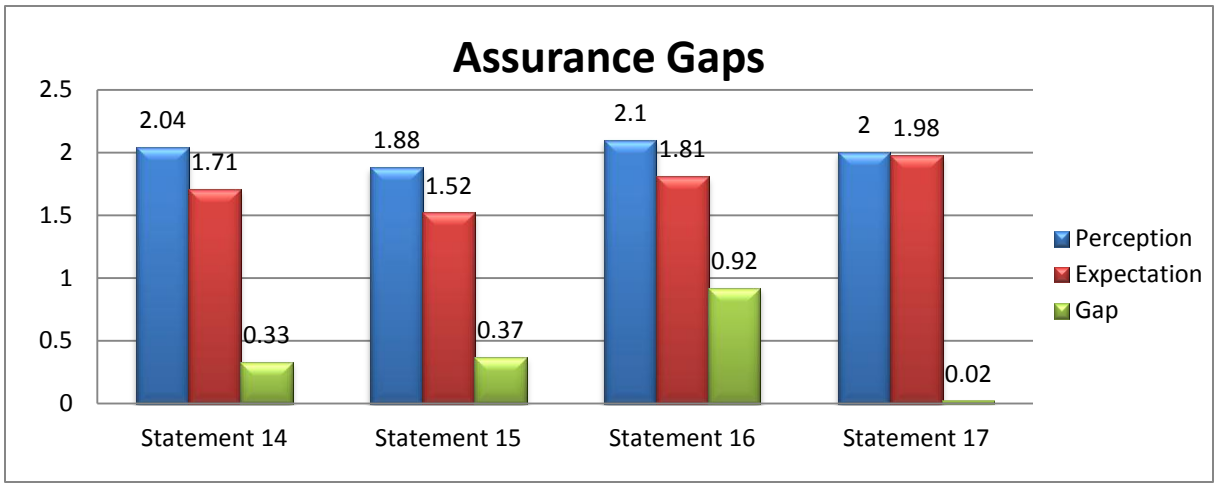


Table 5.5: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test results for Assurance statements (14-17)

Statement	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2tailed)
14	-2.483 (a)	.013
15	-3.174 (a)	.002
16	-2.418 (a)	.016
17	-2.09 (a)	.835

As shown in fig 5.21, statement 16 had the widest gap of 0.92 for the Assurance service quality dimension. ***Statement 16 was on whether college employees should be and are kind and courteous.*** As shown on table 5.5, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the gap on statement 16 is 0.16, which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding an important need to the customers.

Statement 15 was on whether customers feel safe in their interactions with college employees. Statement 15 had the second widest gap of 0.37. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 15's gap is 0.02, which is **significant** as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the needs of the customers

regarding the need which is very important to DTA College's customers. According to the findings, the customers have very high expectations that are not being met by DTA College. ***Statement 14 was on whether college employees behave appropriately.*** Statement 14 had a gap of 0.33. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 14's gap is 0.13, which is **significant** as it is lower than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the need which is of great importance to the customers.

Statement 17 had the narrowest gap of 0.02. ***Statement 17 was on the importance of individualised attention and if the need was being met by DTA College.*** The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 17 is 0.835, which is **not significant** as it is bigger than 0.05. The insignificance of the gap shows that DTA College is meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the need as the difference between customers' expectations and perceptions is very narrow.

5.4.5 Empathy Gaps

Fig 5.22 Empathy Gaps

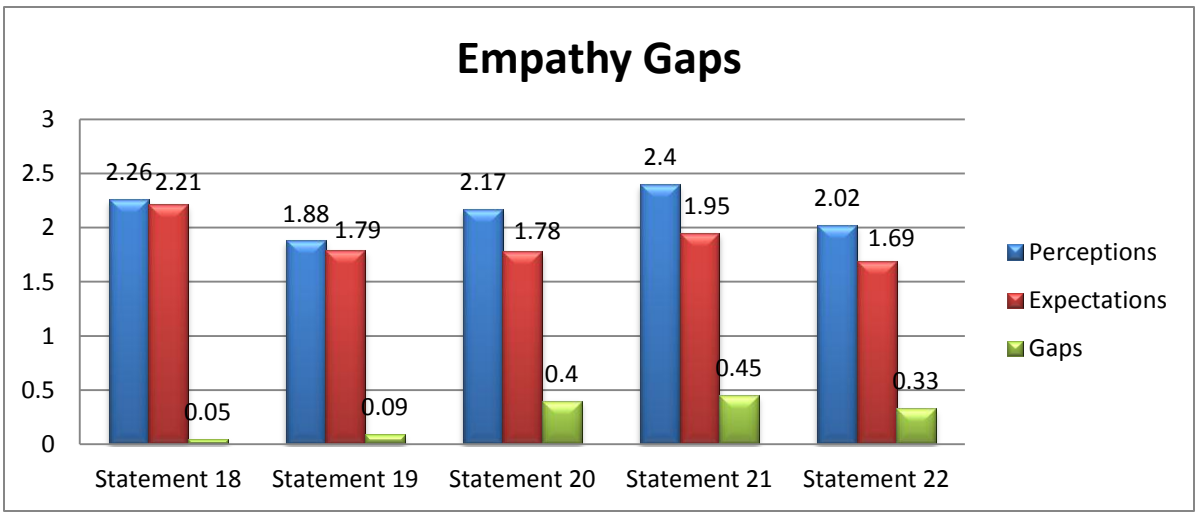


Table 5.6 Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test results for Empathy statements (18-22)

Statements	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2tailed)
18	-.281(a)	.779
19	-.906(a)	.365
20	-2.621(a)	.009
21	-2.942(a)	.003
22	-3.043(a)	.002

Statements 22 were on the importance of colleges understanding the students' needs. Statement 22 had a gap (0.33). The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 22's gap is 0.002, which is **significant** as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap means that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding an important need to the college customers.

As indicated on fig 5.22, statement 21 has the widest gap (0.45) for the empathy dimension. ***Statements 21 were on whether putting students' needs first is important and if the need is being met by DTA College.*** As shown on table 5.6, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 21's gap is 0.003, which is **significant** as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap indicates that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the need which is of great importance to the college's customers.

Statement 20 had the second widest gap (0.40). ***Statements 20 were on the importance of convenient operating hours and whether the need was being met by DTA College***. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 20 is 0.009 which is significant as it is less than 0.05. The significance of the gap indicates that DTA College is not meeting the needs of the customers regarding an important need to the customers.

Statement 19 had a gap (0.09). ***Statements 19 were on the importance of competent employees and the meeting of the need by DTA College.*** The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 19 is 0.365 which is **not significant** as it is bigger than 0.05. The

insignificance of the gap means that DTA College is meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the need.

Statement 18 had the narrowest gap (0.05). ***Statements 18 were on the importance of providing personalised attention to students and the meeting of the need by DTA College***. As shown on table 5.6, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 18 was 0.365 and 0.779 for statements 19 which are not significant results as they are bigger than 0.05. The insignificance of the gaps indicates that DTA College is meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the needs. The insignificance of the gaps also means that the needs are not crucial to DTA College customers.

5.5 Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses were proposed for the study:

H0: Service quality gaps exist at DTA College
H1: Service quality gaps do not exist at DTA College

The Wilcoxon signed - ranks test was utilised to test the significance of the gaps between customer expectations and customer perceptions at DTA College and therefore test the proposed hypothesis. The significance level was indicated by values equal to or less than 0.05. According to the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test results, 18 of the SERVQUAL statements had significant gaps. The results show that only four of the 22 SERVQUAL statements had insignificant gaps. The significance of the 18 statements means that DTA College is not meeting the expectations of the customers regarding the needs on each of the 18 statements. The four statements that are not significant show that DTA College's customers perceive DTA College's performance regarding meeting the four needs as satisfactory. However, customer expectations were higher than customer perceptions on the four gaps that tested insignificant indicating that customers expect more from the college.

The hypotheses H0 is accepted based on the Wilcoxon signed - ranks test results that provided the significance results for each of the 22 SERVQUAL gaps. 18 of the 22 gaps are significant gaps therefore; service quality gaps exist at DTA College. The hypotheses H1 is thus rejected as it is contrary to the findings and the significance test results of the gaps. Table 5.7 summarises the Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for the five service quality dimensions at DTA College.

Table 5.7: Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for the service quality dimensions at DTA College

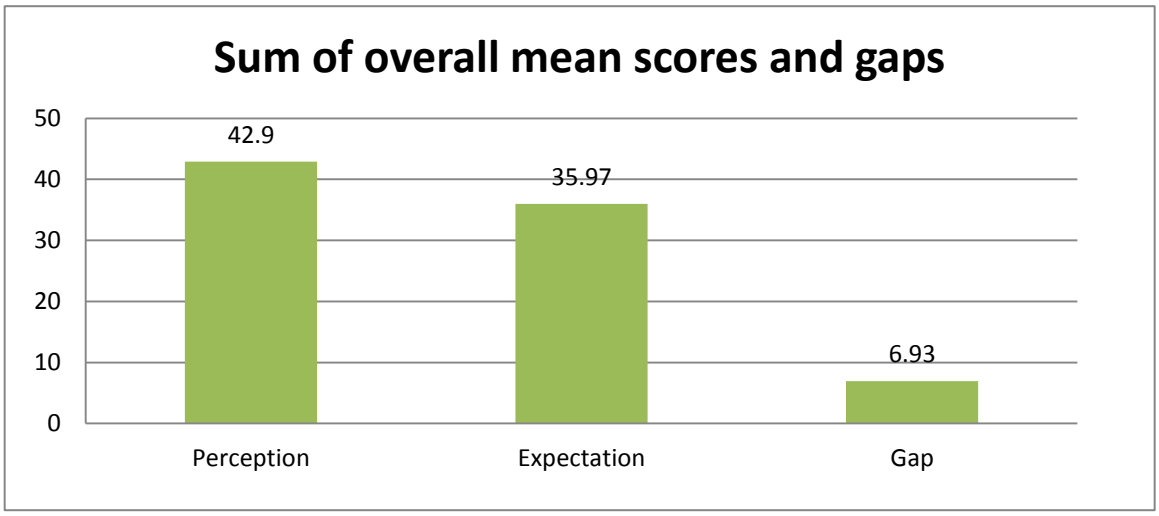
Statements	Z	Asymp.Sig. (2tailed)	Meaning
Tangibility statements 1 to 4			
1	-4.103(a)	.000	Significant
2	-1.147(a)	.252	Not Significant
3	-3.041(a)	.002	Significant
4	-2.713(a)	.007	Significant
Reliability statements 5 to 9			
5	-2.373(a)	.018	Significant
6	-3.104(a)	.002	Significant
7	-4.234(a)	.000	Significant
8	-5.092(a)	.000	Significant
9	-4.269(a)	.000	Significant
Responsiveness statements 10 to 13			
10	-2.194(a)	.028	Significant
11	-2.916(a)	.004	Significant
12	-2.816(a)	.005	Significant
13	-1.282(a)	.200	Significant
Assurance statements 14 to 17			

