ASSESSMENT OF THE EXPECTED AND PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

IN GROUPAGE CARGO SHIPPING MANAGEMENT IN THE PRATUNAM

AREA OF BANGKOK, THAILAND.

BY

MR. AKILE, BERTRAND IFEANYI

ID. NUMBER: 5617190031

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APPROVED BY ADVISORS ON……………………………………………………………………

1. **………………………………………………………………… DR. VIJIT SUPINIT (ADVISOR)**
   (Dean Graduate School of Business, Siam University, Bangkok, Thailand)
   Date ………………/………………………/…………………..

2. **…………………………………………………………ASSOCIATE PROF. PACAPOL ANURIT**
   (ADVISOR)
   Date………………../……………………/…………………………..

MBA Department
Siam University, Bangkok

Advisor Signature

Date

ABSTRACT.

The aim of this study is to focus on the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality and to determine the discrepancy in the service gap, and suggest ways to improve service quality in the three selected groupage cargo service providers in the Pratunam area of Bangkok, Thailand. Qualitative research method is employed because the researcher wants to understand how customers perceive the service quality of the groupagecargo shipping management in a natural setting or real life business situations. Therefore, the researcher in an attempt to observe the reactions of both the customers and the staff of "ANO" companies in a natural environment does not need to control certain behavioural events but would rather prefer to understand how human beings interpret their experiences and the world around them in their own words, and how they give meaning to their experiences regarding their expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo shipping management in a natural setting (Merriam, 2009).This is based on in-depth interviews conducted with the participants from both the "ANO" companies and their customers with reference to service quality. The companies used in this study as case study were tagged "ANO" in order to honour the confidentiality agreement, the researcher had with the management of those companies. The companies were selected based on the number of their customers and their market share. The researcher tends to understand the difference in the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality as well as the discrepancy in the service gaps in the groupage cargo shipping service.

    Hence, in-depth interview was conducted using semi-structured questionnaires as a research instrument to gather the necessary information from the interviewees in order to measure the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, as well as determine the discrepancy in the gaps. A total of 30 participants were used in the interview and data collected were content analyzed. Out of the 30 participants, three Managing Directors/CEO, three senior managers, and three middle executives (operational managers); six front desk employees and 15 focus group members, five members from each company were interviewed.

The result of the findings showed that there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. **Zeithaml&Bitner (1996) state that "customers' expectations are beliefs about service delivery, that functions as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. According to Oliver (1981) expectations are viewed as desires and wants of customers in the service quality literature that is, what they feel a service provider 'should offer' rather than 'would offer.'**The result established that different customers have different expectations.This finding is supported by Reisig and Chandek (2001) which state that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of a product or service, past experiences and needs. These expectations are always influenced by the way and manner in which the service is performed and delivered and advertising on the part of service provider andthecustomers' past experiences, the word of mouth (WOM) which could be either positive or negative, and above all the personal needs of the individual

customer. **This is also in line with Voss et al. (1998) who state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising.**

Again, the result of the findings also revealed that there is a difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality in the groupage cargo shipping service. Here, the customers' expectations were higher than their perceptions; hence customers' expectations were given priority. The result of this finding is supported by Kushwa and Bhargav (2014). The result of their findings revealed that there was statistically significant difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of mobile phone services with the arithmetic mean of expectations being 6.4413 and perceptions 5.8393.The result of this study indicated that the service quality of the groupage cargo service providers in the Pratunam area of Bangkok is low. This could be attributed to the fact that groupage cargo service providers rather than embracing programs that will shore up the service quality, they prefer to engage in price wars by way of discounts instead of improving on the services rendered to their customers. However, having knowledge of these findings and analyses will help managers especially in service oriented companies meet the challenges of improving the service quality in the day to day running of their businesses.

Keywords: Service quality, Customers' expectations, Customers' perceptions, Discrepancy in the gap, Groupage cargo shipping.

Akile, Bertrand Ifeanyi

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study:

The study seeks to assess the expected and perceived service quality in some selected small groupage cargo shipping management companies in the pratunam area in Bangkok, Thailand. The global economy depends on shipping which accounts for about 85 per cent of the world demand for transport however; the world growth is expected to change with time, which will in turn lead to change in seaborne trade (Svensen, DNV Maritime Oil and Gas report shipping 2020, p.10). In 1983, Thailand's preeminent port Bangkok handled about 4,000 foreign vessels and 24 million tons of cargo, including coastal cargo -The Library of Congress Country Studies; CIA Fact book (Photius, 1987).

According to the Thai International Freight Forwarders Association, Thailand's shipping capacity was running at 60 to 70 per cent in 2009, and the Association's forecast showed that the overall port traffic will be declining by 25 per cent in the first quarter and this was expected to continue because of the world economic downturn that started in 2008 (Lowe, 2009). Shipping industry is facing hard time as a result of overcapacity of ships in the world fleet coupled with a significant reduction in the global economic growth; hence, container volumes will continue to decline as a result of the world economic meltdown (Svensen, DNV Maritime Oil and Gas report shipping 2020; Lowe, 2009). However, government of Thailand approved the establishment of Laem Chan Bang deep sea port in Chon Buri province to supplement Bangkok, khlong Toei port in solving the problems of increased traffic (port congestion) with an industrial estate built close to the port to take care of the export oriented industries such as electronics and agro-based like food processing and rubber products and another port Mapthaphut under the same program was constructed to serve the needs of petrochemical, fertilizer and soda wash industries (Photius, 1987). And other ports of significant importance in international trade which are located in the southeastern part of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand include Si Racha and Sattahip However, Laem Chan bang deep sea port witnessed drop in traffic volume by 27 per cent in January and 20 per cent in December 2009, and this led to the ports negative growth in its 18-year history (Lowe, 2009). According to the American Association of Port Authorities, Laem Chan Bang is the world's 21st busiest container port by volume and has the highest gross regional product outside of Bangkok and its vicinity, at about 1.3 trillion baht ($56 billion) a year (American Association of Port Authorities; National Economic and Social Development Board; Lowe, 2009). Apart from the tough economic conditions faced by shipping industry, other challenges abound. For example the shipping industry and maritime industry face other challenges such as (1) security measures at the national level (2) effect of high cost (3) stiff competition (4) the expansion of trade agreement at all levels (5) regulatory and procedural matters particular to the industry (6) commercial trends and (7) legal developments in the industry (Mckenzie).

However, the shipping industry to a large extent creates opportunities for high profit margin and/or reasonable losses as a result of the market conditions (Svensen, DVN Maritime Oil and

Gas report shipping, 2020, p.10). Hence, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Thailand's premier shipyard company, Unithai and America's Austal for cooperation and collaboration in sharing expertise and provision of high quality ship repair services for the US-owned commercial and defense vessels like the LCSs and JHSVs to support US defense (US Navy) operating in the Asia-Pacific region near Thailand (Thai-marine).

Andrew Bellamy, stated thus "We recognize that Unithai shipyard is one of the largest integrated ship repair facilities in Thailand, with a world-class reputation based on its commitment to high standards covering health, safety and the environment, timely delivery, superior customer service and innovative solutions." However, with the world economy recovering slowly, there are signs of shipping industry picking up as Toyota, Honda Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Co. export more cars. The three companies agreed to expend $850 million to boost shipping capacity in Thailand since all of them use Thailand as an export base for other developing countries unlike in China where they produce purposely for domestic consumption (Thai-marine). Because of the overall annual drop of 10 per cent to 750,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) which is the global volume benchmark for the shipping industry, analysts say that the drop will continue (Lowe, 2009).

As at 1985, the Thai merchant fleets were made up of about 71 freighters, 2 bulk carriers, and 25 tankers, totaling 700,000 tons; and Thailand and Japan provided a regular cargo service and one shipping company covering west Europe ports regularly (photius, 1987).

1.2 What is Service?

Parasuraman et al. (1988) state that "service is the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service." However, Agbor (2011) claimed that "in all service can be defined as an intangible offer by one party to another in exchange of money for pleasure." Hence, Gaster (1985) argued that "because service provision is complex, it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpected needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done." However, based on the findings of thisstudy, the researcher defined service as an action, deed or intangible offer performed by an individual or company to another person or company at a consideration or price without parting away with anything. In another development, Kotler& Keller (2009) defined service as "any intangible act or performance that one party offers to another that does not result in the ownership of anything." Sometimes customers partake in the production of service for example, consider a customer or passenger in an aircraft or a customer waiting for his or her shipment to be documented and BoL (Bill of Lading) given to him or her as evidence of shipment with the cargo shipping company. In this case service is inseparable and consumed simultaneously as it is produced.Service is perishable and cannot be stored for example; consider a hotel room which if not sold perishes. Service is heterogeneous because no two service providers can perform or deliver the same service alike. Service is intangible hence, it cannot be seen or touched; and because of its intangibility, it is complex and difficult to define. Therefore, the fact that service is intangible in nature makes it more complex and care must be taken to ensure that it is done right the first time.

For example, service includes delivering postal mail, visiting a doctor for medical appointment, haircut in a barbing salon and so on and so forth. Therefore, service unlike product cannot be seen and inspected to see if there is any defect or not hence, it cannot be touched or stored until it is consumed by the client or customer. In this case, service is better experienced than imagine. This is because; it is only when a service is consumed that the customer can determine both the quality and value of the service (Ford et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important for an organization to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. Once this is done the customer is satisfied and happy. But where the expectations of the customers are not met or fall short of what they expect or meant to expect by the marketing department of an organization in the course of their advertising activities, the customer is unsatisfied or unhappy. This leads to negative word of mouth which is very unhealthy for any business, especially service business.

1.3 What is quality?

According to Crosby (1979) quality means conformance and requirement. However, to Japanese, quality is zero defect or defect free product or service. Garvin (1983) says that quality is all about counting the internal incidence (incidence before the product leaves the factory) and external incidence failure (incidence after the product is installed). Hence, there is no gain saying the fact that quality has helped many companies to increase their market shares, by lowering their production cost and improving productivity. Service is technical in nature as a result of the three basic characteristics vis-a-viz intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability; and this leads to the comparison between the expectation and actual performance. However, Lehtinen&Lehtinen (1991) claim that quality occurs during a two-way interaction between the service provider and customer. They argued that service is of three dimensions namely physical quality- which includes the tangible aspects of service, the corporate quality that has to do with the company image and interactive quality which occurs as a result of interaction between the customer and service provider. Hence, Lehtinen&Lehtinen (1991) argued that service quality has two dimensions- process quality that emphasizes on the way the service is delivered to a customer and output quality is the judgment as to how the service is provided. Therefore, process quality plays an important role in building up the consumers' perception since it is evaluated when the service is still being provided while the output is the outcome of the process quality evaluation.

Chartered Quality Institute says that "ultimately, quality is an outcome- a characteristic of a product or service provided to a customer, and the hallmark of an organization which has satisfied its entire stakeholder." ISO 8402-1986 defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs." In other words quality is intended to meeting the minimum standards requirements for the satisfaction of human needs hence, in many industries it is the responsibility of the British Standards Institute (BSI) to lay down quality standards. According to Peter F. Drucker, quality is not what the supplier puts in a product or service; rather it is what the customer perceives in the product or service and is willing to pay for. According to Wikipedia, "Quality is a perceptual, conditional and somewhat subjective attribute and may be understood differently by different people." However, quality could be measured by customers in

terms of specification, conformance, reliability, maintainability and sustainability of a product or service.

1.4 An Overview of Service in Groupage Cargo Shipping Management

In today's business environment, it is needless to say that quality of service is an important determinant factor in nowadays competitive business world (Angelova&Zekiri, 2011)Service industries are now throwing their weights to improving the service quality so as to meet up with the expectations of their customers. This is because the technological impact which cannot be overemphasized has made the consumers to become more and more aware of service options in the groupage cargo shipping. This coupled with the customers' past experiences and other factors have made it possible for customers to have high expectations with respect to service quality. There is no gain saying the fact that customers' previous experiences, word of mouth-positive or negative, personal needs, recommendation of the peers, service performance, advertising, etc. have a lot of influences in shaping the expectations and perceptions of both the old and new customers. Because of the stiff competition in the groupage cargo business, a lot of priority attentions are giving to meeting the expectations of the customers if not exceeding them in order to remain competitive. As a result, a lot of resources are invested by organizations in attracting new customer in lieu of maintaining the existing ones. However, the results of different studies have shown that the cost of attracting new customeris six to eight times more expensive than maintaining the existing customers (Khorshidi&kardgar, 2009). Therefore, in order to attract new customers, companies or organizations need not only to employ large resources but also a lot of time hence, the organizations are becoming more and more aware that maintaining the existing customers is far more cheaper than attracting new ones (Atlane&Noktedan, 2010).

However, the fact remains that customers observe and rate the same product or service differently, based mainly on their own motives and attitude (Blesicet al.2009 pp.5-12). Because the customers' attitude on the quality is a major issue at service quality level; measurements should be based on field investigation of the customer population (Blesicet al.2009 pp.5-12.). However, taking into consideration the above scenario, the main objective of this research is to assess the expected and perceived service quality of groupage cargo shipping services and to determine the difference in the gap between the expected and perceived service quality and the service quality dimension that is considered the most significant by the customers. This is because the groupage cargo shipping managers more often than not do not know what their customers consider as important when evaluating the service quality and very often do not have reliable methods for determining the expectations and perceptions of groupage cargo service customers as faras service quality is concerned (Blesic et al. 2011).

In finding solution to this problem, many researchers and authors suggest different methods but the one employed in this study is SERVQUAL model. SERVQUAL model since introduced has served as basis for quality service measurements in service industries. Hence, researchers on measuring service quality modify and adapt SERVQUAL model to suit their research purposes and objectives. Parasuraman et al (1985, P. 1988) came up with the GAP model of service quality and SERVQUAL to determine the difference between customers' expectations and actual perceptions in observing whether or not customers' satisfaction is consistent or not. Parasuraman et al. (1991) submitted that there exists the dual-level and dynamic concept to customer expectation. To this end, they opined

that customers' service expectations are of two levels- desired and adequate services levels. Hence, the zone of tolerance (ZOT) is the area in-between the desired service level and the adequate service level, and ZOT can help mangers to develop customer franchise.

A new approach to the exploratory and survey research of service dimensions was examined. They used correspondence analysis to examine the expectations and perceptions of service quality in freight forwarder (Atilganet al.2003). The service quality of Air Mauritius was assessed using the SERVQUAL model to determine the relative importance of the attributes of service quality dimensions by the international tourists. It was found out that four factors influence the perception of service quality, with efficiency of service and effect as the most perceived factors followed by service personalization, reliability, and tangible as the least factors. However, empathy was also valued more than assurance as one of the service dimensions influencing the perceptions of the international tourists in Air Mauritius (Prayag, 2007).

However, groupage cargo shipping industry is characterized by fierce competition posed by large national operators, medium-sized regional companies and smaller local service providers under which this research fall. The global trend in service quality originated in the 1980s and since then organizations have realized that a quality product in itself is not guaranteed to maintain competitive advantage (Vander Wal, Pampalis& Bond, 2002, P.232). Under this scenario, service quality can be used as competitive marketing strategy for increased profitability, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, differentiation and a continual flow of value (Zeithaml, Bitner&Gremler, 2006, P.16). Hence, customers are now demanding higher standards of service because they are more aware of what they want as a result of past experiences and service organizations are now focusing more on customer satisfaction, customer value and service quality in today's business environment and customer era (Wang, Hing-po& Yang, 2004). Therefore, because of the standardized nature of service in the transportation industry with special reference to groupage cargo shipping, service quality becomes a major element in product or service differentiation. As a result the primary goal of groupage cargo managers is to enhance operational responsiveness to customers.

1.5 Problem Statement

Because of the intangible nature of service, customers' expectations vary and as such no objective determination of quality level (and therefore of value) can be made. In manufacturing sector, a quality inspector might define and determine the quality of a product before it is presented to customer, but in the service, it is only the customers that can define quality and value (Ford et al., 2012, p.21). Service quality as a matter of fact can play an important role in increasing the competitiveness of groupage cargo service providers in the shipment of goods grouped according to volume, type of merchandise, condition and destination where each of the lot is tagged individually to ensure error free. This is because the level of service quality as expected and perceived by the customers of groupage cargo service provider in the shipping industry are still not clearly known. Hence, the need to assess the expected and perceived service quality level among the customers of groupage cargo shipping management in the selected groupage small cargo shipping companies in the pratunam area in Bangkok, Thailand. However, the result of previous research has found out that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of the product or service, past experiences and needs (Reisig&Chandek, 2001)

1.6 Objective of the study

The aim of this research is to assess the expected and perceived service quality in groupage cargo small shipping management. This study also tends to identify the GAPs between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality of groupage cargo shipping andsuggest ways to reduce or close the gaps and improve the service quality. This no doubt will improve the service delivery and

design and provide the management with the data about the customers which may be referred to as the need arises (Wilson et al., 2008 p.27).

1.7 Research Questions
➢   Is there any Difference between the Expectations and Perceptions of Customers of Groupage Cargo Shipping with Respect to Service Quality?
➢   Is there any discrepancy in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality?

1.8 Significance of the study
The research was worthy of attention as a result of the customers becoming more and more aware of what kind of service they want the service providers to deliver at the right place at the right time. Hence, rendering the right level of service delivery to the targeted customers in the right market segment may serve as a competitive advantage for firms delivering groupage cargo to the collection centers or warehouses (Kennedy 2011). Wicks and Roethlein (2009. P.83) were of the opinion that "an organization that consistently satisfies its customers, enjoy higher retention levels and greater profitability due to increase customer loyalty." As a result of this development service providers' work hard to meet up with at least their customers' expectations if not wow service, otherwise they will find it difficult to compete with their competitors. Therefore customers that have formed a good perception of a particular brand will always go for it hence, customers' preferences and attitudes are formed relative to their perceptions and attitudes of different brands competing in their minds (Larreeche 1998, p.152).In the light of this therefore, needless to say the fact that the results of this research will be useful for service oriented sectors, researchers in management field that may want to study the expectations and perceptions of customers in service sector and also for academic references.

1.9 Scope of the Study
Based on the nature of this area of research and the time frame the author could not access all the literature dealing with the expectations and perceptions of service quality. However, this research covered both the employees and the customers (Focus groups). This is because customers are the ones that consume the service and will be in a better position to define both quality and value. Hence, the author is limited to this study with respect to service oriented sector because service could be best evaluated from the service sector perspective.

1.10 Research Methodology
The researcher decided to use the qualitative method of research in order to get the in-depth knowledge of the participants concerning their views on customers' expectations and perception of service quality in groupage shipping service. The data for the analysis of this study were collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather the primary data by interviewing the participants. The staff and management of "ANO" companies and their customers (focus groups) were interviewed to gather primary data for this study. While the secondary data were collected from the review of the literature review vis-a-viz text books, magazines, journals, websites, publications and the records alike. However, a total of 30 participants were considered in this study and the data collected content analyzed.

1.11 Structure of the study

This study is structured as follows: Chapter one presented the introduction, research problem, objective of the study, research questions, and the need for the study, others include the scope of the study, research methodology and of course the structure of the study. Chapter two discussed the literature review and the empirical findings of the previous research on service quality. However, chapter three presented the research methodology which included the research design and research methods used. This is followed by chapter four which dealt with the research explanations and analyses of the empirical findings. Finally chapter five discussed the summary of the findings, answers to the research questions, contribution to knowledge, and suggestions on how to improve the service quality in groupage cargo shipping management and conclusions;othersinclude research limitations and recommendations for future research.

1.12 Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this section is to summarize the ideas got from past literature and to bring in the author's contributions in this area of study. Hence, the general idea from the previous researches is that there is a relationship between the expectations, perceptions and service quality performance. The previous research further revealed that the investigation into the expected and perceived service quality could be evaluated with the five SERVQUAL factors. However, it has been proven that perceptions are always considered in relation to expectations (Zeithaml et al., 2009, p.87). Kennedy (2011) stated that in loyal relationships, the gaps in logistics service quality expectations are relatively small, which also signals the importance of logistics service in supplier customer relationships. Hence, the tests of the dynamic process model revealed that two different types of expectations have opposite effects on perceptions of service quality; increasing customer expectations of what the company will deliver can lead to improved perceptions of overall service quality; decreasing customer expectations of what the firm should deliver can also lead to improved perceptions of overall service quality (Kotler& Keller, 2012). Eshghi et al (2008, p.121) were of the view that the overall assessment of a service is done by the customer. SERVQUAL model has been proved to be the most favoured model to measure service quality in service organizations especially with the expected and perceived service quality with minor modifications to suit the researcher's purpose. Accordingly, most of the researchers use the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model in the evaluation of service quality (Wilson et al., 2008, p.79, Bennett &Barkensjo, 2005, p.101, Negi, 2009, Wang &Hing-po, 2002).

Based on these ideas generated by the author from the previous literature, there is an assumption that demographic features and each of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model could have direct impact on the expected and perceived service quality; see fig.1. Therefore, the question that could be deduced from the assumption is whether or not there is significant difference in the expected and perceived service with respect service quality. As a result of the aforementioned question, the following conceptual framework was constructed for this study

Demographic Features	SERVQUAL Dimensions	Dependent Variable
Age	Reliability.	
	Responsiveness.	
Gender	Assurance.	
	Empathy.	
	Tangible	
	(AS EXPECTED)	
Work Experience		SERVICE
		QUALITY
	(AS PERCEIVED)	
	Reliability	
	Responsiveness	
	Assurance	
Length of patronage	Empathy	
	Tangible	
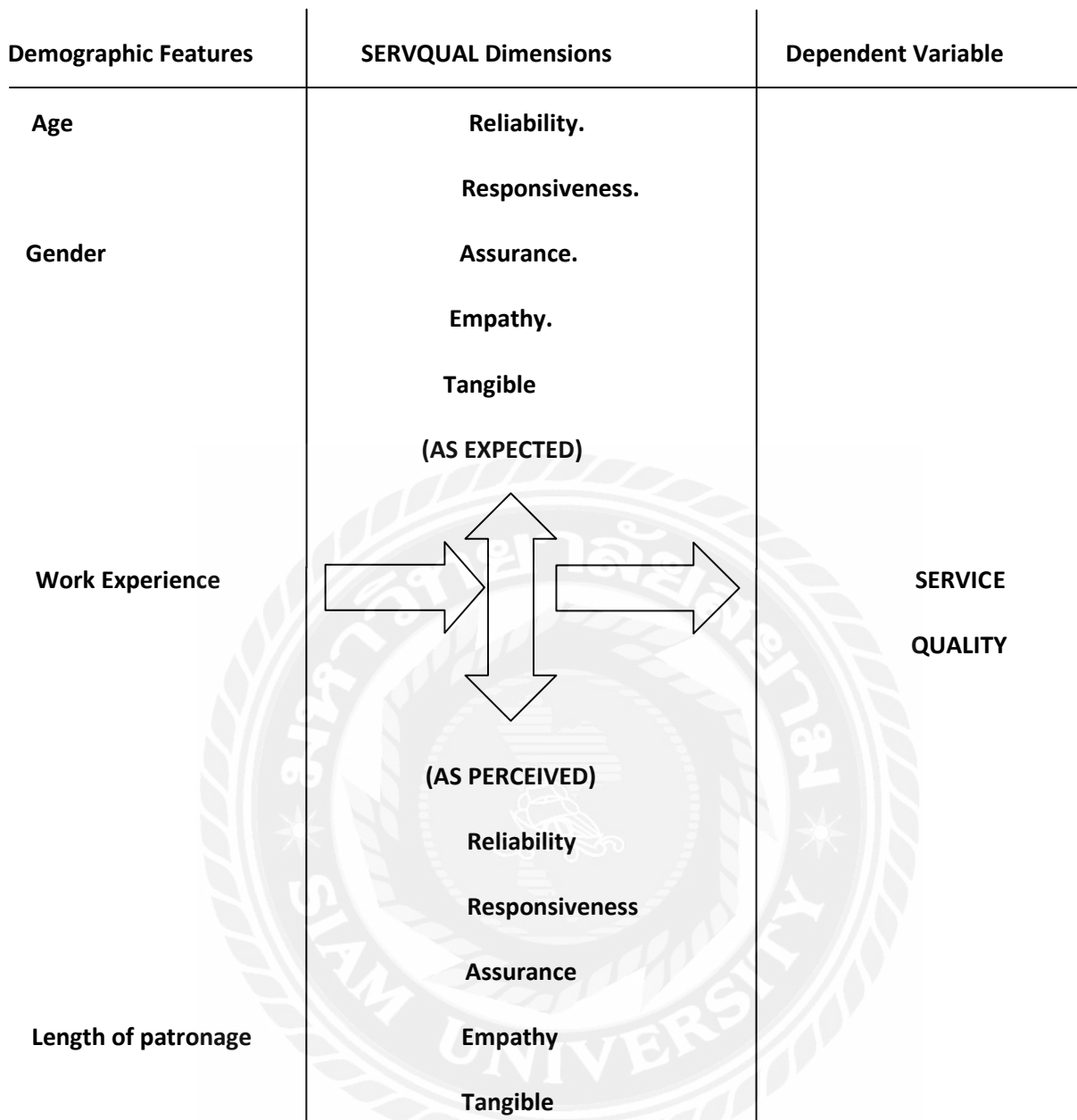
Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter two starts with the concept of service quality. This is followed by the findings of previous research on service quality. Also the customers' expectations of service quality, levels of expectations (model of consumer expectations), Gap model of service quality, and the zone of tolerance of different service dimensions are presented. Equally presented in this chapter are managerial implications of ZOT model, perceptions of service quality and SERVQUAL model. At the end of this chapter, groupage cargo and its meaning are also presented.

2.2 Concept of Service Quality

Grzinic (2007, p.82)) claims that "the domination of the service sector today is confirmed by the fact that 70% of the world GDP is realized in the service section. The same sector sees the concentration of 70% of workforce." Theodore,(1972) claims that "there are no such things as service industries. There are only industries whose service components are greater or less than those of other industries. Everybody is in service." Berry et al. (1988) stated that service quality is a significant differentiator and the most powerful competitive tool which all the service sectors want to possess. Opinions from various definitions of service quality were of the view that it is the result of an evaluation process where different customers compare their expectations about a service with their perceptions of that service as received (Lewis & Booms 1993, Lehtinen&Lehtinen 1982, Gronroos 1984, Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1994). Hence, they were also of the view that service quality could be either of technical quality, that is, what is done and functional quality which means 'how it is done.' Lehtinen&Lehtinen (1982) camp up with a three dimensional view of service quality vis-a-viz interaction, physical and corporate quality. Hence, "service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations." (Weitz and Wessley, 2002, p.340).

Therefore, delivering quality Service is an intangible part of transaction relationship which creates value between a service provider organization and its customer, client or guest (Bower & Ford, 2002). However, there has been a debate as to the best way to define service quality (Becket & Brookes, 2006, p.124). Brink & Berndt (2005, pp.46-47) viewed quality as the degree to which the service, the process, and the service organization can satisfy the customers' expectations.Putruzellis, D'Ugento&Romanazzi (2006, p.359) argued in favour of the statement that the higher the service quality results, the greater the customer satisfaction. Hence, satisfaction is as a result of the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality (Ekinci, 2004, p.200). Woo &Ennew (2005, p.116) claimed that service quality is as a result of customers' comparison of their expectations about a service encounter with their perceptions of the service encounter. Service is defined as "any intangible act or performance that one party offers to another that does not result in the ownership of anything." (Kotler& Keller. 2009, p.789). "In all service can be defined as an intangible offer by one party to another in exchange of money for pleasure." (Agbor, 2011).Parasuraman et al. (1988) stated that "service is the difference between the customer expectations and perceptions of service."

They were of the view that measuring service quality as the difference between expected and perceived service was a valid way and could make management to identify gaps to what they offer as service. Hence, the aim of providing service is to satisfy customers. Therefore measuring service quality is a better way to know whether or not the services are good or bad and to confirm if customers were satisfied or not. Dhurup et al. (2006, p.42) argue that an organization performs a service carelessly makes avoidable mistakes and fails in its responsibility to deliver on promises made by the organization to attract customers, it unsettles the customers' loss of confidence and compromises the organizations of receiving a reputation for service excellence. Brooks (1985) stated that there are fifteen service attributes affecting the selection model of shippers; the freight cost, goodwill of carrier, number of voyage, door-to-door transportation, total transit time, scheduling accuracy, willingness of carrier to negotiate service changes, transit flexibility, carrying capacity, salesmanship attitude, the attitude towards freight loss, and damage, past record of freight indemnification, number of berth in a particular port and transit time reliability.

