UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION, KUMASI

AN ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF FRONT DESK

OPERATION: A CASE STUDY OF MODERN CITY HOTEL IN THE TAMALE

METROPOLIS

ALHASSAN SHAFAWU

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

EDUCATION, Faculty of VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, School of research and

Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the award of Master of Technology Education (Catering and

Hospitality) Degree

AUGUST, 2016

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project work is the result of my own original research, with the exception of specified concept extracted from other authors who have been duly acknowledged and no part of it has been presented for any qualification in this very institution or elsewhere.

Signature: …………………………….....................…........ Date: ……………………..

(ALHASSAN SHAFAWU)

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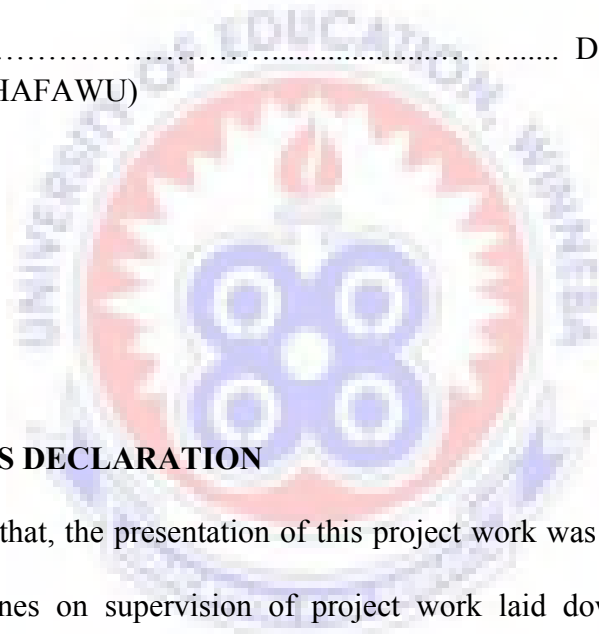
SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, the presentation of this project work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of project work laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Signature: …………………………….....................…........ Date: ……………………..

(PROF. SAMUEL B. OWUSU-MINTAH)

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my three lovely children – AdI, Dhakir and Abdul Wahid

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The research work was steered to assess Customer Satisfaction of front desk operation in the tourism industry with particular reference to Modern City Hotel in the Tamale metropolis in the Northern Region of Ghana. Questionnaire and interview were data collection instruments used to solicit for data from one hundred and five customers and twenty – five employees of the hotel. The findings revealed that customers were much in higher expectation in assurance. Again, customers considered tangibility and empathy as the most important factors for determining satisfactory service delivery. Customers" perceptions however exceeded their expectation. Based on the above findings the suggested strategies to improve quality service delivery by respondents included: hiring qualified staff, organisation of regular training sessions by hotel management to their staff given incentives to staff to boost their morale to work as well as staff attending to guests as quick as possible and delivering the right information at the right time.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the Study

The trend of world markets has changed noticeably from agricultural to service markets (Asian Development Outlook, 2007). All business are trying their best to improve their service quality in order to make customers satisfied with their services, especially the hotel industry. Hotel operators have now shifted focus to quality standards in order to meet the basic needs and expectations of the customers. Once customers and 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). Presently, hotel visitors in Ghana seem to have high standards and demands for excellent service. The hotels have improved their competition and now instead of having only a nice room as a means of drawing customers in, hotels offer -high quality staff as an amenity as well. Guest satisfaction is the highest priority for owners and managers competing with hundreds of others, and personal service is at the top of the travelers & list of the most important things when considering a hotel to stay in (Wipoosattaya, 2001).

Hotel staff ranges from top management staff to front line staff (i.e. housekeepers, receptionists/front desk operators, front cashiers). The front desk staffs are considered a supporting factor in determining customer satisfaction when deciding to return, to recommend the hotel, or in demonstrating loyalty to a particular hotel (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Watt (2007) stated that the front office/desk is an important function

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because customers deal with front office staff as the center of the hotel. They provide assistance to guests, fulfill their needs, and meet their wants as well. Hogan (2006) believe that front office staff are the nerve center of all hotels, and the front office is essential to keep up with what is happening at all areas of the hotels.

With respect to issues raised above, 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. Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined service quality as; a function of the differences between expectation and performance along ten major dimensions. Parasuraman et al. (1988) in later studies revised and defined the service quality in terms of five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. For example, Min & Min (1997) presented the idea that front office/desk services have the attributes that are considered most important, particularly in forming the following impressions of service quality; tangibility (how well the hotel staff are dressed); reliability (ability to resolve problems encountered by guests); responsiveness (convenience of making the reservation, promptness of check-in/checkout process, hotel/tour guide information); assurance (security and safety of guests); and empathy (caring and individualized attention).

Juwaheer & Ross (2003) believed assurance factors such as security and safety of guests, and secondly ;reliability factors such as hotels performing task that have been promised to guests on resolving problems encountered by guests is an integral issue when dealing with customer satisfaction within hotels. Juwaheer & Ross (2003) found that by focusing on these factors, hotels would be able to achieve high levels of satisfaction. Hernon & Whitwan (2001) defined customer satisfaction as a measure of how the

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customer perceives service delivery. Liu (2000) stated, for example, that customer satisfaction is a function of service performance relative to the customer expectation. For this reason, it is important to understand how customer expectation is formed in order to identify the factors of service satisfaction.

Previous research explored customer satisfaction regarding the service quality of all areas in the hotel so that the hotel can assess the customer perception. Little emphasis has been drawn to the influence front-desk offices or operators provide in ensuring effective customer satisfaction or service performance of hotels most especially in developing countries such as Ghana.

With studies concerning the hotel sector, most researchers are interested in maximizing customer satisfaction; satisfied customers tend to return and make the profit to hotel. As Reisig *et al* (2001) noted, different customers have different expectations, based on their knowledge of a product or service. This can be implied that a customer may estimate what the service performance will be or may think what the performance ought to be. If the service performance meets or exceeds customers & expectation, the customers will be satisfied. On the other hand, customers are more likely to be dissatisfied if the service performance is less than what they have expected. As mentioned earlier, a greater number of satisfied customers will make the hotel business more successful and more profitable.

Previous research explored customer satisfaction regarding the service quality of all areas in the hotel so that the hotel can assess the customer perception. This study identified five factors of service quality by focusing on the front office staff only, and explored the customers & expectations and perception levels of these services at the

Modern City Hotel. The results of this quantitative assessment of service quality might provide some insights into how customers rate the service quality and assessed customers & satisfactions at Modern City Hotel.

1.2   General Information about Modern City Hotel

Modern City Hotel is a three star hotel located in Tamale, Ghana. The hotel works from Monday to Sunday with working hours from 6 am to 10 pm each day. Modern City Hotel aside providing room services and conference services has a fitness center, a complimentary wireless internet access and a business center to cater for guest or client needs. The Hotel also has an ultra-modern swimming pool for guest relaxation. The hotel also makes provisions for meeting and event spaces as well as secretarial services.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

The Tourism industry has become one of the most important players of economies worldwide during the past decades (Sriyam 2010). Ghana however is not exception when it comes to revenues generated from the tourism industry. There has been an increased demand for hotels to compensate for the growing number of tourists in the country. Customers" satisfaction has therefore become a key factor for a hotel"s success. Sriyam (2010) stated that customer satisfaction in the hotel industry is the highest priority for owners in the hotel competition.

Makeeva (2010) stated that hotel"s main purpose is to satisfy customers" needs and to delight customers in the hotel system. It is however, unfortunate that most Ghanaian hotels focus only on room provision, infrastructure, and food etc. leaving the

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front desk. Even though the hotels as service providing institutions have to some extent lived up to its mandate and have relatively endeared itself to the generality of the populace and tourists, service quality and client satisfaction cannot be described as excellent which then suggest that some things are not right and calls for investigation. Some clients have made reports of uncourteous attitude of some front-desk staff, delay in having clients attended to, and sometimes insubordination of some front-desk staff.

Such clients tend to form negative impression about the hospitality most especially hotels in the country. These clients feel dissatisfied and often inform others of their unpleasant experience. The repercussions have been lowering public image of hotels in the country. This study is therefore to give an assessment of customer satisfaction of front desk operations at Modern City Hotel.

1.4   Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess customer satisfaction of front desk operations of Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis, while the objectives were to:

- Identify customers" expectation of service quality of the front desk staff in the hotels.

- Examine the perceptions of the customer about the performance of the front office staff.

- Outline procedures that can be put in place to facilitate efficient front desk operations.

1.5   Research Questions

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the expectations of customers about the service they expected to receive from the front office staff?

2. What are the perception of the guests about the quality of service provided by the front desk staff? and

3. What procedures can be put in place to ensure effective front desk operations at Modern City Hotel?

1.6   Significance of the Study

The study when successfully carried out is expected to add to the store of knowledge on the subject matter, particularly its relevance to hotels in Ghana. It is expected that the results of the study will help to expand the frontiers of knowledge with respect to how service quality of the front desk office or front desk staff influences or impacts on customer satisfaction, elements of service quality and other determinants of customer satisfaction.