14	-2.483 (a)	.013	Significant
15	-3.174 (a)	.002	Significant
16	-2.418 (a)	.016	Significant
17	-2.09 (a)	.835	Not Significant
Empathy statements 18 to 22			
18	-.281(a)	.779	Not Significant
19	-.906(a)	.365	Not Significant
20	-2.621(a)	.009	Significant
21	-2.942(a)	.003	Significant
22	-3.043(a)	.002	Significant

5.6 The Overall Service Quality Gap

The overall service quality at DTA college is illustrated in fig 5.23 below. The sum of the average scores for perceptions and expectations is used in an attempt to provide a clear overall picture of the findings presented in this chapter**.** Perceptions have a sum of 42.9, whilst expectations have a sum of 35.97 which leaves a gap of 6.93. The gap is considered negative as the mean scores for perceptions are larger than those of expectations. Larger mean scores indicate an inclination towards responses of disagreement. Fig 5.23 shows the overall service quality gap at DTA College.

Fig 5.23: Sum of overall mean scores and gaps



A service quality gap exists at DTA College as the customers' expectations are higher than their perceptions of the service delivery at the college.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter described the findings from the 2 sets of the 22 SERVQUAL statements. The mean scores for expectations and perceptions were presented graphically together with a clear indication of the gaps for each statement. A clear presentation of the mean scores for the five service quality dimensions is also covered in the chapter. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test results are also tabulated for each statement under the appropriate dimensions' subheadings. A discussion of the findings will be provided in the chapter which follows.

Chapter 6
Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the research in relation to the research objectives. The discussion also includes additional findings from the research that are considered as relevant to the discussion on Service Quality.

The objectives of the Research included;

- To investigate the customer perceptions of service quality offered at DTA College during 2010;
- To investigate the customer expectations of service quality offered by DTA College during 2010;
- To determine the most important service quality dimensions to DTA College's customers during 2010 and
- To determine the service quality gaps that exist at DTA College during 2010

6.2 Objective 1: To investigate the customer's perceptions of service Quality at DTA College during 2010

Perceptions are defined as the processes by which individuals select, organise and interpret information from the environment (Boshoff and Du Plessis, 2009; 40). The perception of a service is the customer experience and observation of the actual service rendered Balachandran (2004; 69). According to the findings, **empathy** was the service quality dimension which had the highest perception mean score of 2.15 whilst tangibility had the lowest perception mean score of 1.93. The higher mean score indicates low perception levels and this implies that a larger proportion of the respondents were not in agreement with the SERVQUAL statements. A lower score (close to 1) indicates high perceptions as 1= Strongly Agree). The scores match with the responses that include: strongly disagree

=5, disagree = 4, not sure = 3, agree =2 and strongly agree =1. Thus, from the findings it can be deduced that DTA College customer's perceptions are **highest for tangibility and lowest for empathy**.

6.2.1 Perceptions on Tangibility

The physical facilities, equipment, communication materials and appearance of the personnel are referred to as the tangibles (Kasper *et al.*, 2006; 180 and Parsa and Kwansa, 2002; 83). The mean score for the perceptions of the respondents of tangibility was 1.93. The respondents' perceptions were high for Tangibility. A summary of the perception mean scores of the tangibility dimension is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Tangibility perception scores

Tangibles statement	**Perception mean scores**
1.Equipment	2.14
2.Visually appealing facilities	1.95
3.Neatly dressed employees	1.71
4. Appealing course materials	1.91
Tangibility Mean Score	**1.93**

With reference to statement 1 of the tangibility dimension of service quality, a large proportion of the respondents have very low perceptions of the equipment as the mean score (2.14) is higher than the dimension's mean score (1.93). The levels of agreement responses were above 80% for 3 of the 4 tangibility statements. 87% of the respondentswere in agreement with statement 2 that *DTA College has visually appealing facilities.* 86% of the respondents agreed *that DTA College employees are neatly dressed on statement 3* and *84% of the respondents agreed that appealing course material is provided by DTA College.* However, *statement 1 which was on up to date equipment at DTA, had only 65% of the respondents agreeing* with the statement.

The importance of tangibility is emphasised by Kotler *et al*. (1996; 599) as cited in Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99) where the authors mention that organisations should always consider tangibles, as tangibles reflect the service quality experienced by the customers. Forest and Kinser (2002; 131) comment on the ongoing consumerism and marketisation of educational institutions and state that "this decade students are putting more emphasis on the facilities like parking areas and equipment of the colleges which is different from the traditionalist approach. Traditionally students had to sacrifice in order to attain an education." The perception scores indicate that the respondents' perceptions of the tangibles at DTA College are closest to "agree" meaning that there is room for improvement in order for DTA College to attain perception scores closer to "strongly agree. DTA College needs to pay more attention to the customers' perceptions of the tangibles and consideracquiring up to date equipment and perhaps introducing an appropriate dress-code for the college staff. The findings indicate that the lowest perception scores are on the issues of the attire of employees and the equipment, which includes chairs, desks and computers.

6.2.2 Perceptions on Assurance

The perceptions mean score of Assurance was 2 which indicates that most of the respondents had high perceptions of DTA College with regard to this dimension of service quality. A large proportion (ranging from 78% to 88%) of the respondents agreed with the statements 14 to 17 SERVQUAL statements.

Assurance can be defined as the service provider's knowledge, courtesy and the ability of the organisation's employees to reflect their credibility and reliability in their service provision (Gilmore, 2003; 40). The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents consider DTA to be a college that provides assurance to its customers. However, there were remaining respondents that did not agree with the SERVQUAL statements under assurance, which means that DTA College still has to improve on its provision of assurance to its customers. A summary of the perception mean scores of the assurance dimension is shown in table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Assurance perception scores

Assurance statement	Perception mean scores
14. Appropriate staff behavior	2.04
15. Safe interactions with staff	1.88
16. Kind and courteous employees	2.10
17. Individual attention	2.0
Assurance Mean Score	**2.0**

The respondents' perceptions on safety when interacting with college employees were highest as the mean score of 1.88 is closest to "strongly agree". Statements 14, 16 and 17 as shown on table 6.2 above had mean scores closest to "agree". The inclination towards agree rather than strongly agree means that there is room for improvement on the part of DTA College regarding the issue of assurance as a service quality dimension.

6.2.3 Perceptions on Reliability

According to authors such as Kasper *et al.* (2006; 180) and Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99), "reliability reflects the service provider's ability to perform services dependably, completely and accurately." SERVQUAL statements 5 to 9 were based on reliability. Statements 5 and 7 had a higher level of agreement responses of 88% and 87% respectively. *Statement 5 was based on whether DTA employees always assist students* whilst *statement 7 was based on whether DTA keeps accurate records.* Statement 9 which was on *providing promised assistance* had 73% of the respondents agreeing. Statement 6 had 78% of the respondents agreeing whilst *statement 8 had only 64% of the respondents agreeing that DTA provides assistance within promised time*. The perceptions of customers on *statement 8 which was on the importance of colleges assisting within promised time* are the lowest thus; DTA College has to improve so that the customer perceptions can be higher.

The findings showed that reliability as a service quality dimension had an average perception score of 2.01, which means that a large proportion of the respondents had high

perceptions of DTA College on the issue of reliability. A summary of the perception mean scores of the reliability dimension is shown in the table below.

Table 6.3: Reliability perception scores

Reliability statement	**Perception mean scores**
5. Employees always assist	1.86
6. Employees show genuine interest	1.98
7. Keep accurate records	1.81
8.Assist within promised time	2.31
9. Assist as per promise	2.10
ReliabilityMean Score	**2.01**

The results indicate that DTA College is not entirely dependable according to the respondents, for instance 36% of the respondents were not in agreement with the statement 8 which was on whether DTA provides assistance within promised time. The perception score for statement 8 of 2.31 as shown on table 6.3, indicates an inclination towards disagreement responses which means DTA College should improve on the issue of reliability.

Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) emphasise that it is important for service providers to take note of the promise they make to customers and therefore the expectations they create in order to achieve service excellence. The findings indicated that DTA College's customers' perceptions are high for reliability but the findings also show a high level of respondents that were disagreeing on all the five reliability statements which shows that there is still need for improvement on DTA College's part.

6.2.4 Perceptions on Responsiveness

KMAfrica (2009; para 2) clearly explain that responsiveness refers to prompt service to customers, willingness to help customers, readiness to respond to customers' requests, and going out of the way to make customers happy. DTA College customer perceptions are

generally low for the responsiveness dimension. The most problematic area from the findings is on statement 13 which had a mean score of 2.17 which is above 2.05 (the mean of the whole responsiveness dimension). *Statement 13 had the lowest level of agreement for the dimension as only 67% of the respondents agreed that DTA College employees are never too busy to assist*. *Statements 11 on prompt service* and *12 on the availability of assistance* both had 76% of the respondents were in agreement with the statements. *Statement 10 had the highest percentage of the respondents (88%) agreeing that DTA always informs students of the services available*. A summary of the perception mean scores of the responsiveness dimension is shown in table 6.4 below.

