Service Delivery And Customer Fulfillment In Hospitality Industry: A Study Of Hotels In Ogoja, Nigeria

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Abstract: Many hospitality organizations are underperforming because service quality and organizational ethics and management function has been neglected. A number of complaints have been filed up by hotel customers as a result of poor services and unpleasant experiences. This situation has become a major issue bordering hotel managers and proprietors alike. This study seeks to assess hospitality services and the fulfillment of customers in Ogoja, using five service quality dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Cluster sampling method was used to divide the study area into five clusters based on the geographical proximity of the hotels. Data were collected through closed ended questionnaire and analyzed with the aid of statistical frequency count, percentages and simple mean in a tabular form. Results show that hotels in Ogoja have not satisfied their customers based on the identified service quality dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Keywords: Service, service quality, service delivery, customer fulfillment, hotel.

I. INTRODUCTION

The major aim of every enterprise is to maximize profit by way of meeting customers' expectations. This can be achieved by constantly improving the quality of services presented. Like every other organization, hospitality industries also vary in their services, quality, reliability and prices. Since there are many hospitality outfits in the market, service providers strive not only to attract customers but also to keep them in other to maintain a position in a competitive business environment.

The trend of world markets has changed noticeably from agricultural to service markets (Asian Development Outlook, 2007 in Manjula, 2010). All service businesses are trying their best to improve their service quality in order to make customers satisfy with their services, especially the hotel industry. Hotel operators now focus more on the quality standards in order to meet the basic needs and expectations of the customers. Once customers' requirements are clearly identified and understood, hotel operators are more likely to anticipate and fulfill their customers' needs and wants (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003). The more satisfied the customers are, the more likely they are to return or prolong their hotel stay (Choi & Chu, 2001). Aaker (2002) argued that, meeting the customer expectation is the central concept of marketing science. Kukoyi and Iwuagwu (2015) maintained that customer satisfaction is the foundation of good business; satisfied customers will make a great foundation for returned business and also bring new clients. The success of hotel business is significantly driven by the quality of service provided, which is why proprietors and managers are constantly seeking for optimum understanding of what exactly

is required by the customers. Akbaba (2006) aver that understanding the service quality dimension required by the customers and how important it is to them for each segment of the hotel would assist management to improve upon the challenges of quality service delivery. Thus; the competitive capacity of any hospitality enterprise is dependent on its ability to pay attention to the determination, creation, management and presentation of quality services to meet customers' expectations.

Service quality is determined by the subjective comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and the perception of the way the service has been ran. Armistead, Pritchard and Machin (1997) argued that the process of service delivery that result to service quality and yield customer satisfaction is achieved by constant improvement of productivity while delivering the expected value to the customer. It is however, important to note that the concept of service is paramount since without it there will be no service quality and customer satisfaction. Customers must encounter some kind of service to be satisfied or dissatisfied with it. A number of definitions has been brought forth by many researchers on the concept of service, but the conceptualization of service quality have not reach a consensus as individual researchers often base their studies on specific parts of service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Reeves and Bednar, 1994 in Sumnaya, 2014). Studies revealed that there is no generally acceptable definition of service quality that is all encompassing. John and Ronald, (2006) in Manjula (2010), defines service quality as a strategic organizational approval or system targeted towards ensuring offering and sustenance of quality services to customers. Kreitter (1995) in Aham (1990) defines service quality as organization's strategic objective of creating a culture that is committed to continuous improvement in the aspect of skills, product processing and teamwork in service delivery to satisfy their customers. Hall (1990) expatiated further pointing that service quality occurs when individual organizations defines its level of standards and try to exhibit or deliver on a consistent basis.

The concept of service quality is the cornerstone of a system that creates, monitors and consistently improves customer expectation in the product and services being offered. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) defined service quality as a function of the differences between expectation and performance along ten major dimensions. In later research, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) revised and defined the service quality in five dimensions as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Min and Min (1997) presented the idea that hotel staff have important attributes that are capable of wooing customers to increase patronage, especially, in forming the impressions of how well the hotel staff are dressed, their ability to resolve problems encountered by guests, convenience of making the reservation, promptness of check-in/check-out process, hotel/tour guide information, security and safety of guests and individualized attention.