It is also expected to find out how best practices in achieving customer satisfaction can be recommended for adoption by the Ministry of Tourism to suit it peculiar circumstances. It is therefore in this regard expected to make concrete recommendations to the Ministry of Tourism to enable it satisfy its wide range of clients, to make it a preferred platform when it comes to country level tourism in West Africa and beyond. Finally, the findings will be compelling enough to lead management of hotels to commit the necessary resources to improve the quality of service rendered by hotel staff.

1.7   Scope of the Study

The study was undertaken within the Modern City Hotel located within the Tamale Metropolis. The hotel is a 3-star hotel with about 50 rooms, 2 conference rooms and to front desk offices. The study will cover quality dimensions and how they impact on client satisfaction; quality practices, processes and structures which either promote or hinder the delivery of quality services and client satisfaction. It also covered quality assurance measures and standards of service quality and customer care in the hotel. The study was conducted within a limited period of five (5) months.

1.8   Organization of the Study

The study had been organized into five (5) chapters. Chapter one which is General Introduction presents the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, and research questions, scope of study, relevance and limitations of the study. Chapter Two is a presentation of the relevant literature on the subject that were reviewed. It looks at concepts and theories as they relate to the research topic and research questions. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology that was adopted. It outlines the research design, data collection techniques, sources of secondary data, the research instruments used and sampling technique. The target population, analytical and presentation tools that were used are also explained. Chapter Four is a detailed account of the findings and results of the study. It discusses the researcher's analysis of the responses to the issues that were investigated. Chapter Five, the final chapter, is a presentation of the conclusions that were drawn from the findings and recommendations to enhance service quality and client satisfaction in the hotel.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This project is aimed at assessing the role of the front desk or front office on customer satisfaction in hotels in Ghana. This chapter, critically reviews the literature concerning three key areas: Standards: a definition of standards within the context of hotels and front office. Next is the customer service and satisfaction; a definition and explanation of how the two are interrelated; an exploration of how customer service is delivered and its impact upon customer satisfaction and a discussion linking standards and customer service. Then, the Front Office: the link between standards and the delivery of customer service satisfaction, and finally, the review will cover dimensions of service quality. The literature of this study has been reviewed under the concepts of customer satisfaction and expectation.

Previous literature reviews highlight the use of standards in the hospitality industry and that standards are not just a choice, rather they are a requirement for any hospitality operation (Panagiotou, 2012). Conversely, the role standards have played and the lengths to which it is discussed in the literature, in recent years, has varied considerably. With this in mind a brief historical overview of the role that standards have played within the literature over the last two decades is provided.

The 1990"s saw some focusing upon the need for standards, not only within branded operations but also within the hospitality industry in general. Lockwood (1999) confirmed this, as he has argued in 1994 that standards are a core element of any

operation. Towards the late 1990‟s into the millennium, the focus upon standards took a back seat as hospitality operations began to consider the idea of improving the „customer experience‟. In turn, through managing the customer experience, customer loyalty could be achieved but more important was the idea that managing the customer experience could ensure the survival of a business (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). Nevertheless, whilst the idea of managing the customer experience was at the forefront of the literature, it was still evident that in order to deliver this there needed to be a relating back to implementing standards to ensure that what was being delivered was to a high specification (Gentile et al, 2007).

Lockwood (1999) defines standards as being required to achieve consistent performance and to ensure the meeting of guest expectations. Standards can be viewed as a promise of, and an approach to, quality. Lockwood (1999) observes that in delivering standards and, in turn, quality, control procedures and work instructions are needed. Standards not only detail what is to be done, who is meant to be doing the task and how it is meant to be done (control procedures) but also specifications on how work instructions should be carried out.

Heskett (1987) comments that operating standards are concerned with how a business positions itself i.e. what is it exactly that the customers want? It is the standards that dictate the service but what actually constitutes good service? Heskett (1987) raises some fundamental questions that hotel operations must ask themselves when founding their mission statement and when communicating to the public what it is they want to deliver. Furthermore, Heskett‟s (1987) observation, regarding business positioning, is an important one; a hotel cannot set its standards without knowing or being able to identify

its key consumers, for example, implementing operating procedures geared towards dealing with leisure guests will not be appropriate if the hotel is a business hotel. Standards are an integral part of the overall operating strategy of any business which includes hotels.

However, standards within operations must be realistic. Lockwood (1999) explains that high standards may offer guests a perceived value however; they inherently may incur high costs. Furthermore, with the promise of delivering high standards, the standard operating procedures (SOP"s) need to be as equally detailed and accurate as the standards themselves in order for staff to meet and help deliver them (Lockwood, 1999).

Lockwood (1999) further commented that standards need to be in line with delivery systems. In addition to Lockwood"s comments it can be observed that it is the quality, ability and competence of staff to be able to deliver a standard of service that matches that of the standards set. Standards exist within branded hotels to standardise not only the service offered but also the product; in order to deliver standards and therefore quality there needs to be SOPs in place, as highlighted by Jones (1999). Standard of Operations (SOPs) are seen not only as a form of quality control but also are to ensure cost and revenue control. Jones & Lockwood (2004) define SOPs as comprising of: "a simple statement of policy, followed by paragraphs indicating directives, procedures, explanation of forms, records to be kept, positional responsibilities and coordinating relationships." The use of SOPs ensures standardization throughout operations yet also ensures that the standard promised to the guest will be delivered (Heskett, 1987).

In conclusion, the most succinct and accurate explanation of standards comes from Jones (1999), who summarizes the importance and reasoning for standards being in place as presenting: "a focal point at the interface of customer requirements and operating performance that will determine, to a large extent, the success of the operation as a whole." Furthermore, the standards in place need to be as well as controlled and directed, as without them good customer service will only be achieved by accident as opposed to through design.

2.2   Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction

The researchers" intention is to define both customer service and customer satisfaction as the two go hand in hand; customer satisfaction cannot be realized without effective customer service and customer service cannot be continually monitored, adapted and improved without the feedback from guests regarding customer"s satisfaction. Pizam & Holcomb (2008) define customer satisfaction as: "The ability of an organisation to fulfill the needs of its customers." Therefore, customer service is the delivery of quality service to meet the guest expectations, the elements of which can be intangible as well as tangible (Vallen & Vallen, 2009).

Customer satisfaction in the researcher"s view is the measure of the degree to which a product or service meets the customer's expectations. Within hospitality, and especially front office, customer service is a fundamental element of the guest experience. Jeong and Oh (1998), observe the importance of customer service, since within the hospitality industry there has been an increase in competition for customer

satisfaction. This is because retention of customers through effective customer service is vital to any business" growth.

The discussion of customer service goes in concert with customer satisfaction; customer satisfaction is the continual feedback from customers about their experiences that can only help hotel operations to improve and build upon their customer service to ensure effective customer service delivery. Jones & Lockwood (2004) highlight the role that technology plays in the delivery of customer service by helping to deliver a higher quality level of service, through the increased speed of actions such as reservations and billing. Furthermore, it can be said that it is the knowledge of front office/front desk staff on how to use the necessary technology that can affect the level of customer service delivered, as technology is only as good as the people using it. This knowledge can only be taught through the effective training and monitoring by management. If this is not put in place, or is not effective, then customer service will be trampled upon. It can however be said that customer service is not about meeting the expectations of customers but rather about exceeding their expectations.

Jones & Lockwood (2004) observed that hotels have fuelled customer"s higher quality expectations by using quality as a marketing tool. With this being the case, hotels have to continually improve customer service to meet the demands of the ever perceptive and knowledgeable general public. Managing is an important part of customer service and customer satisfaction. Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry (1990) believe that strong commitment from management stimulates departments and organisations to improve service performance, yet poor role definitions, poor team work and a team lacking leadership knowledge can all contribute to poor customer service. This is especially

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pertinent to the hospitality industry which is renowned for its high pressure environment and dependency on service knowledge, ability and deliverance. The experience, knowledge and personality of a manager can greatly affect the team"s delivery of customer service. If a manager lacks the knowledge of standards, systems and management then the delivery of customer service will be impeded as the front office or front desk is the first customer interface and the first point of call for any guest with a problem.

2.3   Importance of Customer Service

As characteristic of service, it cannot be separated from customers in service industry. The best service means returning business. Harris (2000) mentioned that one of the most effective and least expensive ways to market a business is through excellent customer service. Customers and service are an obvious requirement for doing business especially in the hospitality industry. The importance of customer service is at an all-time high. Many services require personal interactions between customers and the firm"s employees, and these interactions strongly influence the customers" perception of service quality (Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1996). For instance, a person"s stay at a hotel can be greatly affected by the friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness of the hotel staff, most especially the front desk. One"s impression of the hotel and willingness to return are determined to a large extent by the brief encounters with the front desk staff, bell-person, housekeeping staff, restaurant wait-staff etc. (Rust et al., 1996).

Most businesses have realized that providing a service alone is not enough in today"s competitive economic environment. Customer service is the positive element that

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keeps current business coming back. Recently, customers have become much more sophisticated than they were five years ago. Customers are informed about how products should perform and know that if they are dissatisfied with the service that they receive, someone else probably sells the product and will provide better service. Customers now have expectations that expressing their unhappiness with a situation will elicit a positive result to other place (Harris, 2000).