However, APL report came up with the services priority shipper wanted vis-a-viz transit on time, totally responsiveness of shipper's demand, freight cost, pick-ups and delivery service, transit time, area of service, accurate documentation, equipment availability, well – done service control, the process of freight indemnification and shipment tracking. Gooley (1994) listed out the shipper's expectations from the service provider, and the items include high service quality, quicker voyage, transit on time, ability of electronic information, attitude of salesmanship, freight tracing and documents handling. Lu (2003) conducted a research based on personal interviews with the shipping executives and 33 service attributes were used on the questionnaire survey. The researcher found out that the five most important carrier service attributes according to shippers include the availability of cargo space, low damage or loss record, accurate documentation, reliability of advertised sailing schedule and courtesy of inquiry.

Liang et al. (2006) camp up with twenty four service attributes that characterize the shippers' service needs. These include staff professional knowledge and service attitude, prompt response to claim, provision of consultancy service, willingness to negotiate, computer EDI, and cargoes tracing ability, emergency handling ability, simple and prompt document operation processes, safekeeping ability, ability of sales representatives to handle problems, door-to-door service, simple procedures of consigning for shipment, provision of intermodal services, provision of diversified service, business reputation, maintaining communications with customers, reasonable charging for agent fees, on time delivery, provision of complete ship route, short transit time, safe delivery, sufficient shipping space, reasonable damage indemnification, reasonable operations fees and reasonable transportation price. Therefore putting into consideration the previous studies, the above items indicate that the ocean freight forwarders need to pay particular attention to the shippers' perceptions of those service attributes.

According to Parasuraman, et al. (1985) & Lewis & Mitchell (1990), service quality is the difference between customers' expectations of service and perceived service. In other words if the expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality of service is less than satisfactory and customers are not satisfied. Therefore in measuring service quality, service providers should take into consideration customer expectations of service as well as perceptions of service. Robinson (1999) claims that "it is apparent that there is little consensus of opinion and

much disagreement about how to measure service quality." However, in terms of service quality measurement, SERVQUAL model developed by Parasurraman et al. (1985, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1994; Zeithaml et al. 1990) has been applied extensively by the researchers. Hence, SERVQUAL model is mostly used to compare customers' expectations before a service is delivered and their perceptions of actual service received (Gronroos, 1982; Lewis & Booms, 1983; Parasuraman et al. 1985). However, Gaster (1985) claims that "because service provision is complex, it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpected needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done." Hence, "service quality (SQ) is a comparison of expectations (E) with performance (P); SQ=P-E" (Lewis & Booms, 1983).

Researchers such as Mangold and Bbakus (1991); Richard and Allaway (1993) cited in Kushwah (2014) were of the opinion that both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scales may not be comprehensive enough in measuring service quality because they focus mainly on the functional aspects of quality and not on the technical aspects of quality. Johnson and Sirikit (2002) conducted a research on both the fixed line of cellular telephony and telephones and their impact on service quality and found out that network was the most important factor. Similarly, Wang and Lo (2002) conducted a study on cellular mobile services on service quality and the results revealed that after sales services and network were the most important factors. In the same vein, Kim et al. (2004) carried out a research on cellular mobile services and expectations and perceptions of customers about service quality and the results of the findings revealed that innovation and network were of vital importance.

Akbaba (2006) conducted a study on the service quality of hotels in Turkey for the analyses of the expectations and perceptions of service quality using 29 characteristics indicators and employed SERVQUAL model and the result revealed that tangible service factor was found to be the most important factor that reflected the overall needs of service quality measurement. The results of the research carried out by Johnson et al. (1995) on mobile service provider customers in UK about their expectations and perceptions of service quality showed that there was a difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers and service expectation was prioritized in the study. Also the result of a study conducted by Negi (2009) revealed that the overall service quality of mobile phone in India was low and that there was a gap between the expectations and perceptions of customers hence, the need for improving the customer perceived service quality. However, a research carried out on cellular mobile service using SERVQUAL model to match expectations and perceptions of customers revealed a positive result (Van der wal et al. 2002). Similarly, a study conducted for the quality of service for Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) in cellular mobile services in India revealed that Airtel has superior services compared to other telecom companies such as Aircel, BSNL, etc. (Selvarasu et al.2006). Gabbie and O' Neill (1997) carried out a research on service quality of hotels in Northern Ireland to determine the gaps between the expectations and perceptions of service quality delivered by two 3 – star hotels and employed 22 characteristics of SERVQUAL. The result of the findings showed that a gap between the customers' perceptions and expectations of the first hotel that applied total quality management (TQM) was smaller compared to the other one.

2.3 Previous Research on Service Quality

According to a field research conducted by Mosahab et al. (2010) in Sepah Bank, Fatemi street branch in Tehran, Iran, a total of 147 customers were surveyed to determine the service quality offered by the bank and also to study the relationship between the service quality, satisfaction and loyalty in Sepah bank. The result showed that in all aspects of service quality dimensions, customers' expectations were higher than their perceptions of the bank's operations hence; the quality of the services of the bank is low. Therefore, the result revealed that there is a meaningful difference between the customers' expectations and the bank's performance in each of the dimension separately and totally. Thus the service quality is low in each of the dimensions discussed. Hence, customers' expectations in all areas are more than the bank's performance. However, the findings further revealed that the customers' satisfaction plays a mediation role in the effect of service quality on bank loyalty.

Mackay et al. (2015) surveyed a sample of 891 respondents to investigate the effect of service quality and relational benefits on customer satisfaction, as well as the effect of customer satisfaction on behavioural intention in the short term insurance industry. The findings showed that service quality and relational benefits have a significant effect on customer satisfaction which in turn has a significant effect on customers' behavioural intentions.

In a study conducted by Rao&Sahu (2013) on the Impact of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction in Hotel Industry, a survey of 100 respondents was carried out based on five service quality dimension to determine the level of customers' expectations and perceptions towards the service quality of front office staff. However, the result showed that assurance dimension pulled the highest level of expectations while the tangibility dimension fulfilled the highest level of perception. This study also seeks to determine the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of front office service quality. The result revealed that the overall mean score of perception was higher than the expectations in all dimensions, showing a positive SERVQUAL gap. Hence, their perceptions of service exceeded their expectations which showed a positive gap between customers' expectations and perceptions towards service quality of front office staff.

In another development, in a study conducted by Li &Krit (2012) on Service Is Power: Exploring Service Quality in Hotel's Business, Yunnan, China, to evaluate the service quality of hotels in the Yunnan province of China and to explore the effects of changes in service quality on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand image, a total of 412 participants were surveyed and also primary data collected from in-depth face to face interview, since both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the study. However, the results of the study revealed first, that service quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and brand image. Second, that customer satisfaction has positive effects on customer loyalty and brand image. Third, that customer loyalty has a positive effect on brand image.

Wang &Shieh (2006) carried out a research on the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction: the example of CJCU Library with a sample of 55 respondents to investigate the users' degree of importance and the performance and the overall user satisfaction as provided by the library. However, the results revealed that the overall service quality has a significant positive effect on the overall user satisfaction. All the service quality dimensions except responsiveness have a significant positive effect on the overall user satisfaction. Hence, the top

five most important service quality dimensions to users include: collections, loaning and returning service, overall atmosphere, electronic data-base system, and online reservation and renewal. However, the results further showed that the perceived importance of service quality dimensions have no significant difference among institute and status.

Agbor (2011) conducted a research on the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality: A study of three service sectors in UMEA University. The researcher employed a sample of 100 respondents to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality in service sectors with respect to service quality dimensions. However, the group result showed that responsiveness, empathy and reliability were significantly related to service quality while reliability and empathy were significantly related to customer satisfaction whereas responsiveness was not significantly related to customer satisfaction. But service quality was significantly related to customer satisfaction. Hence, the findings revealed distinctive results for the relationships between service quality dimensions as stated above and service quality/ customer satisfaction. While ICA and FOREX had significant relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction, UMEA University had no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Boon-itt&Rompho (2012) carried out a research on, Measuring Service Quality Dimensions: An Empirical Analysis of Thai Hotel Industry. The aim of the study is to focus on hotel service quality based on the application of 29 characteristic indicators from the SERVQUAL model by comparing two types of hotels- the boutique and the business hotel. The study seeks to understand the expectations, perceptions and gaps between expectations and perceptions regarding hotel service quality. A total of 108 usable questionnaires were analyzed. However, the results showed that the service quality of hotels in Thailand was moderately low. Hence, the hotels were not able to deliver services as expected. The findings also revealed that the customers' expectations of the services of the boutique hotels were higher than that of the business hotels.

Pakdil&Kurtulmusoglu (2014) conducted a research on, Improving Service Quality in Highway Passenger Transportation: A Case Study Using Quality Function Development (QFD). A sample size of 370 respondents was employed to determine how the service quality of the highway passenger transportation systems could be improved using a systematic approach. However, in an attempt to use QFD, the first time, to improve the quality of highway passenger transport service, the result revealed that the passengers' most important expectations are employees' empathetic approach toward customers, technical specifications of buses, error free services, and competent employees. Hence, the most important technical requirements are employees' oriented technical requirements, technical specifications of buses and error-free services in highway passenger transportation.

In a study conducted by Kushwah&Bhargav (2014) on Service Quality Expectations and Perceptions of Telecom Sector in India, which seeks to analyze the gap in service quality of telecom sector in terms of customers' expectations and perceptions regarding mobile phone services. A sample of 500 respondents was surveyed and the result showed that there was a statistically significant gap between customers' expectations and perceptions of mobile phone services with the arithmetic mean of expectations being 6.4413 and that of perceptions 5.8393

significant gap between customers' expectations and perceptions of mobile phone services with the arithmetic mean of expectations being 6.4413 and that of perceptions 5.8393

Ahmed & Razak (2015) conducted a research on, identifying the gaps between customers' expectations and perceptions on service quality dimensions of Islamic banks in Malaysia. A sample of 179 customers who have first-hand experience in Islamic banking services in Malaysia was employed for the analysis. The result of the study revealed that customers perceptions failed to meet their expectations on the service quality of Islamic banks in Malaysia. The result also showed that customers aged below 30 years have higher expectations on empathy from the Islamic banking service compared to other age group. However, the result further indicated that there is no significant difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of Islamic bank service quality based on educational background and occupation.

Table 1.

Previous Research on Service Quality

Author	Significant Findings	Data
Mosahab (2010)	In all aspects of service quality dimension, customers' expectations were higher than their perceptions of the bank operations. Hence, there is a meaningful difference between the customers' expectations and the bank's performance in each of the dimensions separately and totally. Customers' satisfaction plays a mediation role in the effect of Service quality on bank loyalty.	Data derived from 147 usable questionnaires distributed to customers
Mackay et al (2015)	Service quality and relational benefits have a significant effect On customer satisfaction which in turn has significant effect On customers' behavioural intentions	Data collected from 891 respondents through distribution of questionnaire

Rao & Sahu (2013)	Assurance dimension pulled the highest level of expectations while the tangibility dimension fulfilled the highest level of perceptions. Overall mean score of perception was higher than expectation in all dimensions, showing positive SERVQUAL gap.	Data derived from usable questionnaires distributed and collected from 100 respondents
Li & Krit (2012)	Service quality has positive effect on customer Satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand image. Customer satisfaction has positive effect on customer loyalty and brand image. Customer loyalty has positive effect on brand image.	Data collected from 412 participants through usable questionnaires and in-depth face to face interview since both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed.
Wang & Shieh (2006)	Overall service quality has a significant positive effect on the overall user satisfaction. All the service quality dimensions except responsiveness have a significant positive effect on the overall user satisfaction. The most important service quality dimensions to users include: collections, loaning and returning service, overall atmosphere, electronic data-base system, and online reservation and renewal.	Data derived from 55 usable questionnaires from the respondents

	Perceived importance of service quality dimensions have no significant difference among institute and status.	
Agbor (2011)	Responsiveness, empathy and reliability were significantly related to service quality. Reliability and empathy were significantly related to customer satisfaction. Responsiveness was not significantly related to customer satisfaction. ICA and FOREX had significant relationships between service quality customer satisfaction. UMEA University had no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.	Data collected from the usable questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents.
Boon-itt & Rompho (2012)	Service quality of hotels in Thailand was moderately low. Customers' expectations of services of the boutique hotels were higher than that of business hotels.	Data obtained from 108 usable questionnaires from the respondents
Pakdil & Kurlulmusoglu (2014)	Passengers most important expectations are employees' empathetic approach toward customers, technical specifications	Data derived from 370 respondents through

	of buses, error-free service and competent employees. The most important technical requirements are employees oriented technical requirements, technical specifications buses and error-free services in highway passenger transportation.	questionnaire distribution.
Kushwah & Bhargav (2014)	There was a statistically significant gap between customers' expectations and perceptions of mobile phone service with arithmetic mean of expectations being 6.4413 and that of perceptions 5.8393	Data collected from 500 usable questionnaires the from respondents
Ahmed & Razak (2015)	Customers perception failed to meet their expectations on sercice quality of Islamic banks in Malaysia. Customers aged below 30 years have higher expectation on Empathy from the Islamic banking services compared to other age groups. There is no significant difference between The customers' expectations and perceptions of Islamic bank service quality based on educational background and occupation.	Data derived from 179 respondents who had experience with Islamic banking Services in Malaysia.

2.4 Customers' Expectations of Service Quality

The term 'expectation' as used in the service quality literature differs from the way it is used in the consumer satisfaction literature. Specifically, in the satisfaction literature, expectations are viewed as predictions made by customers about what is likely to happen during an impending transaction or exchange (Oliver, 1981, p.33). It is generally agreed that expectations are consumer-defined probabilities of the occurrence of positive and negative events if the consumer engages in some behavior. But in contrast therefore, expectations are viewed as desires or wants of customers in the service quality literature that is, what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Oliver, 1981, p.33)

Voss et al (1998, pp.46-61) stated that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. When the perceived service falls below the service expectations, customers are disappointed. Therefore, successful companies add benefits to their offerings that not only satisfy customers but surprise and delight them. Hence, delighting customers is a matter of exceeding expected service (Rust, 2000, pp.86-94 as cited in Kotler& Keller 2012, p.395). Customers arrive with a set of expectations as to what the company or service provider can and should do, how it should do it, how the servers should behave, how the physical setting should appear, what capabilities customers should have to perform their roles or responsibilities in coproducing the service (Ford et al., 2012, p.17). First time customers' expectations are built based on advertising, familiar brand names, promotional devices, their previous experiences with other service organizations, their own imaginations, and stories and experiences of their peers who have been customers to the organization they want to patronize. Customers' past experience with an organization provide basis for their expectations with respect to their future dealings. This in many instances sets a high standard as to meeting what is called "wow" experience for customers upon first time. Hence, the responsibility of the service provider to get repeat businesses from both new and old customers' lies with the organization's ability to meet and / or maybe even exceed both the promises that marketing department has made in the course of advertising and prior experiences of repeat customers. No matter the type of business you are into, everybody is in service and the key to delighting customers is to consistently over-deliver. It does not matter how brilliant the organization designs the service, the servicescape (physical environment), and the delivery system or develops measurable service standards, if the customer is dissatisfied with any of these elements, the organization has failed to meet the guests or customers' expectations; it has not provided a customer experience of acceptable quality and value (Ford et al., 2012 p.17).

Zeithaml&Bitner (1996, p.76) stated that "customers' expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which performance is judged" Again they were of the opinion that different customers hold different type of expectations for service performance. As a result of this belief, a service experience in groupage cargo service setting may be different from that of bank or food retail sectors considering the customers' expectations and their past experience of other service organizations. Therefore, the perceptions of customers service delivery are compared based on these reference points in trying to evaluate the service quality hence, knowing what the customers expect is of critical importance in gaining competitive advantage (Zeithaml&Bitner, 2003, p.60). It does not matter what business the

organization operates, once the organization fails to find out what the customers want or the level of service they expect, then the organization may be losing its customers to their competitors.

2.5 Levels of Expectations

MODEL OF CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS.
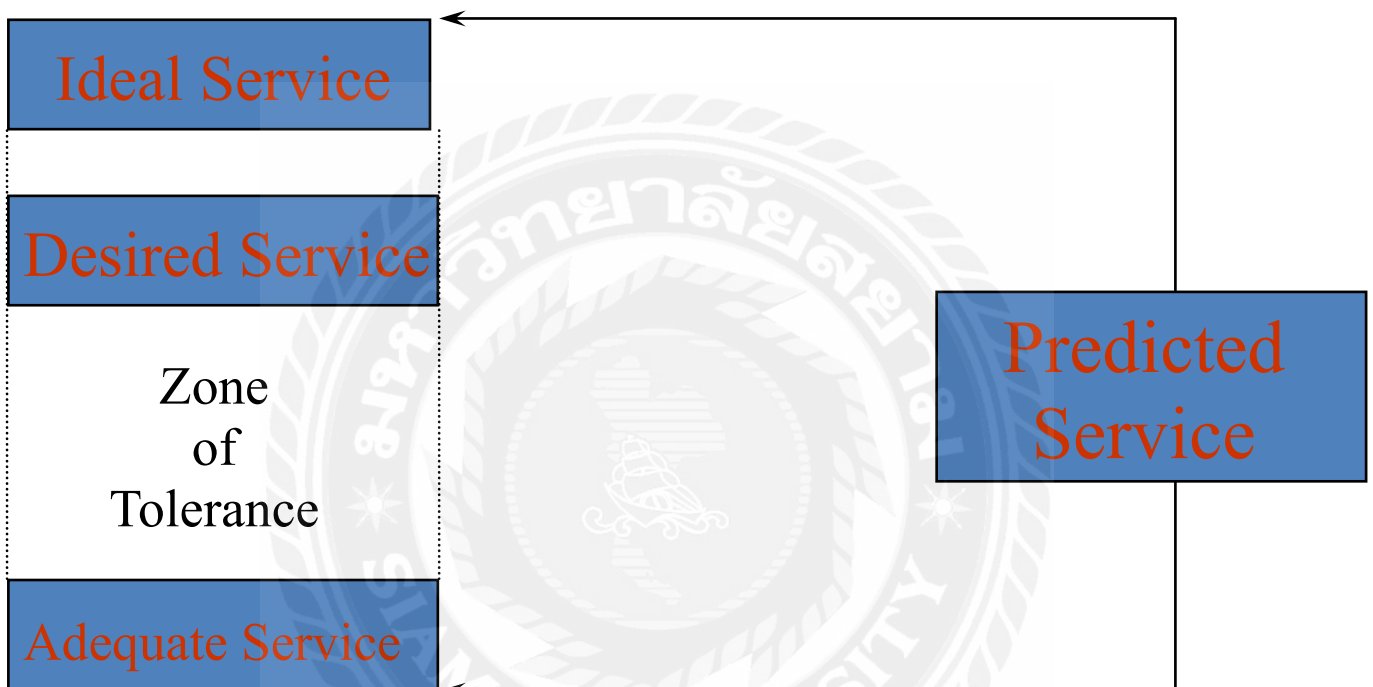
Fig 2: Source: Adapted from Valarie A. Zeithaml, Leonard L. Berry, and
A. Parasuraman, "The Nature and Determinants of Customer Expectations of Services" *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*,
Vol.. 21 (Winter 1993), pp.. 1-12

Zeithaml et al (2009(a) p.77) claims that customers hold two different types of expectations vis-a-viz desired service and adequate service. Hill (2000) defined consumer expectations as pre-trial beliefs about a service that functions as standards against which performance is judged. 'Desired service is the level of service the customer hopes to receive." (Zeithaml et al., 2009(b) p.77). In other words, it is a blend of what the customer believes "can be" and "should be." (Zeithaml, et al.,2009(c) p.77). Zeithaml et al., 2009(d) p.77) believes that desired service is a signal of the level of service the customer hopes and wishes and believes that may be fulfilled and failure on the part

of the service provider to meet these expectations may lead to customer cutting down on purchases. Adequate service on the other hand is the level of service the customer will accept (Zeithaml, et

al.,2009(f)p.77). In other words, it is that service which the customer finds acceptable. This is however based on the customers' assessment of what the service "will be," that is, the customer' "predicted service" (Zeithaml, et al., 2009(g), p.77)

2.6 THE GAP MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY.
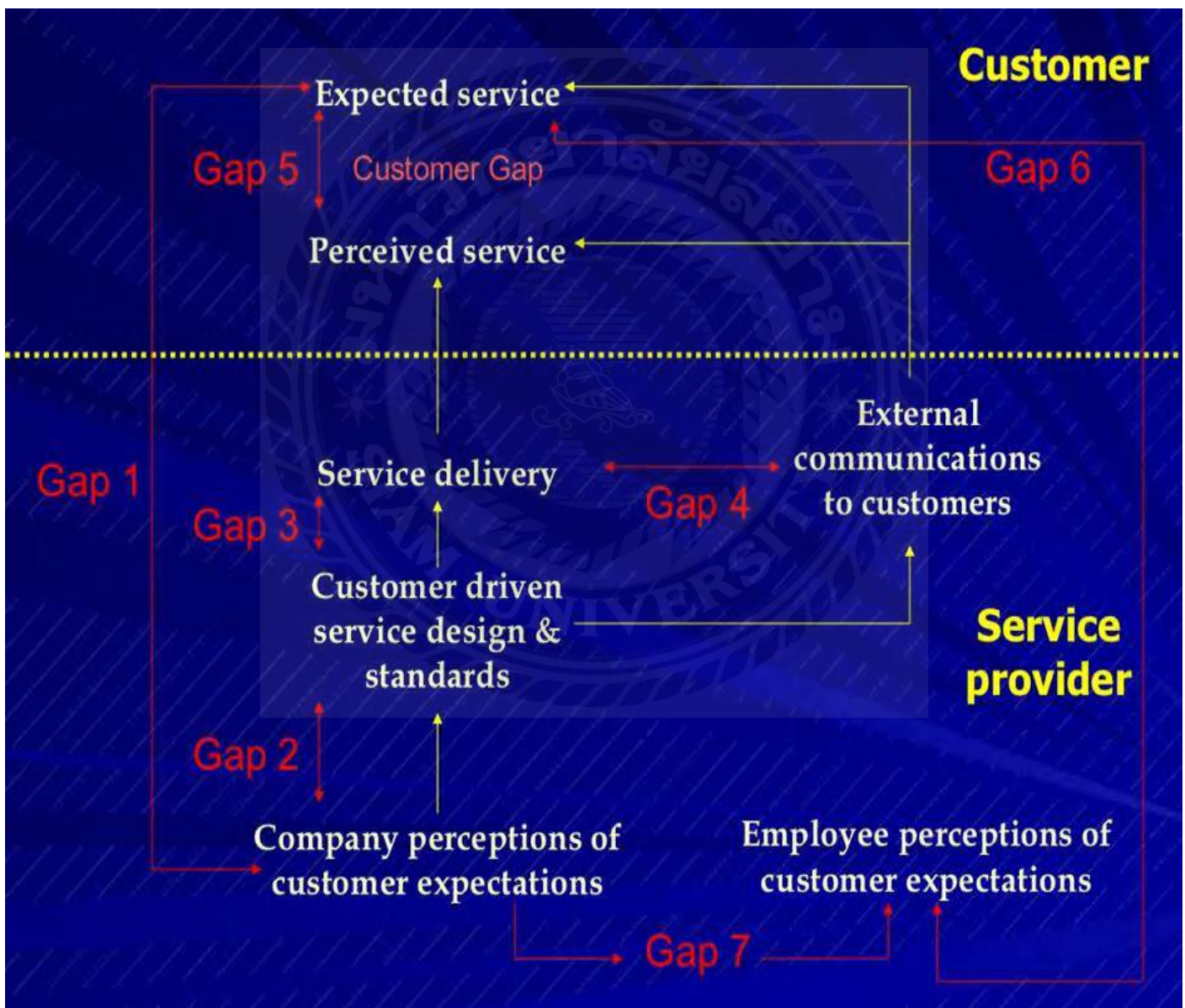
Fig. 3.Source:*Parasuramanet al. GAP model 1985, Shahin, A. (Department of Mangement, University of Isfahan, Iran)*

In other to understand the service quality better GAP model which was first introduced in1985 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry highlighted main requirements for delivering high service quality in an organization (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). The primary purpose of this model was to dictate the sources of the problems in quality and give support to management and suggest ways to improve the service quality. Usually, the gap occurs between the customer and the service provider, with respect to the expectations and perceptions. Hence, this model primarily demonstrates the process of the emergence of service quality (Ljubojevic, 2004). The basic gap is the consumer (customer) gap which occurs as a result of discrepancy between customers' expectation regarding service and customers' perception of the service delivery in an organization (Blesic, et al., 2009).Hence, the gap model or theory identifies five gaps that cause unsuccessful service delivery which occurs as a result of discrepancies within the design and delivery phases of service to the customers.

Parasuraman, et al.,(1985) identified five key discrepancies (gaps) that occur in service delivery.

❖ **Gap 1 occurs between customer expectations- Usually; management more often than not does not correctly perceive what customers want. This gap exists when the management does not really understand what its customers want. Hence, the management must ask questions and get feedbacks from the customer to know for example how long they may be willing to stay in a queue before developing a system for critical time.**

❖ **Gap2 occurs between management's perception of what the customers want and service quality specifications- Management might correctly perceive what customers want without setting correct performance standard to deliver the service quality. In other words the management really knows what their customers want but are not willing to develop or design systems that will deliver the desired service. Hence, several reasons have been given as being responsible for gap 2 such as inadequate commitment to service quality, lack of perceptions of service, lack of perceptions of feasibility, inadequate task standardization and absence of goal setting (Kotler, et al., 2014(a) p.662).**

❖ **Gap3 occurs between service quality specification (quality, standards, forms delivery) and the actual service delivery- The gap has to do with the employees inability to answer questions asked by the customer regarding the services offered due to poor training and this result to conflicting standards which may lead to taking more time to listen to customers than serving than serving them fast. "Gap 3 error occurs during the moments of truth, when the employee and the customer interact. Employees are expected to act cheerfully and solve the customers' problems"(Kotler et al., 2014(b) P.60**

❖ **Gap 4 is the gap between service delivery and what customers expect based on external communication- Customers' expectations are influenced by statements made by the organization's representatives or its marketing department through advertising. This gap is created when the organization through its marketing department promises more that it can deliver in its external communication. Hence, the marketing department must ensure that the organization can deliver what they promise in their marketing campaign.**

❖ **Gap5 occurs between perceived service and expected service-** This is the difference between customers' expectations about the service and their perceptions of the same particular service. Basically, gap 5 is a function of all other gaps. Simply put, as other gaps increase in size, gap 5 also increases. Gap 5 represents the difference between the expected service quality and the perceived service quality. Therefore, the expected service quality is what the customer expects to receive from the service provider while the perceived service quality is what the customer perceives he or she receives from the service provider.

However, if the customers receives less than what they expected, they are dissatisfied. Conversely, if perceived service is greater than expected service, the customers are satisfied (Kotler, et al., 2006, p.435). In another development, a research conducted by Shahin, A. (Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran) on "SERVQUAL and Model of Service Quality Gaps: A framework for Determining and Prioritizing Critical Factors in Delivering Quality Services" revealed that that other major gaps apart from closing gap 5 which is the discrepancy between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service delivered could be closed as well. This could be done by applying these perspectives to the employees of a company and by so doing all other major gaps could be closed in the service quality gaps model (Kang et al. 2002 cited in Shahin, A.). Shahin therefore proposed two other gaps as follows:

❖ **Gap 6 occurs as a result of the discrepancy between the customers' expectations and employees' perceptions.** This is as a result of the differences in the understanding of customers, expectations by the front-desk service providers.

❖ **Gap 7 is the discrepancy between employee's perceptions and management perceptions.**
This gap occurs as a result of the differences in the understanding of customer expectations between managers and service providers.

Hence, gap 5 is the by-product or as a result of all other gaps which occur because of customers' misperceiving of service quality. Kotler et al (2006, p.152) stated that the most important gap is between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality actually received. Zeithaml et al (2006, p.41) supported this agreement and stated that in managing service, it is important to manage the gaps between service expectations and perceptions on the part of management, employees and customers. Mullins et al (2005, p.454) were of the view that organizations must try and close these gaps so as to improve customer satisfaction, build long-term relationships and increase customer franchise. Bruhn &Georgi (2006, p.443) stated that customer satisfaction is customers' assessment of a product or service in terms of whether or not that product or service has met the customers' needs and expectations.

