

Determining Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction at eThekweni Municipality in South Africa

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Abstract

This study proposed to assess service quality, customer satisfaction and the performance of service rendered by the eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit. The research adopted a quantitative research approach using a structured questionnaire survey to collect data. The researcher collected data from four out of the eight walk-in centres and two hundred and eleven respondents were interviewed. Sampling was not undertaken since all the customers who came for service and could be approached were requested to complete the questionnaire. The focus of the study was to assess service quality and customer satisfaction at these four walk-in centres. The data collected were analysed using the SPSS statistical tool. The results indicated that most customers indicated that the service met their expectations in each of the five service quality dimensions; (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and more than 50% of the respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of service they were receiving from the Unit. The unit management would be advised to attend to a few areas of service quality dimensions that are outlined in the research. One was the concerns raised regarding the long queues at the walk-in centres when printing statement of accounts. The study also highlighted the walk-in centre that received the lowest service quality and the customers' satisfaction score. Overall ratings for service quality and customer satisfaction were presented and recommendations made to the municipality to maintain good ratings.

Keywords: Customer expectations; public-sector delivery; repurchase decisions.

1 Introduction

The Water and Sanitation Unit is a division of eThekweni Municipality. The population that is serviced by eThekweni Municipality is estimated at 3,555,868 (eThekweni Municipality Integrated Development Plan, 2016). This population is the potential number of eThekweni Water and Sanitation Unit customers. The province of KwaZulu-Natal is facing the challenge of people migrating from rural communities to urban areas for better resources and quality of life. The main challenge with this migration is that the municipality would have completed its budget and planning but not have included those people that will migrate

to the jurisdiction covered by this municipality. The Unit's customers are urban, rural and from informal settlements. The municipality has put much effort and investment into improving the provision of water and sanitation services to its customers but it still faces the challenge of poor, un-serviced areas that do not have water and sanitation systems.

1.1 Background

The Unit has the monopoly in the provision of water and sanitation. However, customer service quality and satisfaction are still of paramount importance to improve efficiency, better utilisation of resources and enhance customer satisfaction and service delivery. Customer satisfaction will also assist the Unit to minimise service delivery protests. Good service quality will result in the Unit's customers supporting the Unit in its initiatives of water-saving programs and this will result in improvements in service delivery.

Service quality and customer satisfaction assist in influencing and motivating voluntary compliance in terms of wise usage of water facilities through reporting water leakages and payment of the services. In that way, service delivery would improve and both the municipality and its residents would benefit from such a relationship.

The provision of water and sanitation is a basic need for humanity since it is necessary for survival and to live a healthy life. The Constitution of South Africa, Act No.108 of 1996 also emphasises the right of South Africans to access sufficient and safe water. It further requires the state to take reasonable legislative measures through government structures to ensure the realisation of this basic constitutional right (Act 108 of 1996). The provision of water and sanitation has been one of the services that have been on the priority list of the government.

Drought has severely affected the supply of water in the country. The Unit has, therefore, taken some measures to restrict the supply of water. The inflation and economic challenges faced by the country have been reflected in the prices charged by water and sanitation providers. Illegal water connections and public protests are also a challenge of the Unit in terms of wastage and losses of this scarce resource. The illegal connections and public protests frequently affect the supply to legitimate users who pay for their services. The interruption of the water and sanitation services has a direct impact on the number of customers calling the Unit's customer care line and/or visiting the walk-in centres in person. The Unit has eight walk-in centres located around the Metro area.

1.2 Problem Statement

Customer satisfaction influences operational and strategic decision-making. Management can only adequately address or implement improvement strategies when they have identified areas where the organisation is not performing well or there are areas of dissatisfaction. Communication between the Unit and its customers is critical in the provision of water and sanitation which is an essential service that human beings, animals and plants cannot be without. The Unit's walk-in centres are inundated with customers who require service because of different reasons from high water bills, new applications, water service cuts because of burst pipes, or similar services. It is, therefore, essential for the Unit from time to time to measure how its provision of service is viewed and rated by its customers.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- To assess the quality of service provided by the Unit;
- To assess the satisfaction of the Unit's customers;
- To assess the performance of service quality dimensions in the Unit; and
- To recommend improvement initiatives for service quality and customer satisfaction at the Unit.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality

Numerous researchers have defined service quality in different ways. Howanitz and Steindel (2014) maintain that service quality is the ability of the service provider to fulfil the desires and necessities of the service recipient. To Jamal and Naser (2012), service quality refers to a long-term assessment of the service recipients' attitudes. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994) consider service quality as the discrepancy between expected and received service. Clow's (2011) view of service quality is similar to Parasuraman et. al, (1994) who refers to service quality as an error between service received and the service experienced. Service quality refers to the degree that the views surpass the desires of the customer (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Service quality is, therefore, based on the service that the customer or client has experienced vs what they expect.

2.2 Transforming Public-Sector Delivery

A customer care establishment and service quality should be based on the eight premises of Batho Pele principle. The South African Government promulgated several legislative frameworks that have positively influenced the quality of service and the satisfaction of customers regarding the delivery of water and sanitation services. The legislation and principles will also influence the perception of service quality. The following sections provide insight on the legislation since it has had a significant influence on the service quality and customer satisfaction that the study focused on.

2.3 Service Quality in the Public Sector

South Africa adopted a service charter that serves as a contract between the state and its public servants. It outlines what the service beneficiaries can expect from the representative of the state. The service charter aims to improve performance in the organs of the civil society (Public Service Charter, 2013). Some of the objectives of the service charter are:

- Encourage excellence and professionalise the public service delivery;
- Ensure an effective and efficient service that is responsive to the needs of the public;

- Reinforcement and commitment to service delivery improvement for the benefits of South African citizens; and
- Clarification of the rights and the obligations of both the public servants and the citizens.

2.4 Batho Pele Principles

The following Batho Pele Principles are outlined in the service charter (Public Service Charter, 2013):

- Consultation - Citizens ought to be consulted concerning the level and quality of public services and where possible ought to be given a choice of the services offered. It is noticed that in the context of the Unit the choice of services is limited in terms of the nature of services as they are influenced by parliamentary laws;
- Service Standards - Citizens should be made aware of the level and standard of service to expect. The Unit advertisements would usually cover this part;
- Access - Citizens should have equal access to the services they are entitled to. This is an important principle that the Unit's walk-in office needs to uphold as it services many of the citizens of the country;
- Courtesy - Citizens should be treated with courtesy and respect. No customer would be satisfied with the service if they did not get the respect they deserve;
- Information - Full information should be given to the public for them to make informed choices;
- Openness and transparency - Information like authority figures should be made transparent. The Unit's office has displayed a photograph and contact telephone number of the walk-in centre manager;
- Redress - Where the organisation failed to deliver as required it should offer an apology to the affected citizens and also remedy the situation as soon as possible; and
- Value for money - Public service should be delivered efficiently and economically to provide citizens with the best value for money.

The Batho Pele principles emphasise consultation and that all government service should have standards. It should provide opportunities for correction where poor service is provided, provide adequate access to information, and be transparent and open in all dealings (Twinomurinzi, Zwane & Debusho, 2012).

2.5 Importance of Service Quality

In both the public and private sector, quality of service is perceived by the recipients as a critical factor. Mosahab, Mahamad and Ramayah (2010) call it the most intense rivalry weapon. Quality is a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Naidoo and Mutinta (2014) stated that organisations should place much emphasis on service quality since it can either make or break an organisation. It has the potential to create a negative impression of the organisation. Better service quality improves an organisation's image and a reputable name for municipalities. Long-term profits are possible if customers are retained to make repeated purchases and refer new customers (Naidoo & Mutinta, 2014). The municipality's service quality has led to greater customer satisfaction and increased cooperation in terms of paying for municipal rates. This research focused on the public sector since the municipalities fall under the domain of public entities.

2.6 Perceptions of Service Quality

Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2013) stated that a perception refers to somebody's understanding of the qualities of a subject matter. The theory of disconfirmation was developed by Ekinici and Sirakaya (2010) and it refers to the customers' disappointment when their desires are different from what they experienced.