In a highly competitive industry like the hospitality industry, customers who are not satisfied with staying at hotel, simply won't return and change their hotel next time. Therefore, hotel management faces a tremendous challenge in selecting and training all of its employees to do their jobs well and perhaps even more importantly motivate them to provide good service to customers (Harris, 2000).

2.4   Why Customer Service Fail in the Hotel Industry

In his study of customer satisfaction, Gitomer (1998) discussed why customer service goes wrong and the consequences of having unhappy customers. Gitomer (1998) concluded that 91% of customers who leave the hotel premises with angry feeling will never return to a particular hotel. Of this 91%, 96% won't tell the management of the hotel why they left. However, 80% will actually return to the hotel if their grievances are handled as quickly as possible. Customers however carry a bad blueprint of bad incidents if problems are not attended to.

Gitomer (1998) enumerated several basic reasons why customer service goes bad in a hotel. These include: Failure to start friendly relationship. Gitomer (1998) believes the first few words set the tone for the entire dialog. The single most important brick in

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the foundation of customer service is "Friendly." It is also the least consistent element of the experience. Failure to say it in a way that the customer wants to hear it - The first tendency of the front-line person is to make an excuse or tell why something occurred. But that is the last thing the customer wants to hear. Customers want answers started in terms of them and their needs. And that is rare or missing from most front-line communication.

Next, some companies allow employees to be rude to customers and tell customers "No."- When you deny a customer, their need still exists and they are mad. Then you add to the fire by saying, "Don"t talk to me like that, sir." Or "I don"t have to take this." A complaining customer is seen as a "hassle" rather than an opportunity. Moreover we are living in an era of responsibility shirkers and blamers – People do not want to take responsibility. "It is not my job" is their credo. Responsibility takers are so rare that they often receive awards.

Furthermore, is the problem of low training budget priority. Big companies spend more money producing and airing one sixty-second commercial than they will spend on a customer service program in a year. They spend more money on "lip" service than "customer" service, and finally, companies make the fatal mistake of only providing "company training" and "policy training."- They may provide some "customer" training, but very few offer any "personal development" training such as positive attitude, goals, listening, responsibility, pride, or communication skills. This is especially fatal for front-line people. Companies only train once in a while instead of every day. - Fifteen to thirty minutes of training a day will make any employee a world-class expert in five years Gitomer (1998).

2.5 Front Desk or Front Office Operations

Front office, as mentioned earlier, is the first customer facing department that a guest meets, and the first port of call for the majority of guests with any queries or problems. Some of the key functions performed by front office are outlined by Tewari (2009). He states that some of the main functions concerning front office or front desk are: sale of rooms; receiving and registering guests (Check-in) and assign rooms; maintaining room availability; monitoring and handling guest accounts; handling all guest queries and complaints; concluding guests stay with issuing of bills and taking of payment; acting as an information point for guests concerning the surrounding area; undertaking daily financial tasks, such as end of shift banking; coordinating guest services; and facilitating communication with all departments in the hotel;

Baker & Riley (1994) observe that front office or front desk is where guests gain their first important impression, and furthermore, it is a communication hub for the hotel‟s operation. Vallen & Vallen (2009) further described front desk as: "a bundle of duties and guest services." These two definitions go some way to outlining the importance front office plays in the delivery of customer service, as well as ensuring standards are met in hotels. The front desk team need to be knowledgeable of both the standards and the SOPs in place, in order for standards to be achieved. With respect to standards, it is the front desk team‟s job to ensure that the customer‟s first contact with the hotel is a positive experience. This all important first impression will be based upon the welcome and the efficiency of the check-in process, both of which pertain to the standards in place. Incorporated into the delivery of these standards is customer service. It is the job of the front desk team to manage the service encounter effectively. Jones and

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Lockwood (2004), observe that the service encounter is of utmost importance to the operational success of a department.

As discussed earlier, it is about exceeding the expectations of guests, and not just meeting them. Zeithaml et al (1990) further describes the dimensions of service that customers expect to receive. The five dimensions are: reliability; tangibility; responsiveness; assurance and empathy. A study by Parasuraman (1991) provides further enhancement to the five dimensions by demonstrating what is needed to exceed customer expectation. Parasuraman (1991) states that customers believe reliability is the most important factor in meeting customer expectations. In addition process dimensions, such as assurance, responsiveness and empathy, are the most important aspects of exceeding guest expectations. In order for a front desk team to be able to deliver these dimensions, it is important that they receive the correct training. This is down to the manager; it is based upon their experience, knowledge and management style. With respect to the purpose of the study, it is integral to now consider the five dimensions of customers'' expectations.

2.4   Service Quality Dimensions

Service quality is the result of the comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service has been performed (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988). A number of experts define service quality differently. Parasuraman et al. (1985) define it as the differences between customers, expectation of services and their perceived service. With regards to customer satisfaction, if the expectation is greater than the service performance, perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence, customer dissatisfaction occurs. Lewis and Mitchell

(1990), Dotchin & Oakland (1994), and Asubonteng et al. (1996) define service quality as the extent to which a service meets customers, need and expectation.

2.4.1 The SERVQUAL Approach

The SERVQUAL approach has been applied in service and retailing organizations (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1991). Service quality is a function of pre-purchase customers" expectations, perceived process quality, and perceived output quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) define service quality as the gap between customers, expectation of service and their perception of the service experience.

Based on Parasuraman et al. (1988) conceptualization of service quality, a SERVQUAL instrument which included 22 items was used. The data on the 22 attributes were grouped into five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Numerous studies have attempted to apply the SERVQUAL technique to measure service quality. This is because it has a generic service application and is a practical approach to the area of service delivery. This instrument has been made to measure service quality in a variety of services such as hospitals (Babakus & Glynn 1992), hotels (Saleh & Rylan 1991), travel and tourism (Fick & Ritchie, 1991), a telephone company, two insurance companies and two banks (Parasuraman et al. 1991). In this study, the researcher uses SERVQUAL approach as an instrument to explore customers" expectations and perceptions levels of service quality towards the front office or front desk staff at the hotel.

2.5   The Conceptual Framework

Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified ten determinants for measuring service quality which are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, communication, access, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, and understanding/knowledge of customers. In a later study by Parasuraman et al. (1988), these ten dimensions were further purified and developed into five dimensions i.e.: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to measure service quality which are presented in Figure 2.1.
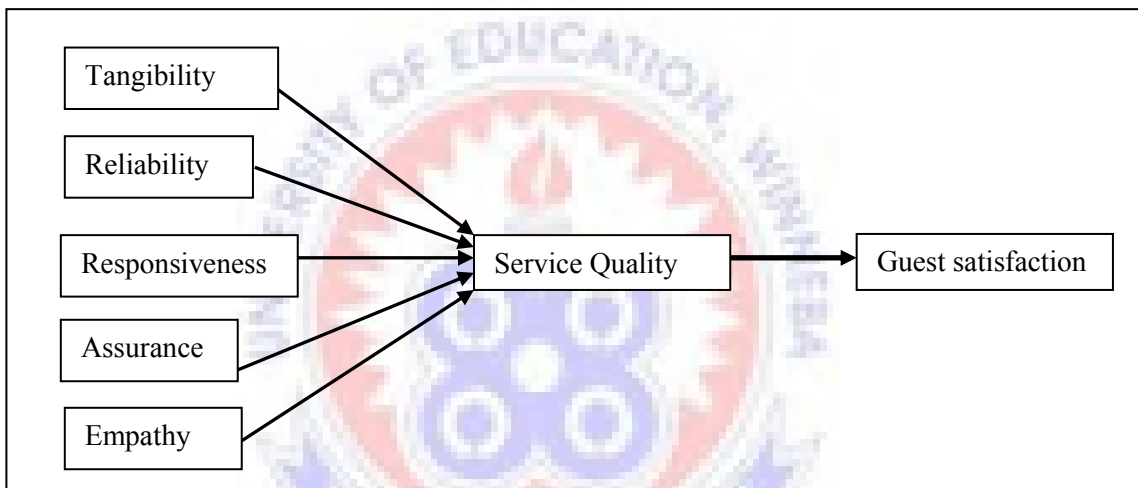
Figure 2.1:   The Conceptual Framework--Measuring Service Quality
Source: Adapted from Parasuraman et al (1988)

These five dimensions according to Parasuraman et al. (1988) were identified as follows:

2.5.1   Tangibility

The physical evidence of front office staff is including a personality and appearance of personnel, tools, and equipment used to provide the service. For example, some hotel chains (e.g. Golden Tulip Hotel, Miklin Hotel, Movenpick Hotel) consciously ensure that their properties are conformed to global standards of facilities wherever they

are located (Nankervis, 1995). However, the researcher, in this study, is focusing on how well-dressed the front desk officials of Modern City are and have been.

2.5.2 Reliability

Reliability involves performing the promised service dependably and accurately. It includes doing it right for the first time, which is one of the most important service components for customers. Reliability also extends to provide services when promised and maintain error-free records. The following examples present the reliability factor; Example 1: The front desk staff performs tasks that have been promised to guests and resolve problems encountered by guests. Example 2: The customers are sensitive to issue such as the telephone being picked up within five rings and their reservations being correct.

