

**CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF ONE STOP SHOP CENTERS AND THEIR
EFFECT ON PUBLIC SERVICE UTILISATION**

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT THESIS

STELLA KAYUNI NGALANDE

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

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By

STELLA KAYUNI NGALANDE

BA (Human Resources Management) – University of Malawi

Submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social
Sciences, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Public
Administration and Management

University of Malawi

April, 2022

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this is my original research work except where proper acknowledgement is made, and to the best of my knowledge, it has not been previously published or submitted for the qualification of any degree or any award to any university elsewhere.

Candidate signature

Date

Name **Stella Kayuni Ngalande**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby certify that the preparation, presentation and compilation of this research work represents the students' own work and has been supervised in accordance with the guidelines on research projects laid down by the University of Malawi (Chancellor College). The thesis has been submitted with my approval.

Supervisor's signature.....

Date

Name Dr. Tiyesere Chikapa

Main Supervisor

Supervisor's signature

Date

Name Prof. Dan Banik

Second Supervisor

DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God, the ultimate Provider.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMCT	Basic Mandatory Competency Training
CHANCO	Chancellor College
DI	Department of Immigration
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit.
DRTSS	Directorate of Road Traffic and Safety Services
MRA	Malawi Revenue Authority
MPC	Malawi Posts Corporation
NPM	New Public Management
RG	Registrar General
PSR	Public Sector Reforms

ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to assess customers' perception and satisfaction of the service quality and its effect on utilization of public services at Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi. Data for the study was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The thesis follows a marketing perspective, paying special attention to customers' perception and satisfaction with services. Given the nature of the research, the research adopted a case-study methodology. The author presents an adaptation from the SERVQUAL framework to measure the quality of services. The study uses the five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model to measure the perception and satisfaction of the quality of public services from customers' perspectives. The major finding of the study is that public perception of the service quality is low. The results show that perception of the service quality at the centre was low across all the five dimension of the conceptual framework. Similarly, the study has revealed that customers were not satisfied with service quality at the centre. The implications of the findings reflect the perceptions of the customers as espoused in the conceptual framework.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The changing needs of citizens have necessitated the push for better public services all over the world. The demand by citizens for governments to deliver services at standards on par with the private sector has been on the rise, partly due to changes in technology and partly due to the fact that the sharing economy has made the expectation of ease and convenience almost global (Amin, et al., 2008). Public services have a significant impact on both citizens' daily lives and on the competitiveness of economies. This has brought into focus the quality of the services provided by the government and the issues relating to the service quality. For this reason, modern societies increasingly demand better efficiency and effectiveness from public agencies. It is within this context, that public service quality has become a priority for most governments (Amin, et al., 2008). Satisfying the needs of different publics, with a clear focus on favouring good governance and national economic competitiveness. The quest to meet the needs of citizens has led to the re-emergency of the prominence of public sector reforms. Public sector reforms have become an integral part of most governments' efforts to modernize the public service, making it more citizen-centric and responsive. Public sector reforms have been informed by the principles of New Public Management (NPM). Implementation of NPM attempts to rectify the authoritative approach by, among other things, proposing adoption of market principles to improve efficiency in the public sector (Roberts et al., 2005).

Customers' perception of public services are at the heart of the functionality of public sector reforms. Perception of the service quality has been identified as a prominent determinant for the utilization of public services. According to Roberts et al. (2014) utilization is only partially a reflection of effective availability, as citizens may choose not to use services, even if they are available. The decision to use available public services depends on people's perception of the quality of services and affordability. People's perceptions and judgment are often conditioned by assessing factors their traditions and culture consider important such as courtesy, responsiveness, attentiveness, and perceived competence of staff (Hersey, 2010). Perceptions are determined by the people's level of satisfaction with the service, as well as their assessment of the attitude of service providers, which often determines whether they would return in future (Hersey, 2010). To achieve maximum utilization of public services, it is imperative that all stakeholders understand the citizen's perception of the quality of public service, to ensure successful interventions. This is critical to developing appropriate promotional messages and campaigns aimed at creating demand for particular interventions.

1.2 Background to the Study

For many years, Malawi has explored a variety of strategies to improve public service delivery. Moving away from the structural adjustment programs and results-based management systems of the mid 1990s and early 2000s, the government has more recently focused on citizen-centric approaches to service delivery. The government has anchored its success on, among other things, the responsiveness of the government to the citizens needs and recognizes the importance of Public Sector Reforms (PSR) and highlights these

reforms as key tenets in achieving the vision of becoming a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life (GoM, 2018). Public sector reforms in Malawi dates back to the country's independence era in 1964. However, the implementation of reforms was problematic due to several factors. They included inadequate commitment to reforms by political, administrative and technical leaders in the public service which led to partial implementation; lack of ownership of reforms since they were mostly externally driven; inadequate resources allocated for implementation of reforms; lack of a shared vision for reforms due inadequate participation of non-state actors and citizens in reforms; and lack of capacity to implement reforms (GoM,2018). In addition, there had been no overarching policy to guide the content and implementation of all public service reform programmes.

Public sector reforms regained momentum when a new government came to power in 2014. In line with its aspirations, the new government prioritized the provision of quality public services to citizens. The public sector reforms were considered a critical part of this effort. The new governments' public sector reform program aimed at transforming public service delivery by providing citizens with access to various public services and information. The new dispensation set up a public service reform commission to provide strategic leadership in the implementation of the reforms. Among others, the objective of the commission was to identify and recommend ways and means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in order to raise the quality of the public services delivered to the public. To show governments' seriousness with the reforms, all parastatal organizations, 35 districts, town, municipal and city councils submitted their proposed reforms to the

president for approval by 2016. This marked the finalization of putting all public sector institutions on reform program and heralded a new era for immediate implementation.

Among the key priority areas introduced in the Public Sector Reforms (PSR) were the establishment of Mlambe One Stop Centre. Mlambe One Stop Centre is a programme by the Malawi government to transform public service delivery by providing citizens access to various public services and information (GoM,2018). It aims to provide efficient government services at the convenience of the citizen. It involves amalgamating related services within one building, possibly on the same floor, effectively making it possible for service seekers to access it conveniently. It is envisaged that citizens will be able to get birth certificates, national identity cards, passports, registration of business names, and applications for marriage certificates, drivers' licences, among other services in one place.

The government launched two (2) Mlambe One Stop Centres in post offices in Lilongwe and Mangochi, as a means to bring services closer to citizens and better the current barriers to service access. The decision to identify post offices to house the Mlambe Centers was arrived at because they are familiar to citizens, most have internet connections, and already facilitate financial transactions. With post offices located throughout the country, it provides the opportunity to expand the network of Mlambe One Stop Centers to additional areas to increase access and widen the scope of services available. According to GoM (2018), Mlambe One Stop Centres aimed specifically at transforming the public service to be people-centred, professional, efficient, transparent and accountable so as to meet global standards and best practices.

The Mangochi Mlambe One Stop Service Centre was officially established by Malawi president in 2018. The centre was created following the restructuring of Mangochi Post Office into a one stop public service delivery centre under government's public sector restructuring. The centre accommodates the Malawi Posts Corporation (MPC), Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), the Directorate of Road Traffic and Safety Services (DRTSS) Department of Immigration and the Registrar General. Some of the services being offered at the service centre are passport issuance (immigration), driving licenses, certificate of fitness, change of vehicle ownership (Road Traffic), domestic taxes (MRA), business registrations, birth and death certificates (Registrar General) and postal and courier services (Malawi Posts Corporation). The coming of the centre brought together public services under one roof. It was hoped that the center would improve efficiency of public service delivery and that people would not spend too much time accessing services as was the case before.

1.3 Problem Statement

Customer perception and satisfaction of the quality of public services are at the heart of the functionality of public sector reforms. Perception is an element that affects customer's views of service quality and satisfaction. Perceptions reflect customer's needs, and if their needs are well satisfied, then their perception of the service quality will be more positive and vice versa (Van, et al., 2000). It is in view of the above that customer perception is considered a significant antecedent of public services utilization. Service organizations therefore, need to be concerned about customers' expectations and how they perceive the actual value of organizations so that product and promotion strategies can be aligned more

efficiently (Zeithaml, 1988; Truong, et al., 2017).

The Mlambe One-Stop Centre in Mangochi was established to enable citizens and customers have a single access point to government information and service transactions under one roof. It was expected that citizens in the district and surrounding areas will utilize the public services offered at the Mlambe One Stop service centre thereby cutting on travels expenses. Mangochi is one of the districts with high population who often migrates to South Africa for business opportunities. These people are always in need of public services such as passports, business registration, driving licences, domestic taxes and also courier services. However, the current reality indicate that the huge investments aimed in the Mlambe One Stop Service centre has not yielded the desired results because of poor utilization of the public services and this problem if continues may lead to the shutdown of the centre. A snap survey by the researcher indicate most citizens in the district shun the centre and prefer to travel long distances to regional spots in Blantyre and Zomba. 7 of the 10 residents that the researcher surveyed indicated that they prefer to seek services in Blantyre and Zomba. This comes against the backdrop of revelations by Tambulasi (2018) that Mlambe One Stop Centres appear to be a development imposed on the people. Another study by Mkandawire (2007) indicated that customers generally perceive services offered in urban areas as more reliable, of better quality and satisfactory. This suggest that customer perception and satisfaction of the quality of public services might have been playing a role in the utilization of services at one stop centres. There are limited studies that have assessed customer perceptions and satisfaction of the service quality of the Mlambe One Stop Centres and how this has affected utilisation of public services.

The lack of specific studies on the subject creates a research gap that has not yet been explored. It is against this background that the current study assesses customers' perception and satisfaction of the public service quality of the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi and its effect on services utilization.

1.4 Study Objectives

The main objective of the study was to assess customers' perception and satisfaction of the service quality and its effect on utilization of public services at Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi.

1.5 Specific Objectives

Within this broader research context, the study focuses on the following research objectives:

1. Measure the level of customer's satisfaction with services quality using the dimensions (Assurance, Reliability, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness) at the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi
2. Measure the customers' perceptions using the dimensions (Assurance, Reliability, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness) at the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi
3. Examine the relationship between perception with service quality and satisfaction, and utilization of services at Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi

1.6 Research Questions

1. Are customers satisfied with public services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi?
2. What are the customer's perception of service quality at the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi?
3. To what extent does the relationship between perception with service quality and satisfaction, and utilization of services at Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi exist?

1.7 Significance

The issue of Public Sector Reforms (PSR) is a hot emerging topic not only in Malawi but Africa. This is partly because PSR are widely accepted as a catalyst for accelerating development. While the existence of the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi has brought public services closer to citizens, the utilization of the same has generally been minimal. The results of this study will enable stakeholders have information behind under-utilisation of public services at the centre. This will provide evidence-based information and give insights to modify plans and policies that would enhance utilization of the services at the centre in the district.

Secondly, customer perception of service quality need to be assessed because customers are not only recipients but are also co- producers and co- designers of the services being offered. Their input in the form of feedback needs to be incorporated into service design and standards and into policy formulated to ensure service quality for customers.

If an organization understands the perception of customers in regard to the product or service they offer, the organization would be in a better position to gain knowledge about how the customer views the product or service (Subramaniam, et al., 2014). Therefore, it is hoped that this exclusive study will provide information on appropriate context-specific interventions that could be directed towards maximizing quality of services that meet customer's expectations at the Mlambe One Stop Centre. Research driven knowledge will be crucial in developing and implementing policies and strategies to enhance better quality services.

Finally, there is no known study that has assessed the degree to which customer perceptions and satisfaction of the quality of services offered at Mlambe One Stop Centres correspond to the public services utilization. The lack of specific studies on the subject creates a research gap that has not yet been explored. Therefore, the study would add to the body of knowledge and literature in the field of public sector reforms and elicit further research on the topic.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is made of five chapters. Chapter one contains background to the study, problem statement, main and specific objectives, hypotheses and study significance. Chapter two consists of literature review. This part discusses the evolution of public administration, public service quality, customer satisfaction, and focuses much on how customers' perceptions of public service quality impact upon utilization. Chapter three describes the methodology that was used to conduct the study.