Walk-in centres for municipalities provide various services to residents such as vital information to walk-in customers, receiving new applications for water and sewer connections, receiving and processing customer concerns, liaising with other departments involved in water and sanitation provision. However, an overview conducted by Probe Marketing survey established that South African citizens had a poor view of the entire service rendered by the municipalities because of unmet expectations (Sriyam, 2013). The respondents of this survey had expected quicker turnaround times in resolving their applications and queries. Respondents expressed their disappointments when they experienced longer periods to receive feedback on their service requests.

2.7 Customer Satisfaction

Olive (2015) views customer satisfaction as a pleasurable level of consumption fulfilment or over-fulfilment as a result of the organisation having to meet their expectations in the delivery of its mandate and services. Oliver (2015) further states that fulfilment is not necessarily limited to meeting the needs of the customer. Fulfilment is when the service gives more pleasure than what was expected. Customers' expectations are the driving force for an organisation's management to provide good quality service and to ensure that the organisation's policies, procedures, structures support continuous improvement in service quality (Aljasser & Sasidhar, 2016).

Based on the definitions of quality that have been defined in this paper it is clear that customer satisfaction is mainly about providing the services in a manner that exceeds customers' expectations. Customer satisfaction is largely influenced by the feelings and attitudes that the users of the service hold about their experience. Customers' feelings and attitudes are based on their expectations of the services. Customer satisfaction, like quality service, is dependent on the service quality determinants which are: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

2.8 Importance of Measuring Customer Satisfaction

A company should know and understand its customers. This will assist the company to improve its delivery of goods and services. According to Zeleke (2012), it is easier to sell to

existing customers than to find new ones. Knowing customers' satisfaction levels can, therefore, contribute to building a customer base and ultimately grow the company and increase market share. It is, therefore, important for a company to influence the expectations of its customers as knowing the customers' expectations helps to take actions to meet customers' expectations (Lankton & McKnight, 2012).

2.9 Assessing the Level of Customer Satisfaction

According to Yu and Goulden (2006), understanding customer expectations results in excellent customer service and high customer satisfaction. Yu and Goulden (2006) further propounded that the assessment of the level of customer satisfaction must involve asking guests whether their services or products have fulfilled or exceeded their expectations. This question is significant because it serves as a reliable way of obtaining information from customers about their levels of satisfaction arising from the services and products being offered (Deng, Lu, Wei & Zhang, 2010).

Deng et al (2010) opined that customer expectations have a strong correlational effect on customer satisfaction because it influences repurchase decisions and customer loyalty. Thus, if customers feel that a service or product was not delivered as per expectations, customers will have negative perceptions of the walk-in centre. On the flip side, if customers believe that services were delivered to their expectations, or exceeded their expectations, there is a higher probability that they will return once more (Deng et al., 2010). According to Lee, Graefe and Burns (2014), ninety-one percent of an organisation's unhappy customers will never purchase services from that walk-in centre again. Thus, one way of assessing the level of customer satisfaction is to measure the repeat visit rate of previous guests. Many repeat visits by customers serve to confirm that there is a higher level of guest satisfaction with services and products being offered by a particular walk-in centre (Deng et al, 2010). Lee et al (2014) further asserted that assessing levels of customer satisfaction could assist a municipality's walk-in centre to reduce the number of unhappy customers.

Andersson, Eriksson & Torstensson (2014) indicated that the assessment of customer expectation and level of satisfaction is not an exercise in futility. This is because customer expectation is inherently connected to guest satisfaction. It has several benefits that accrue to the service centres and other service providers. Andersson et al, (2014:283) listed the following benefits of assessing customer expectations:

- It enables the business to know the service levels expected by customers to keep them happy thereby influencing the business to devise strategies that improve customer satisfaction;
- It diverts management and the employees' attention towards fulfilling customer expectations;
- It provides opportunities for the business to exceed customer expectations; and
- Lastly, assessing customer expectations helps to easily resolve customer complaints since their expectations are known beforehand.

According to Lee et al, (2014), there are several ways of assessing and measuring customer satisfaction. Some of these ways include putting suggestion boxes in strategic areas

of a walk-in centre where they are visible and easily accessible to customers. They further recommend suggestion boxes as a feedback tool, whereby customers can deposit their suggestions and rate the service that would identify unhappy customers (Lee et al, 2014).