2.7 Zone of Tolerance for Different Service Dimensions.
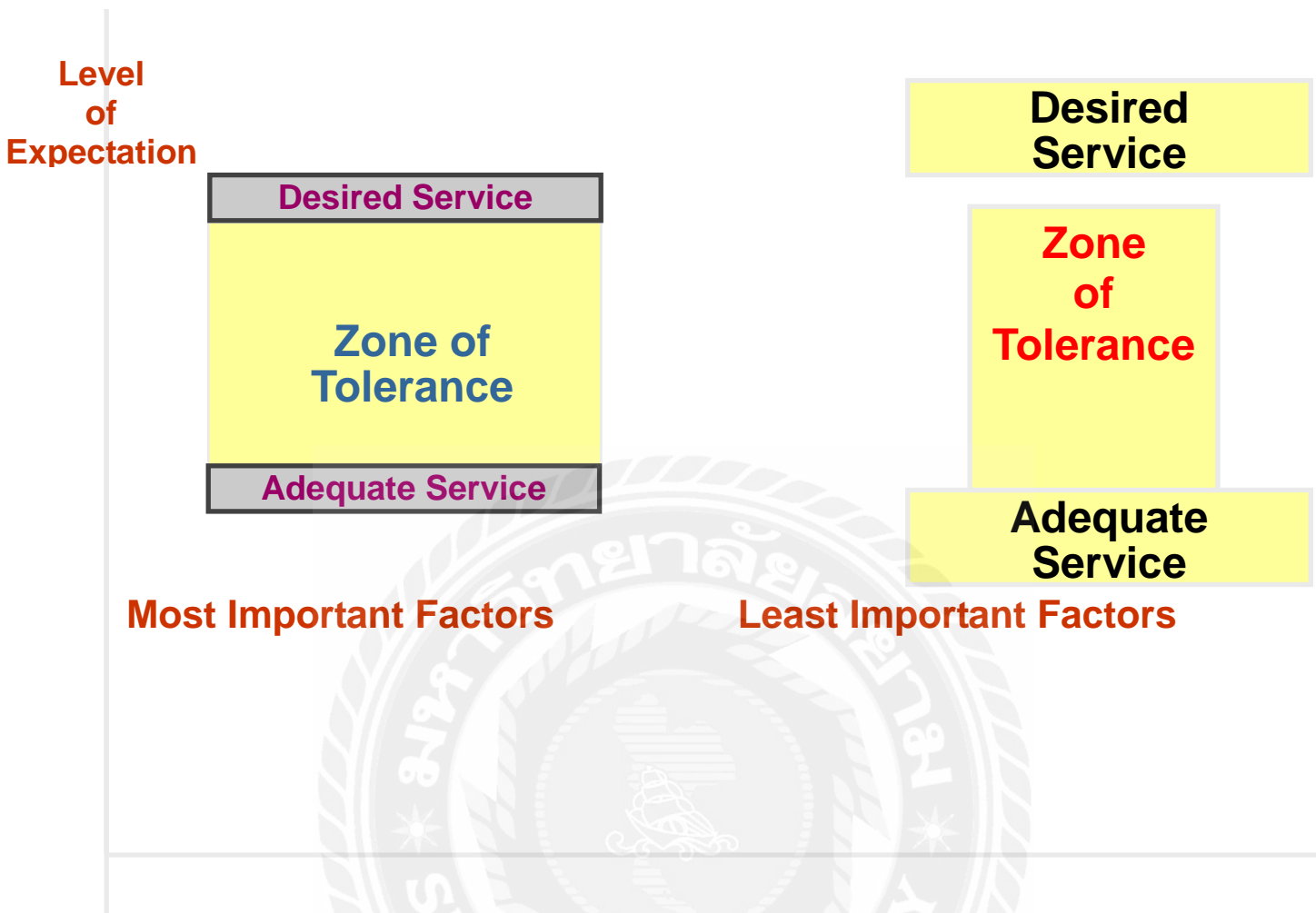
Fig 4:Source: Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1993)

The zone of tolerance (ZOT) is defined as "the difference between desired service and the level of service considered adequate" (Zeithaml et al., 1993, p.6). As suggested by this definition, the ZOT model recognizes the fact that customers enter service encounter with different expectation levels, main desired and adequate service expectation levels. Desired is "the level of service the customer hopes to receive….a blend of what the customer believes can be and should be" (Zeithaml et al., 1993, p.6). Zeithaml et al (1993, p.6) claims that "zone of tolerance" is the difference between desired and adequate services expectation standards. However, this model proposes that satisfaction will always result as long as customers' perceptions of service performance fall within the zone. However, the adequate service level reflects the minimum performance level expected by customers after they consider a variety of individual and situational factors (Parasuraman, et al., 1991, p.1-25). However, if the service drops below adequate service level, customers get frustrated and are dissatisfied with the service provided with organization or service provider (Zeithaml et al., 2009 p.80).

But if the service is above the zone of tolerance, that is where the service performed by the service provider exceeds the desired level, customers no doubt will have favourable or positive response to the business (Zeithaml et al., 2009, p.80). At this point there will be problem if the organization's service performance falls below what the customers are willing and ready to accept. Zeithaml (1993) stated that the ZOT varies across customer and can equally expand or contract with the same customer. This is because adequate service expectations are subjective to change, while desired service expectations are relatively enduring.

However, focusing on the five SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles Parasuraman et al (1988) used the three column formats to measure the respondents' adequate and desired expectations as well as their perceptions of service provider's performance in identical side-by-side. Parasuraman et al (1994) found out that the three column format offered the ability to determine where perceptions fell relative to the ZOT that is, the ability to pinpoint ZOT positions and reduce the chance of inflated ratings and erroneous inference.

Johnson (1995, p.49) in his theoretical article on ZOT specifically examined the relationship between involvement and the ZOT, as well as the impact of various service performance outcomes upon the ZOT. In relation to the impact of involvement, Johnson (1995) stated that the width of the ZOT is inversely proportional to the degree of involvement and that high involvement generates a narrower ZOT. However, similar to Zeithaml et al.,'s (1993) contention, Johnson (1995) stated that performance within the ZOT may go unnoticed by the customer, performance below the customer's adequate expectations level (below the ZOT) will generate dissatisfaction, and performance above the customers; desired expectations level (above the ZOT) will generate "delight," or what Zeithaml et al., (1993) termed a 'customer franchise."

There is no gain saying the fact that disagreement exists in the service marketing literature as to whether or not perceived service quality should be measured using a performance-based framework or with norms (standards)-based framework. Teas and DeCarlo claim that "performance-based frameworks specify perceived performance, without any comparative referents, as the perceived quality concepts. But standards-based frameworks specify a relative or comparative performance conceptualization of perceived quality." However, in answering the question "Does a direct measure of perceived service quality offer greater explanatory power than a norms-based comparative measure?" Parasuraman, et al., (1994) submitted that norms-based models (like ZOT) would be more useful because of the measurement of more precise information about customer perceptions across the multiple expectation levels. Teas &DeCarlo (2004) in their study of 107 undergraduate students' perceptions of a university's students' service center found out that performance-based models revealed more explanatory power than the ZOT with respect to the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intentions. Nevertheless, the study also revealed that ZOT, as the representative norms-based model has superior performance, relative to performance-based models when evaluating the relationship between perceived quality and customer satisfaction. As a result they provided more supportive weight for the ZOT as a useful research and managerial tool for better understanding of how customers' perceptions of service quality impact on customer satisfaction.

Voss et al (1998) however, stated that standards-based framework does not provide sufficient explanation power in all cases. In their study of 200 faculty members of a university, the authors submitted that standards-based framework was only useful when price and performance were consistent. Their study was based on examination of how price perceptions impacted the expectations-perceived performance framework. They found out that the more the customers were price tolerant, the less satisfied they were with a high-price/ low-quality offering. Hence, satisfaction was greater for the low-price/ high-quality offering for those customers who were initially less price tolerant. But in the cases where the levels of delivered performance matched with the price level (low-price and low quality / high-price and high-quality), perceived performance was compared against prior expectations in determining the satisfaction levels.

Walker & Baker (2000) in support of ZOT laid credence to ZOT stating that the width of the ZOT varies for essential versus less-essential service quality components. They were of the view that degree of customer service experience, as well as the number of competitive alternatives perceived by the customers influence the ZOT width. The researchers surveyed 205 college students about health club membership and found out that the width of ZOT does indeed vary depending on the service quality dimensions involved. They found out that the ZOT was narrower for the assurance and reliability dimensions than for the empathy, responsiveness, and tangible dimensions of service quality. With respect to customer experience level, it was found out that there were no significant differences between experienced and non-experienced customers on desired service level expectations.

However, because the experienced customers are increasingly demanding for adequate expectations, the ZOT is narrower for them (Walker & Baker, 2000, p.424). These researchers however, faulted Zeithaml et al (1993) which stated that the presence of readily available provider alternatives would narrow the ZOT. Hence, they attributed their findings to the stability of the desired expectations standards. Gwynne et al (2000) supported Walker and Baker (2000) findings regarding ZOT width. In their investigation regarding the width of the ZOT relative to the different service quality dimensions. Following their study of 218 students, it was found out that service quality dimensions that are perceived as more important enjoy a wider ZOT. This was as a result of higher levels of desired expectations for the most important service quality dimensions hence; these desired expectations tend to be relatively stable. However, ZOT is considered inappropriate in some cases like when the primary purpose is "to explain the variance in some dependent construct," but is appropriate when "the primary purpose is to diagnose accurately service shortfalls," (Zeithaml et al., 1996, p.40).

2.8 Managerial Implications of ZOT model

The ZOT explains that customers enter into transaction with a service organization with different expectations vis-a-viz desired service or adequate service levels. The conceptualization of adequate service level, the ZOT and desired service level can help managers to build the customer franchise through service (Lin & Liang, 2011, pp.77-88). An organization can therefore, operate at a competitive advantage, competitive disadvantage and / or at a customer franchise level based on the conceptualization (Lin & Liang, 2011, pp.77-88). Hence, when the organizations service level falls within the ZOT, the customer is satisfied and thus puts the company in a competitive

advantage. However, falling below the ZOT will definitely put the company at a competitive disadvantage. But when the organization's service performance exceeds the desired service level, it is possible that the organization can develop a long-term competitive advantage through customer franchise or high customer loyalty. But to gain this customer loyalty, it is therefore, important that the organization gain an insight into an understanding of the type of the service quality dimensions that are most important to its target customers. This is because it is within these dimensions that the ZOT is narrowest. However, the less important dimensions should not be neglected by the managers, because they offer an opportunity for the development of sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, the ZOT associated with these dimensions tend to be wider and the organization should always strive to deliver service above the adequate level.

2.9 Perceptions of Service Quality

Perception is the process by which an individual selects, organizes and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world around us. Hence, each individual receives, organizes and interprets this sensory information through our five senses vis-a-viz sight, hearing smell, touch and taste (Sirgy, 1982, pp.287-300). Blose and Tankersley (2004, p.78) stated that providing a service and meeting commitments on time according to the promised service date in a professional manner, will definitely influence a customers' perceptions in an important way. Example, if the employees at the groupage cargo company perform the desired service level correctly the first time, it means that the organization keeps its promises within the specific time frame set out to deliver the service. Therefore, if the delivery is done in a proper way it will enhance the perceived quality of the customer (Brink & Berndt, 2005, p.60). However, perceptions are always considered in relation to expectations (zeithaml et al., 2009, p.87). Perceptions are therefore formed through customers; assessment of the quality of service provided by the organization and to determine whether they are satisfied with the overall service (Zeithaml&Bitner, 2003, p.84). However, because perceptions may shift over time, it becomes imperative for companies to continually assess customers' perceptions of the service quality (Zeithaml&Bitner, 2003, p.85). When exploring the service gap, that is, the difference between customer expectations, the data showed a close match between the suppliers' perception of what the customer expects and actual customer expectations. This study confirms that in loyal relationships, the gap in logistics service quality expectations is relatively small which also signals the importance of logistics service in supplier-customer relationships (Kennedy, 2011, p.104-115). One dynamic process model of service quality was based on the promise that customers perceptions about what will and what should happen during the service encounter, as well as the actual service delivered during the last contact (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin&Zeithaml, 1993). The tests of the dynamic process model reveal that the two different types of expectations have opposite effects on perceptions of service quality; increasing customer expectations of what the company will deliver can lead to improved perceptions of overall service quality; decreasing customer expectations of what the firm should deliver can also lead to improved perceptions of overall service quality (Kotler& Keller, 2012, p.396)

2.10 SERVQUAL Model

In assessing customers' expected, and perceived service quality, there is need to understand the customers' relationship with the service provider (Zeithaml,

Bitner&Gremler, 2009, p.151). Zeithaml et al (2009, p.107) stated thus " a sound measure of service quality is necessary for identifying the aspects of service needing performance improvement, assessing how much improvement is needed on each aspect, and evaluating the impact of improvement efforts." Hence, SERVQUAL was developed to measure customers' evaluation of service as a result of its intangible nature (Zeithaml et al. 2009, p.151). Rhoades & Waguespack (2004) argued that service quality is like beauty in the eyes of the beholder and hence, a matter of perception. DeMoranville&Bienstock (2003) stated that service quality measurement has an important role to play in assessing a service organization's performance, scrutinizing service shortfalls, managing service delivery and determining corporate rewards. However, because of high regards for service excellence and delivering quality service in an organization, service companies such as groupage cargo emphasized their service offerings to establish a competitive advantage that differentiate them from those of their competitors (Gursoy et al., 2005). However, based the research conducted by the researchers of service oriented companies (banking, telecommunication, insurance company, maintenance and repair of apparatuses), the authors of gap model came up with SERVQUAL model for measuring service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991, 1991(a), 1994). Parasuraman et al (1985) based on the original SERVQUAL model defined service quality using ten determinants of quality such as reliability, responsiveness, competence, credibility, access, courtesy, communication, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Berry &Parasuraman (1991) however, eliminated five leaving the following determinants of service quality in this order of importance:

➢ **Reliability- Is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.**
➢ **Responsiveness-Is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.**
➢ **Assurance-This has to do with the knowledge and the courtesy of the employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.**
➢ **Empathy-Is the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers.**
➢ **Tangibles-This has to do with the appearance of physical communication materials.**

2.11 Groupage Cargo

Groupage applies to a shipment which does not justify the exclusive use of customer's container. In this case, cargo will only occupy a small part of a container so that it will be combined with another customer and cost will be split according to its volume. Therefore, a groupage container contains goods from two or more suppliers or customers so that it brings considerable cost savings. However, merchandise is grouped according to volume, type of merchandise, condition and destination. Each lot is tagged individually so that there can be no error (Cargomaster). When it comes to shipping goods a lot of value-added services without which shipments wouldn't arrive home are offered to the clients or customers to get the job done. Unless a client makes his own insurance arrangements, the service provider is usually asked to do so. Hence, one of the basic added-value services in groupage cargo services is cargo insurance. However, in order to reach its destination, cargo often has to go through many transport services, such as road, rail and sea; others include loading and unloading from different means of transports or warehousing, customs' documentations and clearance services and counseling services in the best routes.

However, Gunnar (2015) states "groupage containers in rail transport are a very promising and flexible alternative to air and sea freight; they are more cost effective than air freight, and take only half the time of ocean transport." The shipping companies have the guarantee that only zero-defect containers are used for the safe and secure transport of the customer's goods. Groupage shipping entails that if the goods the customer wants to ship are not enough to fill an entire container, the shipper could send them via group shipping. Hence, the goods are grouped together with others that are conveyed to the same destination. However, people are scared that their goods are in danger of being damaged because they are shipped with a lot of freight, but this is not the case as every consignment is handled with utmost care and goods not stacked on others that are fragile (Reallymoving). According to Michael Spitzlei, regional manager, North Rhine-Westphalia, M & M air sea cargo GMbH. "We see growth potential for groupage containers in this budding market. Customers are restructuring their supply chains, with the time factor playing a decisive role. Our new service is a sensible addition to the full container loads (FCL) rail transports that we also offer on the China-Europe-China trade lane." (Transport Weekly)

The most popular and smallest container sizes are 20 foot and 40 foot lengths and they are measured in terms of amount of volume they contain. Therefore groupage or less container load (LCL) takes into consideration a system that that converts package measurement into a density figure; which is the weight or measurement rule (WM). Hence, the higher of the weight or measure calculation, applies (Freight Filter). Most shippers use cubic metre measurement (cbm) but in USA, it is different, as they use 45lb. per US cubic foot. In order to convert cbm into standard chargeable shipping volume shippers use standard conversions that vary as the case may be. Depending on the shipper, some may work on 1 cbm = 500kg while others may work 1 cbm = 1000kg. However, if the actual weight is lower than this, then the chargeable shipping volume applies but if the weight is higher, there will be penalty because the weight applies (Freight Filter).

In practice however, the groupage cargo service providers will require the measurement and weight of your shipment and a copy of your commercial invoice to be able to prepare their In-house Bill of Lading (BoL) which asserts their rights and responsibilities for the goods which is very important in mixed shipment. The shipper will in turn bring together all the individual In-house BoLs into one ocean BoL for the whole container. For example Brazil and some African countries need an original BoL and you will have to pay for it to be sent there. (Freight Filter).

The groupage cargo service provider must ensure that the standard packaging standards for the cargo receiving country are met as some countries require fumigated, heat treated or plastic pallets. Also care must be taken to ensure that the right customs codes are used to avoid unnecessary delays and demurrage at the port. However, in USA, it is prohibited to use LCL (groupage containers) to ship vehicle in and out of US for example, since other procedures abound which the authorities may not allow the shipper to carry out (Freight Filter).

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1   Introduction:

Research methodology is one of the most important chapters of this study as it determines the success of this empirical study. Methodology for this study therefore specifies the kind of information to be gathered, from where, and what methods of data collection to be used. This chapter thus determines whether the research methodology for this study should be "positivist epistemology or positivism or phenomenology" since both are widely used in business research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). In this study the kind of methodologies selected determines the nature of the relationship between theory and research and whether theory guides this research (a deductive approach} or whether theory is derived from this research {an inductive approach); as this will help in a great extent to determine whether the research should be causal (true experimental, quasi-experimental and action or ethnographic), exploratory {observation, focus groups, interviews and/or descriptive {questionnaire survey} research design. Hence, the research design selected thus determines the kind of research strategies {qualitative or quantitative} and methods for data collection and analysis to be used in this study (Anurit, 2002).

This research employed phenomenology research methodology because the researcher wants to know how situations and problems could be tackled differently and see new solutions emerge. Hence, this study has only one characteristic approach, an inductive approach. This inductive approach was therefore used because of its emphasis on the ways the findings were feedback into the selected theories and / or concepts and the findings of the related literature. Therefore this study employed the qualitative research strategy and this qualitative data collection includes observation, focus groups, face-t-face interviews hence, the research design is exploratory and qualitative data content analyzed, as well as case study.

3.2 Research Method:

Burrell and Morgan (1979}, Daft and Wiginton {1979), Gill and Johnson (1991), Morgan (1986), Woodruff (1996) stated that one of the problems in conducting research of any kind is choosing between the two methods "positivist epistemological or positivism or "phenomenological." This is because these research methodologies suggest why particular research activities are employed and why the researcher felt they were the ones most likely to achieve the research aims (Anurit, 2002). However, Gill and Johnson (1991, p.132) also claim that the primary emphasis of positivism is centered on observable phenomena "with any reference to the intangible or subjective being excluded as being meaningless." However, researchers these days also employ another methodology which is "phenomenology" that attempts to the 'interpretive' understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects {Daft and Wiginton, 1979; Weber, 1947}.

This research is an investigation into the expected and perceived service quality in groupage cargo shipping management in small cargo companies in Pratunam area of Bangkok, Thailand. Hence, the information and data were collected from a numberof customers and the employees of "XYZ"

companies. Methodologically therefore, this is essentially a social phenomenon where groups of people get together for an agreed collective purpose (to purchase a cargo shipping service) Burrell and Morgan (1979) assert that effective research methodology must reflect the multi-faceted nature of reality. Hence, according to Morgan (1986, p.337) the phenomenological approach has a major advantage over the "positivist" methodology and stated that "people who learn to read situations from different (theoretical) points of view have an advantage over those committed to a fixed positions." However, Hirshchman and Holbrook (1986) state that phenomenology has a key role, but not isolated, in developing understanding of the consumer. Therefore the research strategy to be employed in this research will be the qualitative research method. It is deemed the most appropriate and highly favoured in this research because the research questions and objective are to investigate on "how" and "why" questions. However qualitative research tends to understand human and social behavior from both internal and external customers (Patton,2002; Merriam,2009). Hence, the researcher has to go to the site to conduct the research and observe the participants or target population. This live experience will enable the researcher to develop certain details about the expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo shipping management and to be highly involved in the actual experience of the participants (Creswell & Brown, 1992).Hence, the researcher tends to understand what is going on within the organization regarding service quality in groupage cargo shipping management in small "ANO"groupage cargo shipping companies through description, explanation, observation and interpretation by the participants. Therefore a qualitative method will help the researcher to know more about the espoused theory and theory-in-use and make the researcher to understand more about the service quality management in groupage cargo shipment.

3.3 Research Design

According to Churchill (1991, p.127), marketing research design is defined as "the framework or plan for a study used as a guide in collecting and analyzing data. It is the blueprint that is followed in completing a study." Churchill, 1991; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) claimed that a research design should ensure that the research will be relevant to the research context and will use appropriate procedures. In the case of qualitative, unlike that of quantitative, there is no framework on how qualitative research should be conducted. However, there are five types of qualitative research which are as follows: Historical, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study.

This research tends to investigate into the expected and perceived service quality of groupage cargo shipping management, and the qualitative case study research is highly favoured and therefore selected for this study. Yin (2008) claimed that qualitative case study research focused on contemporary phenomena and therefore does not require the control of behavioural events. Hence, the researcher wishes to understand the expected and perceived service quality management processes in small groupage cargo shipping companies and therefore will like to explore and understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct what they say and the meaning they give to their experiences about expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo shipping management (Marriam, 2009).

3.3.1 Quantitative Research Techniques:

This has to do with a number of respondents, structured questionnaires and predetermined response choices. Swenson (2003) was of the opinion that quantitative research approach is best to investigate the perceptions and problems of the study and to discover the hidden values, feelings, attitudes and motivations. Hence, it uses deductive approach and the focus is mainly on testing the theories related to the topic by collecting the analyzing the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, Saunders et al. (2009) and Bryman& Bell (2007) stated that adopting a deductive approach usually is more often related with the quantitative research strategy and presume the conceptions to be organized in a way which allows the fact to be measured quantitatively. However, Biggan (2008) argues that in reality, it is very popular for the researchers to mix and match both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as it could sometimes provide better opportunities to answer the research questions.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research Techniques:

This has to do with the analyses, interpretation and collection of data by studying peoples' behavior, the way they act and their response. Hence, the qualitative research technique is non-statistical and it is therefore used to understand the motivations and reasons in a qualitative way (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research technique is an inductive approach in which interviews and case study methods are used to collect and analyze data. As Garson (2002) puts it "Qualitative research design strive for in-depth understanding of subjects, through such techniques participants observation, or narrative analysis, or they may strive for in-depth understanding of texts through such methods as exegesis or deconstructive." Hence, observation, focus group, face to face interview and semi-structured interview techniques were used with different samples "one time only," known as "multiple cross-sectional design (Anurit, 2002). However, to achieve the aim of this research, qualitative research method was used. With this approach open ended emerging data were collected with primary intent to develop themes from data (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative methods employed in this research were literature review and interview. The state-of –the –art data was collected through literature review while the state-of-practice data was collected through interviews. Hence, the key purpose of the interview was to understand the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality and how the selected companies deal with such issues in groupage cargo shipping management (Qadeer, 2013).

3.4 Case Selection

The small groupage cargo shipping companies under study were selected based on the fact that they are among the leading small groupage cargo shipping companies, in the Pratunam area ofBangkok, in Thailand. This is proven by the number of customers they serve when compared with their competitors. Before the selection process, we had a gentleman's agreement that the names of the three companies under study should remain anonymous. Hence, in order to protect their privacy, the selected companies were tagged "ANO" in this research. The case study provides an opportunity to build theory through the analysis of a number of unit cases and get divergent views of individuals in an organization ranging from the managing director or CEO, senior managers, operational managers, front desk employees and the company customers (focused

group) can be identified and know their collective views about the expectations and perceptions of service quality in small groupage cargo companies, as stated by Gratton et al. (1999) hence, different people have different interpretation of the same issue or world around them. Therefore owing to the nature of this research, the researcher opted for in-depth interview and rich data collection that require thorough investigation into the selected case companies (Yin, 2008).

3.5 Sampling Techniques:

Generally speaking, sample size for qualitative research varies from technique to technique but it is usually small hence, it involves non-probability sampling where little attempt is made to investigate a representative sample. However, there are four types of non-probability sampling techniques which include: purposive, snowball, convenience and quota. However, purposive suites the researcher's study because it is assumed that the researcher wants to discover, understand and also gain more insight and therefore must select an appropriate sample through which the most valuable data could be collected and a lot will be learned (Lecompte&Preissle, 1993). This will enable researcher answer the research questions and make recommendations and draw conclusion. However, the logic and power behind the purposive sampling lie in the selection of information-rich case that will be studied in-depth. Hence, information-rich cases are those in which one can learn a lot about issue of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). However, in this research, the primary data were collected from the following respondents.

Table 2

Sample Size of the Study

Position	Number of Interviewees			
	Company 'A'	Company 'N'	Company 'O'	Total
Managing Director/CEO	1	1	1	3
Senior Manager	1	1	1	3
Middle Level Executives (operational Manager)	1	1	1	3
Focused Group (Customers)	5	5	5	15
Front Desk Employees	2	2	2	6
Total number of Interview participants	10	10	10	30

Source: Research Survey in June 2016.

3.6. Data Collection Techniques:

There are different sources of collecting data but the two most common sources which are generally used are the primary and secondary. This research employed interview method as a source of collecting primary data whereas secondary data was collected through literature review. As a result of the importance of service quality in service oriented organizations and high customers' expectations of service quality, individual and focused group in-depth interview are considered the most appropriate techniques for data collection. However, Cooper and Schindler (2006) argued that individual in-depth interview is regularly used when research topic is a sensitive issue that might provoke anxiety. Hence, different kinds of interviews can be categorized as follows; highly structured, semi-structured and unstructured / informal. After careful considerations, the semi-structured interview was in this research because the study is focusing on both the employees and customers alike.. This is because there is need to assess the service experiences of both the internal and external customers. However, in qualitative research interviews are more open ended and less structured which tends to give the participants the opportunity to express themselves and share any idea or experiences in their own word hence, the questions are more flexibly worded, and thus semi-structured interview was employed in this research.

3.7. Research Instruments:

The questionnaire for the interview were constructed and interview conducted because this study intend to investigate into the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo shipping and achieve an understanding of how the organization perceive and interpret the expectations of the customers and meeting the overall needs of the customers or exceeding the needs and suggest ways through which the gaps will be closed and improve service quality.

3.7.1. Interview Design:

After reviewing the available literatures on the service quality concepts, customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, the interview questions were carefully designed with the help of the existing theories in this research. The questionnaires were latter reviewed by the research advisor to ensure the quality and relevance of the questions in this research. The questionnaires were written in English and interviews conducted as well in English since the target popular language is English. The questionnaires were designed and divided into threecategories. However, the questionnaire started with closed questions regarding the general information about the participants' gender, age, the length of patronage and years of experience and then followed by open questions. These open questions are aimed at letting the interviewees think deeply without limiting their responses or test their real feelings or values. During the interview the researcher broke the silence and led the questioning and at the same time took notes. The researcher however, interjects occasionally in the middle of the interview to clarify a point and / or follow up a line of questioning that may be relevant..

3.7.2. Questionnaire Design:

The questionnaire employed in this study includes "open" questions that are more or less like an interview scripts. Open questions are aimed at letting the interviewees think deeply without limiting their responses or test their real feelings or values. Hence, interesting responses are explored by conducting an in-depth face to face interview. However, in this study the researchertried to capture precise words or descriptions within a specific context by taking notes thus enabling the data to be analyzed through a series of processes. However, there are two questionnaires used in this study. The questionnaire is made up of two sections- section one tagged "Appendix "A" containing 10 questions is for the staff of the "ANO" companies and section two tagged "Appendix "B" containing 10 questions for the "ANO" customers (focus groups). However, each section of this questionnaire contains three categories. Category one is on "service, service quality and SERVQUAL dimensions"; category two is on the "customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality," and category three is on the "discrepancy in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality."