Table 6.4: Responsiveness perception scores

Responsiveness statement	**Perception mean scores**
10. Informs students of services	1.86
11. Provides prompt service	2.12
12. Assistance always available	2.04
13. Employees never too busy	2.17
Responsiveness Mean Score	**2.05**

The perception mean score for the responsiveness dimension was 2.05 which indicates an inclination towards indifferent and disagreement responses. The perception mean score of 2.05 for the dimension shows that it is closer to a score of 2 than it is to 3. The customers' perceptions on responsiveness of DTA College are not entirely low, as shown on table 5.4, perceptions for the responsiveness service quality dimension are averagely high for 2 of the 4 statements (which are statements 10 and 12) which are lower than the whole responsiveness dimension average perception score of 2.05. The issue of employees that are too busy to assist should be addressed as it greatly influences the customers' perceptions of service quality at DTA College.

Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99) explain that responsiveness is difficult to maintain due to consideration of various factors that include temporary demand for a specific service and

limited human resources. DTA College has to assess the variations in demand which could be the reasons why customers might feel that employees are too busy to assist at times.

6.2.5 Perceptions on Empathy

Empathy refers to the caring individualised attention the organisation provides to its customers (Williams and Buswell, 2003; 24 and Parsa and Kwansa, 2002; 83). Bennekan (2002; 71) explains that empathy is divided into two aspects which are **communication skills** and **understanding the customer**. Communication skills refer to the ability to communicate well with the customer. Understanding the customer refers to the customer services agent's willingness to get to know the customer's environment.

Statements 18 to 22 of the SERVQUAL measuring instrument were on empathy. 66% of the respondents agreed that DTA *offered personalised attention* on *statement 18*. 69% of the respondents agreed that *DTA had convenient operating hours on statement 20*. On *statement 21 only 52% of the respondents agreed that DTA puts students' needs first*. The responses show low levels of agreement, indicating that the customers have low perceptions of DTA College on empathy. The highest percentage frequencies for agreement responses were 85% for statements 22 and 19 which still show the existence of 15% of disagreeing respondents thus, pointing out that customers have low perceptions on empathy. The mean score for customer perceptions on empathy at DTA College was 2.15. The mean score was the highest for all the service quality dimensions indicating that empathy had the lowest customer perceptions at DTA College. A summary of the perception mean scores of the empathy dimension is shown in table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Empathy perception scores

Empathy statement	Perception mean scores
18. DTA offers personalised attention	2.26
19. DTA has competent staff	1.88
20. Convenient Operating hours	2.17
21. Putting students' needs first	2.40
22. Understanding students' needs	2.02
Empathy Mean score	**2.15**

As shown on table 6.5 above, the average perception score for empathy of 2.15 is above 2. The perceptions score results indicate an inclination towards indifference and disagreement of the respondents' responses, therefore, translating to low perceptions of empathy at DTA College. The perceptions were lowest for statement 21 which was based on the issue of putting students' needs first. There is need for DTA College to show more concern and care to the customers as the results indicate low perceptions on empathy at the college. According to Lamb *et al.* (2008; 353), "firms whose employees recognise customers, call them by name and learn their customers' specific requirements score very highly on empathy."

6.3 Objective 2: To determine customer expectations of Service Quality at DTA College during 2010

Customer expectations are defined as beliefs about the level of service that will be delivered by a service provider, and they are assumed to provide standards of reference against which the delivered service is compared (Boshoff and Du Plessis, 2009; 40). According to the findings, DTA College's customers' expectations are high as all the mean scores range between 1 and 2, which are agreement scores. Reliability was the service quality dimension that had the highest level of customer expectations. An expectation mean score of 1.50 for the reliability dimension indicated that the average response was closest to 'strongly agree' which was equal to a score of 1 on the Likert scale. The expectations mean

score of Tangibility was the second highest (1.61). Responsiveness, assurance and empathy had mean scores of 1.74, 1.75 and 1.88 respectively.

6.3.1 Expectations on Reliability

Reliability reflects the service provider's ability to perform services dependably, completely and accurately as per promise (Kasper *et al.*, 2006; 180). The findings indicate that DTA College's customers' expectations for reliability as a service quality dimension since 85% of the respondents agreed with statement 5, *it is important for colleges to have assistance that is always available*. 88% of the respondents were in agreement with statement 6 that *it is important for college employees to show genuine interest to students*. With regard to statement 7, *97% of the respondents agreed that it is important for colleges to keep accurate records*. On statement 8, *93% of the respondents agreed that it is important for colleges to provide assistance within promised time*. 92% of the respondents agreed with statement 9, that *it is important for colleges to provide assistance to students as per promise.*

A large proportion of the respondents consider that reliability as important in colleges as the mean score for the dimension was 1.50 indicates a high level of agreement. An expectations mean score of 1.50 indicates that DTA College customers have high reliability expectations. A summary of the reliability dimension expectations mean scores is shown in table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Reliability expectation scores

Reliability statement	**Expectation mean scores**
5. Employees always assist	1.66
6. Employees show genuine interest	1.60
7. Keep accurate records	1.35
8.Assist within promised time	1.45
9. Assist as per promise	1.55
Reliability Mean Score	**1.50**

As shown on table 6.6, the average expectation score for the reliability dimension of 1.50 means that a large proportion of the respondents have high expectations from the college with regard to reliability as a service quality dimension. According to the respondents, reliability is the service quality dimension that had the highest level of customer expectations at DTA College. The findings support the suggestion by Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) that reliability is the most important service quality dimension of the five, as it is related to the care given to customers.

6.3.2 Expectations on Tangibility

Kasper *et al.* (2006; 180) provide an elaborative definition of tangibles and state that the physical facilities, equipment, communication materials and appearance of the personnel are referred to as the tangibles. Tangibles had the second lowest mean score for expectations of 1.61, which indicates that the general responses for tangibility were between 1 and 2 which are 'strongly agree' and 'agree' respectively. The responses on expectations indicate that tangibility is important to DTA College customers. A summary of the expectation mean scores of the tangibility dimension is shown in table 6.7.

Table 6.7: Tangibility expectation scores

Tangibles statement	**Expectation mean scores**
1.Equipment	1.50
2.Visually appealing facilities	1.95
3.Neatly dressed employees	1.47
4. Appealing course materials	1.60
Tangibility Mean Score	**1.61**

As shown on table 6.7 all four tangibility statements were inclined towards "agreement" as they produced expectations mean scores below 2. The expectations for tangibility at DTA College are high as most of the respondents agreed with the four SERVQUAL statements (1 to 4). The agreement levels were high for all the 4 tangibility statements according to the

findings. 88% of the respondents were in agreement with *statement 1 on the importance of up to date equipment*, statement 2 had 84% of the respondents in agreement with the statement, *95% of the respondents were in agreement with statement 3 which was on the importance of smartly dressed employees* and *statement 4 which was on the importance of visually appealing course material had 86% of the respondents in agreement.*

The findings from the study support the literature by authors such as Hyland and Merrill (2003; 54) and Cravett (2007; 45) who state that a conducive learning climate is expected by learners and it should be constantly created and recreated by attending to physical climate, affective-social climate and intellectual components as learners expect up to date equipment and facilities. Oldfield and Baron (2000; 85) also emphasise the importance of tangibles and state that "students spend much of their time in contact with the physical elements of their educational experience (in lecture theatres, libraries, computer laboratories) and therefore it is likely that they would be influenced by the physical facilities. Students who spend hoursevery day in a school are likely to have attitudes toward the school system that are strongly influenced by the physical facilities (tangibles)."

Two of the SERVQUAL authors (Berry and Parasuraman 1991; 16 cited in Kandmpully *et al*., 2001; 54) point out that "although tangibles are typically the least important of the five service quality dimensions, they should still be considered as core service components." Contrary to the statement by the authors regarding the importance of tangibles, the findings from the study conducted at DTA College show that tangibility is very important as it was ranked as the second highest of the five service quality dimensions.

6.3.3 Expectations on Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Bowie and Buttle, 2004; 249). According to the findings, the average mean score for the "responsiveness" dimension was 1.74, which is the mid score for the five SERVQUAL dimensions of DTA College. The expectations for the dimension were high despite being ranked third of the five service quality dimensions. A large proportion (91%) of the

respondents were in agreement with statement 12 that *"it is important for colleges to have available assistance always"*; agreement responses for statement 10 and 11 were 89% and 86% respectively. Respondents indicated least agreement (77%) with the statement "*it is important for colleges to have employees that are never too busy*." However, the overall findings indicate that expectations of responsiveness at DTA College are generally high as evident in the percentages of agreeing respondents which were all above 75%. A summary of the expectation mean scores for the responsiveness dimension is shown in table 6.8 below.

Table 6.8: Responsiveness expectation scores

Responsiveness statement	**Expectation mean scores**
10. Informs students of services	1.64
11. Provides prompt service	1.74
12. Assistance always available	1.64
13. Employees never too busy	1.93
Responsiveness Mean Score	**1.74**

The expectation mean score of the Responsiveness dimension is 1.74. The mean score indicates a high level of expectations. As shown on table 6.8, the highest expectations were indicated for statements 10 and 12 as the scores were closest to 1 (strongly agree). The findings indicate that expectations for responsiveness in terms DTA College's willingness to provide assistance and readiness to respond to customers are high. The findings from the study on the expectations for responsiveness at DTA College are similar to the expectations in the definition of responsiveness by KMAfrica (2009; para 2) who clearly state that responsiveness refers to prompt service to customers, willingness to help customers, readiness to respond to customers' requests, and going out of the way to make customers happy.

6.3.4 Expectations on Assurance

Assurance can be defined as the service provider's knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the organisation's employees to reflect their credibility and reliability in their service provision (Gilmore, 2003; 40). The expectations for assurance at DTA College are generally high. However, in comparison with the levels indicated for the other three service quality dimensions discussed above, assurance had the second lowest expectations. The mean expectation score for assurance was 1.75, indicating that fewer respondents were strongly agreeing with the statements. Statements 14 to 17 were based on assurance, statement 15 had the highest level of expectations as the largest proportion (97%) of the respondents agreed that, *it is important for students to feel safe when interacting with college employees* whilst statement 17, had the least level of expectations as only 70% of the respondents agreed that *it is important for colleges to provide individual attention*. Some of dimension's statements that include statement 17 are not highly prioritised by DTA College customers but assurance is still important as evident in the expectation mean score of (1.75). A summary of the expectation scores of the assurance service quality dimension is shown in table 6.9.