It includes the study design, study population, study setting, sample size and procedures, data collection methods and tools, data validity and reliability, data processing, data analysis, ethical consideration and limitations of the study. Chapter four presents the overall results along with an analysis of the data gathered during the study. Chapter five discusses the findings drawn from the study. Also included is the implication of the findings, contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes a critical review of the available literature that relates to the topic under study. An attempt is made to review the paradigms of public administration, and the resultant emergence of public sector service quality. Then a review of public service quality, customer satisfaction is also made. The chapter ends by reviewing what other authors have done on how customers' perceptions of public service quality impact upon utilization. In all the review, an attempt is made to identify gaps in the literature which this study hopes to address.

2.2 Evolution of Public administration

There is no single distinct definition of public administration. Some scholars have defined public administration as service to the people rendered by a government agency. Public administration as a field of inquiry is comparatively of recent origin and has gone through different stages of evolution. Since inception, it has passed through various stages of evolution to reach in its present form. Max Weber's theory of public administration was based on a hierarchical order neutrality of the bureaucracy in its operations which would be paramount to its achievement of efficiency in the provision of services (Ahmad, 2011). According to Weber, the focus was on the organizational structure and resultant efficiency underpinned by the principles of meritocracy and hierarchy (Amanfi, 2012).

The administration of bureaucracy was to be continuous, predictable and governed by a strict set of rules, coupled with the scientific management of division of labour among the civil servants was seen as key to ensuring efficiency. The administration also assumed that public servants served public rather than their own private interests (Robinson, 2015).

Weber's command and control' approach to public administration has been in practice for so many years. However, it continually became bloated by duplication of duties resulting in inefficiencies. Further, one of the key distinctions made by Weber on the need to separate the policy makers from implementers was not respected due to interference by politicians in the bureaucracy thereby aggravating the inefficiency issues. These inefficiencies coupled with the continued demand for better services necessitated the push for reforms within the public administration and ushered in the era of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s.

NPM was, among other things, aimed at making the public administration more results directed, market oriented, customer driven, and entrepreneurial (Lam, 1997). The concept was a response to the failure of the old administration to respond appropriately to demands of a competitive market economy (Robinson, 2015) and its principles lay in private sector management principles and was aimed at injecting competition into the public administration (Robinson, 2015). NPM resulted in a growth in the use of markets, competition; contracts for resource allocation, and a focus on service delivery in the public sector. There was also a renewed emphasis in delivery of results, performance measures, and a strong focus on containment of costs within the administration.

NPM was the first public administration paradigm to have the citizen both as a customer of the government and the major focus of the public service. For this reason, the quality of service to the citizen as a customer became paramount to the administration. Schonauer, (2008) notes that NPM suggests a new set of norms have developed in public administration viewing public institutions as enterprises and the citizens to whom they offer services to as customers with individual needs. Under NPM, the challenge of attaining and maintaining high levels of service quality in the public service grew in momentum in response to the changing citizen needs. The application of NPM methods and concepts has been termed as an effort to correct the shortcomings of the traditional public service -seen as slow and inefficient- into an efficient and citizen- centric service (Wood, 2000). This has given prominence to the role of public service quality. While there are different schools of thoughts on the paradigms of public administration, it is clear that most authors have generally agreed on the dimensions that public administration has evolved to its present status.

2.3 Definition of Service

There is no generally accepted and complete definition of services. In review of a wide variety of definitions Payne (1993) summed it up when he said, a service is an activity which has some element of intangibility associated with it which involves some interaction with customers or with property in their possession, and does not result in a transfer of ownership.

However, in a broader definition, Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2001) indicate that services include all economic activities whose output is not a physical product or construction, and is generally consumed at the time of production, and provides added value in forms such as convenience, amusement, timeliness, comfort, or health which are essentially intangible in nature. Kotler (1994), on the other hand, defines services as any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. He affirms the view that services are intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable and also added that services normally require more quality control, supplier credibility, and adaptability. According to Gronroos (2000), services are activities or series of activities of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, take place in interactions between customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. It is noted that services are non-material equivalent of goods and service provision is essentially an economic activity that does not result in ownership (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010). Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2001) in an attempt to differentiate between goods and services, indicate that goods and services should be distinguished on the basis of their attributes. They explain that goods are tangible physical objects which can be created and transferred, and can exist over time and therefore can be stored and used later. To summarise, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) defined services as deeds, processes, and performances. What is clear from the above is that service could mean different definitions to different authors but the most denominator is that service are intangibles.

2.4 Customer Satisfaction

Customer and citizen satisfaction has been used interchangeably in this study. Customer satisfaction has been the subject of considerable research and has been defined and measured in various ways (Oliver, 1997). The word satisfaction and its importance has been defined by Zeithami et al. (1996) as, to achieve continuous success of organizations in the long run, the need to emphasize customer satisfaction is a key consideration. Customer satisfaction may be defined as the customer's fulfilment response to a consumption experience, or some part of it. Customer satisfaction is a pleasurable fulfilment response while dissatisfaction isn't a pleasurable one (Buttle, 2004). Put simply, satisfaction can only be met when the performance generated by organizations exceeds customer expectations. In this context, various authors and researchers have highlighted the importance of customer satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction as related to the company's achievement of success and the incurrance of failures in the aspect of meeting the expectations of both the customers and the company (Chidambaram & Ramachandran, 2012; Kheng et al., 2010). Lau and Cheung (2013) specifically explained that meeting the expectations of the customers will not only provide customer satisfaction but also develop customer loyalty that will then lessen the cases of customer loss rates or improve the retention rate. Service quality delivery is considered an important factor to consider in establishing customer satisfaction and the relationship that will be developed between the company and the customers (Amin & Isa, 2008).

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two ends of a continuum, where the location is defined by a comparison between expectations and outcome.

Customers would be satisfied if the outcome of the service meets expectations. When the service quality exceeds the expectations, the service provider has won a delighted customer. Dissatisfaction will occur when the perceived overall service quality does not meet expectations (Looy, Gemmel & Dierdonck, 2003). Minazzi (2008) highlighted that customer satisfaction is the result of comparison between customer's expectations and customer perceptions. In other words, customer satisfaction is seen as the deference between expected quality of service and customers' experience or perceptions after receiving the service.

Without doubt, service quality is an important factor of customer satisfaction. However, measuring of service quality is complicated, because service itself is an intangible product which can be evaluated differently by each individual. According to Erto and Vanacore (2002, p. 166) the customer is actively participating in service process, and furthermore he is seen as a consumer of a service as well as an evaluator of service received. The most important goal of the service provider is to analyze customers' requirements' and after identifying them it is needed to translate into suppliers' service elements.

Customer satisfaction is considered to be one of the most important outcomes of all marketing activities in a market-oriented firm. The obvious need for satisfying the organisations's customer is to expand the business, to gain a higher market share, and to acquire repeat and referral business, all of which lead to improved profitability (Barsky, 1992).

In order to achieve this one thing to be considered and addressed by the organization is knowing of customers' requirements which is essential and it provides a better understanding of the way customers define the quality of the service and the product.

If the company understands customers' requirements it is easier for service providers to satisfy them. Knowing of customers' satisfaction level and their requirements will also help in finding out the best direction in which the organization needs to go on. (Akalu & Awlachew, 2015). Consumers becoming more sophisticated in their requirements and increasingly demanding higher standards of services. To them service means customer satisfaction, customer delight, customer relationship etc. Therefore, knowing customer satisfaction level for service provider is essential. It is widely accepted that it is easier to sell to an existing customer than to find a new one; that is why customer satisfaction level is a very important issue. Accordingly, customers with problems usually don't react and only 4% of them complain; normally a person with problem tells 9 other people about it; while satisfied customers tell 5 other people about their good experience; keeping a current customer costs about 1/7 of the cost of acquiring a new customer. Therefore, organizations need to understand that to what extent their customers would be satisfied with their services. In summary, the review above clearly shows that customer satisfaction is a complex phenomenon that requires further study.

2.4 Service Quality in the Public Service

Public services refer to those activities of the government institutions aimed at satisfying laws, regulations and directives of the government. Public service is a service which is

provided by government to people living within its jurisdiction, either directly, through the public sector or by financing provision of services. Thus, public services are provided by central, local or state government for the community at large.

These include police, prisons, health education services and so forth. In other words, public services may involve outputs that are hard to attribute to specific individual effort and o/r hard to measure in terms of key characteristics such as quality. They often require high levels of training and education and as well as they can attract people with a public service ethos who wishes to give something to the wider public or community through their work.

The key objectives of the public sector reforms are improving the service delivery process, improving performance and acquiring the public sector with a clear sense of direction. Public sector is, collectively, the world's largest service provider entity. In other words, the ultimate goal of public sector is to sustain the quality of the public service and to enhance the capacity to carry out core government functions so as to promote a sustained economic and social development in the environment of its operation (Theodore, 2003).

Service quality has received a great deal of attention from both academicians and practitioners. Negi (2009) has defined service quality as the overall assessment of a service by the customer. In the current study, service quality can be defined as the difference between customer's expectation for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perception of the service received. Service quality is considered an important tool for

an organisations' struggle to differentiate itself from its competitors (Ladhari, 2008, p.172). The relevance of service quality to an organization is emphasized especially by the fact that it offers a competitive advantage to institutions that strive to improve and hence bring customer satisfaction. According to Juwaheer and Kandampully (2009), the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has proven its role and importance, in satisfaction, can be the result of high quality services when management implements service quality concepts and metrics properly.

Any incremental improvement in public services positively impacts service receivers of public organizations. Rapid changes fuelled by the world economy and technology have been forcing different organizations including public sectors to transform themselves in order to become more responsive and competitive in providing service to their customers. As Day and Halpin (2004) point out, this has resulted in a pervasive need for public servants at every level to examine and monitor their effectiveness in providing quality service to meet their large customers' needs. Public sector services are responsible and accountable to citizens and communities as well as to its customers. According to Gowan et al. (2001), service provision is more complex in the public sector because it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpressed needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done. In addition, Caron and Giauque (2006) pointed out that public sector employees are currently confronted with new professional challenges arising from the introduction of new principles and tools inspired by the shift to new public management. Anderson (1995) measured the quality of service provided by a public university health clinic.

Using 15 statements representing the five-dimensions of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), she assessed the quality of service provided by the clinic at the University of Houston Health Center. Patients were found to be generally dissatisfied with the five dimensions of SERVQUAL. The highest dissatisfaction was felt with assurance.

On the other hand, tangibles and empathy exhibited the lowest level of dissatisfaction.

Using the SERVQUAL approach, Wisniewski (2001) carried out a study to assess customer satisfaction within the public sector across a range of Scottish Councils services. In the library service, the analysis of gap scores revealed that tangibles and reliability had negative gaps which indicate that customer expectations were not met. On the other hand, responsiveness and assurance were positive implying that customer expectations were actually exceeded by the service provided. Furthermore, Donnelly et al. (2006) carried out a study to explore the application of SERVQUAL approach to assess the quality of service of Strathclyde Police in Scotland. The survey captures customers' expectations of an excellent police service and compares these with their perceptions of the service delivered by Strathclyde Police. The paper also reports on a parallel SERVQUAL survey of police officers in Strathclyde to examine how well the force understands its customers' expectations and how well its internal processes support the delivery of quality services in the police department. It was found that Strathclyde Police appears to have a good understanding of the service quality expectations of their customers as represented by the responses of elected councillors in the area covered by the force.

There is room for improvement in service quality performance both from the viewpoint of the customer and through police force attention to the definition of, and compliance with, service quality standards.

Wisniewski et al. (1996) discussed the major issues public sector organizations need to address in their search for an adequate measure of service quality, assess the potential of the SERVQUAL instrument for the public sector and report on an application of the instrument to a public library service. In 2001 Brysland and Curry explained the new context in which public services are delivered, emphasizing the relevance of improving service quality. The SERVQUAL tool was used in this study to improve both process management and strategic planning in North Lanark shire Council. In the same year Wisniewski emphasized the use of clear customer/citizen focus across all public services using an adapted model of SERVQUAL across a range of Scottish council services. Wisniewski was able in this study to support using the SERVQUAL by concluding that public sector service managers found the gap approach and the dimension approach both conceptually attractive and operationally useful.