Suggestion boxes, complaints and compliments books allow customers to air their feelings, attitudes, perceptions freely about the services or products serviced. There is a misconception that guests are always negative when making comments in suggestion boxes and compliments/complaints boxes. This is not always the case as customers at times give motivating and positive comments about the services they have received. They can also share useful suggestions that could be adopted to improve both the service and product quality.

Lee et al (2014) further revealed that the level of customer satisfaction could be ascertained through conducting online or walk-in centre satisfaction surveys. These walk-in centre satisfaction surveys are advantageous since customers make comments whilst their memories about the service or product are still fresh. Therefore, the credibility of the findings from conducting satisfaction surveys inside the walk-in centre is higher because it gives a better reflection of the level of satisfaction of the guests. This is not discounting online customer surveys. Online customer surveys also enable respondents to freely express themselves away from any form of pressure. Thus, the feelings and perceptions that were reflected in the data showed the truth on how customers perceived the services they received.

In conclusion, the assessment and measurement of customers' satisfaction is a vital exercise that leads to the next process in the value chain, that of assessing the factors that contribute to guest satisfaction.

2.10 Factors affecting Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

2.10.1 SERVQUAL Determinants

3 Research Methodology

This survey conducted an assessment of the factors influencing customer service quality and satisfaction at four walk-in centres in the eThekweni Municipality: Water and Sanitation Unit. The research adopted a quantitative research approach. The research problem concerning poor service quality and lower customer satisfaction required a research survey involving several respondents, hence, the choice of a quantitative research approach. A modified version of SERVQUAL was used for this purpose. The research also focused on identifying which service quality determinants the Unit was successful with where there were gaps, assessing the effects of service quality on customers' satisfaction and finally examining how effective was communication on water savings strategies.

The adoption of a quantitative research approach was deemed necessary because issues of service quality and customer satisfaction require the views of a larger sample to be able to generalize the findings on perceptions and levels of customer service quality and satisfaction to the larger sample.

An explanatory research design was chosen based on the main research objective which is the assessment of service quality and customer satisfaction of the service as experienced by the customers of the Unit at the four walk-in centres. Through this explanatory research

design, it was relatively easy to identify significant factors contributing to service quality and customer satisfaction at the four walk-in centres of the Unit. Those factors that carried more weight were adopted as the main ones leading to customer satisfaction.

The population for this survey consisted of 381 customers that visited the four walk-in centres of the Unit.

No sampling was done in this study since every customer who could be approached was requested to participate in the study by completing the questionnaire. A minimum number of two hundred and eleven (211) respondents were given a self-administered questionnaire to complete. The sample size was made up of the following from the four walk-in centres in eThekweni municipality shown in the table below:

Table 3.1: Breakdown of population and number of respondents

Walk-in Centre	Respondents	Population	%
Verulam Walk-in Centre	40	93	43%
Pinetown Walk-in Centre	53	111	48%
Prior Road Walk-in (Centre Head Office)	107	154	69%
Mega City Walk-in Centre	11	23	48%
Total	211	381	55%

A structured close-ended questionnaire was used in this study to determine which factors have an influence on customer service quality and customer satisfaction at the Unit. The questionnaire used questions derived from the guidelines of the SERVQUAL quality dimensions tool that was developed by Parasuraman, et al (1993) and from other measures of service quality discussed in the literature.

The results in the survey were analysed through the use of SPSS version 23.0 statistical analysis software running on a Linux Ubuntu machine. The Likert scales used in the research instrument were analysed to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the scales through computations of respective Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Items in the instruments were individually dropped from the scale if by removing them the Cronbach's alpha coefficient would be increased and the reliability will be improved of the overall scale. Through combining with the demographic variables collected in the survey from participants, the results were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics, mostly nonparametric statistics including one-analysis of variance (ANOVA), Mann-Whitney *U* tests, median tests, Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests and Pearson *r* correlations.

3.13 Ethical Issues The gatekeeper's letter was obtained from the management of eThekweni Municipality: Waters and Sanitation. The ethical considerations that were taken into consideration by the researcher include the following:

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The confidentiality of respondents' information was safeguarded by ensuring that the completed questionnaires were securely locked and keys kept solely by the researcher. The anonymity of respondents was assured as the questionnaires did not require their personal details.

