



ASSESSING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION LEVELS IN THE SMEs AUTOMOBILE VEHICLE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN CAPE COAST – GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is key to any service delivery industry. Providing quality service is a means to satisfying and retaining customers who seek the services of the automobile maintenance and repair service garage centres. Most car owners in Ghana seek the services of the Small and Medium –Sized Enterprises (SMEs) automobile maintenance and repair service garages known locally as “wayside fitting workshops” for a number of reasons. This paper assesses the customer satisfaction level of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and service delivery in Ghana. In the study, various automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages called the wayside fitting shops were visited and one hundred and twenty questionnaires were administered to their customers. Analyses were made on the tables and graphs generated using SPSS to measure the response of the respondents on customer satisfaction levels. The study pays specific attention to the SMEs Auto Repair garages in Cape Coast. Quantitative techniques were used in this study. The study shows that wide quality service gaps exist between the expectation of the customer and the mechanics operating the garage. Communication gaps, tools and equipment, lack of service standard and working procedures and the quality of service were the quality service gaps that have influenced customer satisfaction levels. It is recommended that dealership centres should endeavour to work in partnership with these wayside garages, offer training support, help them to come out with service standards and work procedures.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction level, Automobile, Vehicle, Service Delivery, SMEs Auto Repair Garages.*

INTRODUCTION

After-sales services constitute an important source of profit to most automobile dealership companies (Wise and Baumgartner, 1999). Quality service makes the difference between a firm’s overall success and failure. Bundschuh and Dezvane (2003) asserted that profit generated by after-sales services is often higher than the one obtained with car sales. Besides being a long-term potential revenue source, the after-sales service constitutes a means to uncover customer needs, influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Gallagher et al., 2005). Accordingly Zeinab et al., (2014) assert that many successful businesses use after-sales service strategies to consolidate sales, build customer relationships and grow their profits. Their study indicates that providing after-sales service keeps your customers coming back to you and encourages them to refer your business to others.



The quality of service and repair works has become even more important in this time of economic recovery through strengthening customer relationships, attracting lost customers and renewing their confidence in the firm by means of effective service recovery strategies (Lele, 1997). The environment for most of the automobile dealerships is very challenging these days under the massive global market competition. Business enterprises continually develop and provide need-satisfying solutions to customers for profit to ensure their economic survival and growth (Gray 2007). The quality of after-sales service provided by automobile dealerships has a major influence on customer satisfaction. With the aim of sustaining long term relationships with their customers, many businesses have changed their strategic focus to emphasize customer retention (Peng and Wang, 2006). Preserving their long term customer relationships requires that these businesses both measure and appropriately adjust the quality of their service. A customer follow-up may avoid complaints about: delay in completing repair works, and poor quality of work and increase number of returned jobs. The consequences of not satisfying customers in the competitive automobile environment can be severe.

According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), dissatisfied customers can decide to: discontinue purchasing the goods or service; complain to the company or to a third party and perhaps return the product, or engage in negative word-of-mouth communication. It is against this background that customer satisfaction level of service quality delivery level would be crucial to improving service delivery in the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service industry. Larry and Haynes (1987) have asserted that there are a number of techniques involved in vehicle maintenance and repair and that application of these techniques will enable the mechanic to be more efficient, better organised and capable of performing the various tasks properly which will ensure that the repair job is thorough and complete. The need to fulfil customers' satisfaction depends significantly on a service industry whose service conforms with reliability to customers' needs.

This paper aims at assessing the level of customer satisfaction of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages in Ghana. Specifically, the study seeks to find out the level of customer satisfaction in terms of quality service delivery among the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages on the expectations of their customers using the GAP model dimensions. Again, it hopes to find out about the important factors that influence customers of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages to seek or patronise their services. In an attempt to critically look at customer satisfaction the following questions needs answers. These include 'how do the customers of SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages see their service delivery'? Using the GAP model dimensions, 'what are the quality gaps existing between the expectations of the customers of SMEs automobile service garages and their management or mechanics'. Again 'What are the important factors that influence customers of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages to seek or patronise their services'?