Sharifuddin (1998) used the SERVQUAL tool to measure service quality at ten public transportation departments. 400 copies of SERVQUAL questionnaire were distributed to the customers and also service providers of six state departments around Malaysia. He found that even though the public transportation department understands the needs of the customers but the perceptions of the customers are higher. Therefore, this showed that customers' expectations were not met.

Agus et al. distributed two separate modified SERVQUAL models within Malaysian Ministries with results demonstrating a strong correlation between service quality dimensions, service performance, and customer satisfaction.

In 2010 Ilhaamie distributed and used the SERVQUAL tool in 300 public organizations. The conclusion came out quite favorable for Malaysian public services.

The tangible dimension was found to be most important. The reliability dimension was found to be the most unmet dimension. Other countries had their share in this topic including Mauritius where Munhurrun et al. (2010) adopted the SERVQUAL tool to assess and understand the extent to which service quality is delivered in Mauritian public services by investigating the match between customers' expectations and front line employees' perceptions of customer expectations. The findings revealed that there is a significant shortfall between the perception of employees and meeting customer expectations. Although employees understand customers' expectations they fail to meet them. By way of summary, service quality in the public service differs from sector to sector but the general consensus is that it is poor. However, there is need for adequate research in this area given the kind of reforms that are being championed by most governments.

2.5 Factors Influencing Provision of Quality Public Service

The inescapable fact is there are a number of factors that affect the potential capacity of an organization in the service delivery processes and environments. There are a number of researches that have been done regarding those factors in different countries and organization context. According to Wanju, Mururi and Ayodo (2012), the major challenges

that can affect provision of quality public service in an organization include the following: low employees' capacity, ineffective communication, insufficient number of staff and skills required, insufficient finance, poor management of problems, challenges of collective action, policy incoherence and levels of performance. Furthermore, a study conducted in Rwanda RALGA, (2010) finds that poor coordination of staff, poor planning ability, low motivation, geographic location of the center of service recipients.

Lack of effective performance oversight: that is manifested mostly in the form of infrequent and non-periodic monitoring and evaluation of service delivery processes and quality. Therefore, a manager of an organization should pay attention to these problems and their effects in a way that can reduce or eliminate if possible.

2.6 Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

The rising interest in customer satisfaction is said to be closely-related to the quality revolution which started in the early 1980s. Different scholars have realized that improving the quality of products and services could not only depend on the internal metrics of organizations, but it had also to be combined with customer feedback (Archakova, 2013). Hence, customer satisfaction and service quality are leading components in the system of external relations of any organization today, as they largely determine its competitiveness. Sometimes the terms quality and satisfaction are used interchangeably, as if they are one evaluative construct. For example, Iacobucci, et al. (1995) found no differences between quality and satisfaction for disconfirmation, keeping promises, customization, empathy, friendliness, or purchase intentions. In addition, the study of (Fonseca, et al., 2010)

concluded that the company, non-customers, and customers do not make a distinction between them.

However, El-Saghier and Nathan, (2013) stated that perceived quality has been identified as a form of attitude related but not equivalent to satisfaction. Therefore, several researchers were interested in the link between the two concepts and how they differ.

For instance, Liljander and Strandvik (1993) said that experience is not needed for judging quality and a service could be evaluated on the basis of knowledge about its provider, whilst satisfaction is an inner state/ view resulted from the customer's own experience with a service. In this respect, it is clear two opposing trends or schools of thought regarding the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction emerge (Salazar, et al., 2004; Ahmed, et al., 2010). The first school supported the view that customer satisfaction helps to develop perception of high service quality, which means that satisfaction leads to quality or satisfaction can be seen as an antecedent of quality; the global perception (e.g. Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Beerli, 2004; Eboli & Mazzulla, 2012). Contrarily, the other school argued that service quality is a reason of or the ancestor of customer satisfaction, which means that quality leads to satisfaction (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; McDougall & Levesque, 1996, 2000; Antreas & Opoulos, 2003; Negi, 2009; Kassim & Abdullah, 2010). These studies all ensured a relationship between quality and satisfaction, but according to Asubonteng, et al. (1996); there is no agreement on the exact type of relationship between the two constructs (Daniel & Berinyuy, 2010).

Yet other researchers have proposed that quality and satisfaction could be determined by the same attributes, like Parasurman, et al. (1988) who tried to relate customer satisfaction to service quality, since what SERVQUAL tool struggles to measure is the attitude. As a result, more careful analysis leads to the conclusion that service quality and customer satisfaction are not entirely-distinct, but closely-related concepts (Siddiqi, 2011). The relationship between quality and satisfaction subsists when satisfaction is guaranteed. The organization's ability to satisfy the needs of the customer must take into account the various dimensions of quality (Fonseca, et al., 2010). At the same time, although service quality and customer satisfaction are related concepts, they are not exactly the same. The most common explanation of the difference between the two is that service quality is based on long-term cognitive assessments of the organization's service delivery, while customer satisfaction is a short-term emotional reaction to a specific service transaction (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). In spite of this, customers must first experience the quality before they can be satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome. Then, through following service encounters customers may judge the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction – the cumulative overall satisfaction that was mentioned before – and can use this information to update the whole evaluation of service quality which will form later on, along with the customer's needs and desires and other external factors, his/her future quality expectations that will be compared while experience to his/her perceptions in this regard in order to determine the satisfaction or dissatisfaction level again, as if it is a cycle.

Sureshchandar et al., (2002) have contended that customer satisfaction should be seen as a multi-dimensional construct just as service quality means it can occur at multi levels in an

organisation and that it should be operationalized along the same factors on which service quality is operationalized. Parasuraman et al., (1985) suggested that when perceived service quality is high, then it will lead to increase in customer satisfaction. He supports that fact that service quality leads to customer satisfaction and this is in line with Saravana and Rao, (2007) and Lee et al., (2000) who acknowledge that customer satisfaction is based upon the level of service quality provided by the service provider.

According to Negi, (2009), the idea of linking service quality and customer satisfaction has existed for a long time. He carried a study to investigate the relevance of customer-perceived service quality in determining customer overall satisfaction in the context of mobile services (telecommunication) and he found out that reliability and network quality (an additional factor) are the key factors in evaluating overall service quality but also highlighted that tangibles, empathy and assurance should not be neglected when evaluating perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. This study was based only on a specific service industry (mobile service) and we think it is very important to identify and evaluate those factors which contribute significantly to determination of customer-perceived service quality and overall satisfaction. Fen and Lian, (2005) found that both service quality and customer satisfaction have a positive effect on customer's re-patronage intentions showing that both service quality and customer satisfaction have a crucial role to play in the success and survival of any business in the competitive market. This study proved a close link between service quality and customer satisfaction. Su et al., (2002) carried a study to find out the link between service quality and customer satisfaction, from their study, they came up with the conclusion that, there exist a great dependency between both constructs and

that an increase in one is likely to lead to an increase in another. Also, they pointed out that service quality is more abstract than customer satisfaction because, customer satisfaction reflects the customer's feelings about many encounters and experiences with service firm while service quality may be affected by perceptions of value (benefit relative to cost) or by the experiences of others that may not be as good.

A study carried out by Magi and Julander, (2009), among grocery stores in Sweden showed a positive relationship between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. It was proven that customer satisfaction results from high perceived service quality and this makes the customer loyal. However, it could be possible that a satisfied customer must not necessarily become a loyal customer.

Other studies have established the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Organizations strive hard to achieve high customer satisfaction, especially organizations that consider a long-term relationship with customers as an asset. However, understanding the service quality components remains to be a subject of discussions and arguments. For instance, in the retail banking sector, customer satisfaction has become a key consideration for successful business operations although identification of service quality characteristics may not be fully understood (Belás & Gabčová, 2016; Chavan & Ahmad, 2013). So, the model introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1982) has been accepted by many authors to be a predictor variable of customer satisfaction, which was utilized by the Herington and Weaver (2009) study, where they established the relationship between

service quality dimension and customer satisfaction was regarded as a positive relationship. As a result, perceived service quality has been widely considered as an antecedent of customer satisfaction and previous studies have ascertained its relationship (Naik et al., 2010; Yee et al., 2011).

However, there are still arguments and disagreements on the causal relationship between the two variables as applied in different settings.

Three major possibilities had been explored by Brady et al. (2002) regarding the relationship: First, service quality is the antecedent of customer satisfaction; second, customer satisfaction is the cause of service quality (Bitner, 1990); and third, there is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Dabholkar, 1995). These three positions may have a varied impact on the results of the study and other studies, although in general consensus, many researchers have found the relationship between the two variables where the service quality served as an antecedent to customer loyalty in a dominant position as applied to the service industry context such as the banking sector (Akhtar et al., 2011; Cameran et al., 2010).

The service quality literature is based on two main paradigms: the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm and the performance paradigm. The former considers that perceived service quality results from the gap between performance and expectations (Oliver, 1980), whilst the performance paradigm argues that expectations are irrelevant and only performance should be considered. These two perspectives gave rise to two alternative frameworks: SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, et al., 1985; Zeithaml, et al., 1988) and

SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Although they are widely used in service quality assessment, some authors believe that they are too generic and, consequently, a number of adaptations should be made for each specific context (cf. Carman, 1990; Dabholkar et al., 2000; Ladhari, 2008; Finn & Lamb, 1991; Zhao et al., 2002). Nevertheless, it is possible to adapt these frameworks, which were designed for private services for use in assessing public service quality and citizens' expectations and perceptions. It is also important to clarify the relation between quality and satisfaction.

Although it is consensual that customer satisfaction is essential for organization success (cf. Andrews et al., 2011; Dabholkar et al., 2000; Fornell et al., 2006; Keiningham et al., 2003; Stradling et al., 2007; Vavra, 1997), not everybody agrees about the relation between those two constructs (Luo & Homburg, 2007) and what is more, there is no universal definition for satisfaction (cf. Peterson & Wilson, 1992; Yi, 1990). For some authors satisfaction is an evaluation process (cf. Fornell, 1992; Hunt, 1977; Oliver, 1980), but for others it is the response to that evaluation process (cf. Howard & Sheth, 1969; Oliver, 1980, 1997; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). It can also be viewed as a cognitive response (cf. Bolton & Drew, 1991; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Tse and Wilton, 1988) or an emotional response (Cadotte et al., 1987; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). Some authors argue that satisfaction precedes quality (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman et al., 1988), while others support the opposite, in the sense that it is perceived service quality that leads to satisfaction (Brady et al., 2002; Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Fornell et al., 1996; Groenroos, 2000; Oliver, 1993; Parasuraman et al., 1994). In this context, the relation between disconfirmation of expectations and satisfaction with public services is still barely

explored (Roch & Poister, 2006), although there has been some research in this area, concluding that disconfirmation is positively related to satisfaction with public services (cf. Beck et al., 1990; DeHoog et al., 1990; Van Ryzin, 2004).

In a nutshell, the causal relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has been verified by research in several service sectors.

It has been proven that service quality is positively-related to customer satisfaction (e.g. Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Kuo, 2003; Beerli, et al., 2004; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Gera, 2011). Impressive/ surprising service quality may lead to high satisfaction of a customer. In contrast, poor/ low service quality may influence a customer to feel dissatisfied resulting in negative impacts on the company (Yuktanandana & Prasertsakul). Moreover, in relating service quality and customer satisfaction, researchers have been more precise about their measurement. The SERVQUAL model has been evidenced to be the best means to measure service quality in service sectors, especially from the customer perspective. This idea generates a presumption that the five dimensions of this model could have a direct relationship with customer satisfaction (Agbor, 2011: 15). The above review show that factors affecting public service quality are not exhaustive. There are contrasting factors and the review show that most studies that have been conducted in this area have concentrated on market based service. Little research has been done on public services particularly in new reform areas like one stop centres.