Informed consent: Before conducting the actual interviews respondents were apprised of the research objectives. The respondents were told of their right to withdraw from the interviewing processes as or when they felt it necessary.

No harm to participants: The survey questionnaires were distributed to respondents inside the safe environs of the walk-in centres where there is tight security provided by the municipality of eThekweni.

4 Results

A total of 211 questionnaires were completed by the respondents. Respondents completed the questionnaire as instructed with assistance from the researcher and her assistants. Seven spoilt questionnaires had to be discarded. Some of the subjects could not complete the questionnaire due to time constraints. The response rate is unknown since the questionnaire was manually administered. The responses are arranged in the following manner:

Table 4.1: The Likert scale used in the study is a 5-point scale

Rating Option	Score
Strongly disagree/very dissatisfied/never	1
Disagree/dissatisfied/ rarely	2
Neutral/never/sometime	3
Agree/satisfied/most of the time	4
Strongly/very satisfied/always	5

Ideally, management would want the customers to rate its service quality and customer satisfaction at a score of 5, however, a score of 4 would also be acceptable of looking at the scores on the face value. The majority of the respondents were account holders (76%) whilst the remaining 24% came on behalf of the account holders. The male and female respondents made up 51% and 49% of the total respondents in the study respectively. The majority of the participants were aged from 31-60 years (71%), while age 19-30 years was 9% and over 61 years was 20%. The majority of the participants (59%) preferred to be serviced in isiZulu, followed by English with 26%. Xhosa and Afrikaans had low percentages of 2% and 3% respectively. Respondents were mainly (51%) from the Durban Walk-in Centre, followed by Pinetown (25%), then Verulam (19%) and the least participants came from Mega City (5%).

The respondents raised queries mainly related to individual households (92%), Business and Other were low at 2% and 5% respectively. The majority of the queries were related to full pressure water supply (78%); followed by semi pressure at 18% and low pressure at 4%. The majority of the queries (51%) were categorised under Other, which was mainly in connection with balances of accounts, the printing of duplicate statements and water leakages. Payments and settlement of debt enquiries were second-highest at 18%. Payment arrangements and application of debt relief had 10% each. The employed participants were higher (34%) than the other categories, followed by the unemployed at 32% and retired participants at 16%.

The customers that participated in the study have had a long relationship with the Unit as 67% of the participants had been customers of the Unit for over 10 years. The second-highest was over five years with 13%.

Table 4.2: Summary of descriptive statistics composite scores

Dimension	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tangibility	211	3.97	1.201
Reliability	211	4.25	1.089
Responsiveness	211	4.09	1.124
Assurance	211	4.25	1.085
Empathy	211	4.22	1.056
Service quality - dependent variable	211	3.91	1.156
Customers satisfaction – dependent variable	211	3.86	1.123

Table 4.2 tabulates the mean scores and standard deviations of each service quality dimension as independent variables. The table also includes the mean scores of services quality and customer satisfaction as dependent scores. The Pinetown Sizakala Walk-in Centre had the highest mean (136.35) score of customers' satisfaction, followed by Verulam. The lowest score was found in the Prior Road (Head Office) Walk-in Centre being (82.82). Descriptive Measures of the SERVQUAL Statements.

The table below tabulates a breakdown of the descriptive measures of each statement within the five dimensions of service quality that were tested by the questionnaire.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics of service quality dimensions

Service Quality Dimension	Items	N	Mean
Tangibility	Modern furniture and equipment availability	211	4.11
	Visually appealing and easy instructional directions	211	4.37
	Staff appearance and professionalism	211	4.02
	Visibility of contact manager details	211	3.37
Reliability	Respect and friendliness to the customers	211	4.32
	Service being right the first time	211	4.22
	Sincere interest in solving problems	211	4.22
	Customer advised of the necessary requirements	211	4.22
Responsiveness	Staff prompt services	211	4.14
	Immediate staff action to customer complain	211	4.01
	Staff willingness to always help customers	211	4.11
	Staff willingness to always listen to customer problems	211	4.10
Assurance	Staff knowledgeable to answer questions	211	4.17
	Greeting of customers with a warm smile	211	4.26
	Staff instilling confidence in the customers	211	4.30
	Staff consistently courteous to the customers	211	4.25
Empathy	Staff giving customers personal attention	211	4.28
	Staff listening carefully to the needs of customers	211	4.22
	Convenient operating hours to customers	211	4.24
	Staff has customers' best interest at heart.	211	4.13
	Continuing to visit the unit in the future	211	4.21
	Recommendation of the unit to other people	211	4.21