Quality service delivery is important to every business organization across the globe. It increases business and foster customer loyalty, particularly in the hospitality industry. The intangible nature of service product makes production and consumption of hospitality products to take place simultaneously. A service is an activity or benefit that is offered for sale or that is provided in association with the sale of goods, which leads to customer satisfaction. Quinn, Baruch and Paquette (1987) in Manjula 92010), argued that services are all economic activities that offer non-physical produgcts, which are generally consumed at the time of production. Services provide added value in in the form of fulfillment of one's expectation that is essentially intangible. According to Gronroos (1990) in Manjula (2010), "services are an activity or series of activities of intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily take place in interactions between the customer and the service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customers problems". Customers determine their satisfaction level themselves as they compare expected services to what they receive after transaction. The level of satisfaction also delivers judgment on the quality of service. Some observers however, believed that customer satisfaction and service quality are the same concepts and have often used them interchangeably, other disagree by pointing out that the perception of customers about service quality is anchored on a long term judgment of an enterprise service delivery, while customer satisfaction is based on 'on-the-sport' experience of the service rendered. The evaluation of satisfied or dissatisfied experiences by customers informs their decision about service quality of a specific organization.

Customer satisfaction has become a subject of great concern to hotel managers as a result of the increasing number of complaints filed by their clients for poor services that has always resulted to unpleasant experiences. Odartey (2009) argued that many organizations are underperforming and operate as if customers are the beggars. Most organizations, especially in the hotel industry have failed to pay attention to the quality of their employees, which has affected the standard of service delivery. It is as a result of this that this study seeks to evaluate the expectation and perception of customers towards service delivery in selected hotels in Ogoja local government of Cross River State, using the five service quality dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

II. METHODOLOGY

Ogoja Local Government Area is one of the largest among the eighteen Local Government Areas of Cross River State. It is located approximately between latitude 6° 40' 0" North and Longitude 8° 48' 0" East of the Greenwich Meridian with an area of 972sq.km. The local government has ten political wards with a total population of approximately 229,300 (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2016). The land mass has a geographical characteristics feature that comprises of hills, gentle slopes, level land, rivers and valleys. The climate is essentially tropical all year round with a mean annual rainfall of about 4,300mm (Ogoja Local Government Town Planning, 2000). The population of the study consists of all guests that visited hotels in Ogoja Urban within the study period. Ogoja urban was chosen because it has the highest number of hotels in Ogoja Local Government Area and also

because of its proximity to the researcher. Cluster random sampling method was used to select 5 hotels in Ogoja Urban. The researcher divided the hotels into five clusters namely; Ndok Junction, Abakpa, Okuku Road, GRA and Mission Road. This division was based on the geographical proximity of the hotels. Thereafter, one hotel was randomly selected from each of the five clusters making a total of five hotels. Hence, Gamara Hotel was selected from Junction cluster, All-Stars Hotel from Abakpa cluster, Lepe Suites and Hotel from Okuku Road, Gakuna from Mission Road and Ojays Hotel from GRA.

Name of hotel	Location	Cluster area
Gamara	Ndok	Ndok junction
All-star	Abakpa	Abakpa town
Lepe suites	Igoli	Okuku road
Ojays	Igoli	GRA
Gakuna	Igoli	Mission road

Source: Author's compiled data, 2019
Table 1: sample hotels and their location

40 customers each were randomly selected from the sample hotels making a total of 200 respondents. This sampling method was chosen because it gives every member of the population equal chance of being included in the sample. The instrument used for data collection was the close ended questionnaire which was divided into two parts; A and B. Part A contains demographic information of the respondents while section B contains twenty items built into five service quality dimensions. Data analysis was done through statistical frequency count, percentages and simple mean in a tabular form. The analyses of respondents' demographic characteristics were presented in graphical form for easy interpretation.

III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

200 structured questionnaires were distributed among the randomly sampled guests of selected hotels of which 197 were successfully filled and returned. The sample population was made up of both sex and the percentage of gender participation is shown in figure 1, while figure 2, 3 and 4 present the age distribution of respondents, percentage of respondents' marital status and their educational qualifications.