2.7 Citizens' Perception of Public Service Quality

Since the reforms anticipated by the proponents of NPM and reinventing government, listening to citizens has been seen out as an important source of information for improving the quality of public services. Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, complaint management and other methods have been adopted to gather information about citizens' needs and preferences (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This also matches the growing pressures for the improvement of accountability of public entities (VigodaGadot, 2000).

Some researchers have shown that results from internal objective performance indicators and those obtained directly from citizens, reflecting a marketing orientation, are not always coincident, which may be explained by the differences between the two perspectives (Kelly & Swindell, 2000; Roch & Poister, 2006). In this sense, perceived quality – what citizens think about the quantity and quality of the public services they receive – rather than objective internal measures has been considered the antecedent of utilization of public services (Ryzin, 2004). This means that if organizations aim to understand the level of service quality, the relationship between expectations and perceptions is important, and the literature on gap analysis should be considered.

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Customer's perception serves as a foundation for evaluating service quality because, quality is high when performance exceeds expectation and quality is low when performance does not meet their expectation (Asubonteng et al., (1996). Expectation is viewed in service quality literature as desires or wants of consumer i.e., what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Perceived service is the outcome of the consumer's view of the service dimensions, which are both technical and functional in nature (Gronroos, 1984). The customer's total perception of a service is based on their perception of the outcome and the process; the outcome is either value added or quality and the process is the role undertaken by the customer (Edvardsson, 1998).

Parasuraman et al., (1988) define perceived quality as a form of attitude, related but not equal to satisfaction, and results from a consumption of expectations with perceptions of performance. Therefore, having a better understanding of consumers' attitudes help know

how they perceive service quality of service. Negi (2009) suggests that customer-perceived service quality has been given increased attention in recent years, due to its specific contribution to organizational competitiveness and developing satisfied customers. This makes service quality a very important construct to understand by firms by knowing how to measure it and making necessary improvements in its dimensions where appropriate especially in areas where gaps between expectations and perceptions are wide.

When the actual service result provided by the service provider is higher than the customer service expectation, then the customer will be very satisfied; if it is to the contrary, the customer will be very dissatisfied (Joewono & Kubota, 2007). According to Gera (2011), service quality was found to significantly impact on customer satisfaction and value perceptions. Companies that have goods and services that are perceived as being of high quality typically have greater market share, higher return on investment, and higher asset turnover than firms which have goods and services perceived as being of low quality (Kim, et al., 2004). Thus, poor-quality service produces customer dissatisfaction, and customers may not return to the establishment in the future or even immediately move their business dealings to other providers (Prentice, 2013; Cheng & Rashid, 2013).

With regards to One Stop Centres, a study by Abdallah (2015) examined the effect of Huduma centre on service delivery in Kenya. The findings of study showed that majority of the citizens were pleased with the level of transparency, with but slightly low levels of service awareness and clarity of procedures of accessing the relevant service.

In general, most were satisfied with the reliability of service delivery at the Huduma Centre. They felt that officers serving them were courteous, but also felt that the issue of adequacy of staffing levels needs to be addressed. The customers were satisfied with services offered at Huduma Centre. Most participants were satisfied with how complaints were addressed, and almost every respondent was willing to recommend others to seek services at the Centre.

An Exploratory Study on Telecomm in Bangladesh was undertaken to examine and understand the consumer's perception in the choice of selecting mobile telecommunication service providers in Bangladesh. The research surveyed 450 telecom customers in Bangladesh from Dhaka City to determine factors that significantly influence their customer perception. Hypothesis generated from this study were that service quality has a significant influence on customer perception and customer satisfaction plays a significant influence on customer perception. The selected shopping malls (Pavilion, KLCC, and Mid Valley Megamall) are famous for the variety of brands and products sold. From this study, the results supported the significant and positive relationship between store atmosphere, music, merchandise quality, service, and convenience and customer perception.

Agus et al. (2007) carried out a research to identify management and customer perceptions of service quality practices in the Malaysian Public sector. It is important to note that whereas the SERVQUAL model focused on identifying gaps between expectations and actual delivery, their model focused only on perceptions of actual service delivery. They used nine of the ten service dimensions identified by Parasuraman et al. (1985). Their study

looked at the perceptions of management and customers. Their findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction where the results show that if the public offices improve their service quality, the customer satisfaction will also increase.

Furthermore, Mehmood and Shafiq (2015) conducted a study on impact of customer perception of service quality on purchase intention.

The researchers collected data from giving out self-administered questionnaire to 120 respondents. From their research, it shows that service quality has positive relationship towards customer perception. Harith, et al. (2014) conducted a study on coffee packaging: consumer perception on appearance, branding and pricing. This study focused on consumer's perception towards the outlook of the coffee packaging which resulted in influencing their purchasing decision through survey study. Survey was done targeting on 100 consumers residing in Kelantan, Malaysia through printed and online questionnaires distribution. Results obtained shows that consumers notice the differences possessed by each coffee packaging in the market and they purchase what they like based on their perception. All respondents agreed that the appearance of the coffee packaging is important for consumers' perception. From this study, results showed that service quality plays an important role in perception as there was a correlation. The above review show that perception of service quality is multifaceted meaning there are more aspects that need to be evaluated. It is on this premise that this study attempts to add to its scholarly knowledge.

2.8 The idea of One Stop Shop

Citizen interactions with governments are becoming increasingly complex. This is simply reflective of economic realities as businesses, citizens and governments become more interconnected, both domestically and internationally. However, governments can unnecessarily hamper growth opportunities where the interface with businesses and citizens is delinked or cumbersome. In an attempt to address this issue, governments have introduced one-stop shops as a means of reducing transaction costs.

These centers act as a citizens' primary contact point for accessing multiple public services and information, and vary in both scope and form. Some deliver a variety of services under one roof, others focus on a single sector, such as judicial or transport services. They can be operated by a central government or by municipal authorities and can target different groups such as citizens or firms.

The One Stop Shops have emerged as a way for national government to provide better services and improve regulatory delivery to citizens. The one stop shops are government offices that provides citizens access to a range of public services, eliminating the need for citizens to travel to multiple offices to obtain one service. Stone (2006), has noted that one-stop shops are one of several institutional interventions that most governments often adopt to bypass or accelerate existing procedures where they are dysfunctional. At least 15 countries in the Middle East North Africa region have some kind of OSS in existence as part of their investment promotion efforts. Of particular note is the Huduma Centres in Kenya. These are one stop centres which have been popularised by the new dispensation

in Kenya. One-stop Shops became popular in the 1980s as a means to promote investment, often as an adjunct to investment promotion agencies. The basic idea is that an investor would only have to be in contact with one single entity to obtain all the necessary paperwork in one streamlined and coordinated process, rather than having to go through a variety of different government bodies. The most outstanding and well-known examples where such an OSS system works reasonably successful are the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Singapore, the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) and the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) of Ireland. In all three cases, investors can rely on the agencies to provide practically all the approvals and clearances needed.

Meeting the existing challenges in service delivery is prompting the public sector to explore new sustainable models for service delivery – models that can significantly improve customer experience and outcomes through enhanced service levels at the same or reduced cost. The solution lies in developing citizen-centric models that draw inspiration from the relative success.

with which the private sector has addressed the situation. These examples keep the customer at the core of every decision, from strategy formulation and design through to execution. In rising to the challenge, public sector Departments or Agencies across the globe are increasingly adopting a One Stop Shop citizen-centric service delivery model. The concept of One Stop Shops is to enable citizens and customers a single access point to information and service transactions.

One stop shops, are another service improvement tool, different from the various charters.

One of their specific purposes may be to provide clients with particular information adapted to the different situations experienced by them. One stop shops are being tested and promoted mostly at a local level in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and Italy suggest that a single point of contact for information improves efficiency with simple referral tasks (Humphreys, 1988). The idea of one stop centres is an emerging one. However, a review of literature show that very little has been done on this subject. This gap need to be adequately addressed.

2.9 Relationship between perceived service quality and public services utilization

According to Sureshchandar et al., (2002), suggested that when perceived service quality is high, then it will lead to increase in customer utilization. He supports the fact that service quality leads to customer utilization and this is in line with Saravana and Rao, (2007) and Lee et al., (2000) who acknowledge that customer utilization is based upon the level of service quality provided by the service provider. According to Negi, (2009, p.33), the idea of linking service quality and customer utilisation has existed for a long time. He carried a study to investigate the relevance of customer-perceived service quality in determining customer overall utilization in the context of mobile services (telecommunication) and found out that reliability and network quality (an additional factor) are the key factors in evaluating overall service quality but also highlighted that tangibles, empathy and assurance should not be neglected when evaluating perceived service quality and customer utilization. This study was based only on a specific service industry (mobile service) and it is very important to identify and evaluate those factors which contribute significantly to determination of customer-perceived service quality and overall utilization.

Fen and Lian, (2005, p.59-60) found that both service quality and customer satisfaction have a positive effect on customer's intentions to utilize the product or service. In turn customer utilization have a crucial role to play in the success and survival of any business in the competitive market. This study proved a close link between service quality and customer utilization. Su et al., (2002) carried a study to find out the link between service quality and customer utilization, from their study, they came up with the conclusion that, there exist a great dependency between both constructs and that an increase in one is likely to lead to an increase in another. Also, they pointed out that service quality is more abstract than customer satisfaction because, customer satisfaction reflects the customer's feelings about many encounters and experiences with service firm while service quality may be affected by perceptions of value (benefit relative to cost) or by the experiences of others that may not be as good. A study carried out by Magi and Julander, (2009), among grocery stores in Sweden showed a positive relationship between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. It was proven that customer satisfaction results from high perceived service quality and this makes the customer loyal. However, it could be possible that a satisfied customer must not necessarily become a loyal customer.

2.10 Conceptual framework

The need to develop valid instruments for the systematic evaluation of organization's performance from the customer point of view; and the association between perceived service quality and other key organizational outcomes led to the development of models for measuring service quality. One such model was developed by Parasuraman et al.,

(1988) called the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model proposes that customers evaluate the quality of a service on five distinct dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

a. Reliability

The first dimension of service quality is reliability. This refers to the organization's ability to perform the service accurately. It also involves the ability of the company to complete the service on time, consistently, and error-free every time.

b. Responsiveness

The second dimension of service quality responsiveness. Much like the title suggests, this looks at the organization's ability to respond to the customer's needs promptly. When organizations fail to respond to a customer, and particularly when there is no obvious reason or explanation, it creates a negative perception in the minds of the customers. Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customers' request, questions, complaints, and problems. Responsiveness is communicated to customers by the length of time they have to wait for assistance, answers to questions, or attention to problems. Responsiveness also captures the notion of flexibility and ability to customize the service to customers need (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

c. Assurance

This dimension relies on the employee's ability to establish trust and confidence with the customer. This is based on the employee's knowledge and ability to establish friendly and polite communication. This dimension is characterized by four components: competence,

respect for the customer, effective communication, and attitude. Assurance is defined as employees' knowledge, courtesy, and the ability of the firm and its employees to inspire trust and confidence. This dimension is likely to be particularly important for services that customers perceive as high risk or for service of which they feel uncertain about their ability to evaluate outcomes. For example, banking, insurance, brokerage, medical etc. In the service context, the company seeks to build trust and loyalty between key contact managers, employees, and customers (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

d. Empathy

The fourth dimension of service quality is empathy. This is established by the employee's ability to show care and genuine concern for customers. Empathy must be continually displayed by the employee for it to be effective. Individualized attention that the firm provides its customers, the essence of empathy is conveying, through personalized or customized service, that customers are unique and special and that their needs are understood. Customers want to feel understood by and important to firms that provide service to them (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

e. Tangibles

The fifth and final dimension is called tangibles. This can be things like the visual of the organization (the look and feel of the website, the logo, and so on). Tangibles can also refer to other areas of visual such as physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel and communication materials. Tangibles provide physical representations or image of the service that customers, particularly new customers, will use to evaluate quality (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Figure 1 presents a visual presentation of the conceptual framework for the current study.