3.8. Data Collection Procedure:

The researcher approached the participants or respondents concerned through the recommendation of the chief executive and senior managers of the selected case companies. Face to face interviews were conducted at the respondents offices on Wednesdays and Fridays and Saturdays were mapped out specifically for loading of the containers, and the interview time was 15:00 hours to 17:45 hours and each interview lasted between 35 to 40 minutes. Both the researcher and the participants agreed that the interview should be anonymous in order to protect the privacy of the participants. The aim of the interview is to know what the opinions of the interviewees are with respect to the service quality management in groupage shipping service. However, the interviewees were willing to air their opinion on the subject matter and the researcher kept on viewing their experiences under study by listening attentively without using preconceived ideas or existing theories in interpreting their experiences. Hence, content analysis was used to compare different data from different respondents to determine the similarities and difference about the interviewees or respondents' perspective on service quality management of the selected case companies.

3.9. Data Analysis:

There are three main tools available for the analysis of qualitative data vis-a-viz protocol analysis, process analysis and content analysis. Of these three analytical tools, content analysis is highly favoured to be more appropriate for classifying textual materials by reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data (Weber, 1990) as cited in (Anurit, 2002). Weber (1990) argued that the central problem of content analysis centered mainly in the data-reduction process through which many words of texts are classified into much fewer content categories. Hence, content analysis was used to find the themes, stories, and patterns in the data. Thus the evidence from interviews, documents and archival records were used to determine the stakeholders' perceptions and understanding of the service quality management in their companies. However, Cooper & Schindler 2006 were of the opinion that data was analyzed using content analysis

technique to measure the semantic content of communication to diagnose findings with anonymity protection for academic purposes. Hence, using the guidelines from Shye, Elizur and Hoffman (1994), the information or data obtained from the interviews and focus groups will be content analyzed manually.

3.10 Validity and Reliability of the Study:

Saunders et al. (2009) argued that validity and reliability of data depends largely on the questionnaire structure and questions design that is aimed at reducing the possibility of being subjective in creating the questions and consequently receiving wrong answers. However, Bryman and Bell (2007) submitted that validity is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings, whereas reliability is connected with the consistency of the tools for measuring. However, in the qualitative study the researcher is faced with the questions about the validity that is the extent to which the research findings are credible, and reliability, that is the extent to which there is consistency in the findings of using qualitative method for the study (Merriam, 2009). For example, why is it important for the researcher to get the participants' interpretation of what is going on? Since the researcher is the principal research instrument for the data collection and analysis, how can the readers believe that the researcher is a valid and reliable instrument? How will the researcher ascertain when to stop collecting data? Without hypothesis, how will the researcher know what the study tends to achieve? (What information the study is looking for) and the last but not the least, if other researchers should employ the same conditions, questions and methods in conducting the same investigation, would they arrive at the same answers or outcomes (Pansoongnern, 2012).

However, these questions were asked based on the fact that one of the assumptions underlying qualitative study is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing hence, it is no a single, fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and / or measured as in the case of quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). Hence, people find it difficult to trust interviews obtained from the individual in-depth interview technique without formulating any hypothesis applying advanced statistical method to test the hypothesis. Thus, the researcher justifies the choice of qualitative method in this study by employing various methods to increase validity and reliability of the research. Increasing the reliability of the research, the researcher employed the triangulation in this study, which is the use of multiple data sources; respondents' validation which is concerned with soliciting of feedbacks on expected results from some of the participants; and adequate engagement in data collection, which concerns with the constant repetition of the same information over and over again without adding any new information. But in the case of reliability and generalizability of the research thick description was employed. This involves the description of the setting and participants of the study and detailed description of the findings with good evidence presented in the form of quotes from the interviewees if possible (Pansoongnern, 2012).

Chapter 4

Results and Analyses

4.1 Introduction

   The qualitative findings from in-depth interview with the staff of "ANO" Companies and their customers (Focus Groups) were presented in this chapter. The interview questions were divided into two sections of three categories each for both the staff of "ANO" companies and their customers (Focus Group). The categories include (1) Service, Service Quality and SERVQUAL dimensions (2) Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality and (3) Discrepancy in the Gap between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality. Finally the analyses of the results and findings based on the interview conducted were presented. However, the results were discussed and presented based on the review of the related literature in chapter two.

4.2 Interviews:

4.2.1 Service and SERVQUAL Dimensions and, Service Quality and how it is measured

4.2.1.1 Definition of Service

 Service is intangible in nature and as such it is difficult to define. It is difficult because you do not judge or value service until it is consumed. It is only the customer that has the right to determine what the value of service or its quality is. Service is perishable in nature. Sometimes customers partake in the production of service, for example in the aircraft or a customer waiting for his or her shipment to be documented and BoL (Bill of Lading) given to him or her as an evidence of shipment. In this case service is inseparable and consumed simultaneously as it is produced (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

Personally, the word 'service' can be defined as a deed performed by one party to another at a consideration without parting away with any physical item (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Service is difficult to define because of its intangibility. However, service can be defined as an action that is performed for one person by another for pleasure at a price It cannot be stored (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The word 'service' is an act of doing work for someone without taking specific costs or risk for example a telephone user. Service is perishable, it is intangible, itcannot be touched or stored (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Based on my opinion, service is an action performed by one person for another without possession. It is heterogeneous. That is to say, no two service provider can perform the same service the same way. For example, two staff in the same organization cannot perform the same service way because of their knowledge of the service and different service mind set (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The term 'service' can be defined as the performance of a valuable action by an employee of a service company in fulfillment of a customer's need or demand. Service cannot be seen, touched or stored. It is intangible. Because of it intangibility, it is therefore complex in nature. It is complex in the sense that any service oriented company that does not have service culture embedded in its mission statement will find it difficult to satisfy its customers and the staff will lack guide and direction (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

The word 'service' is a sensitive issue and any company that performs good service to its clients is at advantage over its competitors. It is delicate because it is intangible. Unlike product, service cannot be touched or tested to find out if it is defective or not until it is consumed (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

In my own view, service is an effort performed by a service provider in order to satisfy its customers' needs or expectations. Service cannot be seen or touched or even tested. Even after the consumption, it will be an experience and the only thing the customer takes home is the memories of the experience encountered (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Service is difficult to define and as such complex in nature. It is perishable, it cannot be stored. It cannot be seen or touched. It is something you do not part with after making a purchase (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

The term 'service' to me, means an action done in fulfillment of a customer's needs or wants by another party. It cannot be touched, part-with or tested. It is intangible. In fact no two service providers or individuals will perform the same service the same way (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

A company needs to have a service culture or philosophy in place and try to drum it into the ears of the staff to imbibe it, believe in it and have it at the back of their minds. It is difficult to define service because, it is intangible in nature; but to me it is an action or deed performed by an individual or company to another person(s) or company at a consideration or price. Service can neither be stored nor touched (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Service is perishable. It can neither be stored nor seen. Service is more or less an experience encountered in a service setting. Service is better experienced than imagined. Service can be defined as a memory of an experience taken home by a client or customer after a service encounter. It cannot be touched or part away with (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Personally, I think service heterogeneous, it is intangible and because of its intangibility, it is complex and therefore difficult to define. It is inseparable and because of it inseparability, it is consumed simultaneously as it is produced. Service is perishable and cannot be stored (Interview Company 'O' staff).

The word 'service' is a valuable deed or effort done by the service provider in fulfillment of a customer's expectations. It is intangible. It cannot be seen or touché or possessed (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

In my opinion, service is an action performed by one party to another in order to satisfy a need. Service is perishable, it cannot be seen or touched; that is to say, it is intangible. It cannot be possessed or part-with. The quality or value cannot be determined by a customer until it is consumed. In fact service is better experienced than imagined (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

A member of the focus group said that "having a clear-cut service culture or philosophy is a key to establishing a competitive edge over a any competition." However, another member of the focus group cuts in and said "service can be a difference maker between a business success and its failure." The other three members argued that service is perishable hence; it cannot be stored. It is intangible, because it cannot be touched, neither will it be seen nor parted away with (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

Service is a good differentiator between two competing businesses says one of the focus group members. While two of the member argued that service is heterogeneous and inseparable. However the other two stated that service is intangible and perishable in nature. They went further to argue that because of its intangibility nature that it is too complex and therefore difficult to define (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

A member of the focus group said that service is something he pays for without taken possession. Meanwhile his colleague argued that service is an experience and a customer can only take home the memories of that service encounter. However, the other three agree with them but quickly added that service is intangible, perishable and heterogeneous in nature (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.1.2 SERVQUAL Dimensions

Personally, I think the customers value reliability mostly, then followed by assurance, responsiveness, and tangibles and of course empathy. Our customers expect us to deliver as promised and accurately too. If we are reliable our customers' expectations will be met and they will be happy (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

Based on my experience and interactions with our customers, I think they value responsiveness most. If we are handy to help and provide prompt service to our customers, this will no doubt help in meeting their expectations. Then the next is reliability, followed by assurance, tangible and empathy (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Well, I think our customers give more weight to tangibles because when you deliver your service professionally and emphasize on tangible cues, the customers will be happy and will like to keep patronizing us (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Basically, I think our customers value reliability most because if we do not disappoint them and deliver as promised and on time, their expectations will be met; otherwise they will feel bad and unhappy and may not come back next time (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Based on my experience, assurance it is. This is because if the staff can convince the customer to trust and have confidence in both our company and services, then customers will become loyal and keep coming back and can easily make our company their first choice (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Well, from my experience so far, our customers value reliability feature more than any other dimension because when you say that you are going to deliver on so, so and so time and it is done you are building a customer data-base because they will not only come back but with new customers as an evidence that they are satisfied and happy too (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

I think from my own opinion, our customers value assurance most than any other service quality feature. This is because if you can build customers' confidence and trust in your company. They will make you their first choice for their purchases. They will also recommend your services and organization to other customers and even their friends, peers, and family members (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

From what I have observed so far, our customers value responsiveness more than any other features because if we provide prompt services to our customers in a friendly manner, it will not only build our customer data-base but also their expectations will be met and this will also increase profitability (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

So far so good, experience has shown that our customers value empathy more than any other service quality dimension because when you care about your customers and give them individualized attention and due respect they need and also person to person contact or if you like one-on-one interaction, it will make you understand your customers and their needs better (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Personally, my observations so far revealed that our customers value assurance mostly when compared to any other service quality dimension. When you as a service provider assure a customer that you are going to

deliver on a particular date and you do so. The customer will trust you and impose more confidence in your ability to deliver and will like to do more business with you (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Experience has shown that our customers want us to be reliable and I think they are right. They want us to prove to them that we are dependable and can perform accurately once a contract is signed. Hence, the customers expect the service provider to provide the service as promised without lapses (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

I think from my own opinion and observation since I joined the company, customers' value tangibles most. The physical appearance of the company and the way the staff of the company appear makes customers to have more confidence that the company will deliver as promised (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Based on my experience with our customers and my opinion, customers give more weight to assurance than any other service quality dimension. If the employees are knowledgeable about the service they want to provide, it will help to build more trust and confidence in the customers who will now be willing more than ever before to do business with the company (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

My encounter with customers and experience has shown that customers value reliability more than any other service quality features. Customers will like you to be trustworthy, be a man of your words, be dependable and reliable at any given time; making sure that the service is concluded on time and without error (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

In my opinion and understanding of our customers, I think they value responsiveness more than any other service quality dimension. For example, how ready are the staff to help the customers and ensure that the service is performed on time so that their expectations are met? (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

One of the focus group members said that the service provider should be able to be reliable. He further argued that the service provider should be somebody he should depend on and have to perform the service as promised. However, two members agreed that assurance is the most valuable when compared to other service quality dimensions. This is so because the staff of the company has to have knowledge of the service to be able to answer the customers' question in order to convince them to have trust that they are capable of performing once the contract is signed as this no doubt will increase the customers' confidence. However, one of them said that she prefers the service provider to be responsive at any point in time and be ready to help customers and deliver the service on time. While the last but not the least member of the group said that he values empathy more than any of the service quality features because when the service provider cares about the customers and gives them the necessary attention, that the service provider will end up building a data-base of loyal customers that will be of immense help in the future (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

Two customers agree that reliability is the most valuable service quality features. They went further to stress that the service provider should be able to deliver the service as promised without fault in order to meet the customers' expectations. However, one member said that responsiveness is the most important service quality dimension. He argued that if the service provider is willing to help customers and provide the service as promised and on time that the customers' expectations will be met and this will in turn, lead to happy and loyal customers thereby building a customer data-base. Meanwhile another focus group member stated that assurance is the most valuable service quality feature the ability of the service provider to prove to customers that he or she is knowledgeable about the service offered is likely to shore up the customers' confidence and trust thereby meeting the customers' expectations. However, the next member said that tangible feature is the most important compared to other service quality dimensions. This is so because the appearance of the staff, the building in which the service is performed, the service setting and the

technological materials go a long way to convince the customers that the service provider is capable of providing the services without hitches (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

Three of the focus group members agreed that reliability is the most valuable or important service quality dimension. They argued that the service provider should be somebody to depend on and should be able do what he or she says and on time. However, another member said that responsiveness is the most important feature compared to any other service quality dimension. He argued that a service provider who is cheerful and willing to help customers and deliver prompt service will at the end of the day win the hearts of the customers who will not only come back but will recommend the company and its services to his or her friends, peers and even family members. The last but definitely not the least member of the group subscribed to tangible as the most important service quality dimension. She argued that physical appearance and tangible cues are the only thing the customer is seeing that will convince him or her about the type of service and its quality which the service provider has to offer since service in itself is intangible and is better experienced than imagined (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.1.3 Service Quality and how it is Measured

The term 'service quality' is the service which our customers perceived as received as the service encounter. We measure it as the difference between the expected and perceived service of our customers. It could be said to be a differentiator against your competitors (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

Service quality is a strong competitive tool which all the service companies will like to have. It is measured by deducting perception from expectation, that is, expectations—perceptions (E—P) (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The term 'service quality' is the difference between the customers' expected and perceived service as delivered. It is could be good or bad service. For example, if the perceived service is higher than the expected service, that means the service is good but if it is the opposite, it means that the service bad that is, the expected service is higher than the perceived service as received and the customers are not disappointed and unhappy (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Service quality has to do with customers comparing the expectations and perceptions of service as delivered by the service provider. By so doing, it can help the management of the service organizations to identify gap. Service quality is measured as the difference between the expectations and perceptions of the customers (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Service quality is the measure of customers' expectations against their perceptions of the service as delivered. For example, if the perception is higher than the expectations, it means the service is good and vice versa (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Service quality is the customers' expectations minus perceptions and the difference becomes the service received by the customer. In this case it could be poor or quality service. Hence, if the customers' expectations are higher than their perceptions, the service is poor and bad experience and customers are disappointed, dissatisfied and unhappy and in this case customers may resort to negative WOM and the eventual switch to competitor if nothing drastic is done immediately in terms of service recovery. However, where the service exceeds the customers' expectations, it means a quality service and a 'wow' service and the customers are delighted and happy and will keep on coming back with new customers most likely (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

The term 'service quality' has to do with the measurement of the customers' expectations against their perceptions of the service as delivered by the company. It is measured as the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of the service as received (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

When we talk about service quality, I think we are comparing the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service. The difference between them is the service delivered to the customer (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Service quality is a competitive tool that could be used against competition. I think, it is a kind of competitive strategy which every company that is in service business will like to possess as a differentiating factor to outwit competition. It could be measured by determining the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

The term 'service quality' is the service the customer perceives as received after the service encounter. It could be good or bad depending on the interaction between the service provider and the customer. Hence, it is measured by determining the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of that service (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Service quality is the difference in the customers' expected service and perceived service. The service quality could be good or bad. It is so because; it is complex as a result of its intangibility nature. It is equally so because different people have different expectations and as such one man's meat is another man's poison (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Personally, the term 'service quality' to me is a powerful competitive differentiator and it is a tool every service organization will like to have. An organization that has a good service culture and quality standards that is embraced by the staff will always satisfy its customers. It could be measured as the difference between the customers' expectations and their corresponding perceptions (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Service quality is the comparison of customers' expectations and their perceptions of service. It can be measured by determining the difference between their expectations and perceptions of such service (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

I think, service quality is the difference between the customers' perceptions and their expectations of service encounter. In this case, if the perception is higher than the expectations, the service is good and vice versa (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Service quality to me is a competitive advantage which every service organization should strive to possess. This is because it is only a satisfied customer the first time that will like to come back. In fact it is a competitive differentiator and it is measured by determining the difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of such service offered (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

An organization that has quality service is at advantage compared to its competitors says one of the focus group members. However, others concord but added that service quality is the difference between their expectations and perceptions of such service (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

Service quality is the difference between the perceptions and expectations of customers says one of the members of the focus group. Another member said, I agree with the first speaker but it is also a competitive tool I suppose. While the other three vehemently agreed that it is measured by determining the difference between the expectations and perceptions of customers (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

The term 'service quality' I think, is the difference between the expected and perceived service by the customers says a member of the focus group. Another member said it is true, I agree with him. While two of the members said that it could be measured by deducting perceptions from the expectations and the difference is the service which could be poor or quality service. However, the last but definitely not the least member of the focus group said that service quality is all about how it matches his expectations (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.2 Service Quality Improvement Strategy

I think from my own understanding, and facilities and equipment that make the job get done must be put in place to enable the employees do their job effectively and efficiently. The overall level of the service should be increased by having a development program in the form of training in an organization to train the employees especially the customer contact personnel so as to meet the service quality objectives set out by the management (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

It is important that a company has a service culture in place which should be followed by all the employees. Once this policy is in place, the employees will know that the company take the quality service to its customers seriously, and everybody has to sit up. However, the company should try and carry the workers along bearing in mind that the employees are company's greatest asset. Hence, the company should try to motivate the staff by training them, offering them rewards and recognize hard work and giving them bonus. This is because, if they are carried along, they will be happy and in turn, transfer that happiness to customers (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Personally, I believe from the company's perspective that a trained staff will have the necessary skills to deal with the customers about the services offered. In this way, staffers are assets to companies because if the staff understand the service or the product and what it takes to convince the customers in order to build trust and confidence, the customers will be happy. However, a happy customer will not only come back but will recommend others (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The company must have a well-designed service system in place in order to meet customers' expectations. We all know that different customers have different expectations and perception therefore; putting a well-designed service quality system in place will increase customers' satisfaction and loyalty to the company. However, employees should be well trained to be able to convince the customers about the company's service as the service occurs at the point of interaction between the service provider and customer. This is because the performance of the service provider at that juncture affects the customers' perceptions as they are the ones that influence the customers' evaluation of that service. Hence, the training of the employees is very crucial in improving the service quality (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Based on my experience and observation, getting feedbacks from customers will help the company improve its service quality. A company really has to know how customers feel about the services offered to them. Since service is intangible in nature and there is no way a customer can test it before consumption hence, it is only after it is consumed that it could be evaluated by customers. It is therefore important to get information on how our customers feel about our services by sending questionnaires to them to fill and send back to us after the service encounter. Also we can call them on phone and ask them how they feel about the service and know if we met or exceeded their expectations and ask few suggestions on how to serve them better to meet their expectations next time and by so doing we will be able to know exactly what their needs are (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Personally, I think, capacity planning is very important in an organization to know exactly what to produce at any giving time. In this case the company needs to know the service design capacity which is the

maximum amount of work the organization needs to achieve at any given period. This could be done by communicating with different departments in the organization to know exactly what they are doing or what ought to be done in order to save time and avoid unnecessary stress and burden that may eventually affect the quality of the service. Hence, overcapacity and undercapacity need to be balanced to achieve optimal capacity to improve service quality (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

It is important to evaluate the employees' performance if the capacity is known and the service performance standards in place, then the employees can be evaluated based on the set standards. Apart from measuring the performance of service quality, constant monitoring of the employees will no doubt improve the service quality (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

In my opinion, to improve the service quality the company needs to conduct marketing research to know exactly what the needs of the customers. They can also get feedbacks from customers via emails to know how they feel about the service they received. Another way is through recognizing the fact that the employees are the internal customers and should be carried along. Hence, the earlier the company accepts the fact that employees are its greatest asset, the better for it. Therefore, employees should be motivated in form of rewards, training, bonus, recognition of hard work and promotions. This is because a happy staff will go to any length to make an aggrieved customer happy (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Based on my experience, I think team work is important in improving the service quality of the organization. We really need to cooperate amongst ourselves if service quality needs to be improved. We have to share information, and communicate with each other and ask questions whenever we do not understand, because what you do not understand, you do not know and what you do not know, you cannot make use of. This way we will be able to discuss and analyze our customers and be able to predict their needs or expectations based on the information gathered about them (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

From my personal observation and experience, listening very attentively to customers and being able to understand the customer and perform the service right the first time is very important. The service provider should be knowledgeable about the services offered and being able to answer questions or queries posed by customers is very important because some customers are impatient and hate repetition and too much questions may irritate them or make them angry (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Well, if you must improve your service quality in your organization, you really need to know what your customers' expectations or needs are. You really need to go extra mile to be able to get information about your customers so as to meet their expectations. You need to know what they think and feel about your service. Also you need to know about your capacity building. Knowing the number of your customers will really help in the capacity building so as to know exactly what your production will be at any given time. Feedback from your customers is also very important to improve the service quality. We can do this by getting information from our customers by sending questionnaires on how they feel about our service to them through email. We can also get information from our customers by calling them on phone after the service encounter to know how they feel, others include viral marketing such as blog and internet (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

For a company to improve its service quality, the employees need to be evaluated based on the service acceptable standards practice by the company. Also the employees need to be monitored on the monthly or quarterly basis to improve the service quality (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Experience has shown that in order to increase service quality, marketing research need to be carried out to know the expectations of the customers and tailor the service system design to meet those expectations. Apart from marketing research, companies can get information about their customers and needs through

sending questionnaires to their customers after the service encounter to know how they feel about their services and find out whether or not their expectations were met and make suggestions on how to serve them better next time (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Based on my opinion, training staff on service skill will go a long way in improving the service quality. Apart from that recruiting employees with service mind is the key to service quality improvement. This is because a patient and cheerful staff will serve and attract customers' more than other employees. Hence, human resources management should endeavor to recruit people with service mind who are cheerful, smiling, respectful and patient enough and ready to go extra mile to tolerate some rude and impatient customers (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

A company that wants to improve its service quality must have service culture policy in place. All the company staff and the management should be made to believe in that service culture and must be imbibed by all the staff. Once this is done, everybody will sit up and adhere strictly to the tenets of the service culture. Management must also ensure that the service culture is written down as part of the mission statement. Another one is team work and cooperation amongst the staff. There is need to share information and ask questions where necessary and even discuss and analyze customers to be able to know them better internally (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Responding fast to customers' questions and doing it right the first time will do a lot in improving the service quality of the groupage cargo shipping companies says one of the focus group members. Customer is a king you know, he continued, but these people are just after our money and do not care how we feel and never bothered how we feel, no questions to find out what we need or what our expectations are and try to channel their service design system towards meeting our expectations. Another member cuts in and said, yes I agree with him but in addition they should train their staff very well to know the art of service they offer and answer the necessary questions pertaining the service correctly. A situation where the service provider is inattentive to understand and answer my questions and probably do it right the first time irritate me and it shows that the service provider does not know much about what he or she is about to sell to me and in that case I will start having doubts as to whether or not they are capable of delivering the service if the contract is signed. However, the rest three focus group members agreed with the first and second speakers but said that the onus is on the inability of some service companies to conduct marketing research to know exactly what the expectations of the customers are. They also stressed that they can still get information from customers to know how they feel about their service by sending them email to evaluate the service quality after a service encounter (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

You see, before you can talk of improving service quality, you must have service culture policy in your organization and surprisingly some of the service organizations do not have it in place says one of the focus group members. So tell me, he continued how you can start improving on nothing, because you can only improve on the 'culture' you have already. Some service providers are really doing trial and error and gambling with customers' feelings because this is an intangible product we are talking about here and you must have paid for it before you can consume it hence, you cannot see, touch or possess it until you consume it. So it is better experienced than imagined in this case. As a result of its intangibility nature it is service, it is up to you. The second member of the group cuts in and said that the first speaker was right. She went further to say that if at all they have service culture and service standards they follow, that they should be able to evaluate their service providers based on the service standards. They do not care about getting feedbacks from customers to know how they feel about the service offered after the service encounter. The third member of the focus group said that training the service providers or staff is of vital importance in this regard. This will go a long in closing or reducing the gap between the service provider and the customers at the point of sale or service encounter. The next two members of the group agreed in

totality with the first, second and third speakers but argued that some of the service companies do not have a well-designed service system to be able to meet customers' expectations hence, different customers have different levels of expectations and perceptions. Also service oriented companies need service minded and well trained staff to be able to meet the demands of the customers in terms of convincing the customers on the services offered so as to increase the customers trust and confidence, this they believe no doubt will help to improve the service quality in the groupage cargo shipping industry (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

Based on my experience and observation, some of the service providers are absent minded and do not understand the customers the first time and as a result they do not do it right the first time says one of the focus group members. This is worrisome, he continued and service companies need to train their service providers especially the front-desk employees who interact with the customers more often in order to be knowledgeable about the service offered and answer the necessary questions that may be asked by the customer and by so doing understand the customers' needs and expectations. I think my colleague is right says another focus group member. He argued that service quality improvement lies heavily on the service culture itself because some of the service companies do not have the service culture in their company talk less of improving on it. There is no way you can improve on what you do not believe in and practice. Yes echoed another two members of the focus group. They said that the agreed with the previous speakers but claimed that marketing research is also one of the things which the companies must do to increase or improve their service quality. They went further to say that the company really has to know what their customers think and expect from them and by doing so; they will begin to meet their customers' expectations. However, the last but not the least member said that he agreed with all that have been said by his colleagues but added that getting feedback from customers is equally important. He said that this could be done by sending the customers questionnaires regarding your service quality performance after the service encounter via email and also by putting a call through to a customer to really ascertain his or her experience about the organization's service after the experience. Also the company should empower their employees to own any customer's complaint received by any staff until that problem is solved and make the customer happy. This could be done by empowering the staff to exercise certain authority to solve customer's problem without having to consult higher authority as long as it is within his or her limit to do so (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.3 Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service quality

No doubt there is a difference in the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Expectations are customers' desires which they feel the service provider should be able to offer. You see, people are different and so are their wants and expectations. Therefore, different customers have different expectations and perceptions. For example, the way customer 'A' perceives something will definitely be different from the way customer 'B' will perceive the same thing with respect to service quality dimensions (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

There is difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers. Different people have different needs. Customers see expectations as wants which the service providers want to offer them. However, some service providers like us usually do go extra mile of delighting our customers as a form of benefits to surprise them (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Yes, there is a difference. This is because customers come to service provider with a lot of expectations that they expect the company to offer to them. They also expect to experience the service and it should be performed as well. They equally expect to see how the server should behave and the appearance of the physical service setting. All these and more are what the service provider should bear in mind and try to device a service design system that will satisfy these expectations (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

There is difference in the customers' expectations and perceptions. Hence, it is important to know what the customers' expectations are. This is so because the company's knowledge of what the customers' expect is very important as this would serve as competitive advantage. It is equally important knowing the customers' level of service expectations because failure to do so will lead to customers' dissatisfaction which in turn may bleed a bunch of unhappy customers that may even switch to our competitors (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Expected and perceived always get me confused but let me answer the question in terms of desired and adequate service. For example, if am going to buy a service from a service provider, there is a level of service I desire in my mind to accept. But should this desire falls to the adequate level, I will still manage to accept it because of some obvious lapses as a result of human error and the service system designs. But the moment the service falls below adequate level, it is very clear that I will get irritated and will no longer accept the service no matter what (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I think, there is a difference in the expectations and perceptions of different customers. People have different needs and wants. They enter the service encounter with different expectations which they expect the service provider to meet. Once their expectations are met, they are satisfied and are happy otherwise they will be disappointed and get frustrated and dissatisfied too. Hence, the service provider will always strive to meet or exceed the customers' expectations (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