Service quality is made up of five dimensions. The 197 respondents were asked to rate the statements pertaining to each dimension in relation to their expectation and perception of service delivery of the sample hotel staff in Ogoja. The findings of the service quality analysis of each dimension are also presented in table 2 to 6, while table 7 presents the overall mean scores of all service dimensions and the service quality gap.
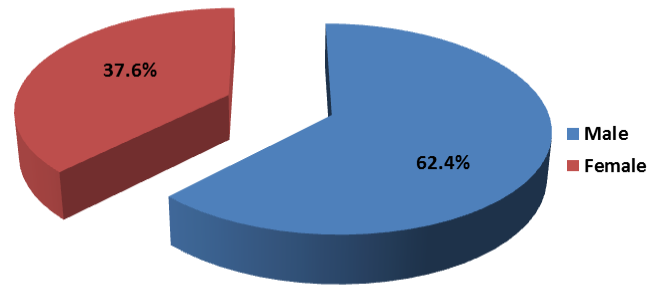
ANALYSIS OF GENDER PARTICIPATION

Figure 1: Percentage of male and female respondents

The above figure shows that, the total number of sample size was 197 of which 123 representing 62.4% were male and the remaining 74 representing 37.6 were female respondents. Therefore, the majority of the respondents were male guests.

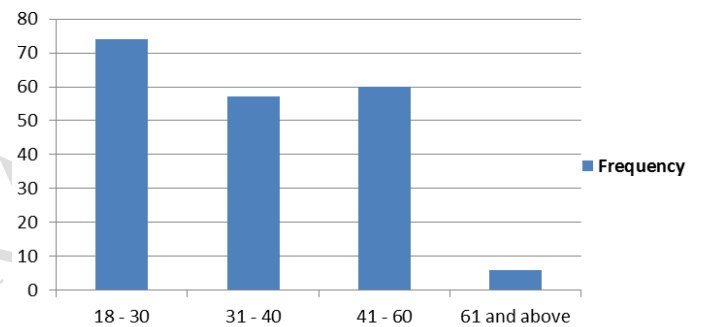## ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' AGE DISTRIBUTION

Figure 2: Age distribution of respondents

Figure 2 represent the analysis of respondents' age. The figure shows that 74 respondents were in the age group of 18 – 30 years, 60 respondents were between the ages of 41 and 60 years and 57 respondents were within the age bracket of 31 – 40 years. Only 6 respondents were between the age of 61 and above. This analysis shows that out of 197 respondents, 191 falls under the age group of between 18 and 60 years.
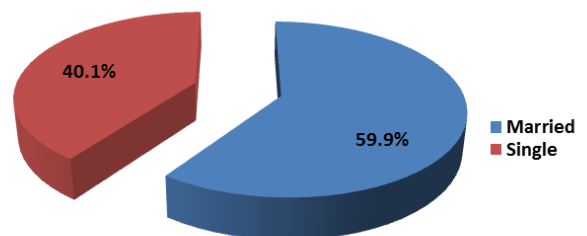
ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' MARITAL STATUS

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents' marital status

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents' of marital status. The analyisis revealed that 59.9% (n=118) of respondents were married while 40.1% (n=79) of the respondents were single. Therefore majority of the sample guests were married.

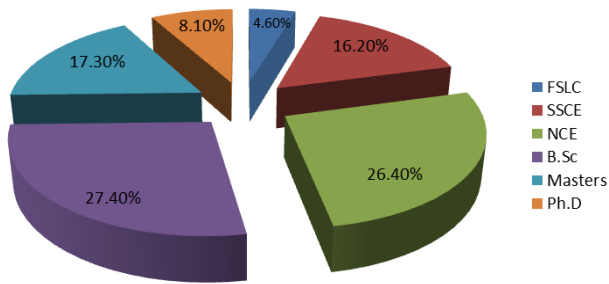## ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents' educational qualification

The result of the educational qualification of respondents is represented in the figure 4 above. It can be seen that 54 respondents representing 27.4% are B.Sc. holders, 52 respondents representing 26.4% are NCE holders, 34 respondents representing 17.3% are Master degree holders, 32 representing 16.2% are SSCE holders, 16 respondents representing 8.1% hold Ph.D and only 9 respondents representing 4.6% are holders of First School Leaving Certificate. This result shows that majority of the respondents hold Bachelor degree, Nigeria Certificate in Education and Master's Degree.