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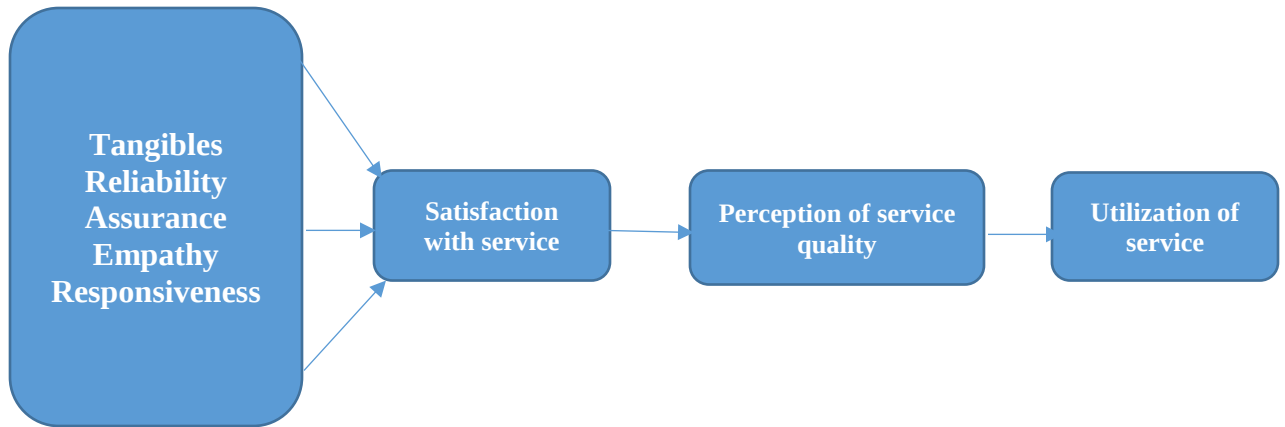


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Various studies have been undertaken using the SERVQUAL because of its generic service applicability. The model has proved to be an invaluable tool for service organizations to better understand what their customers or clients value and how well they are meeting the needs and expectations of customers and clients. It provides a benchmark based on customer opinions of an excellent organization, on the ranking of key attributes and on comparison to what employees of service organizations believe customers feel. The model has been used to measure service quality in a variety of contexts including hospitals, universities, police services, banks and travel agencies, and public utilities. The wide array of application of such an instrument as SERVQUAL spells confidence in its utilization as a technique for measuring service quality in various business sectors and service industries. Since the Mlambe One Stop Center was established, there is no known study that has been conducted on citizens' perceptions of the service quality specifically using the SERVQUAL model as the guiding principle. It is on this basis that the current study adopted and used the SERVQUAL framework to measure the quality of services. The study uses the five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model to measure the perception of the quality of public services from citizen's perspectives. Citizens are co- producers of policies and

are important stakeholders in the delivery of services and hence their perceptions of service quality can help improve the delivery and utilization of public services. The main reason for the application of the SERVQUAL model is because it measures measure gaps in quality and therefore considered a relevant a diagnostic tool to enable management to identify service quality shortfalls.

Even though this model has several advantages and is extensively utilized, it has several flaws and criticisms. First, the model's validity as a generic instrument for measuring service quality across various service sectors has been questioned. And that simply revising the SERVQUAL items is insufficient for assessing service quality in various service environments. Secondly, the assumptions made during the model seem not always true. The term expectation is polysomic; consumers evaluate service quality using standards other than expectations. Finally, the model's gaps are all focused on the process. Regarding the way, the goods or services is supplied. The outcome and how the customer perceives the product would be the focus of outcome orientation

2.11 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has provided a literature reviewed in relation to the chapter under study. It has made a review of the paradigms of public administration, and the resultant emergence of public sector service quality. Then a review of public service quality, customer satisfaction is given. Of particular importance the study has identified gaps in the literature which this study hopes to bridge. The next chapter provides the methodology used for the research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter describes the methodology which was used to conduct the study. The main objective of the study was to assess customers' perception and satisfaction of the service quality and its effect on utilization of public services at Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi. This chapter discusses the research design, research setup, study population, sample size and procedure, data collection techniques, data processing and method of analysis, data validity and reliability. Ethical considerations and study limitations are also given.

3.2 Research design

This research was an exploratory study. Exploratory study establishes causal relationships between variables. Thus, it attempts to clarify how and why there is a relationship between two or more aspects of a situation or phenomenon. Hence exploratory study design was used to assess customer's perception and satisfaction of the service quality of public services and how it affects utilisation at Mlambe One Stop Centre. The study design is considered more objective because it allowed collection of information and opinions of participants from a larger sample to allow generalization to be made hence considered appropriate for this study.

3.3 Study setting

Malawi is a South-eastern African country bordered by Mozambique to the East and South, Tanzania to the North, and Zambia to the West. The current population for Malawi is estimated at 17,563,749 (Malawi Population Housing Census, 2018). The country is divided into 28 districts (6 of which are in the north, 9 in the centre and 13 in the south region). The districts are subdivided into Traditional Authorities (TAs) managed by chiefs and in turn are composed of villages controlled by headmen. Malawi's economy is predominantly agricultural with tobacco, tea, and sugar accounting for the majority of exports. Malawi's traditional major exports are tobacco, tea and sugar.

The study site was Mangochi district which is located in the eastern lakeside region of Malawi as shown in the figure below. The district is 320 kilometres from the country's capital city of Lilongwe. According to National Statistical Office 26 (2018) Mangochi district has a total population of 1, 917,070. The district's population is 94% rural. It has 1,111 villages within 12 TAs and is predominantly Moslem and from the Yao tribe. The district's total land area is about 332 thousand hectares, of which 79 thousand is arable and 31% of this is under estate cultivation (e.g., tobacco or tea). The main livestock kept by farmers are cattle, goats, sheep, poultry, ducks, doves, pigs, and rabbits. While 85% of the district's population relies on farming as the main source of income, 12% depends on fishing. Mangochi district has one district hospital, three community hospitals, 29 health centres, two health posts and 248 outreach clinics. The district has been the first recipient of the Mlambe One Stop Centre under the public sector reforms program. The centre is situated at the main trading centre of the district. The Centre was officially established by

Malawi president in 2018. The structure accommodates the Malawi Posts Corporation (MPC), Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), the Directorate of Road Traffic and Safety Services (DRTSS) Department of Immigration and the Registrar General. Among others, the centre was established to enable citizens save time and money spent on accessing the services elsewhere. Therefore, the centre is open to all residents in the districts and surrounding areas. For this reason, it is assumed that the study participants were drawn from all Traditional Authorities in the district. Figure below presents the map of Mangochi and some traditional Authorities.

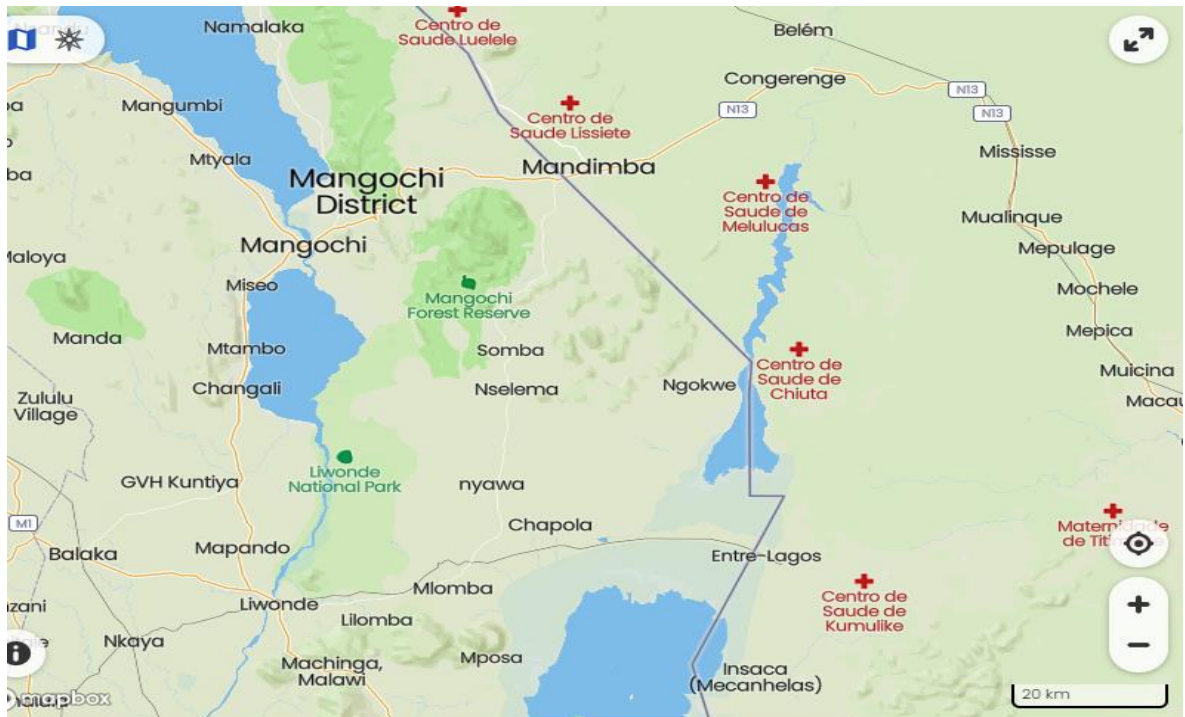


Figure 2: Google Map

Source: google map

3.4 Study Population

Target population is basically the total population from which the sample is to be selected.

The target population of the study was the total number of public citizens who had accessed services in the One Stop Centre from June-December, 2020. The total population of the citizens who had accessed services in 2020 was 7,458. This was based on official records from the five services providers. These formed the study population from which a study sample has been drawn. Eligible public citizens who gave informed consent and were deemed mentally and physically sound were included for the study.

3.5 Sampling procedure and size

The study used purposive random sampling. Purposive sampling technique was used to select Mlambe One Stop Centre in Mangochi because it was the first one stop centre to implement public sector reform programs. Convenience sampling was used to select study participants from the target population. The target population of the study was the total number of customers who had accessed services in the One Stop Centre from June-December, 2020. The total population of the customers was about 7,458. This figure was computed by summing up the estimated average number of monthly customers of the five selected public service institutions under the Mlambe One Stop Centre. The choice of customers/clients was informed by the fact that satisfaction with the service delivery can properly be assessed after one has fully or to a greater extent experienced the service. In addition, care was taken not to select very old or past clients as memories of their experiences might have been faded.

Convenience sampling was chosen because it was convenient for the researcher. Apart from giving each member of the population an equal chance of being chosen, convenience

sampling was relatively easy to implement. The quantitative sample size was determined using the formula by Leslie Kish (Kish, 1965). This formula takes into account level of precision, confidence interval as well as the degree of variability in the attributes being measured, hence considered suitable for this study. The formula is shown below:

$$n = \frac{z(\alpha/2)^2 p(1-p)}{d^2}$$

Where: n= Sample size, Z ($\alpha/2$)² = confidence interval, P= proportion of public service utilization estimation (28% Mlambe One Stop Centre statistics, 2020), d =margin of error.

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.28)(0.72)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 310$$

In order to achieve precision, the sample size was multiplied by the design effect (deff) which was put 2.6 based on the findings from literature review.

$$n = 310 * 2.6$$

$$n = 806$$

To cover up for non-response rate and missing values, the sample size was oversampled by 5%:

Thus:

$$n = 806 * 5$$

$$n = 40$$

Total sample size for this study was to be:

$$n = 806 + 40$$

$$n = 846$$

Therefore, sample size for the study was 846 participants

3.6 Data collection technique

Data for the study was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was developed in local dialect (Chichewa) to make it easily understandable by respondents and then converted into English language for analysis purpose. The questionnaire had three major parts. The first part was about the demographic characteristics of respondents. The second part was designed to measure the satisfaction and perception of citizens with service quality at the Mlambe One Stop Centre by using the SERVQUAL model as proposed by Parasuraman et al (1988), comprising five components of service quality. The components were Empathy, Responsiveness, Assurance, Tangibility, and Reliability. The last part measured the relationship between perception of the public services and utilization. The dimensions of service quality (independent variables) were measured using the SERVQUAL model. Interviews were also conducted using interview guide with the selected respondents to obtain more detailed information, in such a way that the researchers probed by raising some related questions for further explanation. This was intended to get further information which could answer the research questions.