In the automobile maintenance and repair service garage centre, the quality of service delivery is a means to convey trust and to promote the image of the service garage or workshop. Most car owners in Ghana seek the services of the SMEs automobile maintenance and repair service



garages known locally as ‘wayside fitting workshops’ for a number of reasons. Probably, it could be due to proximity reasons, low maintenance cost or unavailability of dealership repair service centre close to their vicinity. A study conducted by Akpakpavi (2014) revealed that a large number of the auto-mechanics in the garages in the country considerably lack the ability to inspect and repair modern automobile vehicles due to low educational and technical backgrounds. Similarly, Akpakpavi’s research indicates the fact that the mechanics of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages lack the ability to identify and use modern diagnostic equipments including manufacturers’ manuals, computers and internet which have characterized modern vehicle repairs in their repair practices. According to Akpakpavi (2014) these garages also lack adequate tools, equipments and other logistical supports. If these are the challenges facing the garage owners, then why do car owners seek for their services? What is the level of customer satisfaction in terms of quality service? These are questions that need answers.

Due to the fast moving technology in the automobile vehicle manufacturing industry, it is clear that the challenges confronting those who seek the services of these local garages are enormous. Looking at the fact that SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages play an important economic role in providing vehicle maintenances services to numerous car owners, a research which aims at assessing the customer satisfaction level of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and service delivery in Ghana is necessary. This study is necessary in order to encourage the local automobile repair industry to change their practice towards the expectations of their customers. This will also instil some confidence in those who will in one way or the other like to patronise or seek the services of the local auto repair industry with their latest automobile model.

Understanding and Knowing the Customer

Horovitz, (1990) revealed that customers dissatisfied with a service will divulge their experience to more than three people. This means making the effort to understand the customer's needs is very important. This includes learning the customer's specific requirements, providing individualised attention and recognising the regular customer. Parasuraman et al (1985) tools to measure service quality are critical application towards understanding and knowing the customer. The dimensions of competence, courtesy, communication, credibility and security formed part of the assurance dimension, access, and understanding and knowing the customer dimensions, formed part of the empathy dimension (Parasuraman, et al 1985).

According to Kotler (2000) service quality perceptions judged by customers will create a competitive advantage. In the motor vehicle service industry the kind of service levels can be a differentiating factor for competition. Kotler’s report indicates that favourable service quality perceptions will also impact on profitability as customers are more satisfied with the service offered. In the light of this assertion, it can be said that the SMEs of the automobile maintenance service industry can offer services that will appeal to the perception of its customers to gain competitive advantage. On the basis of providing quality service, the necessary facilities and equipment as well as the human resource are essential tools for providing the required services.



Customer Assessment of Service Quality

Zeithaml et al., (1990) through their studies propose that service quality is the discrepancy between customer's expectations and perceptions, that word of mouth, personal needs, experience and external communications influence customer expectations and that customers use the ten afore-mentioned dimensions to assess service quality. This theory affirms that service quality is a judgment that only a customer can make. Parasuraman et al.,(1990). Customers can contribute to the quality, satisfaction and value of the service delivery in that they contribute to their own satisfaction experience (Bitner et al., 1997). The acceptance of the quality of service is also improved as chances are good that the customer's expectations are fulfilled (Bitner et al., 1997). This study evaluates from the perspective of the customers of the SMEs of the automobile repair industry what they perceive about service quality.

Five Gaps Model of Service Quality

The Gaps Model is a conceptual model, especially developed to qualitatively measure service quality. It was developed by Parasuraman et al. in 1985 based on results from empirical research. The Gaps Model identifies five organisational gaps within the process of service design and delivery that cause deficits in quality, leading to unsatisfied customers (Parasuraman et al. (1985). As illustrated in Figure 1, the Gaps Model locates and maps five generic gaps that apply regardless of the type of service.