ANALYSIS OF QUALITY SERVICE DIMENSION

Items	Mean		SQ Gap
	Expectation	Perception	(P - E)
1. Hotel facilities/equipment are in good condition	3.65	3.50	-0.15
2. Relevant information is provided at the info. centre	3.40	3.47	0.07
3. In-house communication facilities are functional	3.57	3.45	-0.12
4. Out-door recreational facilities are available	3.10	3.20	0.10
5. Hotel staff are clean, neat and discipline	3.51	3.47	-0.04
Overall Mean and Service Quality Gap	**3.45**	**3.42**	**-0.03**

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 2: Tangibility dimension

Table 2 shows the mean scores of customers' expectation and perception as regard tangibility dimension of service quality. Under the mean scores of perception, item 1 which is "hotel facilities and equipment are in good condition'' has the highest mean score of 3.50, whereas item 4 of "out-door recreational facilities are available and easily accessible to customers" has the lowest mean (3.20). The overall mean score of perception is 3.42.

In terms of the mean scores of guests' expectation, item 1 has the highest mean score of 3.65 with the lowest score of 3.10 from item 4. The overall mean score of expectation is 3.45 which is higher than that of perception. This implies that guest expectation of the services provided in all the sample hotels were higher than what they perceived. The customers expected most services from hotels out-door recreational facilities (3.20) that can be easily accessible to them.

The calculated service quality difference shows that the highest gap (-0.15) is for hotels to provide facilities and equipment that are in good condition and the lowest gap (-0.04) draws their attention to boosting staff cleanliness and discipline. Out of the five items, three have negative scores with the overall difference of -0.03 indicating that the sample hotels in Ogoja has to improve their tangible services especially in the areas of hotel equipment, communication facilities and staff discipline and cleanliness in order to meet the expectations of their guests.

Items	Mean		SQ Gap
	Expectation	Perception	(P - E)
6 Staff provides consistent services	3.34	3.17	-0.17
6. Services are performed accurately	3.27	3.02	-0.25
7. Service time is provided and performed as promised	3.28	3.01	-0.27
Overall Mean and Service Quality Gap	**3.30**	**3.07**	**-0.23**

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 3: Reliability dimension

There are three items in the reliability dimension of service quality. Table 3 shows the mean scores of customer expectation and perception based on reliability dimension of the sample hotels service quality. The result of expectation shows that item six 6 "Staff provides consistent services" has the highest mean score of 3.34; whereas item 7 recorded the lowest mean score (3.27) and the overall mean score is 3.30. The perception of customers has the highest mean score of 3.17 representing item 6 and the lowest score of 3.01 representing item 8.

The overall mean score of customer perception is 3.07. The computed service quality gap shows the highest difference of -0.17, indicating that hotel staff should increase the consistency of the services provided. The lowest gap of -0.25 informs the hotels to provide more accurate services to their customers.

The overall service quality gap of reliability (-0.23) indicates that all the sample hotels has not met guests expectation of reliability. Special attention should be directed to consistency and timely provision and performance of expected services as promised guests.

Items	Mean		SQ Gap
	Expectation	Perception	(P - E)
8. Staff are always willing to render assistance to clients	3.34	3.05	-0.29
9. Staff respond quickly to customer's inquiries	3.33	3.04	-0.29
10. Staff has adequate knowledge of the product	3.42	3.20	-0.22
11. Customers are warmly welcome and received	3.52	3.35	-0.17
Overall Mean and Service Quality Gap	**3.40**	**3.16**	**-0.24**

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 4: Responsiveness dimension

From the analysis of table 4 above, the mean scores of guest's expectation and perception regarding the service quality dimension of responsiveness is given. Under guest expectation, item 11 "Customers are warmly welcome and received" has the highest score of 3.52 against item 10 with the lowest mean score of 3.33. The overall mean score of all the items is 3.40. In the case of the mean scores of guests perception, item 12 has the highest score (3.35), while item 10 has the lowest score of 3.04. The overall mean score is 3.16 pointing to the fact that the expectations of guest were higher than that of the services actually provided by the sample hotels.

The overall mean scores of guest expectation and perception shows a service quality gap of -0.24. This negative result implies that service delivery of sample hotels has not fulfilled the expectations of guests in terms of responsiveness. Management should focus more on training their staff to assist guests (-0.29) in terms of difficulty and also respond quickly to their queries (-0.29).