2.5.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the willingness of the front desk staff to help customers and provide prompt service to customers such as quick service, professionalism in handling and recovering from mistakes. It has been said that today‟s luxury is time; consequently, service providers, ability to provide services in a timely manner is a critical component of service quality for many guests. The examples of responsiveness are as follows: 1) Front desk staff asking for customers, name, address, and post code and telephone number during the telephone booking. 2) Customers being asked to guarantee their booking with the different rates that they are offered and which ones they accept.

2.5.4 Assurance

Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility and security. Competence means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the services. It involves knowledge and skill of the contact personnel, knowledge and skill of operational support personnel, research capability of the organization. Courtesy involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel. Credibility involves trust worthiness, believability, honesty; it involves having the customer"s best interest at heart. Contributing to credibility is company reputation, personal characteristics of the contact personnel. The degree of hard sell involved in interaction with the customer. Security refers to the freedom from danger, risk or doubt. It involves physical safety, financial security and confidentiality.

2.5.5 Empathy

Empathy refers to the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers including access, communication and understanding the customers. Access involves approach, ability and ease of contact. It means the service is easily accessible by telephone, waiting time to receive service is not extensive, hours of operation are convenient and location of service facility is convenient. Communication means keeping customers informed in language they can understand. It means listening to customers, adjusting its language for different consumers and speaking simply and plainly with a novice. It also involves explaining the service itself, explaining how much the service will cost, and assuring the customer that a problem will be handled. Understanding the

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customers means making the effort to understand the customer's need. It includes learning the customer's specific requirements, providing individualized attention, recognizing the regular custom.

It is clear from the above results that customers like to be given enough individualized attention and treated with care. It thus allows the customers to easily approach and spell out their needs regarding the service being provided. The importance of empathy may be the root of the statement; if one looks at who is winning; it tends to be companies that see the guest as an individual.

The SERVQUAL instrument has been invaluable tool for organizations to better understand what customers' value and how well their current organizations are meeting the needs and expectations of customers. SERVQUAL provides a benchmark based on customer opinions of an excellent company, on your company, on the importance ranking of key attributes, and on a comparison to what employees believe customers feel. The SERVQUAL instrument can also be applied to the front desk staff of a hotel, and in this case, other major gaps could be closed in the service quality gaps model.

2.6   Disconfirmation Theory

In marketing literature (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980) as well as in recent information system studies (McKinney et al., 2002); the disconfirmation theory emerges as the primary foundation for satisfaction models. According to this theory, satisfaction is determined by the discrepancy between perceived performance and cognitive standards such as expectation and desires (Khalifa &Liu, 2003).Customers' expectation can be defined as customers' spatial beliefs about a product (McKinney,

Yoon & Zahedi, 2002). Expectations are viewed as predictions made by consumers about what is likely to happen during impending transaction or exchange (Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Perceived performance is defined as customers" perception of how product performance fulfills their needs, wants and desire (Cadotte et al., 1987). Perceived quality is the consumer"s judgment about an entity, direction s overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988). Disconfirmation is defined as consumer subjective judgments resulting from comparing their expectations and their perceptions of performance received (McKinney et al., 2002, Spreng et al., 1996).

Disconfirmation theory declares that satisfaction is mainly defined by the gap between perceived performance, expectations and desires which is a promising approach to explain satisfaction. This theory proposes that satisfaction is affected by the intensity (or size) and (positive or negative) of the gap (disconfirmation) between expectations and perceived performance (Figure 2.2).
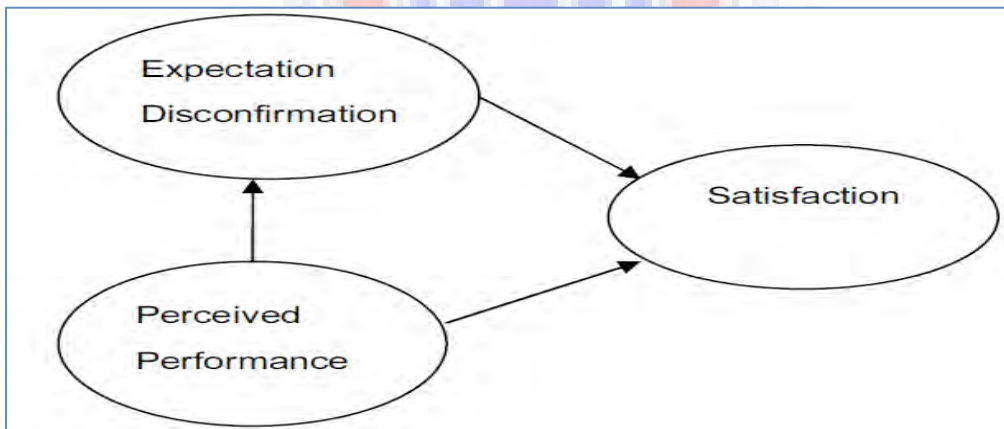
Figure 2.2:   Expectation Disconfirmation Theory
Source: Khalifa and Liu (2003)

Expectation disconfirmation occurs in three forms:1) Positive disconfirmation: occurs when perceived performance exceeds expectations.2) Confirmation: occurs when

perceived performance meets expectations.3) Negative disconfirmation: occurs when perceived performance does not meet and is less than the expectations. It is more probable for customers to be satisfied if the service performance meets (confirmation) or exceeds (positive disconfirmation) their expectations. On the contrary, customers are more likely to be dissatisfied if the service performance is less than what they expected (negative disconfirmation). Khalifa & Liu (2003) discussed that taking expectation disconfirmation as the only determinant of satisfaction; this theory does not cause the fact that if high expectations are confirmed, it would much more lead to satisfaction than confirmation of low expectations. To resolve this drawback perceived performance is included as an additional determinant of satisfaction. In other words the only way to ensure satisfaction is to practically create disconfirmation by manipulating expectations and performance.

2.7 Concept of Customer Perception and Expectation

Harris (2000) noted a perception is the way that we see something based on our experience. Everyone"s perception of a situation will be, at least slightly, different. The question persists, "Is the glass half full or is it half empty?" Perceptions are usually developed over a period of time and reflect the ways that we have been treated, our values, priorities, prejudices and sensitivity to others. Two people could share with same experience and then describe it differently. Unfortunately, perceptions are not necessarily based on rational ideas and may be influenced by momentary frustration and anger (Harris, 2000).

It is important for the customer service staffs to anticipate customer resistance based on the customers" prior interactions and always to work at providing customers with excellent service, so that their most current perception is a positive one(Watt, 2007). Customers may not remember every detail of an experience, but they will retain an overall feeling about it. That "feeling," in combination with other experiences, will create their perception of the hotel. It is hard to erase customers" negative perceptions that are based on their prior interactions, but what customer service staffs can do is to show them, through their genuine action, that their perception is not accurate (Watt, 2007). Harris (2000) explained expectations as our personal vision of the result that will come from our experience. Expectations may be positive or negative. Expectations are usually based on our perceptions. If customer" last experience with a company was undesirable, he may approach a new situation with the expectation that he will again be dissatisfied.

According to Sriyam (2010), expectations can be divided into two distinct categories: primary expectations and secondary expectations. Primary expectations are the customers" most basic requirements of an interaction. For example, when staying at the hotel, customers" primary expectations are to clean room, excise room and amenities, to someone else clean the room, and pay a reasonable price. Secondary expectations are expectations based on customers" previous experiences and represent enhancements to their primary expectations. That is to say, when staying at the hotel, their secondary expectations include good service, courtesy, prompt service and good, tasty food. Consequently, when a guest experienced bad customer service in hotel, he will not expect to get good service again and may not return to same hotel Sriyam (2010).

Factors that influenced expectations from Zeithaml et al., (1990) focus group were as follows: Firstly, what customers hear from other customers-word-of-mouth communications-is a potential determinant of expectations. Findings from Zeithaml et al., (1990) indicated that several respondents in certain groups (product-repair focus groups) that had expected high quality of service from the repair firms they chose stemmed from the recommendations of their friends, neighbors and associates. Moreover, Gitomer (1998) said it is estimated that more than 50% of modern is based on this word-of-mouth ad form. If the experience was good, the customer may not proactively say something, but if the experience was bad, she or he will bring up the story in the first 5 minutes of a conversation.

Secondly, personal needs of customers might moderate their expectations to a certain degree. For example, in the credit card focus groups of Zeithaml et al., (1990) study, while some customers expected credit card companies to provide them with the maximum possible credit limits, other customers wished that their credit card companies were more stringent than they were.

Thirdly, the extent of past experience with using a service could also influence customers" expectation levels. This implies that customers who had bad experiences with a particular hotel would somewhat have low expectations in expecting attributes such as friendliness and politeness from hotel staff on subsequent visits. Zeithaml et al., (1990) believed external communications from service providers play a key role in shaping customers" expectations. Zeithaml et al., (1990) outlined external communications to include a variety of direct and indirect messages conveyed by service firms to customers: a bank"s print advertisement promising the friendliest tellers in town, a television

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commercial for a credit card touting its acceptability around the world, a repair firms'' receptionist guaranteeing the arrival of a service representative at an appointed time, advertising from pizza place delivering within 30 minutes and money back guarantee, hotel''s 100% guest satisfaction guarantee advertising.