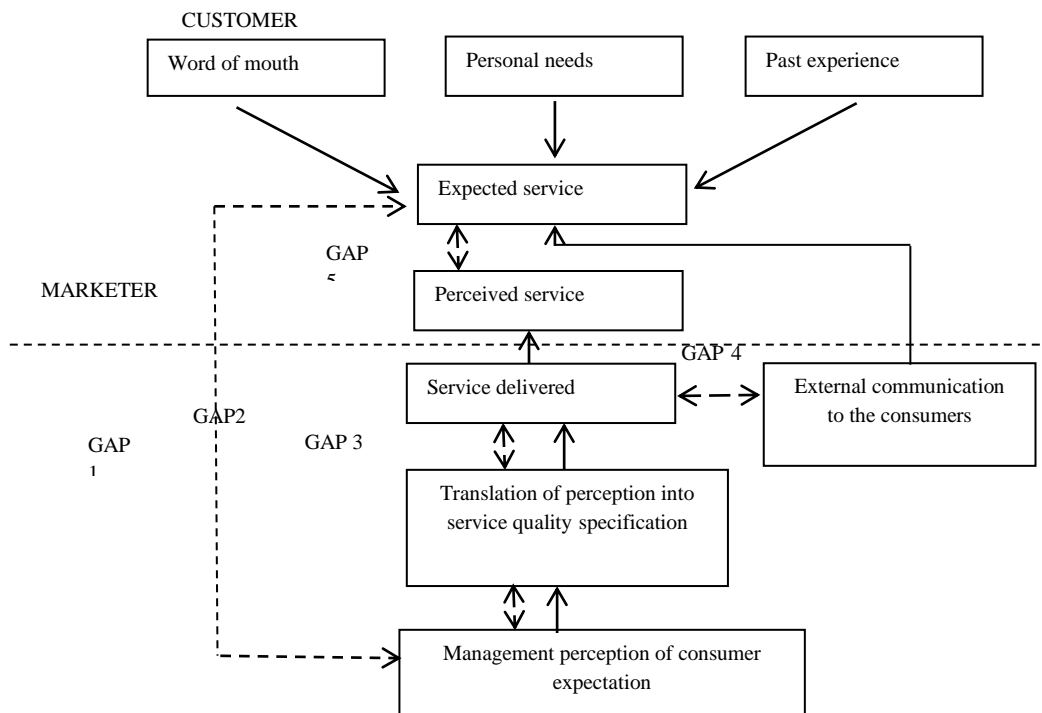


Figure 1: Parasuraman et al (1985) Five Gap Model of Service Quality



Whereas Gap 1 indicates the difference between the customer's actual expectations and that of management, Gap 2 indicates the difference between management perceptions of customer expectations and the firm's stated service standard. Again Gap 3 looks at the difference between the service delivered and the requirements stated in the firms' service standards. This gap occurs when the firm is not able to meet the service quality as set out in their standards. In Gap 4, the difference between the firm's stated service standard and the firm's external communication is indicated. Gap 5 is the difference between the expectations of the customer regarding the service delivered and the actual service experience. The key to ensuring good customer service is being able to meet or exceed the expectations of the customer. Parasuraman et al., (1985) argued that perceived service quality is the degree and direction of discrepancy between Customers' perceived expectations. Brown and Bond (1995) indicate that the GAP model is one of the best received and most heuristically valuable contribution service literatures. The first four gaps are identified as functions of the way in which service is delivered, whereas GAP 5 pertains to the customer and as such is considered to be the true measure of service quality. (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The GAP 5 is the GAP that SERVQUAL instrument influences.

SMEs Automobile Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Service Industry in Ghana

The local automobile service workshops are among the small scale industries that play a pivotal role in the economy of Ghana (Amofo 2012). Tetteh (2015) indicates that, figures from the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority suggest that between 2012 and 2014 over 385,000 vehicles were imported into the country. This means that a good number of service garages are also needed to provide maintenance services to these cars in support of the few dealership garages in the country. Baidoo and Odum-Awuakye (2015) assert that the SMEs automobile workshop, serve as an alternative source of providing after sales vehicle maintenance and servicing to the over 385,000 vehicles imported into the country each year in addition to the number of automobile vehicles already in the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of the study involved eliciting the views of respondents regarding using a questionnaire. The target population of the study were the customers of SMEs auto repair garages (wayside fitting workshops) within the Cape Coast metropolis. A population of about sixty (60) SMEs auto repair garages in Cape Coast metropolis were counted for the study. The total sample size selected for the research was based on the total population size of members considered and precision value of $\pm 10\%$. Yamene's (1967) minimum sample size equation was used to determine the sample size. A sampling frame or list was made for all the sixty (60) fitting shops in Cape Coast metropolis and forty (40) was randomly selected through the lottery method technique. Non-probability sampling methods of purposive sampling and accidental sampling were used to collect data from respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select the customer respondents.