There is no doubt that there is a difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Different customers have different expectations and perceptions. Customer 'X' for example, is different from customer 'Y' hence; they have different expectations because of their personal needs and the way they can

also perceive things. Therefore, two different customers can perceive the same service quality features or dimensions differently based on their past experiences of service quality from different service providers (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Absolutely, there is a difference in the expectations and perceptions of our customers. These customers are coming from different social, cultural and economic background and they see and perceive things in different ways. For example, what I as a person expects from an outing might be different from my wife and so our perceptions too. So it is the duty of the service provider to try and find out what exactly are the expectations of their customers and try to tailor their service system design to meet those needs (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I think so, but I am not too sure of these words- expectations and perceptions. However, permit me to explain or answer your question using these words which I am more familiar with. The customer enters a service encounter with a lot of desired and adequate service levels in mind. The customer hopes to receive what he desired. But the adequate is the minimum level of service which the customer can receive after considering some obvious shortfalls due to controllable and uncontrollable factors, human error inclusive. Once the customer cannot get the desired service, he can only settle for that service level between the desired and adequate no more, no less. This is because no customer with his or her money will like any service below adequate at this point it will be irritating and frustrating (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Definitely, there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Customers enter the service encounter with different expectations. This is because different customers have different expectations and perceptions. Therefore, their expectations vary and so also their perceptions, because they can always perceive the same service quality dimension differently (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Yes, it is obvious that there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Different customers have different expectations and perceptions. For example, what Mr. 'A' may expect and perceive in a service as received will be quite different from what Mr. 'B' will expect and perceive in the same service encounter. Some customers have higher expectations than other as a result of their past service experiences and some privilege information regarding the service and the company before entering into the service encounter (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Certainly there is a difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. This is because different customers have different expectations and perceptions. Some customers' expectations are higher than the orders as a result of what they hear from their peer groups, friends and family members or even from other customers. It also influences their perceptions positively or negatively (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

I think there is a difference between the expected and perceived service quality. Experience has shown that because of the intangible nature of service, it is difficult to satisfy all the customers because of their different expectations and their previous service experiences (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The answer is yes, there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions. Some customers have higher expectations than the others. Once those expectations are not met, the customers will be dissatisfied and get frustrated. It is therefore advisable that service providers should endeavor to relate well with their customers in order to know what their expectations are and try to meet them (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

I believe so because different people have different expectations and perception. Different customers have different expectations and so are their perceptions. They cannot perceive the same thing the same way hence, their perceptions are different. Mr. 'B' is different from Mr. 'C' and their expectations and perceptions should be different too (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The members of the company 'A' focus group strongly believed that there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. According to them they said that they are five people in their group but their expectations and perceptions are different irrespective of their coming together as a group. They said that they perceive things differently. As a result the service provider should strive to meet their individual expectation as they enter the service encounter with different expectations. They went further to say that as they have different expectations so their perceptions are and that each of them will only judge the service based on what he or she perceived as received (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

The members of the group unanimously agreed that there is difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. They added that the difference between the expectations and perceptions of service quality could be either poor or quality service. They argued that if their individual expectations were met, that means quality service but a situation where their expectations were not met by the service provider, it means poor service quality and customers are dissatisfied and even get frustrated and may not come back. Therefore, it is very important for the service provider to meet the customers' expectations (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

This focus group agreed in its totality that there is a difference between the expectations and perceptions of customers. According to them, a happy customer will always come back. Hence, it is good to find out what the expectations of the customers are through marketing research, feedback via email and by putting a call through the customers to ascertain how they feel about the service they just experienced and suggest ways to serve them better by letting the service provider know some of the things they will be expecting in the future. This is because nowadays some of the customers are well informed as a result of their past

experiences and information they gather from friends, peers, relatives and even customers and company Web site and from blog and internet (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.4 Factors Influencing the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

Experience has shown that word of mouth or WOM if you like, has a lot of influence on the customers' expectations. WOM could be positive or negative. WOM is a strong marketing tool which can advertise the company free of charge in a positive way if the expectations of the customers are met or negatively if the customers' expectations were not met and the outcome was a poor service. This will not augur well for the company because the customer who had poor service or bad experience is not happy and will like to tell whoever that cares to listen and may even go to the internet or blog via Tripadvisor to bare his or her mind about the service experience. If this is not corrected immediately and taken drastic steps that ensure service recovery, the company will start losing its customers. Another factor is past experience of the customers about a particular product or service. As a result of this previous experience and knowledge of that service, the customers experience will be high and the only way you can satisfy such customers is to exceed their expectations (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

One of the factors that influence the customers' expectations includes personal needs. I think your present needs as at the time has a lot of influence on your expectations. That will make you to know the kind of things to expect from your service provider. Another factor is your previous experience. In other words, the customers' past experience with the product or service will have a lot of influence in the customers' expectations. However, price plays a lot of role in the perceptions of such service. Customers like bargaining and will like to buy services that are economically priced. But care must be taken not to bring down the price of a service so low as the low or cheap price will make the customers feel that the quality of the service is low even though it is a quality product or service (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Word of mouth (WOM) is one of the factors that influence the expectations of the customers. You see, what people say or hear about a company, product or service matters a lot. This is because what people hear from others has a lot of influences on their expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo business. However, negative WOM has a stronger influence in the customers' perception when compared to positive WOM communication. Again reputation of the product or service or the company has a lot of influence on the perceptions of customers. Reputation of product or service or company does not come just overnight, it is something that is built over time. It takes gradual process (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The way you package and brand your product or service has a lot of influence on your customers' perceptions of service quality. The way and manner you present your service to the first time customer for example, will have a lot of influence on his or her perceptions of that service. Another one is the past experience of the customer. A highly experienced customer, because of his or her knowledge of the product or service, information from relatives or friends will have a very big influence on the customers' expectations. So we need to handle our customers with care and we need to get information about what they need so that we can meet their expectations (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Personally, I believe word of mouth (WOM) has a lot of influence on the customers' expectations. For instance, in the course of making decisions to buy a product or service, the customer is all out to get information and recommendations from friends and family members that have undertaken the same service. Positive WOM can advertise the company and its services free of charge and also project the image of the company positively. But a negative WOM is dangerous for companies. This is because an aggrieved customer has a lot of weapon to his or her advantage. When a customer is angry, it is an opportunity for your competitors to take him or her away from you. The moment your aggrieved customer switches over to

your competitor, he or she will keep on referring to that bad or awful service anywhere he or she goes without remembering the quality service he or she enjoyed before. However, the negative WOM is not good for a company and as such the company or the service provider should not allow any aggrieved customer to leave the company premises unsatisfied or unhappy as this will seriously dent the image of the company. In contrast therefore, positive WOM will tend to portray the image of the company positively and takes it to greater height. Other factors include customers' previous experiences, feedback received from friends, colleagues and relatives about the company and its services and also from advertising campaigns, etc. (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Previous experiences from the customers have a lot of influence on the customers' expectations and perceptions. Those customers with a lot of experience regarding the service as a result of other service providers they have visited in the past are difficult to satisfy. But we always make sure such customers feel that they are recognized and that they are the reason we are in business. However, getting to know how our customers feel about our services is very important. It could be done through sending questionnaires to them via email and calling them on phone once in a while especially after the service encounter. Word of mouth is another factor. WOM communication is a powerful marketing tool which could project the image of the company and its products positively or otherwise. If the WOM is positive, it is wonderful and the company will begin to build customer franchise, but a situation where the WOM is negative, which I do not subscribe to because of its destructive nature. Once an aggrieved customer goes into internet, blog or tweeter to tell his or her bad experience to whomever that cares to listen followed by people's comment, the company is gone unless something drastically is done to amend such situation. Another factor is service quality which tends to play a lot role in the customers' perceptions. If a company has excellent service, it will tend to overshadow a lot of service shortfalls which may go unnoticed by the customers. You see, people want to be recognized. So that personal interaction and attention given to them do a lot of wonders in customers' perceptions of service quality (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

Advertising plays a lot of role in the expectations of the customers. For example, what the company communicates to their customers through advertising campaigns matters a lot. All those promises the marketing department go out there and make add to the customers' knowledge and influence their expectations. Also what customers hear from their friends, colleagues, relatives and even other customers affects their expectations. Reputation of the company and their services also influences the customers' perceptions of the service quality. However, reputation is something that is built overtime so it is a gradual thing (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Customers' needs as at the time he or she wants to make purchases have a lot of influence on the expectations. What he or she needs will determine what the expectation will be. Again word of mouth is another factor. What the customer hears people say about the company or service will affect his or her expectations. Hence, the way and manner you package and brand your product or service will have a lot of influence on the perceptions of the customers. In other words the way the service is presented and delivered to customers will exert a lot of influence on the customers' perceptions (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I think word of mouth (WOM) is an important factor which affects the expectations of the customers. Therefore, what individuals say concerning a company and its service is very important. Hence, WOM could be positive or negative. Positive WOM has a lot of influence on the expectations while the negative WOM affects the customers' perception more. Personal needs are also another factor. The customers' expectations at the point of sale will depend mostly on personal needs as at that moment. Another factor is customers' previous experience. The customers' expectations will depend largely on his or her knowledge of

that particular service or product. If the customer has lot of information about that particular product or service, the expectation will be high and vice versa (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Based on my experience, word of mouth (WOM) is a very important factor as far as customers' expectations are concerned. Information gathered from people and other sources affect the customers' expectations a lot. Also previous or past experience has a lot of influence on the expectations of the customers. The customers' knowledge about the service will exert a lot of influence (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Personally, I think past experience of the customers is a major factor that affects the customers' expectations. If the customer knows much about a particular service, his expectations will be high and vice versa. Another factor is the word of mouth (WOM) which could be positive or negative. Positive WOM is better than the negative WOM. While the positive WOM tends to project the image of the company, negative WOM generates problems to the company. However, reputation is another factor which influences a lot of customers' perceptions. It is a gradual process because it is not built overnight (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Personal needs affect the expectations of the customers. The customers' expectations will depend largely on his or her personal needs as at the time the purchase is made. Next in the list of factors is past experience. In other words the customers' knowledge of service will have a lot of influence on the expectations. However, the way a company packages and brands its service will affect the customers' perceptions. Therefore, the way you present your service to your customers is very important. As a result the front-desk employees will be trained in such a way that they will be knowledgeable enough to answer the customers' queries (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The word of mouth (WOM) communication is a very important factor concerning customers' expectations. The recommendations from friends, relatives, customers and even peer groups affect the customers' expectations. Another factor is previous experience of the customer. This affects the customers' expectations because of their knowledge of the product or service. Another factor that affects customers' perceptions is service quality. This is because if you perform an excellent service it may cover some flaws or service shortfalls that may go unnoticed by the customer (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

I think personal need is one of the major factors that influence the customers' expectations a lot. What the customer will expect will depend wholly on his or her personal needs as at the time the service contract is signed. Again word of mouth (WOM) recommendation is another factor that affects the expectations of the customers. What you hear people say about a particular service you want to buy or the company will influence your expectations (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

One of the factors that influence the expectations of the customers is the previous experience. How much experience one has about a service will make him or her to have either high or low expectations. Therefore, the more experience you have about a service, the higher the expectations and the lesser the experience, the lower the expectations. Again, your personal needs also affect the expectations. However, reputation is another factor that affects the perceptions of the customers. The reputation of the company or its service will influence the customer a lot in trying to judge the service quality of that company (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The members of the focus group unanimously agreed that price and service quality affect their perceptions of service quality. They argued that they will be attracted to a product or service that is economically priced. They also argued that if the company performs an excellent service that some of the shortfalls may be covered because of the way the service is performed. On the expectation, they agreed that past experience and word of mouth are very important factor that influence their expectations. They argued that in the case

of past experience, that the much you know about a service will determine whether or not your expectations will be high or low. However, they said that word of mouth (WOM) could be positive or negative depending on what you hear from people. But they were of the opinion that negative WOM affects their perceptions more when compared with positive word of mouth (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

The members of the group strongly believed that personal needs and word of mouth are the two factors that affect them a lot. They added that their expectations will depend on their individual needs as at that time they want to enter into the service encounter. But in the case of word of mouth (WOM) they argued that what they hear people say about the product or service and company has a lot of influence on their expectations. They went further to say that this information could be from their friends, peer group family members, advertising, blogs, tweeters and internet. However, they stated that in the case of perceptions that service quality, the reputation and price affect their perceptions in trying to judge the service received after an encounter. They argued that when a company performs an excellent service that some of the flaws may be overshadowed and go unnoticed by the customers. They said that the reputation of the company or service though is a gradual process and built overtime will also influence their perceptions. However, they said that they will also like to go for a service that is economically priced but not necessarily low service (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

This group said that previous experiences and personal needs exert a lot of influence on their expectations. They said that the knowledge of the service make them to have high expectations. Apart from the previous experience, they argued that personal needs also have a lot of influence on their expectations. Hence, what they will expect from the service provider will depend on what their needs are as at that time. Consequently, apart from the factors that affect expectations they said that its sister, perception is influenced largely by the price and packaging and branding. They argued that though they will like to buy economically priced goods or services, but it must be of good quality. However, they said that the way and manner a service provider packages and brands its service matters a lot. They said that the way the service is presented to the customers by the service provider, especially those at the front desk has a lot of influence on the perceptions of the customers (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.5 Age Difference in the Expectations and Perceptions of Customers

There is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. The younger customers have higher expectations than the older ones. For example, those between the ages of 25-35 have higher expectations compared to those of 36-45 and 46 and above (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A')

Yes, there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Those that have ages below 36 years have higher expectations compared to those of 36 years and above (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

There is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers. For example, younger ones have higher expectations than the older customers (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I think but I am not too sure if there is really an age difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers of groupage cargo shipping service (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Definitely yes, the younger customers expect more than the older customers. The expectations of those in their thirties and forties are higher than those older customers (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Absolutely, the new generation customers expect more than the older customers. So there is really difference in their expectations and perceptions and the service providers must exercise caution in dealing with them (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

I think the younger customers' expectations are more when compared to the older customers'. Ages from 40 years down expect more from their service providers. So the service provider must exercise caution and patience in dealing with customers within that age bracket to avoid losing them (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I do not think that there is age difference in the expectations and perception of customers. Their expectations from my opinion are the same. This is because they call and send emails asking to know when their consignment will be delivered (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

There is difference in the age concerning the expectations and perceptions of the customers. I think customers between the ages of 25-45 have more expectations and perceptions than the older customers (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

The younger customers' expectations and perceptions are higher compared to the older and loyal customers. The older customers exercise patience more than the new generation customers (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

We are in the jet age and as a result, there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Nowadays most customers have access to a lot of information coupled with their previous experiences, their expectations are high, especially the younger customers' compared to older generations (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

It is very obvious that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. The younger generations rarely exercise patience and would want you to perform as promised otherwise there is a problem. They find it difficult to understand why you could not perform regardless of some exogenous variables that the service providers have to contend with (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

I find it difficult to establish if there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of our customers. Every customer, especially the younger ones wants to know when the good will be delivered based on the contract agreement. I mean all begins to exert pressure on us once the goods are not delivered according to schedule. So I think there is no difference in the age concerning expectations and perceptions of customers (Interview: Company 'O').

Yes, there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of different customers. The younger customers have higher expectations than the older customers (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The answer is yes. There is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Different age groups have different expectations and the younger generations expects more than the older generations. So care should be taken in dealing with both customers (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Four out of the five members of the focus group agreed that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Three out the four members of the group whose age brackets were between 25-35 agreed that their expectations are always high irrespective of service providers' challenges. They argued that once the contract date elapses, that they have every right to demand for the full performance of the contract. Hence, it will be unfair to ask them to continue to wait. The other member out of the four said that his expectation is equally high but not to be compared to those of the first three. He said that his age is within 36-45. However, the last but not the in the focus group whose was between 46 and above refused to comment (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

The members of the focus group unanimously agreed that younger generations' expectations are higher when compared to the older generations. They argued that they are always in a hurry and hardly take 'No'

for answer coupled with the fact that they have access to plenty of information that will guide them in making decisions, should they decide to switch to the competitor (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

Two of the focus group members within the age brackets, 25-36 said that they have high expectations while one still within the above age bracket said that he does not think that he has high expectations but that he could only make his complaints known if the goods are not delivered as promised and wait for an agreed new date. However, a member whose age is between 45 and above said that she has high expectations since the business is only her source of income that she will expect the service provider to deliver as promised and on time. Hence, delivering on time will help her to meet up with her obligation. However, a member whose age is within 36-45 refused to make any comment (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.6 GAP(s) Identified in this Study between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

The gap between the customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations can be identified in this study. That is, the management not being able to perceive well the needs and wants of the customers. This is because the front-line employees who interact with the customers on daily basis cannot communicate to the management because of too many layers of authority (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

I think I can identify one gap and that is the gap between what the customers expect and how they perceive the service received. This is because what customers expect are affected by a number of factors and also their perceptions are influenced by the service shortfalls from the service provider (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

In this study, I can identify the difference between what the customers expect and employees' perception of those expectations as one of the gaps. This has to do with the difference in front-line service provider's understanding of what the customers' needs are (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I can identify the gap between the customers' expectations and how they perceived the service performance. This gap occurs as a result of influences from customers' side and poor service from the service provider's side (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Please to be frank with you, I do not really understand what you mean by the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. But I know that some service providers perform poor or quality service (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I know that there are some gaps but in this study I think I can only identify the difference in what the customers' expect and what the staff perceived to be what the customers expect. This is as a result of the difference in the understanding of what the customers expect by the front-desk staff (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

In this study I can identify the difference in the customers' expectations and management perception of those expectations. This could be as a result of inability of the company to carry out marketing research (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I know that there are gaps but I can only remember one gap now and it is the difference between what the customers expect and their perceptions of how the service is delivered. Their expectations can be influenced by their personal needs, past experience and other factors (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I think I can identify the difference between the customers' expectations and employees' perceptions of those expectations. This is because what the customer contact personnel may perceive as the customers' expectations may not be after all. Hence, this occurs as a result of difference in the understanding (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I can identify the gap between the customers' expectations and management perceptions; which may be as a result of the inability of the front-desk staff to communicate with the management and also inadequate marketing research and feedback from customers (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

In my own opinion, there are one or two gaps that can be identified in this study. Firstly is the difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service as delivered. This is as a result of influences from certain factors on the part of the customers such as personal needs, past experiences, etc. Secondly is the gap between the customers' expectations and the staff perceptions of those expectations. However, this is as a result of the employees' inability to understand exactly what the customers' expectations are (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Thank you very much for this question because, this is mostly the problems faced by service companies. I think if these gaps or differences are reduced or close as the case may be, there will be service quality improvement. The one that is readily in my mind now is the difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions regarding the service delivered. From my personal experience, this gap is the most common and also referred to as the 'customer gap.' Both the customer and the service provider contribute to this gap. Some factors on the part of customers that affect their expectations are major contributors and such factors include word of mouth, previous experience, and others. While some service shortfalls on the part of service provider also affect the service quality delivery (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

It is very obvious that gaps exist between the expectations and perceptions of customers with respect to the service delivered by the service provider. But what is important is now how serious is the gap. However, there is a gap between the customers' expectations and management perceptions. More often than not the management believed that they understood the customers' expectations while they actually did not. This is caused by the inadequate communication between the customer contact employees who are in close contact with the customers because of too many layers of authority, inadequate marketing research, inadequate feedbacks from customers to know exactly what they expect (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

From my opinion, I know that there are gaps but I am not familiar with the gaps. However, I know that as a customer you enter into the service encounter with a lot of expectations, and at the end of the service encounter; if the service you received is less than what you expected, the difference is the gap and it is negative gap because the service the customer received is less than what he or she expected and in that case it is a poor service (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Basically there is a gap between the customers' expectations and the way the employees understand or interpret those expectations. This is as a result of the misunderstanding of the customers' expectations by the front-desk service providers (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The members of the focus group strongly agreed that there are gaps. According to them, the first gap is the discrepancy between the customers' expectations and employees' perceptions of the expectations. They argued that often time some of the front-line employees or staff do not interpret well or understand exactly what the customers' expectations should be. They went further to say that it could be as a result of poor training of the staff to be able to interact well with customers and even ask questions and better acquaint themselves with the exact needs of the customers. They also were of the view that the second gap is the difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions. They added that this gap could be

caused by the influences such as personal needs of the customers, their previous experiences and they hear from people about the company and its product or service and also some mistakes made by the service providers in the course of service performance (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

The group unanimously believed that there are gaps in the expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality. They said that one of the gaps is the difference between the customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations. They argued that many managers or the management of the service company think that they understood the customers' expectations but end up making mistakes as a result of not understanding very well what the customers expect. This could be caused by inadequate marketing research, lack of data about customers, inadequate communication from bottom to up due to too many layers of authority or management. They also said that another gap that can be identified in this study is the difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions. They argued that this gap is as a result of customers' personal needs, word of mouth, advertising, previous experiences and recommendations from friends, peers and even family members and also service shortfalls on the part of the service provider (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

According to this group, there are three gaps that have direct relationship with the customers that can be identified in this study. They are (1) the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service received. They argued that this is as a result of personal needs, past experiences and what you hear people say about that particular service or company and also mistakes made by the service provider during service delivery. (2) the difference between the customers' expectations and management perceptions or interpretations of those expectations due to lack of marketing research, inadequate communication from front-desk employees to the top management as a result of many layers of management, and inadequate feedback from customers due to lack of customer relationship management (CRM) (3) the difference between the customer' expectations and the interpretations of those expectations by the company staff. According to them, this could be as a result of the difference in the understanding of the expectations by the company's front-line staff or receptionist (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.7 Difference in the GAP between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions with Respect to Service Quality

I think there is a difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality. For example, a customer is entering a service encounter with some obvious expectations that he or she expects to be met. However, after the service performance, the customer will now evaluate the service and see if the service he or she perceived as delivered matches or meets his or her expectations. This is because it is only the customer and not the service provider that has the right to assess the quality and value of the service after the service experience. At this point, where the service exceeds the customers' expectations, it is a quality service or wow service and the customer will be happy but where the expectations exceed the customers' perceptions of the service, it is a poor service and bad experience and the customer will be disappointed ant gets frustrated. However, in the context of groupage cargo shipping management, a lot of customers have high expectations and do complaint that our services are insufficient, so we need to improve (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A')

Based on my experience and opinion, I think there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality. This is because different people have different expectations and that two service providers can never perform the same service the same way and based on this fact, gaps are bound to exist and they are mostly negative (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Definitely yes, there is a difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality. Depending on the type of service, some gaps are relatively small for example, in

logistics or groupage cargo shipping services than in hotel industry. However, a customer enters a service encounter with high expectations and once his or her expectations are not met or matched with their perceptions there is gap, which could be negative or positive but mostly negative (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I suppose there is a difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality. This is because different customers have different expectations and perceptions. It is therefore difficult for two people or customers to perceive the same service the same way (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I believe there are lapses in the service delivery hence, there is difference in the gap between the expected and perceived service quality. These gaps need to be reduced to improve on the service quality of the groupage shipping companies (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

No doubt, there are going to be gaps for obvious reasons but what we should do is try to minimize those gaps. This is because there are some exogenous factors that are beyond the control of the service provider such as delays occasioned by government policy at the wharf, logistics problems, delays in customs documentations and clearance, etc. We have been receiving complaints from customers about unsatisfactory service but once what they are asking for is not within our power, we will only plead with them be patient and bear with us. However, we are trying our best to improve (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

There is a difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. This is because high profile customers with previous experiences and a lot of information on what they want may be difficult to satisfy. However, we exercise caution in handling such customers at least to minimize the difference in the gap (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

I think there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Some customers' expectations are high as a result of their past experience and what they hear from friends, and relatives or other customers and the information they gather from internet. Right now we are having a lot of complaints and some customers are threatening to switch. However, we are doing our best to minimize the difference in the gap (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Well, it is obvious that there is gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Some customers enter the service encounter with high, moderate or low expectations depending on what they want, experience and what they hear from others about the service or the company. However, we are trying our best to contend with their expectations, bearing in mind that some customers are difficult to satisfy (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

It is not easy but we shall get there. Gaps exist no doubt about that but we are doing our best to meet our customers' expectations. But customers expect too much from the company even when they know that certain shortfalls are beyond our control, they still blame us after all our explanations and pleading to exercise patience; but we do not blame them because they are kings and they are the reason we are in business and we are doing everything within our power to satisfy and make them happy (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

There is a gap between the expectations and perceptions of customers with respect to service quality. You see when a customer comes into a service company to buy a service; he or she has a lot of expectations to be met. Once these expectations were me, the customer is happy otherwise the reverse is the case. Human beings are very difficult to deal with but we are trying our best to coup with the challenges. Overall our

services are not bad but we are doing what we can to minimize the gaps which are more or less on the negative side (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

In my own opinion, gaps exist between the customers' expectations nag perceptions of service quality. But efforts are being made to close those gaps. It is not easy but I believe that we will get there because our goal is to have a data base of satisfied and happy customers that will be part of us (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Rarely do you find any service company that operates without gaps between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality but the onus here is on the service provider to figure out how best to minimize those gaps to be able to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. It is normal to have gaps but manageable size otherwise there won't be any room for improvement if there is no gap at all (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

Gaps exist because we are serving different customers with different backgrounds and experiences. So what customer 'A' expects will be different from the expectations of customer 'B' and so are their perceptions. Their understanding or interpretations of a particular situation is different hence, the way they perceive the same service delivered to them differs (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

It is very certain that there exist gaps between the customers' expectations and their perceptions. Common! We are dealing with different customers and you do not expect their expectations and perceptions of the same service to be the same; and that is why they are two different people with different economic background, experiences, and educational background with different cultural orientation (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The members of the focus group unanimously agreed that there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. They argued that though they are in the same focus group but that they enter into the service encounter each with different expectations which will depend largely on individual personal needs, past experience, information gathered from different source such as friends, relatives, peers and from what people say about the organization and its services. They also said that as their expectations are different so are their perceptions of service quality. They were of the view that in most cases that their expectations were not met due to some service flaws on the part of the service provider (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

This group strongly believed that there are differences in the gaps between the expectations and perceptions of service quality. They were of the opinion that different customers have different expectations and perceptions. They argued that even though that they were in the same focus group that their expectations and perceptions are different hence, their understanding of the world around them are different. They went further to say that some customers have high expectations which could be as a result of their past experiences from other service companies and what people say about a particular service they want to purchase and the organization's reputation. However, they said the company in question hardly meets their expectations due to some situational factors (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

The focus group members vehemently agreed that there was difference in the gaps between the expectations and perceptions of service quality. They claimed that though they were in the same focus group but each of them enters the service encounter with different expectations depending on the individual need as at that time and his or her knowledge of the service. They were of the opinion that a good percentage of service companies in the groupage cargo shipping service fail to meet their customers' expectations. They argued that the groupage service providers instead of investigating into what customers expect, they rather prefer to engage in price wars in form of discounts thereby neglecting the quality of the service they offer, which is very important to customers. They also claimed that no matter the amount of

discount inducement that if they failed to deliver accurately and on time that their aim would have been defeated and they will end up with a bunch of unhappy customer franchise otherwise known as customer data-base (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.2.8 Strategies for Closing / Reducing the GAP in the Groupage Cargo Shipping Management

This has been a very big problem in the service industry, especially in the groupage cargo shipping service. But we are trying our best to contend with the challenges. We are trying a lot of things to ensure that the gaps are reduce such as CRM (customer relationship management), communicating with customers. This no doubt will help the management to know what the customers' expectations are, and reduce or close the gap between the customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'A').

I think conducting marketing research and getting feedbacks from customers will help to know exactly what customers want and help to close the difference between the customers' expectations and management interpretations of those expectations. This will also help the management to be able to predict what the customers' expectations would be in the future (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

Well, I believe a lot has to be done to reduce the gap for example; management should encourage upward communication from the bottom to the top management within the organization. This is very important in reducing the size of gap between the customers' expectations and management perception of those expectations. Therefore, the customer contact personnel or front-desk employees should be encouraged by the management to communicate in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere. To be successful, upward communication must have the support and blessings of the management and by so doing, the information on how to reduce gap and improve on the service quality should be extracted from the customer contact staff stored information by the management. Also the employees should be motivated by way of rewarding them for their contributions in the management decisions in trying to minimize gap (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

I think we try to reduce the gap between the customers' expectations and management interpretations of those expectations, by reducing the number of layers in the company's management. This is because the higher the number of the management, the more difficult it is for the management to interpret or understand what the customers expect regarding the service quality. So companies are seeking ways of reducing the layers of management to get closer to at least the customer contact personnel that have direct contact with customers. Another means is having a CRM- customer relationship management department in place in the organization to be able to interact with the customers. This will enable the company to personalize their services to their customers and by so doing it will be easier to predict or know what the customers want (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

One of the strategies for reducing the gap is by carrying out the marketing research. This will help in reducing the difference between the customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations. Having direct contact with the customers to know exactly what they want through marketing research is very important. Equally important is trying to know how customers feel about the service they received and start the process of improvement after the research. Another strategy is training the customer contact personnel in such a way that they will be knowledgeable about the services offered by the company to be able to answer the customers queries, and inquiries confidently in a convincing and friendly manner. This will help to reduce the difference between the customers' expectations and the employees' perceptions of those expectations. However the human resources department should also contribute their quota by recruiting employees with service mind; those who are patient and can always tolerate the customers irrespective of their shortcomings and being able to treat them as kings they are. Also having a service

culture and good service standards in place will help to reduce or close this gap. The management should support this policy and drum it into the employees' ears and make them imbibe it and follow it strictly (Interview: Company 'A' staff).