2.8   Training and the Hotel Industry

Today, the highly competitive market, in which business operates, requires skillful workforce in order to remain a successful player in the competitive game of the industry (Ahammad, 2013). One of the main obstacles which occur in the workplace is the lack of training and development. Training is an essential process which should be cautiously designed and implemented within all firms (Ahammad, 2013).

In modern hotel business, it is all about competence in people, and especially the employees'' qualities. The level of service quality depends on the qualities of employees. The qualities are about knowledge, skills and thoughts which lead to a hotel''s survival and development. Therefore, staff training is essential in many ways; it increases productivity while employees are armed with professional knowledge, experienced skills and valid thoughts; staff training also motivates and inspires workers by providing employees all needed information in work as well as help them to recognize how important their jobs are (Wang and Shieh, 2006)

Training and development can be seen as a key instrument in the implementation of HRM practices and policies (Nickson, 2007). Successful hotels always include staff training as their important development strategy. Training is a part of the human resource development, along with the other human resources - activities such as recruitment,

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selection and compensation. The role of human resource department of any organization or industry is to improve the organization‟s effectiveness by providing employees with knowledge, skills and attitudes that will improve their current or future job performance.

Staff training is a significant part as well as the key function of Human Resource Management and Development; it is the crucial path of motivating employees and increasing productivity in the business (McClelland, 2002). With the development of the technologies and the whole business environment, employees are requested to be more skilled and qualified, even if you are a good employee today, you could be out of the line some other day if you do not keep studying. A company needs organized staff training if wants to be competitive among others (Wang 2008).

Staff training is the key task to help everyone in the company to be more united. An enterprise could hire experienced employees or train employees to be skilled. When the company trains their own staff, by providing and forming a harmonious atmosphere, accurate work specification and the passion of work, team spirit will be built between employees and management team within the process Training of work tasks is one of the main aspects of staff training, including principles at work, professional knowledge and skills, by offering employees these essentials, staff training helps personal abilities match with business requirements. Van Wart et al., (1983) suggest that, training is an application driven process and aim at identifying and developing skills that are useful immediately in the particular situation.

With training, every industry or firm surveys their staff to find out areas of need and interest for training purposes. It is also enables the underlying goals to be achieved by equipping its personnel with the competencies, knowledge, skills and attitudes

necessary to achieve whatever realistic aspirations they have in their work by enabling them, through increased competence and confidence to earn more and if desired promotion (Boella, 1988). Current changes in the working environment made the Human Resource Development‟s -role doubly essential in helping businesses being competitive and prepared for any future obstacles that may emerge (Goldstein, 1993). According to Lievens, Harris, Van Keer & Bisqueret, (2003), due to the technological development the workforce in every company needs training, and being more precise, it needs more improved skills in order to overcome any problems and barriers occurring.

The demands of global competition also modifies the way organizations function and provide quality management and customer service training in an attempt to carry on with increasing customer prospects. Additionally, in order to keep ahead in an extremely competitive atmosphere, it has been recommended that the training role has to promote a continuous learning culture (Martocchio &Baldwin, 1997). Additionally, companies offer training in order to guide employees on how to achieve their purpose. In addition they want to advance their employees‟ performance, by becoming more productive, and prepare them for upcoming changes in techniques or technology in their job (McClelland, 2002).

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passion of work, team spirit will be built between employees and management team within the process.

2.9 Benefits of Staff Training

Staff training enhances the capabilities of employees and strengthens their competitive advantage. Effective training will improve the personal characters and professional abilities. Not only employees, management and organization would benefit from staff training, customers and guests benefit as well, because of the received quality products and services (Sommerville, 2007).

2.9.1 Benefits for the Employee

Regarding increases job satisfaction and recognition, during training, employees are introduced to what is the work is about, how to do, what kind of role does the job play in the whole business, it helps them to understand their work better and also love what they do by understanding the work.

Staff training also encourages self-development and self-confidence. After systemized training, employees understand what important role their jobs play, and with the information, knowledge and experiences obtained during the training, they will be more confident with their work, so that better services will be provided.

Also training moves employees closer to personal goals. Employees do not only gain professional knowledge and skills during training, training also broads their choices on setting career targets. Employees can get the opportunity to get to know other positions, increases the possibilities of promotions in the meantime. In addition, training

helps the employee become an effective problem solver. Practical experience can be taught and guided in the training; employees will learn the methods of solving problem or complaints during training.

Finally, training allows the employee to become productive more quickly. By training, employees get familiar with their work tasks, advanced knowledge and techniques which improve their capabilities, increases productivity.

2.9.2   Benefits for the Management

To begin, employee training aids in evaluating employee performance. People who are responsible for training will find out those employees during training, who are quick learners, who have better knowledge and skills, so that different methods of training can be chosen, therefore, better results will be acquired.

Second, training aids in sustaining systems and standards. Within the training, employees will be introduced to the principles and standards of the hotel, together with the policies and procedures; hence hotel can sustain its standards and system with the help of training.

Third, it helps identify employees for promotions or transfers. During the training, employees" abilities and personalities will be easily identified by experienced trainers, or some employees are more suitable for other positions, hotels can adjust and make best use of employees" knowledge and abilities.

2.9.3   Benefits for the Organization

First, employee training leads to improved profitability. Owing to the growth of productivity and better services after training, it is more promised for the hotel to have more profits in return.

Second, training reduces accidents and safety violations at the workplace. Without organized training and guidance, especially employees who work with dangerous facilities, accidents are easily occurred, training can help organizations to prevent accidents.

Third, training aids in organizational development. Hotels need to develop their technologies and way of working in order to be competitive, and staff training assures the competitiveness, because training will bring good quality, effectiveness and loyal customers to the hotels.

Fourth, training reduces wastage and costly employee turnover. Wastage and damages in different departments are commonly found out in hotel operation, with the help of staff training; unnecessary wastage and damages can be avoided. Regular trainings can decrease work pressures and employee turnover, as a result, less labor cost will be spent and better service can be achieved (Sommerville,2007).

2.10   Summary

With reference to above review, the researcher found out that little or no work has been done on the assessment of customer satisfaction of front desk operations as an integral aspect of the Hospitality industry in Ghana. Various studies that have been done have drawn focus on assessing client satisfaction as a whole. It was revealed that various

studies that have been done paid little emphasis to the service quality (SERVQUAL) approach of meeting customer demands in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The researcher also found out that little emphasis was therefore drawn on employee training particularly, front desk staff. The researcher therefore will investigate to find out how customer satisfaction can be assessed in the hospitality industry and also the impact of training on front desk staff performance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This study is about the assessment of customer satisfaction of front desk operations at Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis. This chapter covers a discussion of the methodology and research design used for the study. It also defines the population, the sample and sampling procedure as well as the instrument used in collecting data for the study and also provides a discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed.

3.2   The Research Design

This study used mixed method research technique. Mixed method research is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thus, it is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Boella, 1998).

3.3   Sources of Data

Primary and Secondary data were used appropriately. Data collected from the respondents" (staff and guests) that visit Modern City Hotel) constituted the primary data. Data collected from the various libraries, journal articles, internet, and publications were

treated as secondary data. The researcher personally visited Modern City Hotel to gather data that represent primary data for the study.

3.4   Population of the Study

The target population of this study is made up all guests that enrolled at Modern City Hotel from the month of September to November 2015. Over the period of the study, 115 guests enrolled in the hotel representing the guest population for the study. However, there were 20 employees in the hotel; forming the employee population of the study.

3.5   Sample size Determination

The sample sized that was used for this study comprised all guests that booked reservations from the period of September to November 2015. In all 105 guests booked reservations over the period of September to November representing the guest sample for the study, showing that a census was used to determine the sample size. The 20 employees including front desk staff constituted the employee sample of the study.

3.6   Research Instrument

The instruments that the researcher employed for data collection were a set of questionnaire and an interview and observation guides. The questionnaires and interview guides are attached to the appendix of this study.

3.6.1   Questionnaire

This is a data collection instrument mostly used in normative surveys. This is a systematically prepared form or document with a set of questions deliberately designed to elicit responses from respondents or research informants for the purpose of collecting data or information (Knowles, 2003). According to Knowles (2003), a questionnaire is a form of inquiry document, which contains a systematically compiled and well organized series of questions intended to elicit the information which will provide insight into the nature of the problem under study.

The questionnaires had closed-and open ended items and will provide options for the respondents to choose, rank and react to issues that are investigated. The questionnaire was divided into three (3) main parts: one, two and three. Part one sought information on the profile of respondents. Part two concentrated on customer satisfaction and perceptions on the dimensions of service quality. The last part elicited information on the strategies that could be employed to improve the operations of front desk staff. The Likert Scale with scores in the range of 1 to 5 was used. All items were considered of approximately equal "attitude value" to which participants responded with degree, or intensity of satisfaction and disaffection.

3.6.1 Interviews

An interview is a data-collection technique that involves oral questioning of respondents, either individually or as a group. An interview is a method of asking quantitative or qualitative questions orally of key participants (Margaret & Melissa, 2007). Answers to the questions posed during an interview can be recorded by writing

them down (either during the interview itself or immediately after the interview) or by tape-recording the responses, or by a combination of both (Margaret & Melissa, 2007). Interviews can be conducted with varying degrees of flexibility. The researcher personally designed an interview guide which he administered to Managers of various firms during the course of the study.