Items	Mean		SQ Gap
	Expectation	**Perception**	**(P - E)**
12. The hotel provides security and safety	3.50	3.40	-0.10
13. Staff are polite and very-well mannered	3.28	3.25	-0.03
14. Staff are capable of providing answers to queries	3.23	3.15	-0.08
15. Staff are trustworthy	3.10	3.05	-0.05
Overall Mean and Service Quality Gap	**3.28**	**3.21**	**-0.07**

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 5: Assurance dimension

The results regarding the analysis of the mean difference between the delivered services and guests expectation in terms of assurance are displayed in table 5. It is observed from the table that the overall mean score of assurance regarding guests perceptions of the services provided is 3.21 with an average mean of 3.28 in view of their expectations.

The overall service quality gap of assurance is equivalent to -0.07. This result implies that guests' expectation regarding assurance dimension has not been fulfilled. Management of sample hotels is required to improve on their services in relation to assurance in order to satisfy the expectations of their guests with special emphasis on providing adequate security and safety.

Items	Mean		SQ Gap
	Expectation	**Perception**	**(P - E)**
16. Staff have good communication skill	3.26	3.20	-0.06
			-0.25
17. Staff provide personal attention to customers	3.18	2.93	-0.20
18. Staff understand customers specific needs	3.04	2.84	0.03
19. Facilities are available and conveniently positioned for your comfort	2.88	2.91	
Overall Mean and	**3.09**	**2.97**	**-0.12**

Service Quality Gap			

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 6: Empathy dimension

The analysis of the fifth dimension of service quality (empathy) regarding customer expectation and perception is presented in table 5. The overall average of expectation is 3.09 and that of perception is 2.97 lower than the expected mean score. Since the calculated mean score of expectation is greater than that of perception, therefore there is a gap between the expected service and guests perception of the actual services provided by the hotels.

The table also shows that the service quality of empathy is equivalent to -0.12. This negative result suggests that hotels services have not met their guests' expectations in relation to empathy dimension.

Items	Guests Expectation	Guests Perception	SQ Gap (P - E)
1. Tangibility	3.45	3.42	-0.03
2. Reliability	3.30	3.07	-0.23
3. Responsiveness	3.40	3.16	-0.24
4. Assurance	3.28	3.21	-0.07
5. Empathy	3.09	2.97	-0.12
Overall Mean and Service Quality Gap	**3.31**	**3.17**	**-0.14**

Source: Author's compiled primary data, 2019
Table 7: Mean scores of customer satisfaction towards service delivery and service quality gap of customers' expectation and perception towards quality service

The above table shows that the overall expectation of guests towards the five dimensions was high (3.31). Result showed that tangibility dimension was the highest (3.45), followed by responsiveness (3.40), reliability (3.30), assurance (3.28), and empathy (3.09). Majority of the sample guests expected hotel facilities and equipment to be in good condition.

The overall customer satisfaction of perception in view of the five dimensions was low (3.17). The analysis of customers' perception showed that most customers' perceived empathy as the poorest dimension at (2.97), followed by reliability (3.07), responsiveness (3.16), assurance (3.21) and tangibility (3.42) respectively.

The service quality gap is computed between customers' expectation and perception. Findings show that the overall mean score of expectation in all dimensions was higher than that of perception with a service quality gap of -0.14. This negative gap indicates that guests are not satisfied with the services provided by the sample hotels in Ogoja.

Responsiveness was the poorest dimension with a wider gap of -0.24. The study therefore, revealed that the process of service delivery (responsiveness) such as staff willingness to render assistance to customers, quick response to guests' inquiries, adequate knowledge of the product/service and warmly reception of guests has not met guests satisfaction.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The overall standard of service delivery in selected hotels was measured using the service quality dimensions developed

by parasuraman et.al (1988). This was achieved by calculating the mean scores of all the dimensions. Findings show that the overall mean score of expected service in relation to tangibility dimension is 3.45 and that of perception is 3.42. The difference between expected service and actual service delivered by hotels is -0.03 indicating that hotels have not fulfilled the expectations of their guests in view of tangibility. This finding corroborates the report of Uddin (2015) who realized an overall negative gap difference of -0.19, thus supporting the fact that hotels have not met the expectations of their customers as regards tangibility dimension. Customer satisfaction is an important element of creating and maintaining long term relationships with customers. Customers are more likely to take again the same product or other products of the brand they are satisfied with and ignoring other brands that have not met their expectations (Cronin, Brandy and Hult, 2000; Su and Allan, 2004). Hotel management should improve their services that are related to tangibility dimension particularly in the areas of hotel equipment, communication facilities and staff discipline and cleanliness in order to meet the expectations of their guests.