Table 6.9: Assurance expectation scores

Assurance statement	**Expectation mean scores**
14. Appropriate staff behavior	1.71
15. Safe interactions with staff	1.52
16. Kind and courteous employees	1.81
17. Individual attention	1.98
Assurance Mean Score	**1.75**

As shown in table 6.9 , the respondents indicated the highest level of expectations on the issue of safety on statement 15. Statement 15 had an expectation score of 1.52 indicating a high level of agreement by the respondents that safe interactions with college employees

are very important. The findings support the explanation by Lamb *et al*. (2008; 353) that "customers expect skilled employees who treat customers with respect and show that they know their work and products making the customers feel safe in their transactions." Expectations for all the assurance statements at DTA College are high as the results show agreement responses between 1 (strongly agree) and 2 (agree).

6.3.5 Expectations on Empathy

Empathy refers to giving customers individual, personal attention, employees who deal with customers in a caring fashion, having the customer's best interest at heart and employees who understand the needs of their customers (KMAfrica, 2009; para 5). Empathy had the highest expectation mean score of 1.88, indicating that DTA College customers' **expectations for empathy are the lowest** of all the five service quality dimensions. However, the expectations for empathy are still high for DTA College as the mean score of 1.88 falls between scores 1 'strongly agree' and 2 'agree'. Statements 18 to 22 were based on empathy and none of the statements had an agreement level of over 90%. *Statement 19 had 86% of the respondents agreeing that it is important for colleges to have competent staff. Statement 18 had the least (78%) respondents agreeing that it is important for colleges to provide personalised attention to students.* The agreement responses for statements 19, 20 and 22 were 86%, 85% and 84% respectively. A summary of the expectation mean scores of the empathy dimension is shown in table 6.10 below.

Table 6.10: Empathy expectation scores

Empathy statement	**Expectation mean scores**
18. DTA offers personalised attention	2.21
19. DTA has competent staff	1.79
20. Convenient Operating hours	1.78
21. Putting students' needs first	1.95
22. Understanding students' needs	1.69
Empathy Mean score	**1.88**

As shown in table 6.10, statement 22 which has a mean score of 1.69 had the highest level of expectations. The respondents' responses were inclined towards the response "strongly agree". Responses on the importance of personalised attention at DTA College (statement 18) were inclined towards the indifference score (3), indicating that the customers' expectations are low. However, the mean expectation score for the empathy service quality dimension (1.88) indicates high levels of agreement in the respondents' responses therefore meaning that expectations for empathy are high.

6.4 Objective 3: To determine the service quality gaps that exist at DTA College

The mean scores for expectations and for perceptions were used to provide a clear indication of the gaps that exists for each of the five service quality dimensions for DTA College. The gaps were calculated using the formula (P-E) and were presented graphically in the previous chapter. The gaps are all negative (-) since the ranked perceptions ranked lower than the expectations for all the five service quality dimensions. Expectation responses for all the service quality dimensions were closer to 1 (strongly agree) than the perception responses, hence the gaps were all negative for the fiveservice quality dimensions. Reliability is the service quality dimension that had the widest gap of 0.51. Tangibility is the dimension that had the second widest gap of 0.32, and responsiveness had a gap of 0.31. Empathy produced a gap of 0.27 and Assurance is the service quality dimension which had the narrowest gap (0.25). The service quality dimension gaps that exist at DTA College are summarised in the table 6.11.

Table 6.11: DTA College service quality dimension gaps

Service Quality Dimension	Gap
1.Reliablity	0.51
2.Tangibility	0.32
3. Responsiveness	0.31
4. Empathy	0.27
5. Assurance	0.25

As shown in table 6.11, gaps exist between the customer expectations and their perceptions at DTA College for all the five service quality dimensions. The gaps are negative gaps as the customer perceptions of DTA College customers are lower than their expectations. Therefore, the findings show that DTA College is not meeting their customers' expectations with regard to service quality.

6.4.1 The Reliability gap

Reliability is the service quality dimension that had the widest gap (0.51). All the reliability statements from 5 to 9 had significant gaps as the Wilcoxon signedranks test results indicated scores below 0.05. The significance of the reliability gaps means that the "reliability" service quality dimension is very important to DTA College customers but DTA College is failing to meet the customers' expectations on the issue of reliability. The customer perceptions of service quality at DTA College are greatly influenced by the reliability needs. The findings support the suggestion by Williams and Buswell (2003; 24) that "reliability is the most important service quality dimension of the five, as it is related to the care given to customers." The findings from the study carried out at DTA College also confirm the explanation on the importance of reliability mentioned by Kandampully *et al.* (2001; 54) that reliability includes doing things right the first time which is one of the most important service quality components for customers. The high significance levels of the gaps show that reliability is the most crucial part of service quality to DTA College customers. The hypotheses H0 that service quality gaps exist at DTA College is acceptable as the all the five service quality dimensions have significant gaps.

6.4.2 The Tangibility gap

Tangibility had the second widest gap (0.32) between perceptions and expectations. DTA College is therefore not meeting the customer expectations on tangibility. The four gaps on tangibility were tested for significance and one of the four gaps (statement 2) was insignificant. *Statement 2 was about the importance of visually appealing facilities and if DTA College was meeting the expectations*. The statement had the narrowest gap of (0.09).

The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for the statement's gap was 0.252 which was **not significant**. The insignificance of the gap indicates that DTA College's facilities are considered to be visually appealing by the majority of the customers. The gaps on statements 1, 3 and 4 were all significant which means that DTA College has to improve on the equipment at the college, the dress of employees and the course material as the customers' expectations are higher than the perceptions. The service quality of DTA College is therefore highly affected by the needs on statements 1, 3 and 4, as the gaps are significant.

The findings show that tangibles are very important to DTA College customers and greatly impact their perceptions of service quality at the college. These findings support Oldfield and Baron (2000; 85) who suggested the importance of "tangibles" to education customers and stated that students spend much of their time in contact with the physical elements of their educational experience (in lecture theatres, libraries, computer laboratories), and therefore it is likely that they would be influenced by the physical facilities. Students who spend hours every day in a school are likely to have attitudes toward the school system that arestrongly influenced by the physical facilities (tangibles). The significance of 3 of the 4 "tangibiles" gaps supports the hypotheses H0 that service quality gaps exist at DTA College.

6.4.3 The Responsiveness gap

Responsiveness produced a service quality gap of 0.31. Statement 12 produced the widest gap (0.40). *Statement 12 was on the importance of availability of assistance and whether DTA College is meeting the need.* Statement 13 *on the importance of college employees that are never too busy to assist and if DTA College is meeting the need* produced a gap of 0.24. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 13's gap was 0.2, which isnot significant as it is larger than 0.05. Statement 10 *on the importance of informing students of services available* produced the narrowest gap (0.22). However, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test result for statement 10's gap was 0.028 in comparison to statement 13's gap which was wider (0.24) but insignificant. The insignificance of gap 13 may indicate that

DTA College customers do understand that employees could be busy at times and it is not the most important aspect of the responsiveness dimension of service quality.

The findings based on statements 10, 11 and 12 which had significant gaps indicate that the more important aspects of the responsiveness dimension to DTA College customers include prompt service, availability of the service and being informed of available services. DTA College has to concentrate on closing the significant gaps related to statements 10, 11 and 12 of the responsiveness dimension of service quality. The hypotheses H0 that service quality gaps exist at DTA College is further supported as three elements of the responsiveness dimension of service quality were significant gaps.

6.4.4 The Empathy Gap

Empathy had a gap of 0.27 between customer expectations and perceptions. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test results showed that two of the five gaps were not significant. The gaps that were insignificant were for statements 18 and 19 which were (0.779) and (0.365) respectively. *Statement 18 was on the importance of providing personalised attention at colleges and statement 19 was about the importance ofcompetent staff at colleges*. The low level of expectations and the insignificance of the gaps show the low importance of these attributes of service quality to the customers. The insignificance of the gaps indicates that DTA is meeting the customer needs however, there is always room for improvement. DTA College would have to address the needs indicated in the statements that had significant gaps first as the needs are very important tothe college's customers. The significance of three of the five elements which comprise of the empathy gaps confirm the existence of service quality gaps at DTA College, therefore supporting the hypotheses (H0) that service quality gaps exist at DTA College.

6.4.5 The Assurance Gap

Assurance had the narrowest gap (0.25) for all the five service quality dimensions at DTA College. Statement 16 had the widest gap (0.92). *Statement 16 was on whether college*

employees should be and are kind and courteous and if DTA College was meeting this need. 80% of the respondents agreed that it is important for college employees to be kind and courteous whilst only 78% of the respondents agreed that DTA College is meeting the need. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test results were significant for the gap (0.016) despite having a narrow gap between perceptions and expectations. The significance of the gap means that the college has to ensure that the gap is closed as the need for kind and courteous college employees is a crucial aspect of service quality to the college's customers.

Statement 15 *on whether college employees should be and are safe to interact with* produced the second widest gap (0.37). With regard to statement 15, 97% of the respondents agreed that students should feel safe in their interactions with college employees. The Wilcoxon signed rank test result for the gap was significant (0.002) meaning that the need is very important to the college's customer. 91% agreed that DTA College was meeting the need. The findings show that DTA College's customers do not feel safe in their interactions with the college's employees, therefore the college employees have to assure customers during their interactions.

Statement 14 produced a gap of 0.33. *Statement 14 was on whether college employees behave appropriately.* DTA College employees'behaviour is not meeting the customers' expectations as the Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for statement 14's gap was significant (0.013). Statement 17 had aninsignificant gap (0.835) and had the narrowest gap of 0.02 of all the assurance dimension statements. *Statement 17 was on the importance of individualised attention and if the need was being met by DTA College.* The results indicate that individualised attention needs are being met by DTA College. However, the existence of the narrow gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions means that there is still room for improvement in order for DTA College to close the negative gap completely. The significance of gaps for three of the four elements which comprise the dimension of service quality assurance statements indicate the existence of service quality gaps at DTA College and therefore hypotheses (H0) that service quality gaps exist at DTA College is accepted.