3.7   Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was employed for the study. Purposive sampling is used in cases where the specialty of an authority can select a more representative sample that can bring more accurate results than by using other probability sampling techniques (Latham, 2007). The process involves nothing but purposely handpicking individuals from the population based on the authorities of the researcher's knowledge and judgment. The researcher employed the use of the purposive sampling technique to select 105 respondents and all the employees (20) to represent the sample of the study.

3.8   Limitations of the Study

The researcher had difficulties getting clients to answer to the questions as most of the clients felt reluctant giving details about their stay in the hotel. Moreover, the front desk staff of the hotel gave responses that always went positive with the operations of the hotel; no staff wanted to give response that were detrimental to the operations of the front desk staff of the hotel. Financial constraint was also another challenge since the distance from the researcher‟s residence to the hotel was far.

Furthermore, most of the front desk employees felt their job was at stake and were therefore reluctant to give out the real state of affairs at the hotel. Moreover, some clients thought there was no need to take part in the researcher since they were there for a purpose either than been part of the study.

3.9   Data Analysis

In relation to the related research questions and the items displayed in the questionnaire, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the findings. The data were coded and the SPSS (Version 20) computer software was employed to do the analysis accordingly. The appropriate numbers for the data were placed in the appropriate data file for the analysis. The results were presented in percentages, and tables to illustrate the data. Frequencies and percentages tables were used to ensure that the issues were made clear to give visual impressions of the values. It also helped in the discussion and interpretation of the data collected. Summaries of all responses under each item were then given, thus illustrating the percentages that strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The evaluation criteria were then used to make value judgment. A summary of the findings was given in written form by using descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1   Introduction

This chapter is a presentation and analysis of the field data collected from among one hundred and twenty – five customers and employees of the Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis of the Northern Region. It presents amongst others, information on the demographics of the respondents, a summary of the responses, an analysis of the service quality gap, determinants of service quality at the Modern City Hotel.

4.2   Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section of the presentation reveals some information on the demographics of the respondents studied. It considers their gender, age and educational levels.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Personal Data	Frequency	Percentage
Employees	20	16
Guests	105	84
Sex		
Male	63	50.4
Female	62	49.6
Age		
21-30	48	38.4
31-40	51	40.8
41 and above	26	28.8
Purpose of Trip		
Business	59	56.2
Tourism	46	43.8

Source: Field work April, 2016

Table 4.1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents used for the study. From Table 4.1, 105 guests and 25 employees were used for the study. 63 respondents representing 50.4% were male whereas 62 respondents representing 49.6% were female. However, 51 respondents representing 40.8% were between the ages of 31-40; 48 respondents representing 38.4% were within the age range 21-30 with 26 respondents representing 28.8% having their ages above 41. Of the 105 guests, 59 respondents representing 58.2% patronized the hotel for business purpose whilst 46 respondents representing 43.8% were in for tourism purposes.

4.3 Customers' Expectation and Perceptions towards Service Quality

This section presents the customers expectation and perception towards service quality of front office staff at the Modern City Hotel. Service quality was measured based on the following dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The 105 respondents were asked to rate each statement concerning their expectation and perception of service quality of front office staff at Modern City Hotel between September and November 2015. The findings of the service quality of each dimension were as follows:

4.3.1 Perceptions of Customers about Tangibility of Services

The tangibility dimension includes physical aspects such as the physical appearance of hotel services including the neatness of front office staff and professionalism of employees.

Table 4.2: Customer Satisfaction concerning Tangibility

Tangibility dimension	Guests' Expectation			Guests' Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
Front Desk Staff dress appropriately	3.85	0.68	High	4.43	0.53	Highest
Dress of Front Desk Staff is always clean	3.93	0.68	High	4.53	0.56	Highest
Front desk staff service with a smile	3.92	0.82	High	4.45	0.56	Highest
Front desk staff always appear smart and elegant	3.93	0.78	High	4.40	0.64	Highest
Overall Mean Score	**3.99**	**0.58**	**High**	**4.43**	**0.41**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

Table 4.2 shows guests" expectation and perception with respect to tangibility. Guests" perception of tangibility was ranked at the highest level by guests with respect to outlined rubrics. The overall satisfaction of expectation towards tangibility is at a high level (3.94). Cleanliness of uniform and appearance of staff both received high ranking at 3.93. Moreover, front desk staff appropriateness in dressing and serving guests with smiles received a high rating value of 3.85 and 3.92 respectively.

When front office staffs are well dressed and wear smart uniforms, their appearance impresses guests who feel more confident with hotel services. In addition, the front office staffs of Modern City Hotel are well trained in terms of the services rendered in the hotel. Guest perception of tangibility dimension was also ranked at the highest level by guests (4.43). Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham (1996) believe a person"s stay at a hotel can be greatly affected by the friendliness, knowledge ability, and helpfulness of the hotel staff most especially the front desk. Hence tangibility plays a major role in subsequent by guests.

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4.3.2 Customers Perceptions on Reliability

The reliability dimension refers to the ability of the front office hotel staff to provide services dependably and accurately. Reliable service performance has to meet customers" expectation. Service must be accomplished on time, every time, in the same manner and without errors.

Table 4.3: Customer Satisfaction concerning Reliability

Reliability dimension	Customers' Expectation			Customers Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
Front desk staff provide services as promised	3.95	0.685	High	4.39	0.533	Highest
Front desk staff provide accurate information	3.88	0.688	High	4.33	0.566	Highest
Front desk staff perform services correctly	3.88	0.929	High	4.25	0.565	Highest
Front desk staff tell exactly when service will be provided	4.02	0.780	High	4.24	0.643	Highest
Overall Mean Score	**3.93**	**0.554**	**High**	**4.45**	**0.451**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

Table 4.3 shows guests" expectation and perception with respect to reliability. Guests" perception of reliability was ranked at the highest level by guests with respect to the outlined rubrics. The overall satisfaction of expectation towards reliability is at a high level (3.93) and standard deviation 0.554. This rating is supported by comments by guests at the hotel who believed "The room is ready on time upon check in and I get the late check out until2 p.m. every time of my stay at this hotel". Overall satisfaction of perception towards reliability dimension is also at the highest level (4.45) and standard deviation 0.451, with "The staff provide service as promised" receiving the highest score

(4.39) in correspondence to guests expectation which resulted in a mean value of 3.95 and standard deviation 0.65.This may be because the front office staff provide service correctly (3.88) the first time and keep their promises to customers. Consequently, guest feel satisfied with the reliability of service.

This result is consistent with findings by Juwaheer & Ross (2003), who studied service quality in Mauritian hotels. They found that reliability was the most important factor for ensuring customer satisfaction on service. For example, the hotel staff performed tasks as promised and resolved problems promptly. By focusing on this dimension, hotels can achieve high levels of satisfaction. Moreover, Parasuraman (1991) stated that customers believe that reliability is the most important factor in meeting customer expectations.

4.3.3   Customers Perceptions on Responsiveness

The responsiveness dimension involves willingness to help customers and provide prompt services. It is essential that front office hotel staffs are willing and able to help customers provide prompt service and meet customers" expectation. Table 4.4 shows guests" expectation and perception on reliability. Table 4.4 shows that overall expectation towards responsiveness dimension was at the high level (3.99) and standard deviation 0.604. Staff response to request received the highest ranking of expectation at 4.11 and 0.761 standard deviation. It is highly possible that customers are satisfied when they receive a quick response from the hotel staff. This is supported by guests at the hotel who commented that, "The front office staff are willing to help me when I am looking for the hotel direction. It makes me feel that she is full of service mind in heart". This shows that

these guests received good help when needed. The ability to respond to guests" requests reflected a satisfaction of customers" perception.

Table 4.4 Customer Satisfaction concerning Responsiveness

Responsiveness dimension	Customers' Expectation			Customers Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
Front desk staff respond to request as quickly as possible	4.11	0.761	High	4.38	0.5333	Highest
Front desk staff give prompt service	3.63	0.827	High	4.23	0.566	Highest
Front desk staff are always willing to help guests	4.02	0.770	High	4.38	0.546	Highest
Overall Mean Score	**3.92**	**0.604**	**High**	**4.33**	**0.545**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

In addition, Table 4.4 shows that overall satisfaction of perception towards responsiveness dimension was at a high level (4.33). The two highest ranking points concerned quick response and willingness to help. These findings are consistent with Parasuraman et al. (1998), who measured consumer perceptions of service quality. They found that responsiveness was the most important factor in determining customer satisfaction with service.

4.3.4. Customers' Perceptions about Assurance

The assurance dimension refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility and security.