A total number of 830 questionnaires were distributed to respondents and 16 participants were engaged in semi-structured interview, summing up to 846 respondents. Since the study sample was large, 5 research assistants were engaged in collating the research data. After data cleansing, 824 participants were considered valid for analysis, indicating a response rate of 97.3%.

3.7 Measurement

3.7.1 *Dependent variable*

The study consisted of two dependable variables. These were citizen perception and satisfaction, and utilization of public services. The satisfaction and service quality measures were derived from the five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), that assesses customer perceptions of service quality in service organizations. The variables were measured by means of these five dimensions, all rated using a five-point rating scale.

3.7.2 *Independent variable*

Just like the dependent variable, independent variables were derived from the five dimensions of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), that assesses customer perceptions of service quality in service organizations. The five dimensions are (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).

- a) **Tangibles:** This measured the condition and adequacy of the physical facilities, and their quality
- b) **Assurance:** This measured the citizens' perceptions on how knowledgeable are the staff in providing services and their level of courtesy.
- c) **Responsiveness:** This measured the perceptions on how willing staff members are to address citizen needs and also measure the response time within the Mlambe One Stop Centre.
- d) **Reliability:** This measured the dependability of services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre.

- e) **Empathy:** This measured the attention that the employees given to every citizen during the delivery of service

3.8 Data processing and analysis

The data gathered through questionnaire was analysed quantitatively with the use of percentages, central tendency measures like mean and modes. Presentation devices such as tables, graphs, and charts were also used to analyse and present the results. Qualitative analysis was done by narrating the views and themes based on the research objectives, research questions and the issues discussed. Finally, correlation coefficient (Spearman correlation coefficient) and logistic regression was used to show the relationship between quality public service and customer satisfaction and in addition to check the correlation among the five dimensions.

3.9 Data validity and reliability

The quality of a research study is based generally on the validity and reliability of the measures. The validity of a research refers to how relevant the research activities are in achieving the goal of the research and reliability is concerned with the consistency of results. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with experts who have extensive knowledge in questionnaire construction. It was drawn up following comprehensive review of related literature on the subject matter. The questionnaire was then pre-tested in a pilot study prior to data collection to determine its desirability. The contents of the pilot study were then subjected to rigorous scrutiny by the researcher and supervisor, and necessary adjustments were made.

Collected data was thoroughly checked for completeness, clarity and consistency at the end of each collection day. Constructive criticism of the questionnaire ensured the validity of the research instrument. Pilot study helped to ensure reliability of the research instrument and quality of data. If study is carried out again, it is strongly believed that the same results will be collected because the methodology used was good in terms of collecting trustworthy data from respondents. The study is considered credible because every effort was done to obtain unbiased answers from respondents and analysis was done in conformity with professional standards.

3.10 Ethical considerations

To ensure that ethical principles are upheld, the researcher sought permission from relevant managers of the five public service providers to carry out the study at their facilities. Research assistants verbally explained the purpose of the study to all participants to clear any misconception, fears or wrong expectations and solicit their consent. Voluntary verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants and an undertaking was made to them of their right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the project. Further, they were assured that the information provided would be treated with confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in private places and code numbers (not names) were used on questionnaires for purposes of data identification. This ensured that anonymity and privacy of the participants were maintained. In short, the research upheld the highest ethical standards with regard to issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.

3.11 Limitations

Although the research adds to scholarly academic research and practical contribution, it has some limitations which creates an opportunity for further studies. First, data for this study was collected from one out of the two one stop centers in the country, which in broader sense limit its generalization. This research could be carried out in the other center in Lilongwe to come up with different findings.

Second, the classification of independent variables was limited to only five variables (variables proposed in the SERVQUAL model), further studies could consider focusing on the other variables. By extending to other variables, this could bring out interesting findings which could be helpful for policy direction in improving public sector reforms. Notwithstanding the limitations, the research has significance in that it empirically examines the customer's perception on utilization of public services utilization in the Mlambe One Stop Centres. Being the first kind of its own, it is hoped that the current study will help ascertain salient factors that will guide in improvement of the service centres. The study significance far outweighs the limitations and it is suggested that further research should compare perceptions and expectations for each service quality dimension.

3.12 Summary of Chapter

The chapter has described the methodology which was used to conduct the study. This chapter has highlighted the research design, research setup, study population, sample size and procedure, data collection techniques, data processing and method of analysis, data validity and reliability.

Ethical considerations and study limitations were also given. The next chapter is results and discussion of findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a detailed presentation of the data results and discussion of the same. The chapter covers the various themes and sub-themes which are presented and analysed to achieve study objectives.

4.2 Response Rate

A total number of 830 questionnaires were randomly distributed to respondents. However, out of this number, 21 questionnaires were not received back and one (1) was poorly or inappropriately filled and was therefore not used in the analysis. 16 participants were interviewed, summing up to 846 respondents. After data cleansing, 824 participants were considered valid for analysis, indicating a response rate of 97.3%. According to Babbie (2002), any response of 70% and above is adequate for analysis. Thus, the response rate of 97.3 % was deemed adequate for analysis hence used in that regard. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the responses.

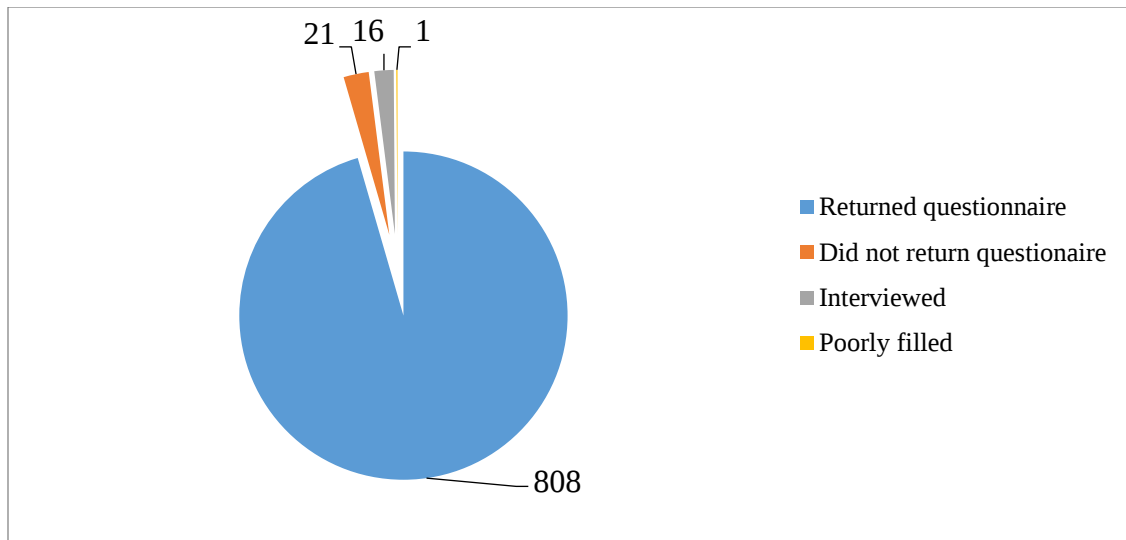


Figure 3: Distribution of total responses

4.3 Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic characteristics factor was not the main concern of this study. However, the demographic feature indicated that majority of male respondents accessed more public services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre than female respondents. With regards to sex, 65% of the respondents were found to be males, with the females constituting 35%. The reason for such a discrepancy could not be established as it was not within the scope of this study.

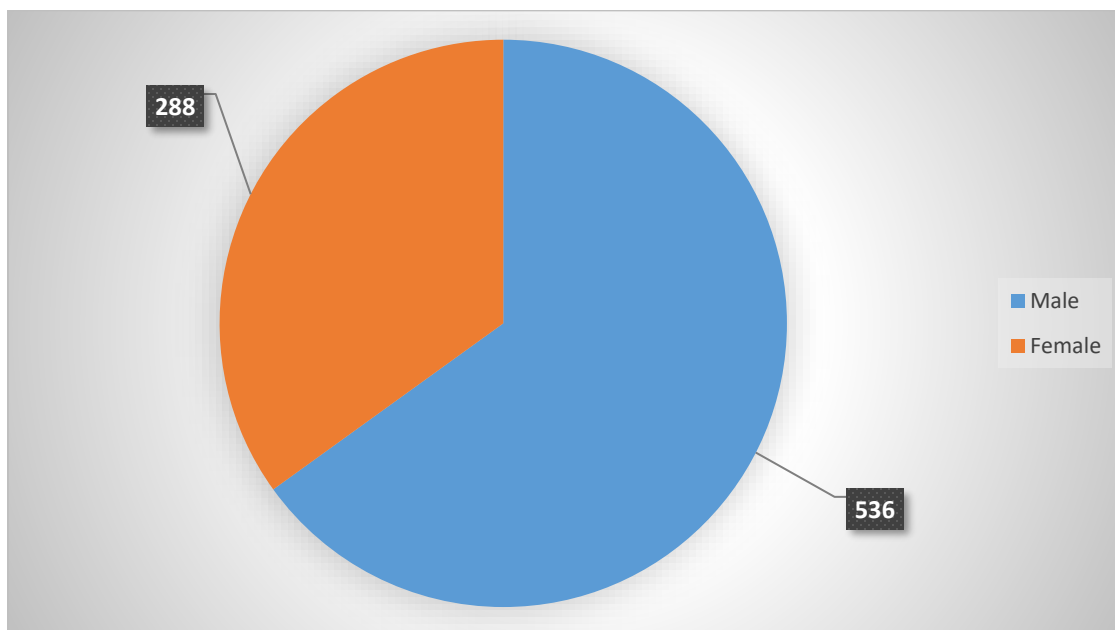


Figure 4: Gender Distribution of Respondents (participants)

4.4 Other demographic characteristics

The study also considered other demographic characteristics of the respondents as follows:

With regards to age, respondents in the age group of 20 to 35 years constituted the majority (which is 56%). The second largest age group is that of 36 years to 60 years, accounting for 35%. These two groups accounted for 91% of the citizens in terms of age. Those in the age group of 61 years and above constituted 9 %. This demographic statistic does not come as a surprise because majority of population in Malawi (by extension in Mangochi) are among the active segments of the population and probably well aware of public services. With regards to their educational background, majority (45%) had not completed primary school, followed by those who finished secondary school (27%) while (15%) had post-

secondary education but not university qualifications. Only 13% had university qualifications.

4.5 Perception of public service quality at Mlambe One Stop Centre

To measure perception of the service quality of public services, mean scores (scores 1 indicates the worst (minimum) score while scores 5 shows best (maximum) satisfaction level) were computed from the five dimensions of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework states that service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perceptions of specific dimensions of quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Table below present the results.