A questionnaire was administered to three customers or persons who seek the services of each of the selected automobile fitting shops, thus, covering one hundred and twenty (120) customers in



all. Out of the one hundred and twenty questionnaires administered one hundred and twelve (112) representing 93.3% were received. Data on their socio-demographics, characteristics of their automobile fitting shops, and their assessment of delivery of service to customers were collected. The customers of the SMEs of the automobile service industry were used for the study because they serve as the key consumers when it comes to quality service delivery of these service garages. The reason is that since they seek for the services of these garages, they may be in a position to tell whether or not their service expectations were met in terms of service quality delivery. Another reason is that, the perception and judgment of the customers of the SMEs of the automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages about quality service would be relevant to the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Customers on SMEs Automobile Maintenance Repair Garages

The perceptions of quality service among customers of the of small scale automobile industry within the Cape Coast Metropolis are evaluated through various factors. This section of the paper presents customer perception of the service quality provided by these small scale automobile shops. Some of the main issues investigated include communication between staffs and customer, quality of work done, equipment and human resource

Communication between Mechanics and Customers

Understanding and meeting customer needs by staff of automobile industry require communication between both parties before any action is taken. Figure 2 represents the perception of customers regarding initial communication. The staff or mechanics of automobile shops listen to their customers to enable them take appropriate actions toward solving customers' problems. Investigation indicates that before action is taken, an 11% of customers are excellently listened to while 13% of customers are poorly listened to. However, 17%, 38%, 21% and 13% of customers perceive that staff of the mechanical workshops listen to customers and this is projected to be good, very good and fair. After the customers have narrated their problems to the staff of the automobile shops, these customers expressed their level of satisfaction regarding explanation action to be taken and cost estimate. 6% and 8% of customer are highly satisfied with explanation to work to be done and cost estimate respectively. 17% and 12% of customers perceive explanation to work to be done and cost estimate, respectively to be poor while 29% and 36% say explanation to work to be done and cost estimate, respectively to be good.

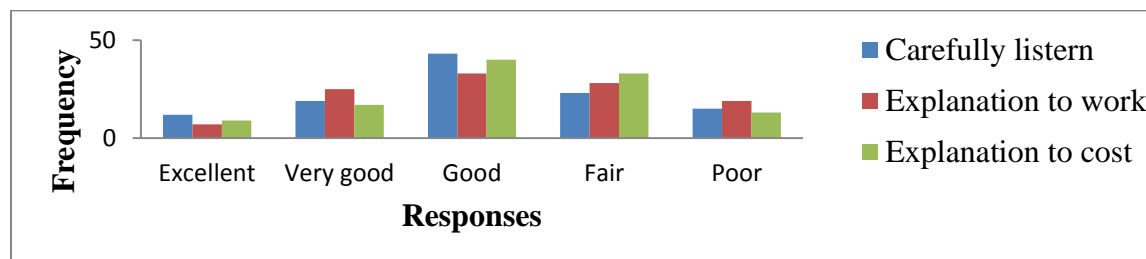


Fig 2: Explanation of Works, Cost Estimate and Whether the Staffs Listen to Customers



Time the Vehicle Stayed in the Workshop, Work Explanation and Work Smoothness

From figure 3, staff of SMEs in automobile industries offered explanation to cost charge to 85% of customers while 15% of customers had no explanation for cost charged. However, the staff who checked on status of vehicle form 33% of customers after maintenance is provided and 67% did not have any follow up after servicing their vehicle.

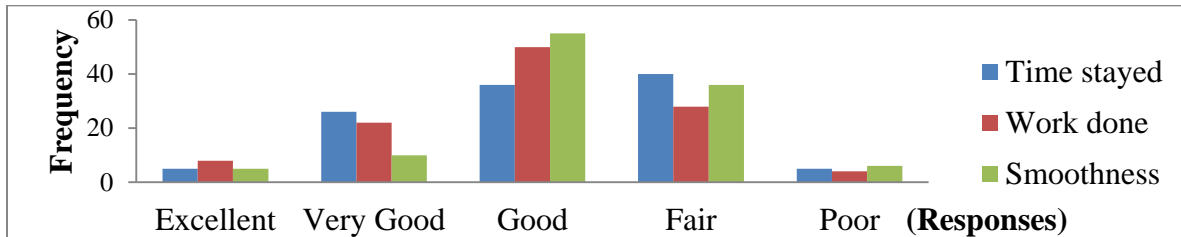


Figure 3: Time the Vehicle Stayed in the Workshop, Work Explanation and Work Smoothness