Table 4.5: Customer Satisfaction concerning Assurance

Assurance dimension	Customers' Expectation			Customers Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
The staff have product knowledge of the hotel	4.10	0.706	High	4.61	0.640	Highest
Front desk staff have skills required to perform service tasks	3.95	0.746	High	4.37	0.610	Highest
Front desk staff possess the appropriate communication skills	2.8	0.32	Low	4.35	0.606	Highest
Overall Mean Score	**3.89**	**0.561**	**High**	**4.37**	**0.440**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

Table 4.5 shows that overall expectation towards assurance dimension was at a high level (3.89) even though "front desk staff possesses the appropriate communication skills" received a mean value of 2.8 and standard deviation 0.32. Most customers expect front office staff to make them feel safe when staying at the hotel. In addition, cashiers should be credible and responsible when handling expenses or money from guests. Perception of assurance dimension ranked at the highest level (4.37), with product knowledge being the most important factor (4.61). Front office staff must have broad and deep knowledge, skills, capacity and experience. They must also be well versed in using advanced technology to improve their performance such as when making room

reservations by computer. These implied front desk staffs require adequate education all Hotel services most importantly on the issue of communication.

4.3.5 Customers Perceptions on Empathy

The empathy dimension represents the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers including access or approachability and ease of contact, effective communication, and understanding the customers. Table 4.6 shows guests" expectation and perception on reliability. Table 4.6 showed that overall expectation concerning assurance dimension was at a high level (4.01) even though front desk staff competency in other languages other than English was low. Effective communication was considered to be low at expectation mean value of 2.11 and standard deviation 0.23. The front office staff represents the hotel and communication is vitally important and as such must abreast themselves with other languages.

Table 4.6: Customer satisfaction concerning Empathy

Empathy dimension	Customers' Expectation			Customers Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
Front desk staff are able to communicate with you in any other language apart from English	2.11	0.23	Low	4.28	0.524	Highest
Front desk staff show personal level attention to you	4.17	0.693	High	4.22	0.739	Highest
Front desk staff are always aware of your specific needs	4.05	0.790	High	4.35	0.663	Highest
Overall Mean Score	**4.01**	**0.563**	**High**	**4.26**	**0.530**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

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The success of the hotel business is based on effective communication (Paige, 1977). The front office deals with reservations, serves as the information centre and as the cashier. They must notify the housekeeping and kitchen divisions of guest information, and also receive feedback. For example, more rooms can be sold by the front office division as long as housekeeping notifies them of any damage in rooms has been repaired and is ready to be returned to service. Effective communication among divisions in the hotel is one of the main factors that contribute to customer satisfaction.

The data on Table 4.6 also show that overall perception of the assurance dimension was at the highest level (4.26). Perception of the personal attention of the staff was ranked highest at 4.37. The results indicated that the front office staffs were enthusiastic to help hotel guests. One guest commented, "The bell boy brought my baggage immediately to the shuttle bus upon my check out". According to Crompton et al. (1991), staff should make customers feel like they belong. This statement is consistent with the definition of empathy.

4.4 Overall Customer Satisfaction towards Service Quality

This section covers a presentation and analysis of the data from the respondents on customer satisfaction towards service quality. It begins with the overall mean score of customer satisfaction towards satisfactory service quality delivery. The data are presented on Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Overall mean score of Customer Satisfaction towards Service Quality

Empathy dimension	Customers' Expectation			Customers' Perception		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level
Tangibility	3.99	0.693	High	4.45	0.415	Highest
Reliability	3.93	0.790	High	4.30	0.451	Highest
Responsiveness	3.92	0.542	High	4.33	0.545	Highest
Assurance	3.89	0.730	High	4.37	0.440	Highest
Empathy	4.01	0.884	High	4.26	0.530	Highest
Overall mean score	**3.95**	**0.542**	**High**	**4.35**	**0.355**	**Highest**

Source: Field work April, 2016

Generally, guests perceptions of the performance of the front desk staff before booking for the hotel was highest even though their expectations ran low after booking for accommodation at Modern City Hotel. Table 4.7 shows that overall satisfaction of expectation towards the five dimensions was at a high level (3.98). The result of guests expectation showed that empathy dimension was at the high level (4.01), followed by responsiveness (3.99), reliability (3.93), tangibility (3.92), and assurance (3.89). Most guests expected the front office staff (especially the cashier) to be trustworthy because they are responsible for the hotel expenses or collecting money from hotel guests.

Overall satisfaction of perception towards the five dimensions was at the highest level (4.35). Most customers perceived tangibility as the most important dimension at (4.45), followed by assurance (4.37), responsiveness (4.33), reliability (4.30), and empathy (4.26). In this study, empathy and tangibility was the most vital factor. Most guests identified the importance of the appearance and cleanliness of the front office staff. Moreover, a feeling of empathy ensured that front desk staff felt always ready to help guests that enroll in the hotel.

When employees were interviewed on how they viewed service quality at Modern City Hotel, almost all employees believed service quality was rated highest in contrast to guests expectation as revealed in this study. Moreover, responses from employees indicated a high level of complains as some guests fail to understand the some languages used for conversations. Since the English Language remains the lingua franca of the nation, employees believed guests who were not fluent in the language were very difficult to be attended to. Employees however raised had major concerns on the level of training that they receive on their job. Employees believed they had no training for some time now, hence affecting the level of services they provide.

4.5 Gap between guests' expectation and perception level towards service quality of front office staff at Modern City Hotel

The service quality gap is calculated between the mean score of expectation and perception. The findings of the study showed the difference between expectation and perception as shown in the Table 4.8, which shows the gap existing between guests" expectation and perception. The study shows that the overall level of perception of all dimensions was higher than the level of expectation. This positive gap (0.39) indicates that customers are satisfied with the services even though there were some few flaws in front desk staff operations especially with communication and the types of languages that were used.

Table 4.8: Service Quality gap of guests' expectation and perception towards the service quality of front office staff at Modern City Hotel

Service Quality Dimension	Customers' Expectations	Customers Perception	Service Quality Gap
Pair 1: Tangibility	3.99	4.45	0.46
Pair 2: Reliability	3.93	4.30	0.37
Pair 3: Responsiveness	3.92	4.33	0.41
Pair 4: Assurance	3.89	4.37	0.48
Pair 5: Empathy	4.01	4.28	0.27
Overall mean score	**3.95**	**4.35**	**0.39**

Source: Field work April, 2016

The study revealed that physical evidence such as uniforms, appearance and behavior of front office staff yield customer satisfaction. Similarly, Ramchurrun (2008) suggested that customers attached importance to the dimension of tangibility because services are intangible. Hence, customers place great importance on the appearance neatness of the staff. In summary, the results showed a positive gap between perception and expectation. Tangibility was determined to be the most important dimension. The front office staff also understood and exceeded customers" expectation of service quality in all dimensions.

4.6   Improving Front Desk Operations

Guests at Modern city Hotel were asked on the process that could be put in place to ensure effectiveness in the operations of front desk staff.

Table 4.9: Factors for improving Front Desk Staff Operations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Job training	48	45.7
Use of CRMs	4	3.8
Monitoring/Supervision	3	2.8
Education on product knowledge	21	20
Training on other languages	29	27.6
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Field work April, 2016

From Table 4.13, 48 respondents representing 45.7% believed job training considered job training to be an effective means for improving the operations of front desk staff. 29 respondents representing 27.6% believed training on other languages can be used to improve communication skills of front desk staff. 21 respondents representing 20% believed front desk staff should be given education on the product knowledge of hotels to improve their operations. As Gitomer (1998) puts it, the first few words set the tone for the entire dialogue. The single most important brick in the foundation of customer service is "Friendly." it is also the least consistent element of the experience" in most hospitality settings.

Four guests representing 3.8% believed hotels could employ the use of Customer Relation Management System with three respondents representing 2.8% believed effective monitoring or supervision could be used to improve the performances of front desk staff. The issue of the use of Customer Relations Management System is supported

by Jones & Lockwood (2004) who highlighted the role that technology plays in the delivery of customer service; by helping to deliver a higher quality level of service, through the increased speed of actions such as reservations and billing. With respect to monitoring employees Parasuraman &Berry (1990) believe that strong commitment from management stimulates departments and organisations to improve service performance, yet poor role definitions, poor team work and a team lacking leadership knowledge can all contribute to poor customer service.

On subsequent interview sessions organized for the employees, they expressed concerns on the fact that regular training sessions should be organized by managers of the hotel to enable them carry out their duties effectively. Sommerville (2007) outlined the major benefits of training to the employee, management and the hotel as a whole. In his view, Sommerville (2007) outlined increased job satisfaction and recognition, increased self-development and self-confidence, helping the employee to become an effective problems solver as the benefits for the employee. Moreover, Sommerville (2007) indicated that training helps the management of hotels to evaluate employee performance, sustenance of systems and standards and also helps to identify employees for promotions or transfers eventually resulting in the profitability for the hotel. This is further buttressed by Mcclelland (2002) who posited that staff training is a significant part as well as the key function of Human Resource Management and Development; it is the crucial path of motivating employees and increasing productivity in the business.

4.7 Analysis of Employee Interview Questions

The researcher as a matter of confirmation of client service quality perception and expectation sought employee views using an interview guide. Outlined below is an analysis of employee responses.

Most employee rated services rendered at Modern City Hotel as being best and gave it a "highest" rating. Employees however agreed to receiving complain from guests or clients. The most predominant form of complain most employees agreed to had to do with the issue of language. Employees indicated language barrier as being detrimental to the operations of the hotel. They stated that several guests who enroll at the hotel are of French descent and as such found it difficult communicating with them. This confirmed the results from the assurance service quality dimension where communication was rated low by guests. Other complain indicated included the issue of lighting and electricity. Employees indicated they received training on how to effectively manage the front desk but raised issues about the consistency of training sessions organized for employees of Modern City Hotel.