Table 2 Summary of Descriptive Statistics on perception of service quality

Tangibles	Mean score	St. deviations
Mlambe has visually appealing materials associated with the service quality	2.7572	1.63426
Mlambe has modern equipment's in the office that facilitate service quality	3.5583	1.59557
Employees have a net and professional appearances	2.4912	1.39629
After all the office's service is usually reliable	2.8688	1.68915
Reliability	2.4107	1.61012
The employees at the centre provide services as promised	3.2243	1.57331
The employees at the centre are dependable in handling citizens service problem	2.8738	1.37692
Employees at the centre perform service delivery right at the first time	2.4019	1.42979
The employees at the centre provide the required	2.1663	1.52679

Responsiveness	2.7572	1.63426
Employees At the centre are always willing to help	2.7683	1.59557
The employees at the centre are ready to respond to request as required	2.4912	1.39629
The employees at the centre provide prompt services	2.8688	1.68915
Employees are never busy to reply to their customer	2.4107	1.61012
Assurance	2.2243	1.57331
The employees at the centre greet customers positively as they enter the office	2.8738	1.37692
The employees of the office are flexible in solving customers problem	2.4019	1.42979
The employees treat customers equal to others for your request	2.1663	1.52679
The organization is good at keeping privacy secret as needed	2.7572	1.63426
The employees ability is convincing in problems solving	2.7683	1.59557
Empathy	2.4912	1.39629
Employees at the centre well understand customer problems	2.8688	1.68915
Employees acknowledge customers need or frustration when solving problems	2.4107	1.61012
The employees are caring for their emotion while service encounter	2.2243	1.57331
The employees are empathic to issues customer bring to them	2.8738	1.37692

Source from field data, 2020

Note =

- 0-2.5 low mean difference of agreement due to positive questions
- 2.6-3.5 medium mean difference
- 3.6-5.00 – high mean

Table has provided a detailed summary of descriptive statistics on citizen's perception of

service quality using the five dimensions of service quality framework. With regards to the service quality part; Tangibility item, the results show that the centre has visually appealing materials associated with the service quality in medium mean score of 2.757 by standard deviations of 1.63426 varies, the centre has modern equipment that facilitate service quality in medium mean score of 3.5583 by standard deviations of 1.59557, employees have a net and professional appearances low mean of 2.4912 by standard deviations of 1.39629, After all the office's service is usually reliable medium mean difference 2.8688 by standard deviations of 1.68915. The study shows that all Tangibility is above moderate level.

With regards to reliability, results showed that citizens perception of how employees provide service as promised in medium mean score of 3.2243 by standard deviations of 1.57331, The employees of the centre are dependable in handling customers service problem in medium mean score of 2.8738 by standard deviations of 1.37692, employees of the centre perform service delivery right at the first time in low mean score 2.4019 by standard deviations of 1.42979, The employees of the centre provide the required in low mean score of 2.1663 by standard deviations of 1.52679. Analysis of the reliability item reveal that it was at moderate level.

With regard to responsiveness, employees are always willing to help customers medium mean score 2.7683 by standard deviations of 1.59557, the employees of the centre are ready to respond to request as required medium mean score 2.4912 by standard deviations of 1.39629, the employees of the office provide prompt services in medium mean score of 2.8688 by standard deviations of 1.68915, employees are never busy to reply to their

customer medium mean score 2.4107 by standard deviations of 1.61012. Analysis of the responsiveness item reveal that it was below moderate level.

With regards to assurance, results showed that employees greeted positively as they enter at the medium mean score 2.8738 by standard deviations of 1.37692, employees at the centre are flexible in solving problem had a low mean score 2.4019 by standard deviations of 1.42979, employees treat citizens equal to others for request low mean score 2.1663 with standard deviation of 1.52679. The centre is good at keeping citizens' privacy secret as needed in medium mean score of 2.7572 by standard deviations of 1.63426, the employee's ability is convincing in problems solving in medium mean score of 2.7683 by standard deviations of 1.59557.

Regarding empathy, results showed that citizens perception of how employees understood their problem in medium mean score of 2.8688 by standard deviations of 1.68915, employees acknowledged their need or frustration when solving problems in low mean score of 2.4107 by standard deviations of 1.61012, employees cared for their emotion while service encounter in low mean score of 2.2243 by standard deviations of 1.57331, employees showed were empathic to issues they brought to them in medium mean score of 2.8738 by standard deviations of 1.37692.

4.6 Citizen satisfaction with public service quality

Satisfaction is the degree to which citizens perceives that an individual, firm or organization has effectively provided a product or service that meets the customer's needs in the context in which the customer is aware of and / or using the product or service

(Cengiz, 2010). Accordingly, respondents were asked to assess their overall level of satisfaction with the ongoing services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre in terms of showing their levels of agreement and disagreement using 5 category Likert-scale (1 very low to 5 very high). Table below provides the results.

Table 3 Citizen satisfaction with public service quality

Variables	Item	Mean score	St. deviations
Service Quality	How do you rate the centres' service provision; and did the employees meet your needs and expectations?	2.6232	1.44731
Service Delivery	How one can judge the timely performance and the centres' commitment to meet your expectations of service?	2.8649	1.62699
Service Encounter	How do you rate the employees' interaction with you in service provision processes?	3.0646	1.55353
Service Recovery	How do you determine the centre in terms of service improvement and the way the office receives and gives feedback to you?	2.5599	1.65619
Outcome	After all, did you get what you requested from the office?	4.1806	1.43213
Overall Satisfaction	How do you rate the overall satisfaction level you feel to all aspects of the service the centre provides to you?	3.5052	1.35559

Source from field data, 2020

Note =

- 0-2.5 low mean difference of agreement due to positive questions

- 2.6-3.5 medium mean difference
- 3.6-5.00 – high mean difference

With regards to satisfaction, the respondents rated the centre service provision, and meeting their needs and expectations in the mean score of 2.6232 by standard deviations 1.44731, they judged the timely performance and the centre's commitment to meet their expectations of service in mean score of 2.8649 by standard deviations of 1.62699. The rate given by respondents of the employees' interaction with them in service provision processes is in mean score of 3.0646 by standard deviations of 1.55353.

Results show that respondents determined that the centre in terms of service improvement and the way the office receives and gives feedback to them in mean score of 2.5599 by standard deviations of 1.65619, they get what they requested from the office in mean score 3.1806 by standard deviations of 1.43213.

Overall satisfaction level of the citizens in all aspects of the service the centre provides was in medium mean score of 3.5052 by standards deviations of 1.35559. This implies that the overall satisfaction of the customers in service quality is below the expected average mean. This suggest that citizens are not satisfied with some of the services carried out at the centre.

4.7 Correlation between service quality and satisfaction

A Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to determine the degree of association between service quality and satisfaction. It was observed that all public service quality

variables correlated in a positive and significance manner with satisfaction ($p < .001$). The analysis indicated a high correlation between satisfaction and tangibility ($r = .585$), followed by reliability ($r = .526$), empathy ($r = .493$), responsiveness ($r = .484$) and assurance ($r = .364$). The effect size of these correlations can be classified as medium to large based on Cohens (1988) guidelines. These findings suggest that public service quality is strongly associated with satisfaction.

Table 3 Pearson correlations of the Perceived Quality Dimensions and Satisfaction

Variables	Empath y	Tangibilit y	Assuranc e	Reliabilit y	Responsive ness	Customer Satisfacti on
Empathy	1.00					
Tangibility	.440	1.00				
Assurance	.395	.343	1.00			
Reliability	.414	.348	.234	1.00		
Responsive ness	.424	.457	.254	.315	1.00	
Customer Satisfaction	.493	.585	.364	.526	.484	1.00

Source from field data, 2020

4.8 Effect of service quality and satisfaction on public services utilization: logistic regression

The logistic-regression analysis on citizens' utilization of public services is presented in table 3. In the model that is for service quality showed significant results for reliability,

assurance, and empathy but showed insignificant results for tangibility and assurance. This implies that reliability, assurance, and empathy were more strongly associated with higher utilization of public services. On the other hand, thus for satisfaction, depicted significant results in reliability, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness but presented insignificant results with assurance. It also implies that reliability, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness had a strong association with public services utilization.

Table 4 Effect of service quality and satisfaction on public services utilization

Service quality	Model		
	β	SE	OR
Reliability	1.000	1.000	1.000
Tangibility	0.266***	0.083	1.001
Assurance	0.298	0.280	0.742
Empathy	0.440	1.680	3.281
Responsiveness	0.310	0.550	4.362
Satisfaction			
Reliability	0.990**	0.380	2.629
Tangibility	0.325	0.790	0.723
Assurance	1.000	1.000	1.000
Empathy	0.289***	0.081	1.802
Responsiveness	0.301***	0.072	1.710

With regards to the interpretation above, the Odds Ratio (OR) greater than 1 implies there are greater odds of the event happening. For example, an OR of less than 1 for reliability meant the event happening was less. Considering an aggregate score showed that there were more odds ration with less than 1, it simply means that the services were less reliable.

4.6 Discussion of the Results

4.6.1 Response rate and demographic characteristics of respondents

The study has sampled 846 respondents to participate in the study. After data cleansing, 824 participants were considered valid for analysis, indicating a response rate of 97.3%. This response rate conforms with minimum standards for analysis and interpretation of results. With regards to gender, the study indicated that majority of male respondents accessed more public services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre than female respondents. The reason for such a discrepancy could not be established as it was not within the scope of this study. With regards to age, respondents in the age group of 20 to 35 years constituted the majority (which is 56%). The second largest age group is that of 36 years to 60 years, accounting for 35%. These two groups accounted for 91% of the citizens in terms of age. Those in the age group of 61 years and above constituted 9 %. This demographic statistic does not come as a surprise because majority of population in Malawi (by extension in Mangochi) are among the active segments of the population and probably well aware of public services. With regards to their educational background, majority (45%) had not completed primary school, followed by those who finished secondary school (27%) while (15%) had post-secondary education but not university qualifications. Only 13% had university qualifications.

4.6.2 Citizens' perceptions of service quality at the Mlambe One Stop Service centre

The findings of the study reveal that most of the citizens accessing services at the centre perceive the services to be below service quality. The results show that citizens' perception

of the service quality using the dimensions of service were below expectations. The elements against which perceptions were measured are discussed below:

a) Tangibles

Tangibles are the physical facilities that the service encounter takes place in. The results of the study has revealed that citizens were generally impressed with the equipment in the centre. This is not surprising since the centre has been opened recently and most of the equipment are fairly new. Tangibles were the only dimension that registered above moderate level. The results of the study are similar to that of Asubonteng (1996) who pointed out that customer's perception in the form of tangibles serves as a foundation for evaluating service quality because, quality is high when performance exceeds expectation and quality is low when performance does not meet their expectation.

(a) Reliability

This dimension sought to measure the dependability of the services and if it was provided in the right manner at the first time. The citizens felt that services were not provided in reasonable time. Most citizens were concerned about the waiting time suggesting more counters for service to be made available.

b) Responsiveness

Responsiveness measured the ability of the provider to attend to the citizens needs in a prompt manner. The results showed that majority were not satisfied with the centre's responsiveness, pointing out waiting time, suggesting more counters for service. The results reflect the views of Edvardsson (1998) who narrates that customer's total perception of a service is based on their perception of the outcome, the responsiveness and the process;

the outcome is either value added or quality and the process is the role undertaken by the customer.

c) Assurance

The assurance dimension measured the knowledge level of the provider and their courtesy to citizens while providing the service. The results showed that citizens were not confident that the centre provide the service that they needed. They registered their unhappiness with the level of courtesy at the centre. This calls for the centre to train employees on all the services offered at the centre so that they are customer friendly. Training can address the issues of employees not being courteous to the citizens.

d) Empathy

Empathy measured the provider's attention to each citizen during the service encounter. Again, the results show that citizens were concerned that there was no individual attention to the citizens during the service encounter. The results corroborate Van Ryzin (2004) views that what citizens think about the quantity and quality of the public services they receive – rather than objective internal measures is considered the antecedent of satisfaction with public services.

4.6.3 Citizens satisfaction with the quality of service at the Mlambe service

The findings of the study reveal that most of the citizens accessing services at the centre were not satisfied with the quality of services offered at the centre. In analysing the citizens' satisfaction with quality service, the results show that majority of citizens were not satisfied with the services.

The elements against which perceptions were measured are discussed below:

e) Tangibles

Just like in perception, the results revealed that citizens were generally impressed with the equipment in the centre.

f) Reliability

This dimension sought to measure the dependability of the services and if it was provided right the first time. There was general dissatisfaction with services as they believe were not provided in reasonable time. The amount of time it took to access services was a great concern.

g) Responsiveness

Responsiveness measured the ability of the provider to attend to the citizens needs in a prompt manner. Again, results showed that majority were not satisfied with the centre's responsiveness, pointing out waiting time, suggesting more counters for service.

h) Assurance

The assurance dimension measured the knowledge level of the provider and their courtesy to citizens while providing the service. The results showed that citizens were not happy with the level of courtesy and knowledge of the employees at the centre.

i) Empathy

Empathy measured the provider's attention to each citizen during the service encounter. Again, the results show that citizens were concerned that there was no individual attention to the citizens during the service encounter.