The analysis in table 4.3 shows that the lowest mean is 3.37 being visibility of branch manager contact details. The highest mean is 4.30 relating to the question asking whether the staff instils confidence in customers (assurance dimension). It is noted that other than the 3.7 mean figure, all the other mean statistics were over 4 out of 5 ranging from 4.01 to 4.30.

4.1 Summary

The results of the study indicate consistency and reliability in the instrument that was used to collect data, hence, it has a high and very close to 1 Cronbach's Alpha of .934. The socio-demographics also showed that the participants were spread across different age group categories, both males and females gender, different language speaking populations and their employment status. The statistical significance and relationships between variables were tested.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings cover most of the factors identified in the literature review that have a bearing on whether the Unit's customers get the services they expect at the four walk-in centres of eThekweni Municipality: Water and Sanitation Unit.

The results indicated that Prior Road had the lowest service quality mean rank of 84.39, the highest mean rank (141.14) was from Mega-City closely followed by Pinetown with 140.32. Since there is a significant relationship with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), it is evident that the average quality rating is lower at Prior Road compared to the other walk-in centres that participated in the study.

Although the research did not focus on measuring the turnaround time, some of the respondents complained that the turnaround time at the Prior Road Walk-in Centre was long and frustrating to the customers. The researcher and her assistants can report that there were at least two episodes of angry customers that were shouting at the staff because they had been waiting to be served for a long period. However, no similar incidents at any of the other three walk-in centres were witnessed.

The Prior Road Walk-in Centre is the Head Office and only specialises in water and sanitation matters, while the other three walk-in centres are part of Sizakala Centres which are dealing with other Municipal services. As Prior Road is the Head Office, high expectations are created that they are efficiently equipped and can effectively resolve all water and sanitation queries.

5.1 Tangibles

Tangibles, as a dimension, had the lowest results with a mean of 3.97, which meant that on average the customers were not fully satisfied with tangibles.

The tangibles that were measured in the study were furniture and equipment, queue management system, staff appearance and the visibility of the contact walk-in centre manager's contact details. The question with the lowest mean is the visibility of the manager's contact details. The study followed a quantitative approach and the respondents were not required to justify their responses. However, some of them insisted on explaining their reasons for a particular score. In the case of the Pinetown and Verulam Walk-in Centres, the few who wanted to explain their scores advised that they did not see the contact details, but were not too concerned as the managers of the centres were available on the floor most of the time. It was noted that in Prior Road they did not comment about the manager.

The researcher is not able to comment whether the manager of Prior Road also walks the floor (like the other walk-in centres) as he was on half-day leave on the day of the data collection. The other questions under tangibles had good mean scores of between 4.02 to 4.37, indicating that the customers were satisfied to very satisfied with those aspects of tangibility.

5.2 Reliability

Reliability as a dimension of service quality had the highest average mean score of 4.25. The results of the study showed that the mean scores for all the statements under reliability

were above 4, with the highest being respect and friendliness towards the customers (4.32) and the other three statements all had a mean score of 4.22 each.

The highest reliability mean score was found in Pinetown being 137.41 and the highest customer satisfaction was also in Pinetown being 136.35. The lowest scores were in Prior Road, Reliability score of 91.24 and customer satisfaction score of 82.52.

5.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness had the second-lowest mean of 4.09, which on its own is a good score as the maximum possible mean score is 5. The mean scores for the other three statements were all above 4, ranging from 4.01 to 4.14. The statements under responsiveness covered aspects like prompt service, immediate actioning of customer complaints, willingness to always help and to listen to customers. The results of the study do not support the findings of similar studies carried out by Mhlongo, et al. (2016), whereby it was determined that responsiveness was rated the highest with a gap score of -.73. The discrepancy could be because Mhlongo's study was considering all the services of the Sizaka Centre while the current study only focused on the Water and Services division. It was also noted that the water services queries in the Sizakala Centres were much less than those received by the Prior Road Walk-in Centre.