The difference between the customers' expectations and how the employees perceived what they expect could be reduced by having training and development program. This program is a kind of platform where all the service providers in an organization, are given equal opportunity to learn the basic components of the service the company offers to customers to ensure effective and efficient delivery to customers should be introduced. Also being cheerful and answering customers' questions in a friendly atmosphere will also go a long way in cushioning the effects of gap in the service delivery process. However, beaming smile to a customer who is waiting to be attended to is a sign that he or she is welcomed and recognized. Another gap is the difference in the customers' expectations and how they perceive that particular service. This can be reduced or closed by being mindful of the promises the marketing departments make out there in the media in the form of advertising and promotions. The service company should not promise what it cannot do as this will increase the customers' expectations. Hence, service the company should always limit their promises to what they can do. However, service companies should avoid giving bogus targets to the marketing departments to avoid making unnecessary and unrealistic promises which they cannot fulfill, which will in turn lead to false hopes and negative word of mouth that will affect or damage the image of the company and its services. Another remedy Is that the service providers should be careful the kind of questions the ask the customers during the service delivery as some customers will like you to go straight to the business of the day instead of trying to beat about the bush that may lead to shortfalls in the service delivery (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'N').

I think the difference between the customers' expectations and management interpretations of those expectations can be reduced by budgeting enough resources to the marketing research to know exactly what the customers' needs are. This is important because ordinary face to face interactions with customers may not yield the desired result as some customers may not be free to say their mind thereby hiding some vital information. Therefore, an independent research institute can be employed to do it in order to get valid and necessary information required in predicting the customers' expectations in the future. Also management layers will be reduced to enable the customer contact employees to interact and communicate with the management and give certain information about customers' expectations. However, the difference between what customers expect and how they perceive the service as received can be reduced by making sure that none of the aggrieved customer is allowed to go unhappy as this may lead to negative word of mouth. This is because an unhappy customer has a lot of weapon to his advantage and can tell anybody that cares to listen to his or her bad service experience and with the help of internet this will reach millions of people in one minute. If the aggrieved customer goes into Tripadvisor for example, the service company will be worst for it unless something drastically in the form of public relations is done immediately to counter such negative publicity before the current and new customers. Again the organization should have the service culture such that the employees should be empowered and made to own any complaint received by any of them from the customer until it is solved or resolved without transferring it to higher authority. The management may empower the employees with certain amount of money to solve the customer's problem and make sure that he or she is happy and keeps coming back (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Based on my opinion, the difference between what the customers expect and how the staff interpret those expectations can be reduced by motivation in the form of rewards and compensation for hard work. This is because a happy staff will go to extra mile in making sure that customers are satisfied and happy by transferring that happiness to customers. Again a happy staff will like to probe further into some hidden needs of the customers which if revealed will help in no small way in predicting the customers' expectations in the future. For the employees to do their job in the most efficient and effective manner, management

should learn how to carry their employees along and treat them as the internal customers they are and make sure that they are happy and rewarded accordingly (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

The difference between the customers' expectations and the management understanding of the expectations can be reduced by doing enough marketing research to be able to know exactly what the customers expect and this will help in the prediction of the customers' expectations. The service organization can send out questionnaires to get feedbacks from the customers after service experience to know how they feel about the service received or even put calls through to customers to know what they think about the service and suggest areas they feel that need improvement in order to serve them better in their next service encounter. However, on the difference between what customers expect and their perceptions of the service received, this can be reduced by maintaining the status quo of meeting the customers' expectations rather than exceeding their expectations as this will always increase the customers' expectations. This is because the more the customers' expectations are exceeded, the more their expectations increased because of their past experiences and information at their disposal (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

Reducing the difference between what the customers expect and management understanding of those expectations will have to take into consideration the marketing research orientation. Hence, the service organization should embrace the marketing to gather enough information about the customers to enable the organization make necessary decision on how to meet their expectations. Also the difference in the customers' expectations and the employees understanding of those expectations can be reduced if the management should see their employees as their greatest asset because it is from that the talented staff that contribute most of the organization's profitability emerge (Interview: Company 'N' staff).

The difference between the customers' expectations and the staff interpretations of those expectations can be reduce by training the customer contact personnel. A well trained staff will be able to know what the service he or she is about to deliver entails, as this will save unnecessary delays and repetitions that sometimes irritate some impatient customers. An employee that knows much about a service will be able to convince the customers and build confidence in them about the organization and its services which at the long-run leads to loyalty and customer franchise. Also the difference between the customers' expectations and the management perceptions of those expectations can be reduce by cutting down on the layers of authorities between the management and the customers' contact personnel so as to communicate with the management and if possible contribute in the decisions that will lead to the prediction of customers' expectations since they are much more closer to the customers (Interview: Managing Director, Company 'O').

Personally, I think the difference between the customers' expectations and how they perceive the service rendered can be reduced or closed by meeting the customers' expectations. This could be done by getting feedbacks from customers and asking questions to know exactly what the customers expect. However, since the business is shifting from production era to marketing era, it is important to know exactly the customers' needs and wants, instead of the service organizations making predictions of the customers' expectations based on their perceptions of customers' expectations as these expectations are influenced by some external factors such as personal needs, word of mouth (WOM), past experience, recommendations from friends, relatives, peers, and family members (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

From my own point of view, the discrepancy between customers' expectations and the staff perceptions of those expectations can be reduced by training the customer contact employees to be conversant with the services they deliver to customers.. The training is important because if I as an employee know much about the service I am about to deliver or offer to customers, I will have more confidence to talk with the customers and who knows at the end of the encounter i may convince them to buy. Another way to reduce

this gap is the management being able to carry the staff along by way of motivation and reward of hard work. Saying well done to the employee that performs exceptionally well is a right step in the right direction. By so doing, the staff will now see it as a challenge to do more because to whom more is given, more is expected (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The gap between the customers' expectations and management perceptions will be reduced by budgeting, enough resources to marketing research in order to know exactly what customers expect, as this will help in the future predictions of the customers' expectations. Also reducing the layers of authority between the management and the customer contact employees will help to reduce this gap. This will enable the customer contact employees communicate freely with the management and help them with the information for the decision making pertaining the prediction of customers' expectations, since they are closer to customers and have vital information about them that could be used in the decision (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The difference between the customers' expectations and the staff perception can be reduce by giving the front-line staff sound training on how to handle customers and also about the service they offer to customers. This is because, if the service provider fails to answer customer's questions about the service correctly during the service encounter, customers may be frustrated in the process and become unhappy. Again listening attentively is another way to close this gap as some impatient customers hate repetition and get irritated (Interview: Company 'O' staff).

The focus group members said that asking questions and getting feedbacks through sending them email after the service encounter to know how they feel about the service received will help in no small way in closing the gap between the customers' expectations and the managers' perception of those expectations. They argued that the layers of management should be reduced to enable the customer contact personnel that interact with the customers on daily basis to communicate with the management and help them in their decisions to predict their expectations. They however, stated that the difference in their expectations and the staff perceptions could be reduced or closed by training the staff to be able to listen attentively to the customers and answer their questions correctly regarding the service they offer. They further argued that this will help to convince them and make them have confidence in the service and the company (Interview: Company 'A' focus group).

According to this group, closing the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service as received can be closed by trying to meet the customers ' expectations and avoid letting any aggrieved customer to leave unhappy as any aggrieved customer can go to any length to share his or her bad experience with anyone that cares to listen and this definitely will not go down well with the company hence, prevention is better than cure. Also getting information from the customers the customers by putting calls through to customers to know how they feel about the service received after an encounter will go a long way in reducing this gap. They further argued that feedbacks from customers by sending them questionnaires after service encounter is another possible way of reducing this particular gap. Furthermore, they stated that the gap between the customers' expectations and employees' understanding of those expectations can be reduced or closed by giving the staff especially the customer contact employees professional training on the art of cuddling and handling customers in a friendly way. For example, they argued that an employee who is willing to help a customer and beams smile while attending to the customer will win more customers than any other staff. They also argued that this gap can also be closed by motivating and rewarding excellence by giving compensations in the form of monetary reward and trip to one of the western countries for the customer relationship management of the year. This will make other staffers to sit up to satisfy and draw more customers to the company (Interview: Company 'N' focus group).

According to this focus group in closing the gap between their expectations and the management perceptions of those expectations, there should be a marketing research orientation in the service industry especially, in the groupage cargo shipping management. They argued that a well conducted marketing research to know what customers expect will go a long way in meeting their expectations and save the cost of trial and error. They said that big companies that have marketing department can use them to conduct the research or better still employ the services of an independent research organization for valid results. They also said that cutting down on the management layers of authority will enable the customer contact personnel to communicate with management and offer advice in the prediction of customers' expectations since; they have some vital information about customers at their disposal. They further argued that the gap between customers' expectations and the staff perception will be closed by training the staff in the professional manner to enable them face the task ahead of them. Drum into the ears of the staff that customers are always right and should be treated as kings they are they stated. However, they argued also that staff should be made to understand that it is the customers that pay their salaries and not management and should make sure that customers are satisfied and happy before leaving the company premises. They argued however, that management should champion the course of making any staff that receives any customer's complaint to own it until it is resolved by empowering the staff with a particular amount to enable him or her get rid of the problem and make the customer keep coming back. They went further to say that this particular gap can be closed by letting the employees know that it more cost effective and economical to maintain the existing or current customers than soliciting for new ones. They stated that another gap that has direct relationship with the customers and needs to be closed is the difference between the customers' expectations and their understanding of the service received. This gap they argued can be closed by getting feedbacks in the form of sending questionnaire to the customers after receiving the service delivered to them and make suggestions on how to improve (Interview: Company 'O' focus group).

4.3 Analyses of the Results and Findings

The study revealed that service is a very sensitive issue in groupage cargo shipping management and serves as a competitive edge in the cargo shipping industry. In this competitive age where every service industry struggles to survive that those that provide exceptional services to their customers no doubt have an edge over their competitors. The fact that service is intangible makes it more complex and care must be taken to ensure that it is done right the first time, otherwise customers will be disappointed, dissatisfied and unhappy.

4.3.1 Demographic Findings

4.3.1.1 Gender

Out of the 30 participants interviewed, 10 were female representing 33 per cent of the sample while the remaining 20 were male representing 67 per cent of the participants.

4.3.1.2 Age

Out of the total number of the participants that were interviewed, those between the ages of 25-35 were 15 and out of this number, the staffers of the "ANO" companies were 5 in number and 10 were customers of the "ANO" companies. Also those between the ages of 36-45 were 9 and out of this figure, the staffers of "ANO" were 6 and the customers were 3. The remaining 6 people were between the ages of 46 and above. Out of this number, 2 were customers while 4 were the "ANO" staffers. The results of the findings revealed that the expectations of the customers between the

ages of 25-35 were very high followed by those of ages between 36-45 and then the customers of ages between 46 and above

4.3.1.3 Length of patronage

The result also showed that 45 per cent of the customers about 7 of them have done business with "ANO" companies for 5 years. Then 30 per cent of the customers about 4 of them have done business with the companies for 7 years; and 25 per cent of them about 4 customers have done business with the "ANO" for 10 years. Note that the customers of "ANO" consist of 15 participants of three "focus groups" of 5 participants in each group drawn from each company and were independent of each other and interviewed differently to get their divergent views regarding the subject matter.

4.3.1.4 Years of Experience

Again the result also established that 20 per cent of the "ANO" staffers about 3 of them have less than 5 years' experience; while 45 per cent of the staff about 7 workers has experience between 5-10 years. Then the remaining 35 per cent or 5 workers have experience 11 years and above. Worthy of note is that altogether 15 participants were introduced by the managing directors/chief executives of the three companies selected for this study for the interview. Since the companies are relatively small companies, 5 participants from each company were interviewed in this study to get their individual views regarding the topic under study.

4.3.2 Service, the Most Valuable SERVQUAL Dimensions and, Service Quality and how it is Measured

4.3.2.1 Definition of Service

This study revealed that service is a very sensitive issue in groupage cargo service management and serves as a competitive edge (tool) or advantage in the cargo shipping industry. However, in this competitive age where every service sector struggles to survive, those that provide exceptional service to their customers no doubt have an edge over their competitors. The fact that service is intangible makes it more complex and care must be taken to ensure that it is done right the first time otherwise customers will be disappointed, dissatisfied and unhappy. Service is intangible in nature and cannot be seen or touched. Hence, you do not judge or value service until it is consumed. It is only the customer that can determine both the value of service and its quality. This finding is supported by Ford et al. (2012) which state that "in hospitality field, only the guest can define quality and value." Sometimes customers partake or participate in the production of service for example, consider a customer in an aircraft or a customer waiting for his or her shipment to be documented and BoL (Bill of Lading) given to him or her as evidence of shipment with the cargo shipping company. That is to say that service is inseparable and consumed simultaneously as it is produced. Service is perishable and cannot be stored for example, consider a hotel room which if not sold perishes. Service is heterogeneous because two service providers cannot perform or deliver the same particular service the same way. Service has been identified as a good differentiator between two competitions. Hence, having a clear cut service philosophy is a key to ascertaining a competitive advantage over competitors. The study also establishes that service can be a difference maker between business success and its failure.

However, in an attempt to define service, the participants unanimously agreed that because of the intangible nature of service, it is complex and difficult to define. Hence, the following definitions were extracted from the participants' responses. First, service is an action that is performed for one person by

another for pleasure at a price without possession. Second, service is an act of doing work for someone without taking specific costs or risk for example, a telephone user. Third, service is an effort performed by a service provider in order in order to satisfy its customer's needs or expectations. Service cannot be seen or touched or even tested. Even after the consumption, it will be an experience and the only thing the customer takes home is the memories of that experience encountered. Fourth, service can be defined as the performance of a valuable action by an employee of a service company in fulfillment of a customer's need or demand. Service cannot be seen, touched or stored. Fifth, service is an intangible offer or something you do not part with after making a purchase. Sixth, service is an action or deed performed by an individual or company to another person or company at a consideration. Seventh, service is defined as a memory of an experience taken home by a client or customer after a service encounter. It cannot be touched or part away with. However, the researcher defines service as an action, deed or intangible offer performed by an individual or company to another person or company at a consideration or price without parting away with anything. Hence, various definitions are supported by Kotler& Keller (2009) which defines service as "any intangible act or performance that one party offers to another that does not result in the ownership of anything." Agbor (2011) states "in all service can be defined as an intangible offer by one party to another in exchange of money for pleasure." While Business Dictionary defines service as "a valuable action, deed or effort preformed to satisfy a need or to fulfill a demand." In conclusion therefore, service is a sensitive issue and any company that performs good or quality service to its clienteles or customers is at advantage over its competitors. It is delicate because it is intangible. Unlike product, it cannot be touched or tested to find out whether or not it is defective until it is consumed.

Table 3.

4.3.2.2The Most Valuable SERVQUAL Dimensions

Participants	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Tangible	Empathy	Total Score
AZO Companies Staff	5	3	4	2	1	15
AZO Focus Groups	6	3	3	2	1	15
Grand Total	11	6	7	4	2	30

Source: Research Survey in June 2016

   Reliability

      From the table it can be deduced that out of the 30 participants that took part in the interview, 5 staff and 6 focus group members totaling 11 participants rated reliability high as the most valuable dimension in the groupage cargo shipping management, maybe as a result of the service providers doing what they say they should do. It has therefore shown that reliability is the most critical dimension. This was the result given by the 'AZO' Companies staff and focus groups of the 'AZO' Companies put together when asked to choose one dimension that is most critical in the customers' service quality perceptions. Hence reliability refers to the ability of the service provider to provide service dependably and accurately (Dabbolker et al; 1996). Therefore, reliability has to do with reliable service performance that will meet the customers' expectations. That is, doing the same service on time, every time and in the same way and error free. However, the findings revealed that the customers expect the service provider to be reliable and deliver as promised and accurately too. If service provider is reliable, the customers' expectations will be met and they will be happy. On the other hand, if the service provider does not deliver as promised, the customers will be disappointed, feel bad, dissatisfied and unhappy and may not come back next time. Hence, Bruhn &Georgi (2006) state that customer satisfaction is customers' assessment of a product or service in terms of whether

or not that product or service has met the customers' needs and expectations. However, if the customers receive less than what they expected, they are dissatisfied. Conversely, if perceived service is greater than expected service, the customers are satisfied (Kotler et al. 2006). The findings further revealed that if the service provider delivers as promised that the company is building a customers' data-base because they will not only come back but with new customers as an evidence that they are satisfied and happy too. Mullins et al. (2005) were of the view that organizations must try and close these gaps so as to improve customer satisfaction, build long-term relationship and increase customer franchise. It was further established that customers expect the service provider to be trustworthy, keep to their words, be dependable and reliable at any given time, making sure that the service is concluded on time and without error. Overall, reliability is the most valuable service quality dimension in the groupage cargo shipping management as judged by the staff and focus group of the AZO companies (Zeithaml et al. 1990).

Assurance

It could be seen from the table that the second most critical dimension according to the staff and focus group of AZO Companies is assurance, which has to do with the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Parasuramanet al.1991). Hence, 7 out of the 30 participants rated assurance second. The findings revealed that if the service provider can make the customers have trust and confidence in both their service and the company by way of conviction that customers do not keep coming back with new customers but become loyal customers. It was also established that if a service provider can build confidence and trust in the minds of the customers, that they will make the company their first point of call or first choice for their purchases. Hence, these customers will in turn recommend the company and its services to their friends, peers, and even family members. Furthermore, when the service provider assures a customer that they are going to deliver on a particular date and they do so, the customer will trust and impose more confidence on the company and will like to do more business with them. Also if the service employees are knowledgeable about the service they provide that customers will have more trust and willing more than ever before to do business with the company.

Responsiveness

The third critical service quality dimension in the groupage cargo shipping according to the participants is responsiveness. Responsiveness is referred to as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service services (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The findings revealed that 6 out of 30 participants interviewed were of the opinion that responsiveness is equally important and placed it at third position. Hence, the result further showed that if the service provider is handy to help and provide prompt services to customers, that this will no doubt help to meet their expectations. The findings also revealed that providing prompt service to customers in a friendly manner will not only build customer base but will also increase profitability. Hence, readiness of the employees to help the customers and ensure that the service is performed on time will help meet their expectations. The willingness of the service provider to help customers provide the service as promised and on time will help to meet the customers' expectations which will in turn lead happy and loyal customers. Furthermore, a service provider who is cheerful and willing to help customers and deliver prompt service will at the end of the day win the hearts of the customers.

Tangibles

The fourth service quality dimension in the groupage cargo shipping management is tangibility. It can be seen from the aforementioned table that 4 out of 30 participants interviewed rated tangible fourth. However, tangibles have to do with the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personal and communication materials (Zeithaml et al. 1990). When the service provider emphasizes on the tangible cues and delivers their service professionally, the customer will be happy and will like to keep on patronizing the

company. However, the physical appearance of the company structure, and the way the company staff appear neatly make customers to have more confidence in anticipation that the company will deliver as promised. Hence, the appearance of the staff, the building in which the service is performed, the servicescape, service setting and the technological materials go a long way to convince the customers that the service provider is capable of providing the required services without hitches. The result further showed that physical appearance and tangible cues are the only thing the customer is seeing that will convince him or her about the type of service, and its quality which the service provider has to offer since; service in itself is intangible and it is better experienced than imagined.

   Empathy

   The findings revealed that 2 out of the 30 participants supported empathy and placed it on the fifth position compared to other service quality dimensions in groupage cargo shipping. However empathy refers to the provision of caring and individual attention to customers (Parasuraman et al. 1991). The result showed that caring about your customers and giving them individualized attention, required respect and person to person (one-on-one) contact will make the service provider to understand the customers better and be able to predict their expectations. However, when the service provider cares about the customers and gives the necessary attention, the service provider will end up building not only customer data-base but loyal customers that will be of immense help in the future.

4.3.2.3 Service Quality and how it is Measured

   The findings of this study revealed that service quality is a strong competitive tool, which all the service oriented organizations will like to have or possess. Service quality is a competitive tool that could be used against the service provider's competitors. It is a powerful competitive differentiator as well as a tool which service organizations strive to acquire. This is supported by Berry et al. (1988) which states that service quality is a significant differentiator and most powerful competitive tool which all the service sectors want to possess. All the participants unanimously agreed that service quality is the service which the customer perceived as delivered after the service encounter. It is measured as the difference between the customers' expected service and perceived service as received. Service quality is the comparison of customers' expectations and their perceptions of service. It is measured by deducting perceptions from expectations, that is, Expectations—Perceptions (E—P). It could be poor or quality service. For example, if the perceived service is higher than the expected service, it is quality service and customers are happy and satisfied but if the expected service is higher than the perceived service, it is a poor service and the customers are disappointed, unhappy and dissatisfied. According to Parasuraman et al. (1985) & Lewis & Mitchell (1990), service quality is the difference between customers' expectations of service and perceived service. In other words, if the expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality of service is less than satisfactory and customers are not satisfied, they stressed. However, Lewis & Booms 1993; Lehtinen&Lehtinen 1982; Gronroos 1984; Parasuraman et al. 1985; 1988; 1994 were of the view that service quality is the result of an evaluation process where different customers compare their expectations about a service with their perceptions of that service as received. Lewis & Booms (1983) states that "service quality (SQ) is a comparison of expectations (E) with performance (P); SQ=P—E." Parasuraman et al. (1988), state that "service is the difference between the customer expectations and perceptions of service." Hence, Woo &Ennew (2005) claimed that service quality is as a result of customers' comparison of their expectations about a service encounter with their perceptions of the service encounter.

 Comparing, the expectations and perceptions of service as delivered helps the management of the service organization to identify gaps in service quality. Service quality can be good or bad because of its intangibility and complex nature. It is equally so because different customers have different expectation and as a result 'one man's meat is another man's poison.' However, an organization that has a good service

philosophy or culture that is embraced by all the staff will always try to satisfy its customers. This is so because it is only a satisfied customer the first time that will like to come back. Hence, service quality is all about how it matches the customers' expectations. However, in support of this study Weitz&Wessley (2002) claimed that "service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customers' expectations."

4.3.3 Service Quality Improvement Strategy

Training and Development

The result showed that the overall level of the service will be increased by having developmental program in form of training in the service organization. This will enable the organization to train the employees so as to meet the service quality objectives set out by the organization. A trained staff from the company's perspective will have the necessary skills to deal the customers and challenges of the services offered. In this way the staff can be an asset to the company because if the staff understand the service or the product and what it takes to convince the customers in order to build trust and confidence, the customers will be happy and recommend others. Hence, the employees should be well trained to be able to convince the customers about the company's services as service occurs at the point of interaction between the service provider and the customer. This is so because the performance of the service provider at that juncture affects the customers' perceptions as their discussions at that point influences the customers' evaluation of that particular service. Pfeiffer et al. (1995) claimed that training and skill development programs help in creating the skilled workforce that can provide an excellent service. Therefore, training of the employees is very crucial in improving the service quality. For example, hear what one of the focus group members has to say "responding fast to customers' questions and doing it right the first will do a lot in improving the service quality of the groupage cargo shipping companies. Customer is a king you know, he continued but these people are after our money and do not care how we feel and never bothered how we feel. No questions to find out what we need or what our expectations are and try to channel their service design towards meeting our expectations." Another focus group member cuts in speaks thus: "yes I agree with him but in addition, they should train their staff very well to know the art of the service they offer and answer the necessary questions pertaining the service correctly. A situation where the service provider is inattentive to understand and answer my questions and probably do it right the first time irritates me and it shows that the service provider does not know much about what he or she is about to sell to me and in that case I will start having doubts as to whether or not they are capable of delivering the service if the contract is signed." The findings further revealed that training the service provider or staff is of vital importance and will go a long in closing or reducing the gap between the service provider and the customers at the point of sale or service encounter. Hence, having a service minded and well trained employees will help in meeting the demands of the customers in terms of convincing the customers on the company's capabilities to deliver on time without hitches which in turn will help to build the customers trust and confidence.

Feedback from Customers

The findings revealed that getting feedbacks from customers could be done by sending questionnaires to customers regarding the company's service quality performance after the service encounter via email and also by putting calls through to customers to really ascertain their feelings and experiences about the service after the service encounter. Apart from marketing research, service companies can get information about their customers' needs through questionnaires sent to their customers after service encounter to know how they feel about their services and find out whether or not their customers' expectations were met and if not ask them to suggest on how to serve them better. Service providers can also get information on how customers feel about their services through viral marketing such as blogs and internet. Hence, feedback from customers is very important in improving the service the service

quality. This is because the service provider really have to know how the customers feel about the services offered to them, since service is intangible in nature and there is no way a customer can test it before consumption hence, it is only after it is consumed that it can be evaluated by the customer. It is therefore, necessary and important to get information on how your customers feel about your service.

Developing Service Philosophy

The findings revealed that it is important that the company has a policy of service culture in place. This service philosophy should be supported by management and followed as a service guide by all the employees. Once this policy is embedded in the company's mission statement, the employees will know that the company takes the service to its customers seriously, and everybody has to sit up and imbibe the service philosophy. In other words a company that needs to improve its service quality must have service culture in place. All the staff and management of the service company should be made to believe in that service culture and must be imbibed by all the staff and adhere strictly to the tenets of that service culture. Hence, the management must believe in it. Hear what one of the focus group members has to say, "you see before you can talk of improving service quality, you must have service culture policy in your organization and surprisingly some of the organizations do not have it in place. So tell me, how you can start improving on nothing, because you can only improve on the 'culture' you have already. Some service providers are really doing trial and error and gambling with customers' feelings, because this is an intangible product we are talking about here, and you must have paid for it before you can consume it hence, you cannot see, touch or possess it until you consume it. So it is better experienced than imagined in this case. As a result of its intangibility nature, it is pay before service. However, if after the service experience and you are not satisfied with what you got, it is up to you." For example, this is why Will Potter, CEO of Maryland-based Preston Trucking Company made each employee agree in writing to abide by the company's service philosophy which states, in part (cited in Zeithaml et al., 1990) "once I make a commitment to a customer or another associate, I promise to fulfill it on time. I will do what I say when I say I will do it… I understand that one claim or one mistake is one error too many. I promise to do my job right the first time and to continually seek performance improvement." Also another focus group member says "I suppose the improvement lies heavily on the service culture itself because some of the service companies do not have the service culture in place talk less of improving on it. There is no way you can improve on what you do not believe in and practice.

Capacity Building/Planning

The results showed that facilities and equipment that make the jobs done must be put in place to enable the employees do their job effectively and efficiently. Capacity planning is very important is very important in an organization to know exactly what to produce at any given time. In this case the organization needs to know the service design capacity which is the maximum amount of work the organization needs to achieve at any given period. This could be done by communicating with different departments in an organization to know exactly what they are doing or what ought to be done in order to save time and avoid unnecessary stress and burden that may eventually affect the quality of the service. Hence, overcapacity and undercapacity need to be balanced to achieve optimal capacity to improve service quality.

Empowering Employees to Take Responsibility of Resolving Customers' Complaints

The findings revealed that companies should empower their employees to own any customer's complaint received by any staff until that problem is solved and make the customer happy. This could be done by empowering the staff to exercise certain authority to solve customer's problem without having to consult higher authority as long as it is within his or her limit to do so. This finding is supported by Kotler et

al. (2014) which states that "the staff learn that anyone who receives a customer complaint owns that complaint until it's resolved. They are trained to drop whatever they're doing to help a customer-no matter what they're doing or what their department. Ritz-Carlton employees are empowered to handle problem on the spot, without consulting higher-ups. Each employee can spend up to $2,000 to redress a guest grievances and each is allowed to break from his or her routine for as long as needed to make a guest happy.

Marketing Research

The findings have also shown that service quality can be improved through conducting marketing research. It was established that service organizations really need to go extra mile to be able to get information about their customers' expectations and needs in order to meet them. The service providers really need to know what their customers think and feel about their services. This research can be conducted by the marketing department of the organization or by an independent research institute without revealing the name of the organization under which the research is being conducted to avoid customers' being bias in their report. This is because if the customers know the organization under which the research is being conducted, they may not be objective in their response. Hence, the need for the marketing research is to know the expectations of the customers and tailor the service system design to meet those expectations.

Team Work and Information Sharing

The findings showed that team work and cooperation amongst the staff will go a long way in improving the service quality. There is need to share information and ask questions where necessary and even discuss and analyze customers to be able to know them better internally. It is important to ask questions in this regard and communicate properly with each other whenever you as a staff do not understand because what you do not understand, you do not know and what you do not know, you can not make use of. This way the service provider will be able to predict their customers' needs and expectations as a result of the information at his or her disposal. According to Pfeiffer et al. (1995) in order to become the best service provider, it is important that the staff be provided with all the relevant information.