4.7 Results of Interviews

The aim of having interviews was to provide further insights into the elements against

which perceptions were measured. A total number of 16 participants were interviewed. Participants were asked the extent to which they were satisfied with the quality of service at the Mlambe service. Nine (9) of the participants indicated that they were not satisfied with quality service. This underscore the fact that most users of the centre are not satisfied with the services rendered at the centre hence the urgent need to find lasting solutions for this.

On the question of perception of services quality at the Mlambe One Stop centre, majority (11) of the interviewees indicated that they perceived the services to be below service quality. This essentially suggest that citizens' perception of the service quality is negative. Among the reasons that were highlighted for such negative perception include prolonged time to get service assistance and staff's delay in assisting them.

In general, the results on satisfaction reflect the views of Sureshchandar et al., (2002) who contended that customer satisfaction should be seen as a multi-dimensional construct just as service quality means it can occur at multi levels in an organisation and that it should be operationalized along the same factors on which service quality is operationalized.

Another significant finding of the study is the correlation analysis between perception and satisfaction. The results have clearly shown that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. This implies that these variables should be continuously emphasized by the centre in their operation because of their significance to utilisation of public services. These results were also consistent with previous studies that affirmed the relationship between

service quality and customer satisfaction (Jalagat, et al, 2017; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Moreover, it also agrees with the findings of the study done by Hamzah et al. (2015) for Malaysia that service quality has a direct and positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

The study has presented findings of assessing citizens perceptions and satisfaction of public services in a public service context in Malawi. The assessment of perceptions investigated in this study has proved to be reliable in the public service setting. From the above findings, it is clear that the service quality gaps were failing to meet the expectations of the citizens. This resulted in low perception of public services at the One Stop Centre. The results of this analysis provide evidence that service provider gaps must be reduced.

Using the SERVQUAL instrument, this study was able to identify important areas for improvement in its service delivery. The findings revealed that citizens have significant differences in opinions in terms of the gaps between their perceptions and expectations of the Mlambe One Stop Centre. The findings are congruent with the studies of Bitner et al. (2004) and Schneider and Bowen (2015) where citizen's perceptions of One Stop Centres were below their expectations.

4.8 Summary of Chapter

The chapter has presented data findings and discussion of the study. The chapter covered themes and sub-themes which have been presented and analysed to achieve study objectives. The next chapter provides conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusion of the study. The conclusions are aligned to the specific study objectives and are in line with the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Public service quality is viewed as essential to national development and international recognition. It is essential to assess public services from the users' viewpoint in order to prevent the occurrence of negative incidents and recover the service when dissatisfaction arises. The purpose of this study was to assess citizen's perception of service quality and satisfaction and its effect on utilisation of public services using the SERVQUAL model at Mlambe One Stop Centre. The reasons to measure service quality was two-fold. First, it aimed to uncover reliable data that can be used to monitor and maintain improved service quality at the centre. Secondly, using the SERVQUAL model enabled management to better understand the various dimensions and how they affect service quality and customer satisfaction. This would help them to identify those that have strengths and weaknesses and thereby make necessary improvements.

5.2 Major conclusions

From the analysis conducted in Chapter 4, the study reveals that the overall perceived service quality is low as expectations exceed perceptions meaning citizens desired more than what was offered to them. The general perception of the service quality at the centre was low across all the five dimension of the conceptual framework. In evaluating the perceptions of the citizens, it is clear that no dimension of service quality brought no favourable or high perception except for tangibility which showed above moderate level. These indicate that there is service quality problem in some activities at the centre. The low perception from citizens on service quality means the centre has to improve performance on all the dimensions of service quality in order to attain favourable perception from citizens.

Similarly, the study has revealed that citizens were not satisfied with service quality at the centre. Citizens had higher expectations than what they actually received from the centre. From the analysis, the overall satisfaction of the citizens in service quality is below the expected average mean. As a result of this gap, it is clear that citizens were not satisfied. This therefore implies that the centre should focus on all dimensions of service quality and make efforts to improve them in order to have better performance that would lead to higher citizen satisfaction. And again, there is need to assess the main factors that are mainly sources of dissatisfaction, as a means of designing focused and effective strategies not only to improve satisfaction, but also to act on dissatisfaction. The results of this study have not only corroborated previous studies such that of Jalagat, et al, (2017) and Parasuraman et al., (1988) on the effect of perception and satisfaction on utilization of public services, it

also revealed significant association between the perceptions people hold of the quality of services and their satisfaction levels.

Based on the analysis of the service quality, the conclusion that can be drawn is that citizens' perception of service quality was low in the dimensions except for Tangibility which was above moderate level. Majority of the citizens perceived reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to be low.

5.3 Policy Direction

The empirical findings provide several service quality implications for the Mlambe One Stop Centre to improve quality attributes that would increase citizen perception and satisfaction. From a strategic standpoint, the centre can determine the relative importance of the five service quality dimensions in predicting citizen satisfaction. By doing so, the centre can determine which service quality dimension(s) they should pay most attention to. Given the findings in the study, it is imperative for the centre to identify the relevant extrinsic and intrinsic cues used by citizens in order to effectively communicate to them the relevant quality signals.

Among others, waiting time to access service was identified in this study as a problem. There is a need for the Mlambe One Stop Centre to consider this on an urgent basis as it affects the service quality provided to the citizens. The centre should attempt to open more service counter to help assist customers. A pro-active communication strategy and public awareness of their mandate, services provided including the service flow, service promises,

complaints resolution procedure, and invest in a feedback system that informs citizens if documents are ready or not or any challenges in processing their requests on account of errors or omissions in filling in the required documentation. strategy can be useful to better inform the citizens about the services offered at the centre. Public awareness and constant communication of the avenues where citizens can get this information will impact the service encounter and increase efficiency both on the provider and the citizens' part. This communication should also include training of the staff on the services, requirements, service flow steps, expected times for feedback or for collection of documents or information sought and to which government agencies to direct citizens in case their service query cannot be handled at the Centre.

Furthermore, the findings show that service quality and satisfaction variables relate significantly with utilization. The affirmation from previous studies conducted on their relationship still holds, with emphasis that as the service quality increased, the levels of customer satisfaction and public services utilization also increased (Flint et al., 2011; Gillani & Awan, 2014; Hall, 2011; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Tsai et al., 2010).

5.4 Concluding remarks

The findings of the study provide implications about citizen perception and satisfaction with the public services in light of SERVQUAL model. This model provides valuable information about the relationship among perceived service quality, satisfaction and utilization of public services. The present study contributes in terms of establishing the relationship among the previous studies which address the different research problem. This

study emphasizes how the model has relevant in overall services as well as specific service areas. From this study it is clear that perceptions have contradictory effect (either positive or negative) on satisfaction and subsequent utilization of public services. It may be because expectations can change over time; different measures are available for expectations.

Additionally, the results of the findings reflect the perceptions of the citizens as espoused in the conceptual framework. As espoused in the conceptual framework, the results provide a better platform to understand what citizens value and how well they are meeting the needs and expectations of customers and clients. It has provided a benchmark based on customer opinions of an excellent organization, on the ranking of key attributes. The use of the five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model to measure the perception of the quality of public services from citizen's perspectives provides a realistic perception gauge of the citizens views towards services satisfaction at Mlambe One Stop Centre.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Stella Kayuni Ngalande, a final year student studying for a Master of Public Administration and Management (MPA) at Chancellor College. Part of my minimum requirement to graduate is to write a publishable dissertation. To fulfil the above, I am currently undertaking a research study titled **“Assessing citizens’ perception of service quality and satisfaction and its effect on public services utilization at Mlambe One Stop Centre”**. Therefore, this questionnaire has been prepared with the aim of collecting that data for the aforementioned purpose. You are kindly requested to spare some few minutes to respond to this questionnaire. This is purely for the purpose as stated above. Be assured that your answers will be strictly confidential. Your contribution will be highly appreciated.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

1. State your gender

☐

Male

☐

Female

2. What is your age

☐

15-25

☐

26-35

☐

36-59

☐

Above 60

3. State your highest level of education

- ☐ Primary level
☐ Secondary level
☐ Diploma or higher
☐ University degree and above

4. Is this your first time to visit Mlambe One Stop Centre?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

5. What service did you need at Mlambe One Stop Centre?

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SECTION B: PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION AT MLAMBE ONE STOP CENTRE

This section has questions related to the citizens' perception on the quality of service and satisfaction at the Mlambe One Stop Centre. The questionnaire assesses the perceptions of citizens on the service quality and satisfaction through the dimensions of service quality: the reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and the physical facilities (tangibles). The questionnaire was developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and has been adapted for the Mlambe One Stop Centre in Malawi.

Perception of public service quality

Note:

Please tick the only number that best fits your opinion and feelings.

NB: 5=very high, 4=high, 3=medium, 2=low, and 1 very low with the respective statements stated below.

Tangibles	1	2	3	4	5
Mlambe has visually appealing materials associated with the service quality					
Mlambe has modern equipment's in the office that facilitate service quality					
Employees have a net and professional appearances					
After all the office's service is usually reliable					
Reliability					
The employees at the centre provide services as promised					
The employees at the centre are dependable in handling citizens service problem					
Employees at the centre perform service delivery right at the first time					
The employees at the centre provide the required					
Responsiveness					
Employees At the centre are always willing to help					
The employees at the centre are ready to respond to request as required					
The employees at the centre provide prompt services					
Employees are never busy to reply to their customer					
Assurance					
The employees at the centre greet customers positively as they enter the office					
The employees of the office are flexible in solving customers problem					
The employees treat customers equal to others for your request					
The organization is good at keeping privacy secret as needed					
The employees ability is convincing in problems solving					
Empathy					
Employees at the centre well understand customer problems					
Employees acknowledge customers need or frustration when solving problems					
The employees are caring for their emotion while service encounter					
The employees are empathic to issues customer bring to them					

Satisfaction with public service quality

Note:

Please tick the only number that best fits your opinion and feelings.

NB: 5=very high, 4=high, 3=medium, 2=low, and 1 very low with the respective statements stated below.

Tangibles	1	2	3	4	5
Mlambe has visually appealing materials associated with the service quality					
Mlambe has modern equipment's in the office that facilitate service quality					
Employees have a net and professional appearances					
After all the office's service is usually reliable					
Reliability					
The employees at the centre provide services as promised					
The employees at the centre are dependable in handling citizens service problem					
Employees at the centre perform service delivery right at the first time					
The employees at the centre provide the required					
Responsiveness					
Employees At the centre are always willing to help					
The employees at the centre are ready to respond to request as required					
The employees at the centre provide prompt services					
Employees are never busy to reply to their customer					
Assurance					
The employees at the centre greet customers positively as they enter the office					
The employees of the office are flexible in solving customers problem					
The employees treat customers equal to others for your request					
The organization is good at keeping privacy secret as needed					
The employees ability is convincing in problems solving					
Empathy					
Employees at the centre well understand customer problems					

Employees acknowledge customers need or frustration when solving problems					
The employees are caring for their emotion while service encounter					
The employees are empathic to issues customer bring to them					

SECTION C: HOW SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION AFFECTED PUBLIC SERVICES UTILISATION

This section has questions related to the extent to which citizens' perception of service quality and satisfaction affected their decision to utilize public services at the Mlambe One Stop Centre.

6. To what extent did service quality affect your decision to utilize public services at the Mlambe One Service Centre?

☐ Very high
☐ High
☐ Medium
☐ Low
☐ Very low

7. To what extent did satisfaction with service quality affect your decision to utilize public services at the Mlambe One Service Centre?

☐ Very high
☐ High
☐ Medium
☐ Low
☐ Very low

8. Based on what you have heard about Mlambe One Stop Centre (on the news, from their website, from friends etc) was the service experience you received better or worse than your expectations

☐ Better than I expected
☐ Worse than I expected

9. In your opinion what are the areas that the Mlambe One Stop Centre can improve on?

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