The result of reliability dimension also revealed that the expected mean score (3.30) from all sample hotels is greater than the perceived services provided by the hotels (3.07) and the overall service quality gap is -0.23, indicating that reliability dimension has not fulfill the expectation of guests. This negative result disagrees with the submission of Rao and Sahu (2013) who realized a positive gap difference of 0.37, suggesting customer satisfaction. The result however tallies with the findings of Uddin (2015) with an overall negative gap difference of -0.35. As rightly argued by Williams (2000), customers are driven by needs, and increasingly expect to receive excellent services. When a service truly satisfies customers, it enhances their quality of life and makes them to demand for more services. Consumers demand faster and better service and will remain loyal to organizations that consistently provide the highest levels of service (Williams 2000). It is therefore advisable for all hotel managers to get acquainted with the way customers perceive service delivery as quality so as to serve them well.

The analysis of responsiveness shows that the mean score of guests' expectation is 3.40 and that of perception is 3.16 with a service quality difference of -0.24. As earlier stated, this negative gap difference suggest unsatisfied expectations of customers, thus informing hotel managers to focus more on training their staff to assist guests in terms of difficulty and also respond quickly to their queries. The ability of staff to respond quickly to the needs of customers is a fundamental factor that hotel proprietors must devote their attention in order to keep their customers. Gronross (1987) argues that the functional aspect of service delivery is more appreciated than mere technicality in terms of quality. According to him, the success of any hotel establishment is anchored on her functional quality service delivery that is demonstrated in the interaction between organizational staff and customers respectively. Assurance dimension proves that the expectation of guests is higher than that of perceived services. The overall mean score of customers expectation is 3.28 and the computed score of perception is 3.21. The difference between expectation and perception of hotel service quality as regards assurance is -0.07. This result implies that guests' expectation has not been fulfilled. In corroboration of this finding, Uddin (2015) reported a negative gap difference of -0.19, which also imply dissatisfaction of guests' expectation of service quality in hospitality industry. Management is therefore required to improve on the quality of their services in relation to assurance dimension with special focus on providing adequate security and safety.

Lastly, the result of the analysis of empathy revealed a negative service quality difference of -0.12. The calculated mean of expectation was 3.09 higher than that of perception (2.97). The empathy dimension shows that customers are not given special attention that is required. It also suggests that the hotel staff are not easily accessible, thus making staff-guests' communication ineffective. As one customer in Gakuna hotel commented, "I struggled all alone to arrange seats for our relaxation this evening without the assistance of the hotel staff". This statement is consistent with the result of empathy. As rightly argued by Crompton et.al (1991) cited in Rao and Sahu (2013), hotel staff should provide all the needs of customers to make them feel at home. This assertion was however not supported by the findings of empathy dimension.

The overall difference between guests' expectation and perception towards service delivery in all dimensions is noticeably -0.14. This negative score implies that the services of all sample hotels are below the expectations of their customers. Therefore, management must step up their services specifically, in responsiveness and reliability dimensions. Hotel staff should be train to respond quickly to customers queries and assist them in their difficulties. They should also be trained on how to perform prompt and accurate services to customers. According to McKenna (1997), "marketing is everything and everything is marketing in service organization". This statement implies that everyone in the service organization should be oriented towards customer relations. The above findings corroborates the report of Su and Allan (2004) who studied hotel service quality in Taiwan and revealed that no single hotel has met all the identified best practices of hospitality industry.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the findings of this study have shown a negative gap between customer expectation and perception towards service quality of hospitality enterprises (hotels) in Ogoja. The mean score of customer expectation was greater than their perception. It is glaring that majority of the sample guests were not satisfied with the services delivered by the hotels. This is evident in the service quality gap of all dimensions as shown is table 6, tangibility (-0.03), reliability (0-.23), responsiveness (-0.24), accuracy (-0.07) and empathy (-0.12) respectively. An overall service quality score of -0.14 has demonstrated that the actual services delivered to customers is below their expectations. Hotel managers should therefore give precedence to responsiveness; reliability and empathy were the service quality gap are comparatively higher improve the overall quality of the services rendered.

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