Customers' Perception of Service Quality

The perceptions of customers about the quality of services provided by the SMEs of the automobile industry are indicated on figures 4 and 5. Figure 4 shows the perception of customers regarding quality of maintenance performed by the garages and the general customer satisfaction level about the quality services provided by the garages. According to figure 4, 10% customers perceive quality of maintenance performed on their vehicle to be excellent while 17%, 43%, 25% and 5% of customers perceive quality of maintenance performed to be very good, good, fair and poor respectively. While figure 5 indicates service quality delivery in terms of the mechanic offering explanation to the cost charged, delivering time and the follow up-contacts.



Figure 4: Customers Perception on Quality of Maintenance Performed

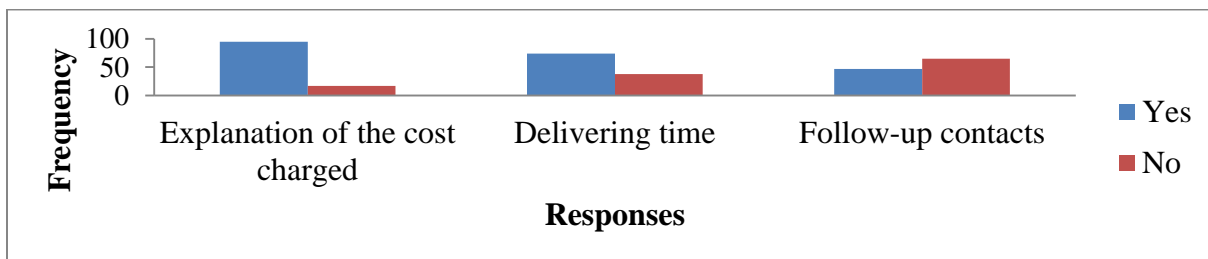


Figure 5: Explanation to the cost charged, delivering time and the follow up contacts



Reasons Why Customers Seek the Services of the SMEs Auto Workshops

Table 1 indicates that about 86% visit the local automobile shop because they are easily accessible. About 70% send their car to these shops because of the possibility to negotiate for service charge. Also 47% of respondents go to the local automobile shops because they do not have any alternative while 23% service their cars at these shops due to family relationship.

Table 1: Why the customers send their car to local Automobile shop

Decision of servicing a car at local Automobile shop?	Agree	None Responsive
Easily accessible	96	16
Can negotiate the service charged	78	34
Have no choice but SMS	53	59
No dealership center	44	68
Family member's shop	26	86
Only available service	29	83
A good service is assured	20	92
Good place to relax	20	92

Source: (Field work 2016)

Whether or Not the Customer is Satisfied with the Service Garage

One of the main objectives of the study is to determine or find out about the satisfaction level of customers or car owners who seek the services of the SMEs or local automobile repair service garages. Table 2 indicates the level of satisfaction as perceived by respective customers on the services of their various workshops. In general a reflection of 2.8 mean score indicates the level of customers' satisfaction with the service garage.

Table 2: The distribution of the customers' satisfaction with the service garage

Item	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	Total	Mean
customers' satisfaction with the service garage	15 (75)	19(76)	31(93)	28(56)	19(19)	319	2.8

Source: (Field work 2016)

Garage Recommendation and Whether Customers Would Return to the Service Center

The consequences of not satisfying customers in the competitive automobile environment can be severe. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), dissatisfied customers can decide to; discontinue purchasing the goods or service; complain to the company or to a third party and perhaps return the product, or engage in negative word-of-mouth communication. Table 3 indicates customers' response as to whether per their level of satisfaction to their respective



vehicle repair service garages they would return to the garage and even go ahead to recommend the centre to prospective customers. Questions like ‘Definitely would’, ‘Probably would’, ‘Might/Might not’, ‘Probably would not’ and ‘Definitely would not’ were posted on the questionnaire to answer whether or not customers would recommend or return to their respective service garages. While 46 customers representing 41% indicated they would definitely recommend their service garage to respective customer’s 49 customers representing 44% indicate they might/might not return to their service garage for one reason or the other.