Listening Attentively

The findings revealed that some service providers are absent minded and do not understand the customer the first time and as a result they do not do it right the first time. This is worrisome and service companies need to train their service providers especially the front-desk employees who interact with the customers more often in order to be knowledgeable about the service offered and answer the necessary questions that may be posed by their customers, and by so doing understand the customers' needs and expectations. This result is supported by Lucas (2015) who states that "listening effectively is the primary means that many customer service professionals use to determine the needs of their customers." Listening is very important because, many customers are impatient and hate repetition and making them to repeat themselves irritate and get the frustrated.

Service System Design

 The findings revealed that the service organization must have a well-designed service system in place. This is because different customers have different expectations and perceptions and a well-designed service system will lead to customers' satisfaction and their corresponding loyalty to the organization. Hence, Parasuraman et al. (1994) research showed that the real problem exists in the service design. Therefore, a well-defined service philosophy and service guidelines should be strictly followed based on the service standards. Hence, this will help to monitor and evaluate the service providers based on the prevailing service standard.

Recruiting Staff with Service Mind

 Recruiting employees with service mind is a key to service quality improvement. This is because a patient and cheerful staff will serve and attract customers more than other employees. This finding is supported by a statement made by Ritz-Carlton's vice president of quality "we want only people who care about people" (Schlossberg, 1993; cited in Kotler et al. 2014). Therefore, human resources department should endeavour to recruit people with service mind who are respectful, patient enough and can smile and are ready to tolerate some rude and impatient customers.

Motivation and Recognition

 The findings showed that the company should try and carry the staff along bearing in mind that the employees are the company's greatest asset. The staff should be motivated in the form of training and development, recognition and reward for hard work, promotion and giving bonus for the job well done. This is because if they are carried along, they will be happy and in turn transfer that happiness to the customers. Hence, a happy staff will go to any length to make an aggrieved customer happy.

Service Recovery

 Consumer research has shown that resolving a service failure effectively and in a more friendly way has strong impact on customer satisfaction level, loyalty, positive word of mouth (WOM) and organization performance. According to Zeithaml et al. (2009) customers who have experienced initial service failure and experienced high level of excellent service recovery will lead to more satisfaction and loyalty towards the service organization, labeling as a service recovery paradox effect. Service recovery therefore involves taking proactive and reactive actions by the service provider to get things right for the affected customers as a result of service failure. Hence, the service organization needs to employ service recovery strategies to get things back to normal and improvement process initiated where necessary.

4.3.4 Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

Zeithaml&Bitner (1996) state that "customers' expectations are beliefs about service delivery, that functions as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. The findings revealed that there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Expectations are viewed as customers' desires which they feel the service provider should be able to offer. People are different and so are their wants and expectations. According to Oliver (1981) expectations are viewed as desires and wants of customers in the service quality literature that is, what they feel a service provider 'should offer' rather than 'would offer.' Different customers have different expectations and perceptions. For example, customers 'A' perceives something different from the way customer 'B' will perceive the same thing with respect to service quality. However, some service providers usually go an extra mile of delighting their customers as a form of benefits to surprise them. This finding is supported by Kotler&keller (2012) which state that delighting customers is a matter of exceeding expected service. Customers enter the service

encounter with a lot of expectations that they expect the service provider to meet. They also expect to experience the service and how it should be performed as well. They equally expect to see how the server should behave and the appearance of the physical service setting. All these and many more are what the service provider should bear in mind and try to device a service design system that will satisfy these expectation. Ford et al. (2012) argue that customers arrive with a set of expectations as to what the company or service provider can and should do, how it should do it, how the servers should behave, how the physical setting should appear, what capabilities customers should have to perform their roles or responsibility in coproducing the service. The findings also established that it is important to know what the customers' expectations are. This is because the company's knowledge of what the customers expect is very important as this could serve as a competitive advantage. It is equally important knowing the customers' level of service expectations because failure to do so will lead to customers' dissatisfaction which in turn may bleed a bunch of unhappy customers that may even switch to the service provider's competitor. Hence, Zeithaml&Bitner (2003) state that knowing what the customers expect is of critical importance in gaining competitive advantage.

However, two respondents out of the 30 participants said that they were confused with the words---expectations and perceptions but preferred to answer the question in terms of desired and adequate expectations. They argued that a customer enters a service encounter with a lot of desired and adequate service levels in mind. Hence, the customer hopes to receive what he or she desired. However, they further argued that adequate is the minimum level of service which the customer can receive after considering some obvious service shortfalls due to controllable and uncontrollable factors, human error inclusive. They said that once a customer cannot get the desired service, he or she can only settle for that service level between the desired and adequate, no more, no less. This is because no customer with his or her money will like any service below adequate level which at this point will be irritating and frustrating. Hence, Zeithaml et al. (2009a) claim that customers hold two different types of expectations vis-a-viz desired service and adequate service. According to them Zeithaml et al. (2009b) "Desired service is the level of service the customer hopes to receive." Also Zeithaml et al. (2009c) state in other words that, it is a blend of what the customer believes "can be" and "should be." Hence, Zeithaml et al. (2009d) believe that desired service is a signal of the level of service the customer hopes and wishes and believes that may be fulfilled and failure on the part of the service provider to meet these expectations may lead to customer cutting down on purchases. Zeithaml et al. (2009e) also argued that adequate service on the other hand is the level of service the customer will accept. However, Parasuraman et al. (1991) argued that adequate service level reflects the minimum performance level expected by customers after they consider a variety of individual and situational factors. The findings also established that people have different needs and wants and enter the service encounter with different expectations which are expected to be met. Once these expectations are met, the customers are satisfied and happy, otherwise they get dissatisfied and frustrated. Hence, the service providers will also strive to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. It is the duty of the service provider to try and find out what exactly are the expectations of the customers and try to tailor their service system designs to meet those needs. Customers' expectations vary as a result of the fact that some customers have higher expectations than others due to personal needs, past experience, word of mouth recommendations, advertising and other privileged information before entering the service encounter. This could be as a result of what they hear from their peer groups, friends and family members and other customers. This influences perception positively or negatively. However, Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. According to company 'O' focus group, a happy customer will always come back. Hence, it is good to find out what the expectations of the customers are through marketing research, feedback via email and by putting calls through to customers to ascertain how they feel

about the service they just experienced and ask them to suggest ways to serve them better, as it will help in no small way in predicting and meeting the expectations of the customers in the future.

4.3.4.1 Factors Influencing the Customers' Expectations of Service Quality

Word of Mouth

The findings showed that word of mouth (WOM) communication has a lot of influence on the customers' expectations. However, Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. WOM can be positive or negative. WOM is a strong marketing tool which can advertise the company free of charge in a positive way if the expectations of the customers are met or negatively if the customers' expectations were not met. This will not augur well for the company because the customer who had poor service or bad experience is not happy and will like to tell whoever that cares to listen and may even go to internet or blog via Tripadvisor for example, to bare his or her mind about the bad experience. According to Ford et al. (2012) "angry customers can instantly tweet their friends or post their complaints on established Web sites or blogs dedicated to providing a means for customers to convey their experiences with different organizations or products." Therefore, if this is not corrected, the company will start losing its customers. For example, what people say or hear about a company's product or service matters a lot. This is because what people hear from others has a lot of influence on their expectations and perceptions of service quality for instance in the groupage cargo shipping. However, negative WOM has a stronger influence on the customers' perceptions when compared to positive WOM communication. WOM has a lot to do with the expectations of the customers. In the course of making decision to buy a product or service, the customer is all out to get information and recommendations from friends and family members that have undertaken the same service. Hence, negative WOM is dangerous for companies.

This is because an aggrieved customer has a lot of weapon to his or her advantage. When a customer is angry it is an opportunity for your competitors to take your customer from you. The moment your aggrieved customer switches over to your competitor, he or she will keep on referring to that bad experience anywhere he or she goes. Ford et al. (2012) state that "if what guests experience falls short of what they have been led to expect or have learned to expect, they will be unhappy. They will not remember later a delightful, carefully planned guest experience; they will remember their unmet expectations as poor service and a bad experience." Therefore, negative word of mouth communication is not good for a company and as such the company or the service provider should not allow any aggrieved customer to leave the company premises unsatisfied or unhappy as this will seriously dent the image of the company. While in contrast, positive WOM will tend to portray the image of the company positively and take it to greater heights. Hence, positive WOM leads to customer franchise. However, information gathering could be from friends peer groups, family members, advertising, blogs, tweeters and internet.

Past Experience

The findings revealed that the customers' past or previous experience with the product or service will have a lot of influence on the customers' expectations. However, Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. As a result of this previous experience, the customers' expectations will be high and the only way such customers can be satisfied is to exceed their expectations and probably delight them. A highly experienced customer because of his or her knowledge of the product or service, information from relatives and friends will have a very big influence on the customers' expectations. Such customers need to be handled with care and information about their needs should be gathered to meet their expectations. This is because such customers with a lot of experiences regarding the

service as a result of other service providers they have visited in the past are difficult to satisfy. Service providers should endeavour to make such customers feel that they are recognized and that they are the reason the service provider is into business. Hence, putting calls through to such customers after the service encounter to know how they feel about the service will do a lot of magic to meeting their expectations. Therefore, how much experience one has about a service or product will determine whether the expectations will be high or low. Hence, the more experience you have about a service, the higher the expectations and the lesser the experience, the lower the expectations.

Personal Needs

The result showed that the customers' personal needs as at the time the customer wants to purchase a service affect their expectations. However, Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. Hence, your present need as at the time will make you to know the kind of things to expect from your service provider. Therefore, what the customer needs will determine what the expectations will be. However, customers' expectations at the point of sale will depend mostly on the personal needs as at that moment.

Advertising/External Communication

Advertising plays a lot of role in the expectations of the customers.However, Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include pastexperience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. This is because advertising campaigns increase the customers' expectations. For example, what the company's marketing department communicates to their customers through advertising campaigns matters a lot. Hence, all that promises that the marketing departments go out there to make add to the customers' knowledge and influence their expectations. However, what customers hear from their friends, colleagues, relatives, and even other customers affect their expectations.

4.3.4.2 Factors Influencing the Customers' Perceptions of Service Quality

Price

The findings showed that price plays a vital role in the customers' perceptions of service quality. This is because some customers like to bargain and will want to buy services that are economically priced. That is to say that some customers will like to buy services or products that are cheap without loosing its quality. However, service providers should be careful not to bring down the price of their service so low as some customers consider cheap service as inferior even though it is a quality service as a result of its cheap price. Hence, the result established that though customers will like to go for service that is economically priced but not necessarily a poor or inferior service.

Reputation

Reputation of a product, service or company affects the customers' perceptions of service quality. The reputation of the company, product or service does not come just overnight, rather it takes a gradual process. Reputation is enhanced overtime by the advertising campaigns and the positive word of mouth which tends to project the image of the company. Therefore, apart from service brand identification and the organizational image, the customers' perceptions of the service quality reputation is enhanced by the whole process of service system design and service delivery system put together.

Packaging and Branding

The way the service provider packages and brands its product or service will affect the customers' perceptions of service quality. The way and manner you present your service to thee first time customer for example, will have a lot of influence on the customer's perception of that service. In other words, the way the service is presented and delivered by the service provider especially; front-desk staff to the customer will exert a lot of influence on the customers' perceptions. However, the enhancement of the tangible cues, the service setting, service branding and ambiance will affect the customers' perceptions of service quality.

Service Quality

The results also revealed that service quality affects the customers perceptions because when the service provider performs an excellent service, it will tend to overshadow a lot of service shortfalls which may go unnoticed by the customers as a result of personal interactions at the point of sale or the way a problem is resolved professionally by the customer contact personnel. Hence, personalization of attention at this juncture is very important in the perception of service quality before and after the service experience. However, the personal interaction and attention on one-on-one basis do a lot of wonders on customers' perceptions of service quality. Hence, everyone wants to be recognized as a valued customer

Negative Word of Mouth (N-WOM) Communication

For example, what the customers' friends are saying about the groupage cargo company the customer is about to patronize is very important. WOM tends to be very important in services that are difficult to evaluate, for example, groupage cargo shipping service before making a buying decision or direct experience of them. If the intending buy's friends are saying negative things about the cargo company and its services, this will influence the perceptions of the buyer negatively. Hence, the N-WOM reports from friends and family members are also WOM sources that affect the levels of desired and predicted service in a negative way. Therefore, WOM communication is the strongest source of information that helps to shape the customers' expectations of service. This could be in form of personal and non-personal statements, which may be made by parties other than the organization. These statements tend to convey to the consumers what the service will be like and they will affect both predicted and desired service.

4.3.5 Age Difference in the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions

The findings revealed that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers. The younger customers have higher expectations than the older ones. For example, those between ages 25-35 have higher expectations compared to those of 36-45 and 46 and above. The result also established that the new generation customers expect more than older ones and that the service provider must exercise caution in dealing with them to avoid losing them to competitors, unlike the older ones that exercise patience more. However, a staff of company 'A' said " I think but I am not too sure if there is really an age difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers of groupage cargo shipping service" Another staff of company 'N' said "I do not think that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Their expectations from my own opinion are the same. This is because they all call and send email asking to know when their consignment will be delivered." Hence, the managing director of company 'O' said "we are in the jet age and as a result, there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. Nowadays most customers have access to a lot of information and coupled with their access to technology, internet, and plenty of information and previous experiences, there expectations are high especially the younger customers compared to the older generations."

According to Dyk, 2008; Miller & Washington, 2009 cited in Kotler et al. (2014) the millennial otherwise called generation 'Y' or the echo boomers who are the children of baby boomers born between1977 and 2000 with a population of about 83 million, out numbering both the generation Xers between 1965 and 1976 and the baby boomers between 1946 and 1964 will one day take over from them. This generation 'Y' includes 19 and young adults 20-35 with a total purchasing power of more than 733 billion USD represents a huge and attractive market that has utter fluency and comfort with computer, digital and internet technology in common. With a lot of information at their disposal, the younger generations rarely exercise patience and would want the service provider to perform as promised, otherwise there is a problem. They find it difficult to understand why the service provider cannot perform as promised regardless of some exogenous or uncontrollable variables that the service provider has to offer to contend with. Hear what a staff of company 'O' has to say "I find it difficult to establish if there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of our customers. Every customer especially, the younger ones want to know when the goods will be delivered based on the contract agreement. I mean all begins to exert pressures on us once the goods are not delivered according to schedule. So I think there is no difference in the age concerning the expectations and perceptions of customers." All the members of the focus group except two who refused comments unanimously agreed that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of customers. However, those between the age bracket 25-35 agreed that their expectations are always high irrespective of the service providers challenges. They argued that once the contract date elapsed, that they have every right to demand for the full performance of the contract. Hence, it will be unfair to ask them to continue to wait. However, a member whose age is between 36-45 said that his expectations are equally high but not to be compared to those of ages 25-35. But two of the focus group whose age bracket is between 36-45 declined comments. However, a member of the group whose age is between 46 and above said that he has she has high expectations since the business is only his source of income, that she expects the service provider to deliver as promised and on time. Hence, delivering on time will help her to meet up with her obligations. She further argued that though she has high expectations that her expectations should not be compared to those of age brackets 25-45 whose expectations are always higher as a result of the fact that they are always in a hurry and hardly take 'No' for an answer and coupled with the fact that they have access to plenty of information that will guide them in making decisions should they decide to switch to other competitors. However, one the members of the focus group within the age bracket 25-35 said that he does not think that he has high expectations but that he could only make his complaints know if the goods are not delivered as promised and then wait for an agreed new date. This is because there may be some hitches that are beyond the service provider's control for example, logistics, government policy and even port congestion.

4.3.6 GAPs Identified in this Study between Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

The study revealed that gap exists between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Originally there were five major gaps in the service quality concept as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). However, two new gaps were later proposed by Shahin (Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran) making it seven gaps as an extension of Parasuraman et al. (1985) gap model of service quality. This study identified three gaps that have direct relationships with the customers and they include Gap1, Gap5 and Gap6. This finding is in line with (ASI Quality Systems, 1992; Curry, 1999; and Layton, 2002 as cited in Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran) which state that "the three important gaps, which are more associated with the external customers, are Gap1, Gap5 and G6, since they have a direct relationship with customers." Hence, the gaps are summarized as follows:

Gap1: Customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations (Parasuramanet al.1985). They argued that many managers or the management of service companies think that they

understood the customers' expectations but end up making mistakes as a result of not understanding very well what the customers expect. This could be as a result of inadequate marketing research, lack of data about customers, lack of communication from bottom to up due to too many layers of authority and inadequate feedbacks from customers due to non-existence of customer relationships management in service companies.

Gap5: The difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service received or customer gap (Parasuraman et al. 1985). This is as a result of influences from customers' personal needs, word of mouth communication, recommendations from friends, peers, and even family members and previous experience; and also service shortfalls on the part of the service provider and information from advertising campaigns from the company's marketing department. Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs and advertising.

Gap6: The difference between the customers' expectations and staff perceptions (Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran). This is one of the newly proposed gaps and it is as a result the differences in the understanding of the customers' expectations by the customer contact personnel (front-line employees or front-desk service providers or receptionists).

4.3.7 Difference in the GAP between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

The findings of this study revealed that there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality. This is because different people have different expectations having come from different cultural and economic background with different experiences. This result is supported by Reisig&Chandek (2001) which state that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of a product or service. "However, two service providers can never perform the same service the same way and based on this fact gaps are bound to exist and they are mostly negative" says the managing Director of company 'A.' Depending on the type of service, some gaps are relatively small for example, in logistics or groupage cargo shipping service than in hotel industry. However, a customer enters a service encounter with high expectations and once his or her expectations are not met or matched with their perceptions there is gap, which could be negative or positive. Hence, different people have different expectations and perceptions and it is therefore difficult for two customers to perceive or judge the same service the same way. In other words, after the service performance, the customer evaluates the service to see if the service he or she perceived as delivered matches or meets his or her expectations. This is because it is only the customer and not the service provider that has the right to assess both the quality and value. This finding is in line with Ford et al. (2012) which state that "it is only the customer that can define both quality and value in hospitality field." However, the findings also showed that there are lapses in the service delivered by the groupage cargo service providers hence, the difference in the gap between the expected and perceived service quality. When the service exceeds the customers' expectations, it is a quality service and the customers are happy but where the expectations exceed the customers' perceptions of service, it is a poor service and bad experience and in that case the customer will be unhappy, disappointed and frustrated. According to Ford et al. (2012) "no matter how brilliantly the organization designs the service, the environment, and the delivery systems or develops measurable service standards, if the guest is dissatisfied with any of these elements, the organization has failed to meet the guest's expectations; it has not provided a guest experience of acceptable quality and value." According to the Managing Director of company 'N' "there are going to be gaps for obvious reasons but what we should do is try to minimize those gaps. This is because there are some exogenous variables that are beyond the control of service providers such as delays occasioned by government policy at the wharf, logistics problems, delays in customs documentations and clearance, etc. We have been receiving a lot of complaints from

customers about our unsatisfactory service delivery but once what they are asking for is not within our power, we will only plead with them for patience. However, we are trying our best to improve." Blose&Tankersley (2004) state that providing a service and meeting commitments on time according to the promised service date in a professional manner will definitely influence a customer's perception in an important way. For example, if the employees at the groupage cargo company perform the desired service level the first time, it means that the company keeps its promises within the specific time frame set out to deliver the service. Therefore, if the delivery is done in a proper way, it will enhance the perceived quality of the service (Brink & Berndt, 2005). Zeithaml&Bitner (1996) stated that "customers' expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which performance is judged." Hence, some customers enter the service encounter with high, moderate or low expectations depending on what they want, experience and what they hear from others about the service or company. Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. According to the Managing Director of company 'O,' "human beings are very difficult to deal with but we are trying our best to coup with the challenges. Overall our services are not bad but we are doing what we can to minimize the gaps which are more or less on the negative side." However, company 'O' staff added "in my own opinion, gaps exist between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. But efforts are being made to close those gaps. It is not easy but I believe that we will get there because our goal is to have a data-base of satisfied and happy customers that will be part of us." Therefore, the onus is on the service provider to figure out how best to minimize those gaps to be able to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. The findings further revealed that it is normal to have gap but a manageable size otherwise there won't be any reason for improvement, if there is no gap. However, customers' understanding and interpretation of a particular situation or the world around them is different hence, the way they perceive the same service delivered to them differs. Overall, the result revealed that the customers' expectations in the groupage cargo shipping service are higher than their perceptions due to unsatisfactory and poor service. Hence, the groupage cargo shipping service providers have failed to deliver acceptable quality and value to their customers (Ford et al. 2012). However, the service providers prefer to engage in price wars in the form of discounts rather than delivering quality services that are important to customers.

4.3.8 Strategies for Closing/Reducing the GAPs Identified in this Study

4.3.8.1 GAP1: Customers' Expectations and Management Perceptions of those Expectations (Parasuraman et al. (1985).

Marketing Research

The study has revealed that marketing research orientation in the service industry especially in the groupage cargo shipping service will reduce or close gap 1. Hence, a well conducted marketing research based on service quality to know what customers expect will go a long way in meeting their expectations and save the cost of trial and error. Therefore big companies that have marketing departments can use them to conduct the research or employ the services of an independent research organization for valid result. However, enough resources should be budgeted for the marketing research so as to carry out research to know exactly what customers expect as this will help in the predictions of customers' expectations. Hence, service organizations should embrace marketing research to gather enough information about the customers and their expectations to enable them make the necessary decisions on how to meet the customers' expectations. Marketing research is important because ordinary face to face interactions with the customers in the office may not yield the necessary result as some customers may not be free to say their mind there by hiding some vital information. However, employing an independent researcher will yield valid and required information. This will allow the organization to have direct contacts

with the customers to know exactly what they want about the service quality and also how they feel about the service they have received and start the process of improvement if need be after the research.

Customer Relationship Management

The findings have shown that customer relationship management is a tool for reducing or closing gap 1. Communication with customers will no doubt help the management to know the customers' feeling and expectations. Having a good customer relationship management (CRM) in an organization will allow for a cordial relationship between the customers and the employees especially, the customer contact personnel. This will enable organization to personalize their services to their customers hence, making it easier to predict the customers' expectations.

Upward Communication

The findings also revealed that encouraging upward communication will help in closing gap 1. This will enable the customer contact personnel to communicate freely with management and in turn offer valuable advice that will be used in making decisions that will help in predicting the customers' expectations. This is critical because they have some vital information about customers at their disposal. Management must engineer this bottom-up communication and make sure that it is done in a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere of cordiality as this will help in no small measure in cushioning the effects of gap 1. Therefore , for this upward communication to be successful, it must have the support and blessings of management, and by so doing management will be able to extract the information needed to take decision on how to close gap1 and improve service quality from the customer contact personnel. This will enable the customer contact employees to communicate freely with management, and help them with customer information or data that could be used in decisions concerning the predictions of customers' expectations.

Cutting Down on Management Layers

The result revealed that the higher the number of the management layers, the more difficult it is for thee management to interpret or understand the customers' expectations regarding service quality. However, organizations should look for ways of reducing the management layers in order to get closer to at least the customer contact personnel that have direct access or contact with the customers on daily basis. The findings also revealed that this management layers if not closed might lead to gap 7 (Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran), which is the discrepancy between the employees' perceptions and management perceptions, as a result of the differences in the interpretations of customers' expectations between the management and service providers as both parties may hold different opinions based on their perceptions or understanding of such expectations.

4.3.8.2 GAP5- Customer Gap: The Discrepancy between Customers' Expectations and their Perceptions of the Service Delivered (Parasuraman et al. 1985).

Getting Feedback from Customers

The findings also established that getting feedbacks from customers will help to know exactly what customers want and reduce gap 5, as this will predict customers' expectations. The service organization can send out questionnaires to get feedbacks from customers after service experience to know how they feel about the service received or even put calls through to customers to know what they think about the service and suggest areas they feel that need improvement. However, since the business is shifting from production era to marketing era, it is therefore very important to know exactly the customers' needs and wants before production. Instead of the service providers making predictions on customers' expectations based on their interpretations, it will be better done on the basis of feedbacks as these expectations are influenced by

some external factors such as personal needs, word of mouth (WOM), previous experiences, recommendations from friends, relatives, peers and even family members that are beyond the control of the service provider, and also advertising.

Avoid Negative Word of Mouth

The findings showed that gap 5 can be reduced or closed by trying to meet the customers' expectations and avoid letting any aggrieved customer leave the company premises unhappy. This is because any aggrieved customer can go to any length to share his or her bad experience with anyone that cares to listen and this will definitely not go down well with the company hence, prevention is better than cure. Therefore, the organization should avoid anything that will bring about the negative word of mouth as this will portray the image of the company negatively. An unhappy customer has a lot of weapon to his advantage and with the help of internet or tweeter and if the customer decides to tweet the bad experience, it will reach millions of people in one minute. For example, if the aggrieved customer decides to share his or her bad experience with Tripadvisor, the organization will be worst for it unless something drastic in form of public relations is done immediately to counter such negative publicity before the current and new customers.

Avoid Making Promises that cannot be Kept

The findings revealed that gap 5 can be reduced or closed if the organization fulfills its promises to its customers. Hence, the organization should be mindful of the promises the marketing department make out there in the media in their advertising campaigns and promotions. However, the service providers should not promise what they cannot do as this will increase the customers' expectations. Organizations should always limit their promises to what they can do. However, organizations should avoid giving bogus and unrealistic targets to the marketing departments which make to make unnecessary promises that are rarely fulfilled that lead to negative word of mouth which affects the image of the organization and its services.

4.3.8.3 GAP6: The Discrepancy between Customers' Expectations and Employees Perceptions (Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran)

Training the Customers' Contact Personnel

The findings showed that training the customer contact employees will reduce or close gap 6. A well trained staff will be able to know what the service, he or she is about to deliver entails, as this will save unnecessary delays and repetitions that sometimes irritate some impatient customers. However, a staff that knows much about a service will be able to convince the customers and build confidence in them about the organization and its services which at the long-run leads to loyalty and customer franchise. Training a staff, especially the customer contact personnel in a professional way on the art of cuddling and handling customers in a friendly manner is very important. For example, a staff who is willing to help a customer and beams smile while attending to customer will win more customers than any other staff. It is equally important that the management in the course of training drums into the ears of the employees that customer is always right no matter what, and should be treated as king, as everybody is a customer and king in one way or the other. So treat every customer the way you will want to be treated elsewhere as a customer. However, letting the employees know that it is the customers and not the management that pay their salaries and bills will make the employees build good relationship with the customers. Also management should champion the course of making any staff that receives a customer's complaint to own it without transferring it or going to higher authority until it is resolved.

This can be done by empowering the employees to take responsibility by mapping out a particular amount to get the customer's complaint resolved, make the customer feel happy and keeps coming back. This no doubt will avoid unnecessary bureaucratic delays and reduce gap 6. Hence, it is more cost effective and economical to maintain the existing or current customers than soliciting for new customers. However, employees should be trained to listen very attentive to customers and answer their questions regarding the services they offer correctly, as customers do not like repetition and absent minded employees. Therefore, human resources should also contribute their own quota by recruiting employees with service mind, who are patient and can always tolerate the customers irrespective of their shortcomings. However, training and development programs where all the service providers in the organization are given equal opportunity to be taught the basic components of the service they deliver to ensure effective and efficient delivery to the customers should be organized periodically. Hence, being cheerful and answering customer's questions in a friendly atmosphere will also go a long way in cushioning the effects of gap in the service delivery. Again, beaming a smile to a customer who is waiting to be attended to is a sign that he or she is welcome and recognized.

The training should also cover the kind of questions service providers ask the customer during the service delivery, as some customers will like you to go straight to the business of the day (service proper) instead of trying to beat about the bush that may lead to service shortfalls in the service delivery. Hence, training the customer contact personnel to be knowledgeable about the services offered by the company to be able to answer the customer's question and inquiries confidently in the most convincing and friendly manner is very important

Service Philosophy and Standards

The findings also revealed that having service culture and standards in place as a guide will help to reduce gap 6. The management must believe in the service philosophy and standards to be followed and should also make the employees to believe in it and embrace it too. Once the management believes and embraces the service culture and the standard, the employees will know that the management takes its services to the customers seriously and all employees will sit up and deliver the service as it ought to be and according to standards. Hence, the staff will be monitored and evaluated periodically to ensure that the service they deliver to the customers is in line with the company's service philosophy and standards.