6.5 Objective 4: To determine the most important service quality dimension to DTA College'scustomers

The most important service quality dimension to DTA College customers was determined through the **level of expectations** and through the **significance of the gaps between expectations and perceptions.** Statistical tests that include mean scores and Wilcoxon signed ranks test were utilised. The differences between the mean perception scores and mean expectation scores were calculated to provide the exact gaps and test the significance of the gaps. In terms of the expectations of DTA College customers. In terms of the expectations of DTA College customers , Reliability is the service quality dimension which was highly ranked, followed by Tangibility, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Table 6.12 shows the perception and expectation scores of the dimensions in the ranked order.

Table 6.12: Summary of perception and expectation mean scores

Service Quality Dimension	Perception mean score	Expectation mean score
1. Reliability	2.01	1.50
2. Tangibility	1.93	1.61
3.Responsiveness	2.05	1.74
4. Assurance	2.0	1.75
5. Empathy	2.15	1.88

The expectation mean score for reliability as a service quality dimension was the lowest (1.50), indicating that reliability was rated as a very important dimension by the largest proportion of the respondents. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for all the reliability statement gaps were significant indicating that the dimension is very important to DTA College customers. The significance of the gaps also indicates that DTA College is failing to meet the customer expectations thus reliability has a huge impact on perceptions of service quality at DTA College. The three most significant gaps (statements 7 to 9 gaps with 0.00) were from the reliability dimension. Statement 8 which was on *the importance of providing assistance within promised time* had the most significant and widest gaps of

0.86. The college customers consider the provision of "promised assistance within promised time" as very important but DTA College is not meeting this expectation. The keeping of accurate records as per statement 7's gap and providing the promised assistance as per statement 9 are also very important aspects of service quality to DTA customers.

The findings support the suggestions on the importance of reliability stated by Nwankwo and Aiyeku (2002; 99) and Williams and Buswell (2003; 24). These authors suggested that reliability is the most important dimension as it is related to the care given to customers. Bowie and Buttle (2004; 249) also emphasise the importance of **reliability** and add that it is important for service providers to take note of the promise they make to customers and therefore the expectations they create when companies make promises to the customers pre-encounter. The customers expect the company's product, service quality and price to match the promise. When companies match their promise, they are considered to be reliable by the customer (Bowie and Buttle, 2004; 249).

The mean score for customer expectations on the tangibility dimension of service quality was 1.61, which was the second highest of the five service quality dimensions. Three of the four tangibility statements' gaps were significant indicating that this dimension is very important to DTA College customers. *Statement 1 on up to date equipment at college* had the widest (0.64) and most significant (0.00) gap. The high significance of the gap indicates that DTA College customers consider up to date equipment as very important. Statement 2 on the importance of *visually appealing facilities and if DTA is meeting the expectations* produced an insignificant gap (0.313). The insignificance of the gap shows that DTA customers' expectations are being met and that DTA College has to concentrate on the other three significant gaps that affect the customers' perceptions of the tangible elements of service quality. Tangibility is an important service quality dimension to DTA customers as evident in the expectation mean scores for each of the four statements which all range between 1 and 2, indicating agreement and high expectations.

Responsiveness, assurance and empathy had expectations mean scores of 1.74, 1.75 and 1.88 respectively. The service quality dimensions are all important to DTA College

customers as the expectation mean scores fall between 1 and 2. Gaps between customer expectations and perceptions also exist for all the five service quality dimensions at DTA College thus, all the dimensions are important and there is need to close all the existing gaps. However, the expectation mean scores for responsiveness, assurance and empathy are inclined towards 2 which is 'agreeing' rather than 1 which is 'strongly agreeing'. The importance of these three dimensions is not as high as the importance of reliability which had a mean score of 1.50 which is closer to a score of 1 (which is to strongly agree). The three service quality dimensions all have gaps that exist between customer expectations and perceptions but unlike the reliability dimension some of the gaps were not significant. One of the four responsiveness gaps was not significant whilst only two of the four assurance gaps were significant. Empathy had two of the five gaps testing insignificant.

The insignificance of two of the four assurance gaps and two of the five empathy gaps indicate that although the expectations are stated by the customers, the insignificant gaps' expectations are not as important and urgent to DTA College customers as the significant gaps' expectations. DTA College's efforts should be directed at closing the significant gaps first as they influence customers perceptions of service quality at the college greatly. Understanding the perceptions and expectations of customers will aid DTA College in organising resources and effort on the key service quality issues to meet the college's customers' expectations. Dean (2008; para 6) emphasises the importance of collecting information on customers' expectations and perceptions and states thatit is important for service organisations to know the perceptions and expectations of customers so that they can assess their service processes and work towards meeting expectations and improved customer perceptions.

6.6 Conclusion

The five service quality dimensions are all important to DTA College customers as is evident in the findings, specifically the high levels of expectations for all the five dimensions. The importance ranking however, provides an indication of the dimension that

DTA College can highly prioritise when formulating strategies to close the service quality gaps that exist. The next chapter discusses recommendations that DTA College can implement to reduce the gaps that exist at the college.

Chapter 7
Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the recommendations that could be implemented by DTA College. The recommendations are based on the literature reviewed during the study and the findings obtained from the study. Recommendations are discussed with regard to each service quality dimension.

7.2 Recommendations on Reliability

Reliability is the service quality dimension that had the most significant gap. DTA College has to prioritise the closing of the reliability gap. According to the findings DTA College is not matching the promised service quality especially when it comes to assisting within promised time and providing the promised assistance. The reliability gap at DTA can be best explained as gaps 3 and 4 of 'the GAPS model'. According to Grewal and Levy (2010; 371), "gap 3 refers to the differences between service quality specifications and service delivery whilst gap 4 refers to the variations between service delivery and external communications to the customers. The lack of resources is usually the main cause of gap 3."

Lamb *et al*. (2008; 354) explain that gap 3 is caused by poorly trained or poorly motivated employees and lack of cooperation with colleagues and management. Inappropriate and inadequate work tools or technology and role conflict whereby employees are involved in conflicting tasks that are sometimes not clear also cause the delivery gap (gap 3). Inadequate resources and technology at DTA College is possibly one of the main reasons for the existence of the reliability gap. The college has to work on providing adequate work tools for facilitators to perform their tasks more effectively.

A budget allocation for new staff computers is highly recommended for DTA College in order to improve on the inadequacy of work tools. Up to date learner materials and computers with recent software programs are recommended for DTA College in order to be able to improve the service delivery. The availability of Internet facilities at the college could greatly assist facilitators when compiling important information for the lectures.

Motivational workshops need to be considered to motivate employees. Management should facilitate employee involvement in training workshops and conferences that are held for instance, by the Higher and further education ministry to encourage continuous learning and avoid redundancy of the staff. Employees also become more aware of current developments in the industry and can pass on the invaluable knowledge to the students. When employees are involved in continuous learning and exciting events their motivation also improves which is ultimately good for service delivery.

It is recommended that DTA College management discusses and set clear guidelines on service delivery and then, communicate internally first before communicating with the customers to avoid the communications gap (gap 4). According to Grewal and Levy (2010; 371), "it is important to discuss and agree on the degree to which services can be standardised as some customer expectations are not feasible. It is very important to inform employees of all guidelines and marketing communications before it is passed to the customers so that all employees know and understand the image the company is portraying externally." The lack of clarity on some service processes at DTA College leads to a situation whereby the customers will end up feeling that the organisation is not keeping their promise. If DTA College employees communicate the same message to students all the time and are clear on all the guidelines, the variations in service delivery can be reduced.

During the process of setting guidelines on service delivery, DTA College should consider the existing limitations that prevent the college from fulfilling promises to the customers. The college should make realistic and achievable promises to customers to avoid low customer perceptions on the issue of reliability at the college. According to

Robertson (2005; para 4), "under-promise and over-perform is a reliability slogan or rule that service providers should implement, as it provides guidelines that reminds the organisations to set expectations with their customers at a reasonable level, and at which the organisation can consistently exceed their customers' expectations. Robertson (2005; para 4) provides an example of how service providers successfully implement the under-promise and over-perform reliability rule and states that if the organisation has a task to research a problem for a customer that can be completed in two hours, the organisation has to be disciplined and inform the customer that they will call back the customer in four hours. This helps the organisation to account for those unexpected emergencies that might come up, yet still meet their customer's expectations (Robertson, 2005; para 4). The adoption of the 'under-promise over-perform' rule can enable DTA College to fulfill the promises the college makes to the customers, therefore resulting in customers considering the college as reliable.

It is recommended that DTA College implements a performance assessment and monitoring tool in order to evaluate the college's service quality performance regularly. The evaluations can aid the college in identifying the areas that need to be improved in order to fulfill the promises it makes to customers. Dobrzański and Roszak (2007; 224) emphasises the importance of assessing and monitoring performance and suggest thatsenior management in education services has to ensure that customer expectations are met on the following; effective organisation of the process of the education,variety of educational offer, determining the requirements to the students, competences of the persons conducting the classes, quality of the relation with lecturers and managing personnel, and access to the infrastructure supporting the education. The problems of the quality of the educational services root from the above mentioned issues. Sohail, Rajadurai and Rahman (2003) cited in Gbadamosi and De Jager (2008; 374) point out that in the context of Higher education many college administrators see implementation of quality practices, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) as a way toreassure that institutions of higher education perform well and that the customers of higher education are beingserved well. TQM principles are based on the preference to do things right the first time. DTA College should consider

implementing TQM principles as they are easily monitored and assessed to ensure that the college's service delivery is of high quality.

7.3 Recommendations on Tangibility

This service quality dimension produced the second widest gap and was also ranked as the second most important service quality dimension at DTA College. It is recommended that DTA College should allocate a budget for up to date equipment as it was the need with the most significant gap. The purchase of up to date computers for the students should be top priority as none of the computers available have up to date software programs. Internet facilities should be made available to students as students need to be competitive in the current technologically advanced environment.