Table 3: Recommendation of service center and the whether the customers would return to the service center

Recommend service center	Freq.	%	Return to service center	Freq.	%
Definitely would	46	41	Definitely would	22	19
Probably would	30	27	Probably would	30	27
Might/Might not	29	26	Might/Might not	49	44
Probably would not	5	4	Probably would not	9	8
Definitely would not	2	2	Definitely would not	2	2
Total	112	100		112	100

Source: (Field work 2016)

Customers Satisfaction of Tool, Equipment and Human Resource Capacity

Figure 6 shows the satisfaction level of customers with regard to tools and equipment used by their respective vehicle maintenance and repair service garage. It also shows the level of satisfaction of human resource capacity and the technical competence of their respective mechanics. While majority of respondent representing 65% reported to be satisfied with the human resource and the technical abilities of their mechanics, 64% said they were not satisfied when it comes to requisite tools and equipment.

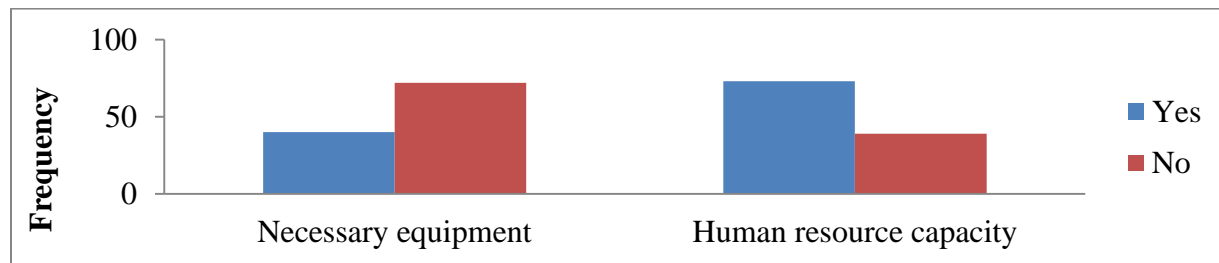


Figure 6: Distribution of the Equipment and the Human Resource Capacity

Customers level of Satisfaction of Equipments & Facilities and Quality Service

A research by Baidoo and Odum-Awuakye (2015) on the topic *Influence of Service Quality Delivery in the SMEs of the Motor Vehicle Repair Service Industry in Ghana* established the fact that the quality of service rendered by the SME’s of Automobile Service Garages is independent on the number of modern equipment owned by the service garage. They further stated that this is



possible looking at the environment in which the research was conducted. It is important to note that these service providers may improvise tools or equipment useful for achieving results. Akpakpavi (2014) compliments the findings of Baidoo et al and revealed that these garages lack adequate tools, equipments and other logistical supports. Figure 7 shows response of customers to their level of satisfaction of equipment and facilities owned by their respective garages and the level of service quality they received using these equipments. A number of respondents indicated that though they were not satisfied with the equipment used by their respective garages in terms of quality service, they are much satisfied. This could probably be due to the fact that customers were measuring their level of quality satisfaction and not looking at the equipment being used.

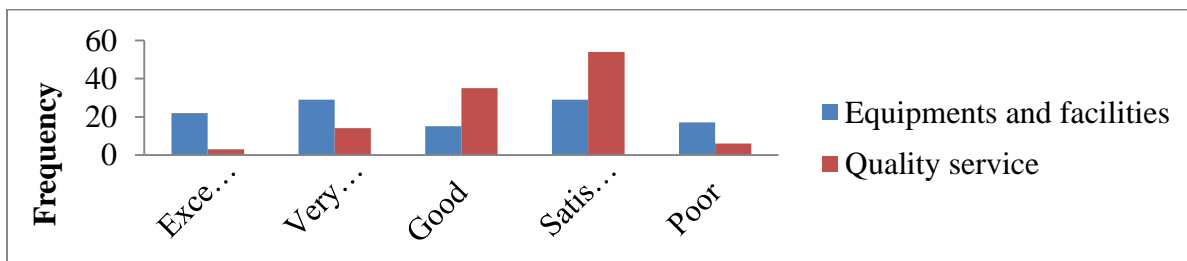


Figure 7: *Equipment's & Facilities and Quality Service*

Gap Model Analysis of Customer Expectation and Expectation of Management of SMEs Automobile Vehicle Maintenance and Repairs Service

The objectives of the study are to find out how the customers of SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages see their service delivery. Again it was to use the GAP model dimensions to assess the actual expectations of the customers who seek or patronises the services of SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages and management expectation.