Motivating and Rewarding Excellence

The findings also showed that motivating and rewarding excellence can also close or reduce gap 6. This can be done by giving compensations in the form of monetary reward and non-monetary reward such as a trip for two to one of the western countries for example, for the best 'customer relationship management staff' of the year. Hence, Rosander (1989) cited in Pakdil&Kurtulmusoglu (2014) states that employees oriented needs and expectations are the most important phenomena, demonstrated in service quality literature. This no doubt will be a challenge to all the staff to sit up and look for ways and means of satisfying and attracting more customers. Hence, rewarding hard work and saying well done to the employee that performs exceptionally well is a right step in the right direction, and by so doing the employees will now see it as a challenge to do more because to 'whom more is given, more is expected.' This way the management should see their employees as their greatest asset because, it is from them that the talented employees that contribute to most of the organization's profitability emerge. According to Piansoongnem&Anurit (2010), their findings revealed that talent is very important factor that lead to corporate success and sustainable profitability of the firms. However, this is also similar to Piansoongnem (2012) where "top executives defined talent as a group of high performance employees called 'Manus Thongkhum' because more than eighty per cent of corporate revenue is generated by this group of employees." However, for the employees to do their jobs in the most effective and efficient manner,

management should learn to carry their employees along and treat them as the internal customers which they are and make sure that they are happy and make sure that they are happy and rewarded accordingly. A happy staff will go extra mile in making sure that the customers are satisfied and happy by transferring that happiness to customers. Again, a happy staff will like to probe further into some hidden needs of the customers which if revealed will help in no small way in predicting the customers' expectations in the future. Hence, Gaster (1985) states that "because service provision is complex, it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpected needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done."

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the research findings and answers to the two research questions. Next are the suggestions, and contributions, followed by conclusion and presentation of research limitations and then recommendations for future research.

5.2 Summary of the Research Findings

In summary, from the qualitative study, the researcher was able to (1) Define service as an action, deed or intangible offer performed by an individual or company to another person or company at a consideration or price without parting away with anything. (2) Identify the most critical and valuable service quality dimension in the groupage cargo shipping management as reliability, followed by assurance then responsiveness followed by tangible and then empathy. (3) Define service quality as a powerful competitive differentiator as well as a tool which service organizations strive to acquire. (4) Found out that service quality is measured by deducting perceptions from expectations that is, Expectations—Perceptions (E—P), which could be poor or quality service. (5) Suggest key strategies in improving service quality as: training and development, feedbacks from customers, developing service philosophy, capacity building/planning, empowering employees to take responsibility of resolving customers' complaints, marketing research, team work and information sharing, listening attentively, service system designs, recruiting staff with service mind, motivating and recognition and service recovery (6) Found out that there is difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. (7) Suggest key factors that influence the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality- in the case of expectations as: word of mouth (WOM), past experiences, personal needs, and advertising /external communication and in the case of perceptions as: price, reputation, packaging and branding, service quality and negative word of mouth (N-WOM). (8) Found out that there is age difference in the expectations and perceptions of the customers, that younger customers aged 25-35 have higher expectations compared to those of 36-45 and 46 and above. (9) Identified three key gaps militating against service quality in the groupage cargo shipping management as: Gap 1- Customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations, Gap 5- The difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service received (Customer gap), and Gap 6- The difference between the customers' expectations and staff perceptions. (10) Determined that there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality. (11) Suggest key strategies for closing or reducing the gaps. In the case of gap 1 as marketing research, customer relationship management, upward communication and cutting down on management layers, and in the case of Gap 5 as getting feedbacks from customers, avoid negative word of mouth (N-WOM), avoid making promises that cannot be kept, and for Gap 6 as training the customer contact personnel, service philosophy and standards, and motivating and rewarding excellence.

5.3 Answers to Research Questions

5.3.1 Research Question 1: Is there any Difference between the Expectations and Perceptions of Customers of Groupage Cargo Shipping with Respect to Service Quality?

For the research question 1, there is difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality. Zeithaml&Bitner (1996) state that "customers' expectations are beliefs about service delivery, that functions as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. Expectations are viewed as customers' desires which they feel the service provider should be able to offer. People are different and so are their wants and expectations. According to Oliver (1981) expectations are

viewed as desires and wants of customers in the service quality literature that is, what they feel a service provider 'should offer' rather than 'would offer.' Different customers have different expectations and perceptions.This is in line with Reisig&Chandek (2001) who state that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of a product or service, past experiences and needs. For example, customers 'A' will perceive something differently from the way customer 'B' will perceive the same thing with respect to service quality. However, some service providers usually go an extra mile of delighting their customers as a form of benefits to surprise them. This finding is supported by Kotler&Keller (2012) which state that delighting customers is a matter of exceeding expected service. Customers enter the service encounter with a lot of expectations that they expect the service provider to meet. They also expect to experience the service and how it should be performed as well. They equally expect to see how the server should behave and the appearance of the physical service setting. All these and many more are what the service provider should bear in mind and try to device a service design system that will satisfy these expectation. This is also in line with Ford et al. (2012) who argued that customers arrive with a set of expectations as to what the company or service provider can and should do, how it should do it, how the servers should behave, how the physical setting should appear, what capabilities customers should have to perform their roles or responsibility in coproducing the service. It is therefore, important to know what exactly the customers' expectations are. This is because the company's knowledge of what the customers expect is very important as this could serve as a competitive advantage. It is equally important knowing the customers' level of service expectations because failure to do so will lead to customers' dissatisfaction which in turn may bleed a bunch of unhappy customers that may even switch to the service provider's competitor. Hence, Zeithaml&Bitner (2003) state that knowing what the customers expect is of critical importance in gaining competitive advantage.

However, two sets of expectations were identified in this study and they include desired and adequate expectations. Therefore, a customer enters a service encounter with a lot of desired and adequate service levels in mind. Hence, the customer hopes to receive what he or she desired. However, adequate service level is the minimum level of service which the customer can receive after considering some obvious service shortfalls due to controllable and uncontrollable factors, human error inclusive. This is supported by Parasuraman et al. (1991) who argued that adequate service level reflects the minimum performance level expected by customers after they consider a variety of individual and situational factors. Once a customer cannot get the desired service, he or she can only settle for that service level between the desired and adequate, no more, no less. This is because no customer with his or her money will like any service below adequate level which at this point will be irritating and frustrating. Zeithaml et al. (2009a) claim that customers hold two different types of expectations vis-a-viz desired service and adequate service. According to Zeithaml et al. (2009b) "Desired service is the level of service the customer hopes to receive." Also Zeithaml et al. (2009c) state in other words that, it is a blend of what the customer believes "can be" and "should be." Also Zeithaml et al. (2009d) believe that desired service is a signal of the level of service the customer hopes and wishes and believes that may be fulfilled and failure on the part of the service provider to meet these expectations may lead to customer cutting down on purchases. Zeithaml et al. (2009e) also argued that adequate service on the other hand is the level of service the customer will accept. However, Parasuraman et al. (1991) argued that adequate service level reflects the minimum performance level expected by customers after they consider a variety of individual and situational factors. It was also established that people have different needs and wants and enter the service encounter with different expectations which are expected to be met. Once these expectations are met, the customers are satisfied and happy, otherwise they get dissatisfied and frustrated. Hence, the service providers will also strive to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. It is the duty of the service provider to try and find out what exactly are the expectations of the customers and try to tailor their service system designs to meet those needs. Customers' expectations vary as a result of the fact that some customers have higher expectations

than others due to personal needs, past experience, word of mouth recommendations, advertising and other privileged information before entering the service encounter. This could be as a result of what they hear from their peer groups, friends and family members and other customers. This influences perception positively or negatively. This is also in line with Voss et al. (1998) who state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. However, a happy customer will always come back. Hence, it is good for the service companies to find out what the expectations of the customers are, through marketing research, feedback via email and by putting calls through to customers to ascertain how they feel about the service they just experienced and ask them to suggest ways to serve them better, as it will help in no small way in predicting and meeting the expectations of the customers in the future.

5.3.2 Research Question 2: Is there any Discrepancy in the GAP between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions with Respect to Service Quality?

The answer to this question shows that there is difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of service quality. This is because different people have different expectations having come from different cultural and economic background with different experiences. This result is supported by Reisig&Chandek (2001) which state that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of a product or service. "However, two service providers can never perform the same service the same way and based on this fact, gaps are bound to exist and they are mostly negative" says the managing Director of company 'A.' Depending on the type of service, some gaps are relatively small for example, in logistics or groupage cargo shipping service than in hotel industry. However, a customer enters a service encounter with high expectations and once his or her expectations are not met or matched with their perceptions there is gap, which could be negative or positive. Hence, different people have different expectations and perceptions and it is therefore difficult for two customers to perceive or judge the same service the same way. In other words, after the service performance, the customer evaluates the service to see if the service he or she perceived as delivered matches or meets his or her expectations. This is because it is only the customer and not the service provider that has the right to assess both the quality and value. This finding is in line with Ford et al. (2012) which state that "it is only the customer that can define both quality and value in hospitality field." However, it has been also established that there are lapses in the service delivered by the groupage cargo service providers hence, the difference in the gap between the expected and perceived service quality. When the service exceeds the customers' expectations, it is a quality service and the customers are happy but where the expectations exceed the customers' perceptions of service, it is a poor service and bad experience and in that case the customer will be unhappy, disappointed and frustrated. According to Ford et al. (2012) "no matter how brilliantly the organization designs the service, the environment, and the delivery systems or develops measurable service standards, if the guest is dissatisfied with any of these elements, the organization has failed to meet the guest's expectations; it has not provided a guest experience of acceptable quality and value." According to the Managing Director of company 'N' "there are going to be gaps for obvious reasons but what we should do is try to minimize those gaps. This is because there are some exogenous variables that are beyond the control of service providers such as delays occasioned by government policy at the wharf, logistics problems, delays in customs documentations and clearance, etc. We have been receiving a lot of complaints from customers about our unsatisfactory service delivery but once what they are asking for is not within our power, we will only plead with them for patience. However, we are trying our best to improve." Blose&Tankersley (2004) state that providing a service and meeting commitments on time according to the promised service date in a professional manner will definitely influence a customer's perception in an important way. For example, if the employees at the groupage cargo company perform the desired service level the first time, it means that the company keeps its promises within the specific time frame set out to deliver the service. Therefore, if the delivery is done in a proper way, it will enhance the perceived quality of

the service (Brink & Berndt, 2005). Zeithaml&Bitner (1996) stated that "customers' expectations are beliefsabout service delivery that function as standards or reference points, against which performance is judged." Hence, some customers enter the service encounter with high, moderate or low expectations depending on what they want, experience and what they hear from others about the service or company. Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs, and advertising. According to the Managing Director of company 'O,' "human beings are very difficult to deal with but we are trying our best to coup with the challenges. Overall our services are not bad but we are doing what we can to minimize the gaps which are more or less on the negative side." However, company 'O' staff added "in my own opinion, gaps exist between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. But efforts are being made to close those gaps. It is not easy but I believe that we will get there because our goal is to have a data-base of satisfied and happy customers that will be part of us." Therefore, the onus is on the service provider to figure out how best to minimize those gaps to be able to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. The findings further revealed that it is normal to have gap but a manageable size otherwise there won't be any reason for improvement, if there is no gap. However, customers' understanding and interpretation of a particular situation or the world around them is different hence, the way they perceive the same service delivered to them differs. Overall, the result revealed that the customers' expectations in the groupage cargo shipping service are higher than their perceptions due to unsatisfactory and poor service. Hence, the groupage cargo shipping service providers have failed to deliver acceptable quality and value to their customers (Ford et al. 2012). However, the service providers prefer to engage in price wars in the form of discounts rather than delivering quality services that are important to customers.

 Based on the results of this study, there is no doubt that gap exists between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Originally there were five major gaps in the service quality concept as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). However, two new gaps were later proposed by Shahin (Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran) making it seven gaps as an extension of Parasuraman et al. (1985) gap model of service quality. This study identified three gaps that have direct relationships with the customers and they include Gap1, Gap5 and Gap6. This finding is in line with (ASI Quality Systems, 1992; Curry, 1999; and Layton, 2002 as cited in Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran) which state that "the three important gaps, which are more associated with the external customers, are Gap1, Gap5 and G6, since they have a direct relationship with customers." Hence, the gaps are summarized as follows:

GAP1: Customers' expectations and management perceptions of those expectations (Parasuramanet al.1985). Managers or the management of service companies think that they understood the customers' expectations but end up making mistakes as a result of not understanding very well what the customers expect. This could be as a result of inadequate marketing research, lack of data about customers, lack of communication from bottom to up due to too many layers of authority and inadequate feedbacks from customers due to non-existence of customer relationships management in service companies.

GAP5 or Customer Gap: The difference between the customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service received (Parasuraman et al. 1985). This is as a result of influences from customers' personal needs, word of mouth communication, recommendations from friends, peers, and even family members and previous experience; and also service shortfalls on the part of the service provider and information from advertising campaigns from the company's marketing department. Voss et al. (1998) state that service expectations can be formed by customers from many sources which may include past experience, word of mouth, personal needs and advertising.

GAP6: The difference between the customers' expectations and staff perceptions (Shahin, Department of Management, University of Isfahan, Iran). This is one of the newly proposed gaps and it is as a result the differences in the understanding of the customers' expectations by the customer contact personnel (front-line employees or front-desk service providers or receptionists).

5.4 Suggestions and Recommendations

In a research conducted by Zeithaml et al. (1996) a conceptual model of the impact of overall service quality on a particular behaviour, for example word of mouth (WOM) communication was developed, and prioritized saying positive things about the company or organization and willingness to recommend the organization to others vis-a-viz friends, peers, relatives, etc. for future businesses. In this research, it was found that higher service quality performance bleeds positive WOM and higher purchase intention. However, in this research-investigating into the expected and perceived service quality in groupage cargo shipping service, it was found out that WOM is a strong marketing tool and can advertise the company positively or negatively free of charge. This is because what people hear from others or say about a company has a lot of influence on their expectations and perceptions of service quality. It was also found out that negative word of mouth has a stronger influence in the customers' perception when compared to positive WOM. Hence, companies should be playing safe and not let an aggrieved customer leave their premises unhappy. Therefore, organizations should try at any point in time to erase doubts from the minds of their customers to avoid negative WOM as the following favourablebehavioural intention indicators supported this study empirically (Choudhury, 2013). These indicators include saying positive things about the company to others (Boulding et al. 1993; Zeithaml et al. 1996), willingness to recommend the organization or service to others (Parasuraman et al. 1988, 1991; Zeithaml et al. 1996), carrying out more business with the organization (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996), having the company as the first choice from which to do business -buy service (Zeithaml et al. 1996) and continuing to do business with the company (Boulding et al. 1993).

The marketing department or the sales people of the organization should not promise what they cannot offer in their bid to lure customers to their organization to undertake their services. This is because all these promises increase the customers' expectations of the service quality and in the event that the customers do not get what was promised them or expected, they will be disappointed and loose confidence in the company, and if not handled well will lead to negative WOM.

The organization should try to do it right the first time and meet the customers' expectations. This will enable both the old and new customers to have confidence and trust in the organization and the company will enjoy the repeat purchases that come with it and recommendation of the organization and their services to others.

The front-desk staff should be well trained in handling and answering customers' questions in a friendly way without delay as this will shore up the customers' confidence and trust that will make them keep coming back. Personalization of service is also a key to wooing customers. Calling customers by their names gives them sense of belonging and shows that they are valued and recognized as esteemed customers and kings they are.

The groupage cargo service providers should focus more attention on the quality standards rather than luring customers through discounts in order to meet the basic needs and customers' expectations. This is because if the customers' needs are clearly identified, it will be much easier for managers of groupage cargo shipping service providers to be able to predict and fulfill their customers' needs and wants (expectations).

The staffers of the groupage cargo service providers should be trained to have broad and deep knowledge of the services provided by their company and have the required skills, capability and the experience to deliver the services to the customers in a way that will meet their needs and wants.

In view of the stiff competition in the global business environment where businesses have to survive and grow, service quality should form an essential part of service marketing; and as such groupage cargo service providers will have to focus on the reduction of the gaps between the customers' expectations and perceptions of their service quality if they have to compete globally. This recommendation is rightly supported by the views of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) which state that if companies want to improve that aspect of their service quality, the first step to take should be to diminish the gap between the "expected service" and "perceived service" because of the intangible nature of service. Hence, companies should try as much as possible to deliver quality service to their customers.

Pariseau& McDaniel (1997) were of the opinion that if there is an agreement that service quality exceeds, meets or falls below expectations, then there should be room for continuation or improvement of the service quality level. Therefore, from the analyses of this research findings, it is obvious that the customers' expectations from the groupage cargo service providers are higher than the perceived quality of the services provided by them hence, the need for improvement and /or redesigning of the service delivery system as indicated by the results of the findings to meet or exceed the customers' expectations.

Human resources department should contribute their quota by recruiting people with service mind who are ready to tolerate some impatient and rude customers. Those who are always ready and willing to improve on the service they offer to the customers.

Sending emails immediately after a service encounter to know how customers evaluated the service they had just consumed is a right step in the right direction. This will enable the company to get information about the customers' feelings toward their service and try to improve where necessary. Also putting calls through to high-end customers or those with higher expectations as a result of their many experiences from other service providers will do a lot of magic in their future purchase decisions.

5.5 Contribution to Knowledge

This study no doubt has contributed in no small measure to the theoretical advancement of the consumer buying behavior and customers' expectations and perceptions theory in the service quality management, service marketing and groupage cargo shipping industry literature by analyzing some important service quality issues in groupage cargo service industry. Having

knowledge of these findings and analyses will help managers especially in service oriented companies meet the challenges of improving the service quality in the day to day running of their businesses. The choice of Thailand as a case study is because of it strategic positioning as a tourist destination where service businesses thrive as well as the fact that Thailand is one of the emerging economies in Asia. The researcher was particularly interested in the groupage cargo shipping because not much research has been done in that area as far as service quality is concerned. Groupage cargo shipping industry is characterized by fierce competition posed by large national operators, medium-sized regional companies, and smaller local service operators under which this research falls. The global trend in service quality originated in the 1980s and since then organizations have realized that a quality product in itself is not guaranteed to maintain competitive advantage (Vander et al. 2002). This particular sector has been neglected by the researchers when compared to sectors like banks, hotels, hospitals, schools, etc. Zeithaml&Bitner (2003) defined service as deeds, processes and performances. However, from the findings the researcher is able to define service as an action, deed or intangible offer performed by an individual or company to another person or company at a consideration or price without parting away with anything. This definition is supported by kotler& Keller (2009) which defined service as "any intangible act or performance that one party offers to another that does not result in the ownership of anything." The finding further revealed that service is a sensitive issue and any company that performs good or quality service is at advantage over its competitors. It is delicate because it is intangible. Unlike product, service cannot be touched or tasted to find out whether or not it is defective until it is consumed. The findings also showed that reliability is the most critical dimension in the groupage cargo shipping followed by assurance, then responsiveness followed by tangible and the last but not the least empathy (Zeithaml et al. 1990).

Service industries are now throwing their weights to improving the service quality so as to meet up with the customers' expectations. The findings revealed that technological impact coupled with past experiences of the customers have exposed them to a lot of information regarding a particular service which makes them to have higher expectations. The study also revealed that it is more cost effective to maintain the existing or current customers rather than soliciting for new customers. However, the results of different studies have shown that the cost of attracting new customers is six to eight times more expensive than maintaining the existing customers (Khorshidi&Kardgar 2009). The finding is also in line with Atlane&Noktedan (2010) which state therefore, in order to attract new customers, companies or organizations need not only to employ large resources but also a lot of time hence, the organizations are becoming more and more aware of that maintaining the existing customers is far more cheaper than attracting new ones. It was also established from the findings that different people have different expectations and perceptions and it is therefore difficult for two customers to perceive or judge the same service the same way. However, Blesic et al. (2009a) claimed that the fact remains that customers observe and rate the same service or product differently, based mainly on their own motives and attitudes. Because the customers' attitude on the quality is a majorissue at service quality level, measurements should be based on field investigation of the customer population (Blesic et al. 2009b). The findings further revealed the characteristics of service as perishability, intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity or variability (Kotler et al. 2014).

However, the findings also showed thatservice quality is a strong competitive tool which all the service oriented companies will like to have or possess. Service quality is a competitive tool that could be used against the service provider's competitors. It is a powerful competitive differentiator as well as a tool which service organizations strive to acquire. In fact service quality is money spinning marketing strategy. This finding is supported by Zeithaml et al. (2006) which state that service quality is can be used as competitive marketing strategy for increased profitability, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, differentiation and a continual flow of value. This study also confirms the empirical study carried out by Reisig&Chandek (2010) which revealed that different customers have different expectations as a result of their knowledge of a product or service, past experiences and needs. This is true in this study because the result showed that different customers have different expectations as these expectations are mainly influenced by the way and manner in which the service is performed and delivered and advertising on the part of the service provider, and the customers' past experiences, the word of mouth (WOM) which could be either positive and negative, and above all the personal needs of the individual customer.

5.6 Conclusion

In this study, the expected and perceived service quality and the discrepancy in the service gaps in groupage cargo shipping management were reviewed. The SERVQUAL instrument was applied to assess the quality of both the internal service as provided by the staff of the 'ANO'companiesunder study as well as the external service quality as perceived by the customers of the 'ANO' companies. However, from the results of the empirical findings, service organizations can use SERVQUAL features to assess the level of services provided by the service providers and how those services were perceived by the customers in order to determine whether or not the customers' expectations are met or exceeded or even below. The result will also enable the organization to find out which dimension of SERVQUAL needs attention, as this will help managers to channel the scarce resources to ailing areas thereby closing the gaps and improving the service quality.

Assessing service quality from time to time will help the management to better understanding of the SERVQUAL features and monitor the service quality that will help the managers design an effective and efficient service delivery system. There is no doubt that measuring the service quality and its accompanying discrepancy in gaps will help expose the organization's strengths and weaknesses which in turn will help the organization to better redesign service delivery process and channel the scarce resources to the needy areas.

The key findings from this study revealed, first, there was difference in the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. The groupage cargo service providers were not able to deliver services as expected hence; customers' expectations were prioritized as a result of low service by the service providers. Second, there was discrepancy in the gaps between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality among the groupage cargo service providers. The result indicated that the service quality of the groupage cargo service providers in the Pratunam area of Bangkok is low. This could be attributed to the fact that groupage cargo service providers rather than embracing programs that will shore up the service

quality, they prefer to engage in price wars by way of discounts instead of improving on the services rendered to their customers. Having knowledge of these findings and analyses will help managers especially in service oriented companies meet the challenges of improving the service quality in the day to day running of their businesses.

5.7 Research Limitations

In carrying out this research, the researcher was faced with few limitations. First and foremost, the time allocated for the research was short hence; the researcher had to work under tight schedule in order to meet up with the dead line.

Second, the researcher would have accommodated more than three companies for the case study but it was rather very difficult to convince some of the companies the researcher approached for this study for fear of letting out some of their secrets. However, only three companies agreed to cooperate with the researcher on condition of anonymity and strict confidentiality. Hence the companies under study were tagged "ANO".

Third, because of the tight schedule of the staff of the "ANO" companies under study, the interview could only be held during break time between 35-40 minutes every interview day, 3 times a week. However, for the focus groups, the interview was fixed for first and last Saturdays of every month between 35-40 minutes at 1600 hours in order to accommodate all because of their tight schedules and engagements. However, it took 5 weeks to conclude the interview with the focus groups.

Fourth, the study was limited to investigating into the expected and perceived service quality and discrepancy in the service gap in the groupage cargo shipping in the Pratunam area in Bangkok, Thailand, with a total sample size of 30 participants.

Fifth, limited resources was also one of the limitations as this research is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Business Administration of Siam University hence, no financial grant was made available for the research and as such the researcher was limited to some extent by financial constraints.

5.8 Recommendations for Future Research

Further research may be extended to cover the logistics and shipping industries generally. However, since this study employed the qualitative method to collect and analyze data, the next study on the same or related study can be done using quantitative method in order to learn and emphasize more on the customers' perspectives. The result of this study should not be used to generalize since only a small number of groupage cargo shipping service companies and participants located in a particular area of Bangkok, Thailand were studied, because of time and resource constraints. Hence, future research in this area or related areas should be done to cover other areas in Bangkok metropolis.

Also future research is also recommended in the groupage cargo shipping management and other sectors such as banking, hotel industry, hospital management and tertiary institutions to determine the impact of service quality on profitability with respect to SERVQUAL dimensions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be employed for comparison of the result and findings.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction:

My name is Mr. Akile, Bertrand Ifeanyi, an MBA student International program of Siam University. Mr. Akile is currently conducting a research on "investigating into the expected and perceived service quality of groupage cargo shipping management in the Pratunam area of Bangkok, Thailand" and your establishment is one of the three companies selected for the case study; because of your contributions to the shipping industry, and also as one of the companies that have the largest market share within the Pratunam area of Bangkok.

Aim:

The aim of this study is to assess the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality in groupage cargo shipping. The researcher will also seek to determine the discrepancy in the gap between the expectations and perceptions of service quality in the groupage cargo shipping management in the Pratunam area of Bangkok and proffer solutions on how to reduce or close the gap(s) and shore up the service quality. The researcher will be delighted to ask the following questions and your detailed contributions will be highly appreciated as this will contribute immensely in answering the research questions and doing justice to the objectives of this study and its successful and timely conclusion. Thanks in anticipation for your cooperation.

Research Questionnaire:

The questionnaire is made up of two sections- section one tagged "Appendix "A" containing 10 questions is for the staff of the "ANO" companies' staff and section two tagged "Appendix "B" containing 10 questions is for the "ANO" customers (focus groups). However, each section of this questionnaire contains three categories. Category one is on "service, Service Quality and SERVQUAL dimensions; category two is on the "customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality," and category three is on the discrepancy in the gap between the expected and perceived service quality."

Name of the interviewee……………………………………………………………… (Optional)

Gender…………………………………………………………………………………………….

Age…………………………………………………………………………………………

Length of patronage…………………………………………………………………

Years of experience……………………………………………………………………

Appendix A

Section One

Appendix 'A'- Interview Questions for "ANO" Companies' Staff

Category One: Service, SERVQUAL Dimensions and, Service Quality and how it is Measured

1. In your own word, what do you understand by the term 'service' and how do you describe it?

2. In your own opinion what do you understand by the term 'service quality' and how do you measure it?

3. Having worked with your organization for some years now, which of the service quality features or dimensions do you think your customers value most and why?

4. In your own understanding and opinion, how do you think the quality of service could be improved in your organization in order to meet or exceed your customers' expectations?

Category two: Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

5. Do you think that there is a difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality?

6. What factors do you think affect the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality?

7. Is there really difference in the expectations and perceptions of different age groups of your customers and if so what age bracket(s) in your own experience has the highest expectations?

Category three: Discrepancy in the Gap between the Customers' Expectations and Perceptions

8. What gap(s) in your own opinion and understanding of the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality can you identify in this study and why?

9. In your own opinion, do you think that there is any difference in the gap between the customers' expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality?

10. Based on your experience, how do you think the gap can be reduced or closed to increase the service quality of your organization?

Appendix B

Section Two

Appendix 'B'- Interview Questions for the "ANO" Companies' Customers (Focus Groups)

Category One: Service, SERVQUAL Dimensions and, Service Quality and how it is Measured.

1. In your own word, what do you understand by the term 'service' and how do you describe it?

2. In your own opinion what do you understand by the term 'service quality' and how do you measure it?

3. Having been a customer of company A, N, or O for many years now, which of the service quality features or dimensions do you consider the most important to you and why?

4. In your own understanding and opinion as a customer of Company A, N, or O, how do you think the quality of service could be improved to meet your ailing needs and wants (expectations)?

Category two: Customers' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality

5. Do you think that there is a difference in your expectations and perceptions of service quality with respect to SERVQUAL dimensions?

6. In your own opinion what factors do you think affect the customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality?

7. Now based on your respective ages, do you think it has any influence in your expectations?

Category three: Discrepancy in the Gap between the Expected and Perceived Service Quality.

8. What gap(s) in your own opinion can you identify as having direct relationship with you as a customer?

9. As a customer, do you really think that there is a difference in the gap between your expectations and perceptions with respect to service quality?

10. How can you suggest the gap(s) should be reduced or closed and shore up the service quality to meet your needs and expectations?

Name of the Researcher: Mr. Akile, Bertrand Ifeanyi

MBA student, Siam University

Bangkok, Thailand

Tonycool27@yahoo.com

Thank you so much for your time, contributions and attention.