The introduction of staff uniforms that are comfortable and presentable is recommended for DTA College. The uniforms should be adequate for employees to wear throughout the week and therefore portray a smart and good college image to the college's customers. The findings from the study indicated a high level of customers' expectations on the issue of neatly dressed employees. The significance of the gap between expectations and perceptions for the statement indicated that the need was very important to the respondents thus, influences the perceptions on the issue of tangibles and ultimately service quality. According to Lamb *et al.* (2008; 353), "the appropriate dress-code and the introduction of staff uniforms are attempts to improve tangibility that have been successful in many service industry companies." The introduction of appropriate staff uniforms by DTA College can improve the perceptions on the issue of tangibility at the college.

Uncomfortable chairs need to be replaced with new chairs. According to Cravett (2007; 45), "a conducive learning climate is expected by learners and it should be constantly created and recreated by attending to physical climate and affective-social climate." It is important that DTA College periodically re-evaluates the ergonomics of the students continuously to ensure that customer perceptions on service quality are always high. The

improvement of the equipment that includes chairs, desks and computers improves the appearance of the learning environment as well as the image of the college.

It is also recommended that DTA College allocates a budget for appropriate stationery that includes learners' notes and course guides. Branded learners' materials and formal letter-heads indicate a high level of professionalism. DTA College can improve customer perceptions on tangibles through building a good image from the college's physical evidence.

7.4 Recommendations on Responsiveness

Responsiveness gaps that were significant were on the issue of assistance that is always available. The findings indicated that assistance is not always available and that service not always provided promptly at DTA. It is recommended that DTA implements supply and modification strategies to close the responsiveness gaps. These strategies could include modifying supply through encouraging students that are in their 3rd or 4th year of study to tutor and work in groups with first year students towards assessment and exam days. The few facilitators that are available at DTA College can then oversee the tutoring and devote the extra time to other important roles in order to reduce the responsiveness gap. According to Verma (2008; 326) "in order to improve on responsiveness companies need to implement 'synchro-marketing' which refers to supply modification and demand modification, for instance the demand of tutorial classes will be high towards and during exam months, it is therefore wiser to modify supply through employing part time staff and even use customers as resources by encouraging group discussions and tutorials to avoid short falls." Thus, synchro-marketing is highly recommended for DTA College in order to close the existing responsiveness gap.

It is also recommended that DTA College attempts to close the responsiveness gap through the development of a website and intranet facility that students can utilise. The college website and the intranet facility will allow students to view time-tables, weekly assessment

results and get assistance on enquiries that students would normally have to queue at the facilitator's office to get answers for. Temporary demand fluctuations can be avoided as self assistance on the intranet will be availed to students. Forest and Kinser (2002; 131) mention that colleges are offering courses at times and places more convenient to adult and part-time students through on-line technologies to accommodate the busy schedules of non-traditional students. On-line technologies are important as students can access the web at any time which contributes to achieving excellence in responsiveness (Forest and Kinser, 2002; 131). DTA College can definitely improve on convenience and responsiveness through the use of a website that is interactive.

It is important for DTA College to ensure training programs are availed to the college's employees particularly on new systems and technologies that can improve the speed of the service delivery processes. On-line technologies that can be used to improve responsiveness are effective only if the college's employees know how to use the systems. According to Boshoff and Duplessis (2009; 50), "service organisations should note that even when guidelines exist for the performance of services and the appropriate treatment of customers, high quality service is not guaranteed. Even when standards accurately reflect customers' expectations, if the organisation fails to provide support for employees through staff development and training, the standards will not be maintained. Customer based service must be supported by appropriate resources (that include people, systems and technology) and the implementation must be monitored to be effective." Short courses on using the internet, social networks, intranets and computer programs should be offered to DTA College employees to ensure that the necessary skills are acquired. Skilled employees can perform their tasks more effectively and maintain the college's standards on responsiveness.

It is imperative that the college understands the customers' expectations regarding the service delivery process to ensure that technological solutions that include the internet are provided according to the customers' needs. DTA College's customers that prefer personal interaction with the facilitators should be catered for as per request. According to John (2003; 43), "in order to succeed, the services manager has to make decisions based on

questions that include; what aspects of the service can be standardised, what needs to be customised in the customer interactions, and what do expect from the front-line employees. The understanding of customers' expectations the customers will assist the services manager in setting standards that will ensure the best possible service delivery to the customer."

7.5 Recommendations on Assurance

The assurance gap at DTA College could be reduced greatly through training employees. Training courses that will allow DTA College's facilitators to be up to date with the latest research on students and how to meet the needs is recommended. According to Lamb *et al.*(2008; 353), "skilled employees are a crucial aspect to improving perceptions of assurance." Courtesy, competence and credibility are the three important assurance qualities that service providers should possess (Bennekan, 2002; 71). Continuous improvement of the facilitators' skillsat DTA College will equip the educators to perform their jobs well and deliver better service.Lamb *et al*. (2009; 354) explain that "management needs to ensure that employees have the skills and proper tools to perform their job. Training has to be management's priority so that employees know what management expects. Encouraging team-work and hiring employees with the proper attitude also aids in improving customer perceptions of service quality."

The introduction of performance measurement, evaluation and rewarding of employees is recommended for DTA College. Employees' skills and performance are important determinants of assurance. KMAfrica (2009; para 3) provided a precise definition for assurance and stated that "assurance means employees who instill confidence in customers, making customers feel safe in their transactions, employees who are consistently courteous and employees who have the knowledge to answer customer questions." DTA College has to ensure that the performance of the college's employees meets the expected standards. Quarterly performance evaluation and skills development programs are recommended for DTA College employees to enable identification of problematic areas so that corrective

action and improvements can be made. According to Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 49), "the customer based service must be supported by appropriate resources that include; people, systems and technology and the implementation must be monitored to be effective. Employee performance in terms of the service standards of the organisation should be measured and front-line employees in particular should be rewarded on the basis of performance along the service standards." Rewarding good performance is an incentive that motivates employees and can result in even better performance from the college's employees.

Headlining is a strategysuggested by Robertson (2005; para 12) that service organisations should implement in order to improve customer perceptions of assurance dimension of service quality. According to Robertson (2005; para 12), "a good technique in providing customers with assurance (providing well-informed, knowledgeable service that is performed with competence and confidence) is to tell a customer what the organisation's services consultant is going to do, before they do it. This technique is called headlining, in the sense that a newspaper article's headline tells the reader what they are going to read before they read it." DTA College should consider engaging the customers in the service delivery processes of the organisation through informing customers of the activities involved in the service process during and after the delivery process to show consideration. Dobrzański and Roszak (2007; 224) supportRobertson (2005; para 12) and explain that "education is a process depending on providing the service in which a number of subjects participate including the student, teacher and the employer.In education there is a close association between a provided service and a person who provides it, the lecturer has proprietary rights to the realised service and quality is possessed by the service which was done according to the expectations of the customer." Informing the customers of the processes involved improves the perceptions of customers' service experiences as the customers will feel more respected and considered by the college.

Time allocation for consultation on an individual basis should be introduced at the college to allow more interaction between the customers and the organisation. Facilitators can then offer assistance to learners individually during specific and agreed time slots.Individual

consultation between the students and the facilitators is recommended at DTA College to improve the customers' perceptions of the service experience.According to Pratasavitskayaa and Stensakera (2010; 46), "the improvement of a student's learning experience could beachieved if it is based on critical dialogue between the learners and teachers about the nature andstyle of their learning, and also between the teachers about the teaching and learning process,as well as on communication with the external partners. The senior management has to encourage and ensure the transformative process which is possible through seniormanagement commitment, the continuous improvement culture and the team interaction." The management and employees of DTA College have to reach an agreement on how to structure the student consultation process. DTA College's customers (students) have to be consulted regarding the consultation process to ensure good coordination of the process at the college. The consultation with students indicates consideration to the students (customers) which is also assuring to the customers.

7.6 Recommendations on Empathy

Empathy issues at DTA College can be best explained in line with gap1 of 'the GAPS model'. According to Grewal and Levy (2010; 373), "gap 1 is the knowledge gap that exists between customers' expectations and the organisation's perceptions of those customer needs." The knowledge gap is mainly caused by lack of investment in research and lack of on-going interaction with the customers (Kasper *et al*., (2006; 193). The findings from this study indicated that DTA College's customers had low perceptions of the college's understanding of customers' needs and the putting of students' needs first. DTA's operating hours was also an area of concern.

However, DTA College believes that the organisation is presumably based on understanding the educational needs of the students and in line with the company's policies and procedures (DTA; 2006; 3). DTA College believes that the needs of the students are put first indicating the lack of the correct information regarding the expectations of the customers. More research on customer expectations and perceptions is recommended for

DTA College.According to Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 49), “in order to address the knowledge gap, service organisations need to establish learning systems that capture, organise and disseminate service quality information to support decision making. The systems that could be used include; customer surveys, focus-group interviews and service reviews.” DTA College should conduct student experience surveys quarterly or monthly to collect the important information on perceptions and expectations from the customers.

DTA College has to ensure that accurate information is collected from customers regarding the college’s service quality performance that is free from bias and assumptions. According to Oldfield andBaron (2000; 85), “it is important for institutions to look at what their students want and not to collectdata based upon what the institutionperceives its students find important.”As customer perceptions and expectations are always changing, it is recommended that DTA College invests in more in-depth research regularly to gain deeper insight into customers’ expectations. Skilled researchers should be assigned to conduct research periodically.

Continuous training is also recommended for DTA College’s employees to improve the service quality the college offers. According to Lamb *et al.* (2008; 353), “firms continuously ensure empathy through providing continuous and refresher customer care training to their employees.”Refresher courses and new findings on service quality concepts that include empathy can be learnt by DTA College’s employees at customer services training sessions and workshops. The training can equip the college employees with the knowledge on how to handle emotional issues and how best to improve on empathy.

An open-door policy thatallows employees to communicate with management regarding work related issues should be implemented at DTA College. Open communication between management and employees enables management to be updated on operational issues. According to Boshoff and DuPlessis (2009; 49) and Kasper *et al.* (2006; 193),“lack of communication from frontline employees and inadequate attention to service quality recovery are some of the causes of the knowledge gap.” According to the findings of this

study, DTA College customers felt that the college does not understand the needs of the students and does not put the needs of the students first, meaning that a knowledge gap exists at DTA College.An environment that allows open communication between employees and management can allow the college to handle issues more frequently and avoid the creation of back-logs that can be forgotten. The communication and addressing of issues on a day to day basis can enable the college to reduce the knowledge gap.