Gap 1: This looks at the difference between the customer's actual expectations and that of garage mechanics or management in terms of tools, equipment and quality service. The study revealed a gap between tools, equipment's and service quality. The customer's actual expectation of quality service satisfaction was not met, due to the fact that the use of equipment and tools were lacking in respective garages used for the study. In terms of customer expectations tools and equipment were the major gap to the customer as indicated in figure 7, while to the manager or the mechanic, tools and equipment were not the issue.

Gap 2: The dimension looked at the difference between Management or mechanics' perceptions of customer expectations and what the mechanics can offer by way of how they provide their services. The study revealed a communication gap between customers of the SMEs repair service garages. Figure 2 and figure 5 show the level of communication that exists between customers of SMEs repair service garages and Management. There were inconsistencies in the result on the explanation of works, cost estimate, delivery time and the follow-up contacts and whether the staff listen to customers due to lack of working standards. Communication gaps exist between customer expectation and Management or mechanics expectation due to lack of service standard and procedures.



Gap 3: This establishes the difference between the actual service delivered by the SMEs service garages and the expected service requirements by stated dealership repair service garages. As stated in gap two, the study revealed lack of service standard and standard procedures set in the SMEs auto repair service garages. Figure 4 indicates quality of maintenance performed by the garages and the general customer satisfaction level about the quality of services provided by the garages. A gap of service quality exists in the SMEs auto repair service garages due to lack of set standards.

Gap 4: This gap identifies the difference between the SMEs automobile repair service garages service practices and the garages external communication. Individual skills dictate work standard or practices leaving a gap between the service garage and external environments. Again there was no linkage between the wayside mechanic and the dealership service centre mechanic. A gap exists as a result of improvise service standards being communicated to the customer of the SMEs auto repair service garages and the standard and work procedures of the dealership service centres.

Gap 5: The gap establishes difference in SMEs auto repair service garages customer expectation regarding the service delivered and the actual service experience. The study revealed that when it comes to auto repair service industry, customers, irrespective of where or who provide the service, expect that their expectations were met. The result (table 3,) on the question of whether customers would or probably recommended their respective repair garages to a prospective customers as indicated most customers' expectations were not being met. Poor customer service exists in SMEs auto repair service garages due to lack of communication, tools, equipment, among others as well standard garage service procedure. Again, mechanisms to ensure standard compliance level were the keys needed to meet the expectations of the customer. The end result is the service quality gap created above customer expectations.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to find out the level of customer satisfaction, in terms of quality service delivery among the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages on the expectations of their customers using the GAP model dimensions. Again, it was to find out about the important factors that influence customers of the SMEs automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages to seek or patronise their services. The study concludes that a customer's satisfaction in terms of quality service was low due to wide communication gap between the customer and SMEs auto repair garage management or mechanics. A gap exists between the tools and equipment used and the quality of service these SMEs auto repair garages provide. Lack of service standard and standard procedures exist in the SMEs auto repair service garages leading to poor customer satisfaction. When it comes to auto repair service industry, customers, irrespective of where or who, provide the service except that their expectations were met. Most car owners seek the services of the SMEs automobile maintenance repair service garages ('wayside fitting shop') because they are easily accessible in terms of proximity and the possibility to negotiate for service charge.



Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, it is recommended that all stakeholders including Government and individuals should focus on assisting the automobile vehicle maintenance and repair service garages with the needed support in terms of training and equipment to meet the needs of their customers. Dealership centres should endeavour to work in partnership with these wayside shops to offer training support to safeguard the image of their brand name. Again, it is recommended that those who seek the services of these garages should continue to do so since the study did not reveal a hopeless situation. There are some acceptable levels of customer satisfaction in terms of service quality and that prospective customers with no options are encouraged to seek the services of these garages. If possible, the dealership service centres should assist SMEs repair garages to come out with good services and repair standards.

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