On the measures that could help improve front desk staff operations in the hotel, most employees asserted a consistency in the amount of training that is given to them by managers of the hotel. Few respondents raised concerns on the level of supervision received in from supervisors of the hotel. Respondents however stressed on the provision of alternate electricity as frequent power outages affected service quality delivery.

4.8   Conclusion

The results of the study were presented and discussed in relation to the research questions and objectives of the study. Questionnaires were designed for the guests and front office staff of Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis. The study examined the perceptions of the guests of the hotel on service dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The study emphasized that the guests of Modern City Hotel of Tamale are discerning enough. From all indications, the study has shown that the employees at the front office of the Modern City Hotel deliver satisfactory services to their guests by being responsive and reliable in their services to their guests. The other dimensions of tangibility, assurance and empathy were also adequately covered as areas that were of importance to the guests in their dealings with the Modern City Hotel located in the Tamale Metropolis.
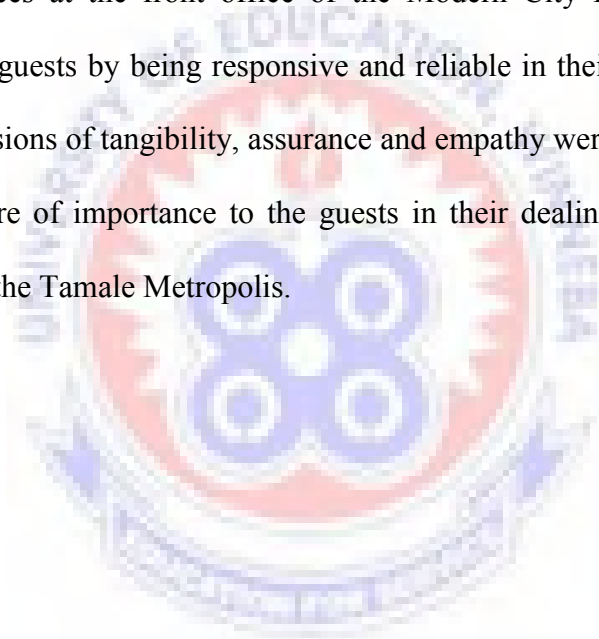
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of the study was to assess customer satisfaction of front desk operations of Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis. This Chapter covers a presentation of the summary of findings of the study, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made.

5.2   Summary of Findings

Services and Hospitality businesses have been growing rapidly in recent decades, while guests" demand for high quality service is increasing. This is certainly the case at Modern City Hotel in Tamale. To remain competitive, the hotel needs to analyze customers" expectations and perceptions towards the service quality delivery of its front office staff.

In this research, the SERVQUAL instrument, developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), was applied in designing the questionnaire by using five the dimensions of service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The results revealed that the assurance dimension raised the highest level of expectation, whereas the tangibility dimension fulfilled the highest level of perception.

This study focused further on the gap between guests" expectations and their perceptions of front office staff"s service quality delivery. The results showed that the overall mean score of perception was higher than expectation in all dimensions, yielding

a positive service quality gap. Hence, the customers were satisfied with all dimensions of service quality studied. In this study therefore, the findings showed that most of the respondents identified tangibility and empathy as the most important factors in determining satisfactory service delivery. Moreover, their perceptions of service exceeded their expectations.

5.3   Conclusions

This study arrived at the following conclusions. Assurance was shown to be the weakest dimension of satisfaction; therefore, hotel management should arrange special courses to improve skills of their employees to enable them attend efficiently to tasks. Tangibility and empathy were shown to be the strongest dimensions of satisfactory service delivery at the hotel. Therefore, hotel management should maintain the attributes of tangibility and empathetic service qualities at the hotel.

5.4   Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

- Hotel managers should try as much as they can to hire qualified staff, who will work at the front office since it is the first point of contact to the hotels.

- Moreover, regular training sessions should be organised by hotel management for hotel staff to educated front desk staff on recent trends of attending to guests.

- Management of hotels must also receive frequent training sessions to help improve their performance towards delivering quality service to their guests.

- Furthermore, guests visiting hotels must receive the assurance from staff of the hotels that they will enjoy safety and security of themselves and their property whenever they are guests of these hotels.

- Finally, Human Resource Management should arrange in-house training programmes to improve the performance of the front office staff of the hotel to ensure their efficiency in service delivery.

5.5   Suggestions for Further Research

It is hoped that further research will be conducted on the relationship between quality service delivery and customer retention, and also a relatively larger sample with an extended period of time should be used to enable Hotels, and Restaurants to discuss benefits accruing to them for rendering services that meet the needs of their guests who patronize their services.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION, KUMASI
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GUESTS OF MODERN CITY HOTEL, TAMALE

This Questionnaire seeks to solicit views from guests of Modern City Hotel at Tamale on the assessment of customer satisfaction about the operations of the Front Desk staff. This is purely for academic purposes. You are kindly requested to provide responses to the questions as candidly as possible. All information given will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your responses would be highly appreciated for the success of the research. Thank you for your co-operation.

SECTION A: Respondents' Profile

1. Sex   i). Male [ ]   ii). Female [ ]

2. Age in years: i). 21-30 [ ]   ii). 31-40 [ ] iii). 41--50 [ ] iv). 51 and above. [ ]

3. Educational background   i) Basic [ ]   ii) Secondary/Technical [ ] iii).Tertiary [ ]

4. Nationality   i) Ghanaian [ ] ii).Other (Specify)_____

5. Purpose of Travel i).Business [ ]   ii) Tourism [ ]   iii) Visiting friends/Relatives [ ]

   iv). Others (Specify)_____

6. How did you do the Hotel booking?   i).Online Reservation [   ]

   ii) Booked by a friend [ ] iii). Personal Reservation [ ]

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SECTION B: Guests' Perceptions of Service Quality Dimensions of Front Desk Staff

Please indicate the level of your expectations and perception on the following service quality dimensions before booking reservation Modern City Hotel using the following scale. **[1=Highest 2=High; 3=Moderate; 4=Low; 5=Lowest]**. Please tick (√) in the space provided.

No.	FACTORS	Guest Perception					Guest Satisfaction				
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tangibility											
7.	Front Desk Staff dress appropriately										
8.	Dress of Front Desk Staff is always clean										
9.	Front desk staff service with a smile										
10	Front desk staff always appear smart and elegant										
Reliability											
11	Front desk staff provide services as promised										
12	Front desk staff provide accurate information										
13	Front desk staff perform services correctly										
14	Front desk staff tell exactly when service will be provided										
Responsiveness											
15	Front desk staff respond to request as quickly as possible										
16	Front desk staff give prompt service										
17	Front desk staff are always willing to help guests										
Assurance											
18	The staff have product knowledge of the hotel										
19	Front desk staff have skills required to perform service tasks										
20	Front desk staff possess the appropriate communication skills										
21	Front desk staff can be trusted										
22	Front desk staff make you feel at home										

Empathy											
23	Front desk staff are able to communicate with you in any other language apart from English										
24	Front desk staff show personal level attention to you										
25	Front desk staff are always aware of your specific needs										

SECTION C: Strategies to Ensure Efficient Front Desk Operations

Please indicate by ticking [✓] whether these measures can help ensure efficient front desk operations at Modern City Hotel.

26. Which of the following measures could be employed an improvement in the operations of front desk office staff. (*Choose as many as possible)*

    i.   [   ] Job Training

    ii.   [   ] Use of Customer Relationship Management System

    iii. [   ] Monitoring operations of Front Desk Staff

    iv.   [   ] Education on Product Knowledge

    v.   [   ] Training in other languages

Thank you for your cooperation

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION, KUMASI

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM EDUCATION

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES OF MODERN CITY HOTEL

This Interview Guide is to solicit information on the topic "An Assessment of Customer Satisfaction of Front Desk Operation: A Case of Modern City Hotel in the Tamale Metropolis". This is purely for academic.. You are kindly request to provide responses to the questions as candidly as possible. All information given will be treated with strict confidentiality. I will take not more than 20 minutes of your time. Thank you for your co-operation.

Gender: a) Male [ ]   b) Female [ ]

Department…………………………………….

Section A: Socio-demographic Characteristics

1. How old are you……………………………..…………
2. Your highest educational qualification…………..………..
3. Your position in the organisation…………………………
4. Number of years of service……………..………………

Section B: Attending to Guests visiting the Hotel

5. How would you describe your relationship with your guests?

6. Do you ever receive tips for services rendered to your guests?

7. What is the behaviour of management towards tips received from guests?

8. What is your behaviour to guests who show unruly behaviour towards you?

9. Do your guests visiting this hotel always get accommodation?

10. What do you do when the place is fully booked?

11. do you have many of your guests repeat their guests?

Section C: Attending to Guests visiting the Hotel

12. How would you rate the services you render to guests that visit the hotel?

13. Do you ever receive complains on service rendered to guests?

14. What form of complains do you mostly receive from guests?

15. How often do you receive training on your job?

16. What can be done to ensure that you services are improved?