In situations whereby DTA College fails to provide good service quality, the college should have a service quality recovery process that empathises with the customer. It is recommended that DTA College considers the setting up of a student counseling centre to assist students that might be encountering life challenges that could be interrupting their academic work. The college should train facilitators to sincerely assist students who would have failed assessments. Addressing of customer complaints should be assigned to certain college employees who can record the issues and provide feedback to customers.According to studies carried out by Magnini, Ford, Markowski and Honeycutt (2007; 221), "service failure recovery offers a unique opportunity to build customer satisfaction, the training of employees in the area of service recovery should be of reasonable importance."

Service firms could train their employees in the (LEARN) process (listen, empathise, apologise, react, notify) which could serve as a useful service recovery process because of the listening and empathising stages (Magnini and Ford, 2004 cited in Magnini *et al*., 2007; 221). Magnini *et al*. (2007; 221) further explain that "if service quality recovery is managed correctly the failure redress procedures of a service firm can serve as a powerful tool in increasing customer loyalty. If recovery procedures are well-managed to the extent that the competition cannot easily duplicate them, then it can be argued that a firm's failure recovery constitutes a core competency." Good service quality recovery plans aid a service organisation in improving the customer perceptions on empathy thus; it is recommended that DTA College should have a good service recovery process.

Good service quality provides many benefits that service organistions like DTA College can enjoy.According to Brink and Berndt (2008; 55) and Weinstein and Johnson (1999;

74), “organisations that excel in quality service can have a distinct marketing edge since improved levels of service quality related to higher revenues, increased cross-sell ratios, higher customer retention and expanded market shares.”Satisfied customers will remain in the business and recruit more customers therefore, financial performance improves (Walsh, 2003 cited in Kumar *et al.*, 2009; 217). Several authors that include Grewal and Levy (2010; 387) and Kasper *et al*. (2006; 176) agree that good service quality eventually leads to better financial performance of the business. According to Schneider and White (2004; 20), “when customers receive quality service, they will be satisfied with the organisation providing the service. The customer’s satisfaction with the service provided by the organisation will in turn lead them to be loyal customers to the organisation. Finally, the repeat business of loyal customers translates into higher profits.” Service quality is an investment that organisations make that should generate a positive return (Rust *et al*., 1996 cited in Schneider and White, 2004; 20). Thus, based on the research by Rust *et al*. (1996) cited in Schneider and White (2004; 20) it is imperative that DTA College works on improving service quality to enjoy all the benefits that good service quality brings.

7.7 Conclusion

DTA College has to work on reducing the service quality gaps that exist at the college. The purchase of up to date equipment such as new computers with internet installation will not only improve tangibility but will also aid in responsiveness as students can access the college website to get prompt assistance. The reliability dimension can also be improved by equipping facilitators with adequate work tools and technology to perform their jobs better. Technological advancements such as a website can facilitate the development of an intranet system and interactive software that could encourage more communication between the organisation and its customers.Continuous training of college employees is very important as it aids the college’s employees in improving on all the five service quality dimensions at DTA College. The following chapter provides a discussion on the research limitations and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 8
Recommendations for Future Research

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter consists of the research limitations and recommendations for future research.

8.2 Research Limitations

- The research was only limited to DTA College in Pietermaritzburg due to limited resources and time constraints. More insight on service quality in similar colleges could be gathered in future through a comparative study at various private and public colleges.

- Time concerns from students was a constraint to the researcher during the data collection period as most of the students hurriedly left after their lectures, before completely filling the questionnaire due to the length of the questionnaire.

8.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- The research was based on DTA College in Pietermaritzburg only. Future research could be done on similar further education institutions for comparison purposes, specifically of the customer expectations.

- Future research on service quality in education institutions is recommended using an instrument with open-ended questionnaires to allow respondents to provide suggestions from their specific environments.

- Research on the effects of marketisation on academic performance could be conducted as there are concerns on the issue. According to Thomas (2005; 177),

“the concept of consumerism and ‘marketisation’ of higher and further education is argued to be possibly compromising the core service which is education. Most colleges and universities are being dictated to by students.” Forest and Kinser (2002; 131) add thatdue to consumerism, most colleges and universities are selling the education packages just to maintain market share as students feel that they are purchasing a degree rather than pursuing an education.

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Document

I, Zivai Machaka, am a student registered for a Masters of Commerce in Marketing at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Pietermaritzburg campus. My student number is 208529903 and I can be reached on 208529903@ukzn.ac.za or on 0737369740. A requirement for the degree is a dissertation and I have chosen the following topic;

"A SERVQUAL Investigation into Customer's Perceptions and Expectations of Service Quality at DTA College in Pietermaritzburg during 2010."

My supervisor is Mr Sanjay Soni and he is based in the School of Management at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He can be contacted on Soni@ukzn.ac.za or 033-260 5185 during office hours.

The purpose of this research is to investigate customer perceptions of service quality at DTA College and it is hoped that the research will provide useful information that can be used to improve service quality at the college. Service quality has become one of the major source of competitive advantage for higher and further education institutions. Information gathered in this study will include data retrieved through a questionnaire that I would require you to complete. Please note that your name will not be required and will not be included in the report. The information will be seen only by my supervisor and examiner. Your anonymity and confidentiality is of utmost importance and will be maintained throughout the study through the use of password restricted access on the computer.

Your participation through completion of the questionnaire is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time during the study. I would be very grateful for your participation as it would enable me to complete my dissertation and will also provide better insight into the issue of service quality at DTA College.

Please complete the section below:

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……

Appendix 2: Research Questionnaire

To whom it may concern

I, Zivai Machaka, am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research to determine the service quality at DTA College as part of my degree's requirements. It is hoped the research will provide useful information that can be used to improve service quality at the college. I would like to kindly ask for your cooperation in completing the attached questionnaire. I hope you will be kind enough to accept my request, which will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

The questionnaire consists of 2 parts. Part A has questions which require you to provide answers regarding your expectations of service quality at further education colleges. Part B consists of questions which require you to rate the Service Quality at DTA College in Pietermaritzburg.

If you agree to take part in the study, your information will be kept confidential. Please note that your name will not be included in the report and the questionnaire does not require any personal information. The information will be seen only by me and my supervisor and examiner. Your anonymity and confidentiality is of utmost importance and will be maintained throughout the study.

If you have any queries regarding the research, my supervisor can always be contacted at this email address Soni@ukzn.ac.za.

Thank you for your time.

Yours Sincerely,

Zivai Machaka

Please show the extent to which you think adult training colleges should have the features described by each statement below by ticking in the appropriate box. Please rate both **Part A and B** on a scale of 1 to 5.

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

Part A

1.Colleges should have up to date equipment (e.g. chairs, computers and desks)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2. Physical facilities like college buildings should be visually appealing	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3. College employees should always be dressed neatly	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. Materials like test papers, feedback reports and pamphlets should be visually appealing	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5. College employees should offer assistance to students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. When learners have problems, college employees should show genuine interest in solving it	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. Colleges should keep accurate records	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8. Colleges should do what they promise, at the time they promise	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9. An excellent college will always provide assistance as it promises	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. A good college informs students of all the services and classes available and when they will be performed	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11. Prompt service should always be available	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
12. Assistance should always be available to learners at a college	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13. Employees should never be too busy to offer help to learners	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. The behaviour of staff should allow students to have confidence in staff	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15. Learners should be able to feel safe in their transactions with the college employees	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16. Employees should always be kind/nice/ courteous	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
17. Staff is expected to give students individual attention	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18. The college should give students personalised attention	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
19. Staff should be knowledgeable and competent	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
20. The college should have operating hours that are convenient for all their students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
21. The college and all staff should have the best interests of the customers at heart and know their needs	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
22. Staff should understand the basic needs of the students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Part B

Please show the extent to which you agree with the statements mentioned below by ticking in the appropriate box.

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

1. DTA has up to date equipment (e.g. chairs, computers and desks)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. DTA has up to date equipment (e.g. chairs, computers and desks)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2. DTA's physical facilities like college buildings are visually appealing	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3. DTA employees are always dressed neatly	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. DTA's materials like test papers, feedback reports and pamphlets are visually appealing	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5. DTA employees offer assistance and are helpful to students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. When learners have problems, DTA employees always show genuine interest in solving it	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. DTA keeps accurate records	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8. DTA does what it promises, at the time it promises	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9. DTA always provides assistance as it promises	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. DTA informs students of all the services and classes available and when they will be performed	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11. DTA provides prompt service always	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
12. Assistance at DTA is always available to learners	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13. DTA employees are never too busy to offer help to learners	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. DTA's staff behaviour always allows students to have confidence in staff	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15. Learners feel safe in their transactions with DTA employees	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16. DTA employees are always kind/nice/ courteous	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
17. DTA staff gives students individual attention	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18. DTA provides students personalised attention	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
19. DTA staff is knowledgeable and competent	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
20. DTA's operating hours are convenient to all the students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
21. DTA has the best interests of the customers at heart and knows their needs	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
22. DTA's employees understand the basic needs of the students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Part C

Please tick the appropriate answer.