5.4 Assurance

Assurance had the same mean score of 4.25 as reliability. The assurance dimension had four statements and each of the four statements had a mean of not less than 4, ranging from 4.17 to 4.30. The statements under this dimension considered knowledge, friendliness, confidence and courtesy of the staff servicing the customers. From the findings, Prior Road had the lowest score of 86.98 which is a big gap from the top score of 141.1 found in Megacity. Prior Road is the office that attended to the highest number on the day the data was collected. This office also had one supervisor walking the floor and supporting the staff whenever they needed support. This could have an impact on the way they handle customers, if a customer is waiting because the Supervisor is assisting another staff member, that could be viewed negatively by the customer hence they rated Prior Road lower.

5.5 Empathy

Empathy had a mean score of 4.22 - the middle score. Empathy covered the statements of providing customers with personal attention, convenient operating hours, listening carefully to the needs of the customers and staff having customers' best interest at heart. Empathy as a dimension of service quality had four statements. Each of the statement had a mean score of not less than 4 ranging from 4.13 to 4.28. The statement that scored the highest in this service dimension was the one asking whether the staff was giving the customers personal attention at all times.

Resolution of the Research Problem

The researcher established that:

- The service quality provided by the Unit is good and
- Customers were satisfied with the service they received from the Unit.

- Performance on the service quality dimension is good.

5.6 Key outcomes of the study

The key outcome of this study was that the reasons behind the long queues at the walk-in centres were mainly attributable to the printing of duplicate statements, which constituted 51% of the queries from the respondents who participated in the survey. The split between the customers who requested duplicate statements and those who did not receive any statements was not established;

Service quality and customer satisfaction were rated the lowest at Prior Road Walk-in Centre which is the Head Office and the branch that attends to more customers (50%) of the total respondents. The Prior Road Walk-in Centre is the central and perhaps the one that is easily accessible to most customer hence it attends to more customers than the other walk-in centres.

The second-highest queries related to payments of debt was 18% of the respondents. The study could not establish whether these respondents were aware of the alternative payments methods that are offered by the Unit.

5.7 Implications of the findings

- The Unit Management should pay more attention to the Durban Prior Road Walk-in Centre to investigate the actual reasons why the quality of service and customer satisfaction was rated low at this walk-in centre;
- Durban Prior Road management should look at the staffing numbers and the number of supervisors walking the floor to support consultants and also more staff to manage the queues.
- Management should look at more and efficient ways to send statements of accounts to its customers.
- Management should adopt a more aggressive awareness campaign to inform its customers of the existing efficient and better ways of getting statements of accounts and payments without having to necessarily visit.

5.8 Recommendation for future studies

It is recommended that a further study should be done to investigate the reasons for the delay in sending statements of account to the customers. It was noted that some clients were frustrated that they had to spend money and take time to visit a walk-in centre just to request a statement of account.

Another area where a further study is recommended is on the service delivery side, being the delay in processing applications to attend to water and sanitation complaints like terminated service, water burst pipes.

5.9 Summary

The study highlighted the quality of service and customer satisfaction as rated by eThekwini Municipality: Water and Sanitation customers. The issues that arose from the score ratings by respondents and during the data collection period have been highlighted and discussed. The study has detailed long queues as contributing factors and made recommendations in improving effectiveness and efficiency.

The walk-in centre that received the lowest score has been discussed and recommendations made to management. The study also stated that the service quality dimensions management needs to ensure that they continue to excel to maintain good service quality and customer satisfaction. These dimensions have a significant impact on service quality and customer satisfaction. The reason for this is that these dimensions focus on service quality and customer satisfaction that meet the expectations of the Unit customers that will result in their support of water-saving initiatives and this will improve service delivery. Gaining customers' support will also help the Unit to deliver on its mandate of providing safe and clean water to the citizens of eThekwini Municipality.

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