1.) What is your gender? a.)Female b. Male

2.) What is your age group?

a.) 18 - 22

b.) 23 - 27

c.)28 – 32

d.)33 – 37

e.) over 38

3.) What is your marital status?

a.) Single

b.) Married

c.) Divorced

d.) Widowed

4.) What is your race?

a.) Black

b.) White

c.) Indian

d.) Colored

e.) Other (Please Specify):

5.) What NQF level are you currently studying?

a.) 1 b.) 2 c.) 3

Appendix 3: Measures of central tendency and Frequency tables for statements 1-22

1. Statements A1 an B1 Statistics

		Up to date Equipment is important	DTA has up to date Equip
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.4310	2.2241
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Up to date Equipment is important

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	44	75.9	75.9	75.9
	Agree	9	15.5	15.5	91.4
	Not Sure	2	3.4	3.4	94.8
	Strongly Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA has up to date Equip

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	20	34.5	34.5	63.8
	Not Sure	13	22.4	22.4	86.2
	Disagree	7	12.1	12.1	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

2. Statements A2 and B2 Statistics

		Visually appealing facilities	DTA has appealing Facility
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.8276	1.9655
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		2.00	2.00

Visually appealing facilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	24	41.4	41.4	41.4
	Agree	27	46.6	46.6	87.9
	Not Sure	2	3.4	3.4	91.4
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA has appealing Facility

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	14	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Agree	37	63.8	63.8	87.9
	Not Sure	3	5.2	5.2	93.1
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

3. Statements A3 and B3 Statistics

		Neatly dressed employees	DTA has neatly dressed
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.4138	1.7759
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	1.00

Neatly dressed employees

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	39	67.2	67.2	67.2
	Agree	17	29.3	29.3	96.6
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA has neatly dressed employees

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	28	48.3	48.3	48.3
	Agree	21	36.2	36.2	84.5
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	93.1
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

4. Statements A4 an B4 Statistics

		Appealing Materials	DTA has appealing Material
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.5517	1.9310
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Appealing Materials are important in colleges

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	36	62.1	62.1	62.1
	Agree	16	27.6	27.6	89.7
	Not Sure	4	6.9	6.9	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA has appealing Materials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	32	55.2	55.2	84.5
	Not Sure	6	10.3	10.3	94.8
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

5. Statements A5 and B5 Statistics

		Employees should always assist	Employees always assist
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.5862	1.9138
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

College employees should always assist

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	34	58.6	58.6	58.6
	Agree	17	29.3	29.3	87.9
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	96.6
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA employees always assist

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	33	56.9	56.9	86.2
	Not Sure	6	10.3	10.3	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

6. Statements A6 and B6 Statistics

		Employees genuine Interest	Employees have genuine interest
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.6034	2.0172
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

College employees should show genuine Interest

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	34	58.6	58.6	58.6
	Agree	17	29.3	29.3	87.9
	Not Sure	4	6.9	6.9	94.8
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA employees have genuine interest

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	28	48.3	48.3	77.6
	Not Sure	9	15.5	15.5	93.1
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

7. Statements A7 and B7 Statistics

		Keep Accurate records	DTA keeps accurate records
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.3276	1.8966
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Colleges should keep accurate records

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	42	72.4	72.4	72.4
	Agree	15	25.9	25.9	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA keeps accurate records

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	19	32.8	32.8	32.8
	Agree	30	51.7	51.7	84.5
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

8. Statements A8 and B8 Statistics

		Assist within promised time	DTA assists within promised time
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.3448	2.3103
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Colleges should assist within promised time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	42	72.4	72.4	72.4
	Agree	14	24.1	24.1	96.6
	Not Sure	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA assists within promised time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	10	17.2	17.2	17.2
	Agree	27	46.6	46.6	63.8
	Not Sure	15	25.9	25.9	89.7
	Disagree	5	8.6	8.6	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

9. Statements A9 and B9 Statistics

		Assist as per promise	DTA assists per promise
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.4655	2.2069
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Colleges should assist as per promise

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	37	63.8	63.8	63.8
	Agree	18	31.0	31.0	94.8
	Not Sure	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA assists per promise

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	13	22.4	22.4	22.4
	Agree	25	43.1	43.1	65.5
	Not Sure	17	29.3	29.3	94.8
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

10. Statements A10 and B10Statistics

		Inform students of services available	Informs students of services avail
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.6034	1.9655
Median		1.5000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Colleges should inform students of services available

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	29	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	25	43.1	43.1	93.1
	Not Sure	3	5.2	5.2	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA informs students of services available

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	15	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Agree	35	60.3	60.3	86.2
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	94.8
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

11. Statements A 11 and B11 Statistics

		Prompt service always	Offers prompt service always
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.7414	2.1207
Median		2.0000	2.0000

Colleges should offer prompt service always

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	24	41.4	41.4	41.4
	Agree	26	44.8	44.8	86.2
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	98.3
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Offers prompt service always

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	14	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Agree	30	51.7	51.7	75.9
	Not Sure	8	13.8	13.8	89.7
	Disagree	5	8.6	8.6	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

12. Statements A12 and B12 Statistics

		Assistance should always be available	Assistance is always available
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.6379	2.0345
Median		1.0000	2.0000

Assistance should always be available

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	32	55.2	55.2	55.2
	Agree	21	36.2	36.2	91.4
	Disagree	4	6.9	6.9	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Assistance is always available

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	18	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Agree	26	44.8	44.8	75.9
	Not Sure	10	17.2	17.2	93.1
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

13. Statements A13 and B13 Statistics

		Employees never too busy to assist	Employees are never too busy
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.9310	2.1724
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Employees should never be too busy to assist

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	28	48.3	48.3	48.3
	Agree	17	29.3	29.3	77.6
	Not Sure	6	10.3	10.3	87.9
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	93.1
	Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Employees are never too busy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	18	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Agree	20	34.5	34.5	65.5
	Not Sure	14	24.1	24.1	89.7
	Disagree	4	6.9	6.9	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

14. Statements A14 and B14 Statistics

		Staff behaviour should be appropriate	Staff behaviour is appropriate
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.7069	2.0345
Median		1.5000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Staff behaviour should be appropriate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	29	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	22	37.9	37.9	87.9
	Not Sure	3	5.2	5.2	93.1
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Staff behaviour is appropriate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	15	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Agree	33	56.9	56.9	82.8
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	91.4
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

15. Statements A15 and b15 Statistics

		Safety in interactions with employees	it is safe to interact with DTA employees
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.5172	1.8793
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Safety in interactions with employees is important

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	34	58.6	58.6	58.6
	Agree	22	37.9	37.9	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

It is safe to interact with DTA employees

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	18	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Agree	35	60.3	60.3	91.4
	Not Sure	1	1.7	1.7	93.1
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

16. Statements A16 and B16 statistics

		Employees to be kind and courteous	Staff are kind and courteous
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.8103	2.1034
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

College employees should be kind and courteous

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	27	46.6	46.6	46.6
	Agree	19	32.8	32.8	79.3
	Not Sure	8	13.8	13.8	93.1
	Disagree	4	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Staff are kind and courteous

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	16	27.6	27.6	27.6
	Agree	29	50.0	50.0	77.6
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	89.7
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	94.8
	Strongly Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

17. Statement A17 and B17 Statistics

		Employees are to give individual attention	Individual attention is given
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.9828	2.0000
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		2.00	2.00

College employees' should give individual attention

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	21	36.2	36.2	36.2
	Agree	23	39.7	39.7	75.9
	Not Sure	11	19.0	19.0	94.8
	Strongly Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Individual attention is given by DTA

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	12	20.7	20.7	20.7
	Agree	39	67.2	67.2	87.9
	Not Sure	4	6.9	6.9	94.8
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

18. Statements A18 and b18 Statistics

		College should give personalised attention	Personalised attention is given
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		2.2069	2.2586
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		2.00	2.00

Colleges should give personalised attention

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	13	22.4	22.4	22.4
	Agree	28	48.3	48.3	70.7
	Not Sure	10	17.2	17.2	87.9
	Disagree	6	10.3	10.3	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Personalised attention is given by DTA

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	9	15.5	15.5	15.5
	Agree	29	50.0	50.0	65.5
	Not Sure	17	29.3	29.3	94.8
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

19. Statements A19 and b19 Statistics

		Staff should be competent	DTA Staff is competent
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.7931	1.8793
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00(a)	2.00

College Staff should be competent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	25	43.1	43.1	43.1
	Agree	25	43.1	43.1	86.2
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	94.8
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Staff is competent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	20	34.5	34.5	34.5
	Agree	29	50.0	50.0	84.5
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

20. Statements A20 and B20 Statistics

		Operating hours are to be convenient	Operating hours are Convenient
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.7759	2.1724
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

College operating hours should be convenient

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	27	46.6	46.6	46.6
	Agree	22	37.9	37.9	84.5
	Not Sure	5	8.6	8.6	93.1
	Disagree	3	5.2	5.2	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA operating hours are Convenient

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	14	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Agree	26	44.8	44.8	69.0
	Not Sure	14	24.1	24.1	93.1
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

21. Statements A21 and B2 Statistics

		The needs of the students to be put first	Needs of students are put first
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.9483	2.3966
Median		2.0000	2.0000
Mode		2.00	3.00

The needs of the students should be put first

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Agree	30	51.7	51.7	81.0
	Not Sure	9	15.5	15.5	96.6
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Needs of students are put first by DTA

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	9	15.5	15.5	15.5
	Agree	21	36.2	36.2	51.7
	Not Sure	25	43.1	43.1	94.8
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

22. Statements A22 and B22 Statistics

		Staff should understand students' needs	Staff understand students' needs
N	Valid	58	58
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.6897	2.0172
Median		1.0000	2.0000
Mode		1.00	2.00

Staff should understand students' needs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	31	53.4	53.4	53.4
	Agree	18	31.0	31.0	84.5
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

DTA Staff understands students' needs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	11	19.0	19.0	19.0
	Agree	38	65.5	65.5	84.5
	Not Sure	7	12.1	12.1	96.6
	Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Part B: Demographics

1.Statistics on gender of respondents

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		1.6207
Median		2.0000
Mode		2.00

Gender of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	female	22	37.9	37.9	37.9
	male	36	62.1	62.1	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

2.Statistics on age group of respondents

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		1.8103
Median		2.0000
Mode		1.00(a)

Age group of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	25	43.1	43.1	43.1
	23-27	25	43.1	43.1	86.2
	28-32	3	5.2	5.2	91.4
	33-37	4	6.9	6.9	98.3
	over 38	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

3. Statistics on marital status of respondents

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		1.0690
Median		1.0000
Mode		1.00

Marital Status of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	54	93.1	93.1	93.1
	Married	4	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

4. Statistics on race of respondents

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		1.1034
Median		1.0000
Mode		1.00

Race of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	black	55	94.8	94.8	94.8
	White	1	1.7	1.7	96.6
	Indian	1	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Coloured	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

5. Statistics on NQF level of respondents

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		2.3793
Median		2.0000
Mode		2.00

Respondents' current NQF level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	37	63.8	63.8	63.8
	3	20	34.5	34.5	98.3
	4	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

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