Travellers’ level of satisfaction with the quality of services at Harare International Airport

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Abstract

Although Zimbabwe’s tourism suffered a dramatic downward trend between 2000 and 2010, the establishment of the government of national unity brought a positive upturn in tourist arrivals. However, the growth of tourism is still below its expected potential. Whilst a number of factors militating against the full realization of the country’s tourism potential have been identified, the influence of the quality of service delivery has not been analyzed. This study, therefore, purports to specifically assess how travellers rated the quality of service delivery at Harare International Airport. In this pursuit, the objectives of the study are to (1) ascertain the profile of passengers travelling through Harare International Airport, (2) determine the quality of airport services from the passengers’ perspective and (3) identify aspects of service delivery that need to be improved. This study adopted a quantitative approach and made use of questionnaires administered to 410 passengers departing from the Harare International Airport between December 2013 and January 2014. Drawing from the SERVQUAL model the study focused on 5 dimensions, namely, reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. Analysis of the typically numeric data was essentially done through SPSS and reveals that developed countries dominate international arrivals travelling to Zimbabwe by air. In this regard, Europe is the key source market for Zimbabwean tourism, whilst South Africa stands out as the dominant market for travellers from within the African continent. The study reveals that the greatest number of respondents (88%) has, over the last twelve months, travelled more than once through Harare International Airport. Travellers on holiday dominate the tourist market followed by business and educational travellers respectively. South African Airways, BA Comair, Kenya Airways and Emirates are the most travelled on airlines to Harare, with South African Airways having the largest market share of international travellers. Considerable gaps exist between expectations and perceptions. Although rated as above average, service quality across the five dimensions falls below passenger expectations. Of significance, the largest service quality gap relates to the lack of a variety of well known retail outlets at the airport. It is, therefore, concluded that there is room for improvement in all aspects of service delivery at the airport. Whereas airport authorities should consider recommendations from the passengers to close the existing negative gaps, the dynamic nature of the aviation industry calls for the continuous assessment of service quality to ensure consistent satisfaction of airline passengers.

Keywords: service delivery, reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, responsiveness
Background

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the Zimbabwean economy. It is a key contributor to the country’s gross domestic product, creates direct and indirect employment, generates much needed foreign currency, and contributes positively to the balance of payment. Zimbabwe is endowed with abundant natural resources and cultural heritage sites that give a strong base for tourism growth and development. The key attractions include the Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe, abundant wildlife and magnificent sceneries in the Matopo Hills and Eastern Highlands.

Figure 1 below shows trends in tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe from 1964 to 2012 and clearly illustrates the relatively steady growth that prevailed between 1980 and 1999.

Between 1989 and 1999, tourist arrivals to Zimbabwe grew by an average growth rate of 17.5% (ZTA, 2000). This was way above the average of 6.4% for the whole of Africa (UNWTO, 2006). The tourism industry in Zimbabwe was, therefore, vibrant and performing well above the continent’s average. However, the turn of the millennium witnessed a drastic change in the country’s tourism fortunes, with a negative average decline of 4% between 2000 and 2010 and an annual growth rate of around 1% thereafter.

The major causes of the decline included political instability associated with the land reform programme that began in 1999, negative publicity in the major international source markets, and the harsh macroeconomic environment (ZTA, 2010). The establishment of the transitional Government in 2009 had a marginally positive influence on international tourism due to relative political calm and economic stability. The image of the country in major source markets gradually improved. Furthermore, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) embarked on aggressive efforts to enhance the image of the country and encourage tourist visits to Zimbabwe. These factors contributed to the gradual upward trend in growth of tourist arrivals.

Statement of the Problem

Although international tourist arrivals have been improving, the rate of growth has not yet reached full potential. Now that the country is more peaceful and enjoying relatively more positive publicity than a decade ago, international tourist arrivals should be increasing at a more accelerated rate. Furthermore, given the vast tourism...
resources that Zimbabwe possesses, tourist arrivals should be approaching their full capacity. It is against this background that the researchers deemed it necessary to examine factors that could possibly influence international tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe.

It has been argued that an improvement in airport service quality has great potential in enhancing tourist arrivals (Muchapondwa & Pimhidzai, 2011, Cristureanu & Borbica, 2007, Cejas & Rendeiro, 2006). This paper, therefore, sets out to determine the perceptions of airline passengers regarding the quality of services offered to them at Harare International Airport.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main aim of the study is to assess the quality of service delivery at the Harare International Airport. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

i) To ascertain the profile of passengers travelling through Harare International Airport.

ii) To determine the quality of airport services from the passengers’ perspective.

iii) To identify aspects of service delivery that need to be improved.

In accomplishing its objectives the study applies the SERVQUAL model which focuses on five dimensions, namely, reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness (RATER).

**Significance of the Study**

Airports are the first and last point of tourists’ contact with their holiday destinations. They give the first and last impressions of a country or tourism destination. It is, therefore, vital to evaluate the quality of airport services as a critical factor in the growth and development of the whole tourism industry. According to Cristureanu & Borbica (2007), good air services affect a traveller’s total experience and must, as a result, provide a service standard which is of sufficient quality to attract airline customers and their passengers. The study is thus aptly timed to coincide with the Government’s focus on developing the country’s airports as well as boosting international tourist arrivals. It is hoped that a better understanding of passenger needs and satisfaction levels would guide the development and raise service delivery to levels that do not just meet, but surpass, passenger expectations.

**Review of Related Literature**

**Theoretical Framework**

The SERVQUAL model

The SERVQUAL model is an established method of measuring service quality. It was developed by A Parasuraman, Leonard Berry and Valerie A Zeithaml during their research on service quality in the 1980s through to the 1990s. According to Zeithaml et. al (1990), the SERVQUAL model is centred on three fundamental concepts:

i) That service quality is more difficult for customers to evaluate than the quality of goods.

ii) That service quality is evaluated based on the process of service delivery as well as the outcome of a service.

iii) That the only criteria that count in service evaluation are defined by the customers themselves.

Parasuraman et. al (1985) submitted that the key to ensuring good service quality is by meeting or exceeding customer expectations from a particular service. Thus, the SERVQUAL tool establishes the general expectations of customers regarding a
service and then matches them with customer assessments or perceptions of a specific service organization in the service industry. In short, one statement measures an expectation about service delivery while the other measures a perception about the actual service within the organization under study.

The trio conducted an exploratory study comprising of 12 customer focus groups, drawn from various sectors in the service industry. The discussions eventually culminated in the establishment of 5 dimensions known as reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness (RATER) (Buttle, 1996). Reliability relates to the ability to perform the promised service dependably. Assurance is defined by the knowledge and courteousness of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. Tangibility or tangibles refer to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. Empathy considers the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers. Responsiveness expresses the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

Definition of Service Quality

According to Johns (1992) service quality is simply the sum of customer perceptions of the service experience. Service quality is alternatively defined as a subjective measurement of the disparity between the expectations and perceptions of customers with regards to service delivery (Wilson et al, 1997). A more common definition that has been adopted and built upon by several scholars is given by Lewis & Booms (1983) who assert that service quality is in fact a measure of the level to which services delivered conform to customer expectations.

Customers form certain service expectations from past experiences, word of mouth and advertisements. They then compare their expectations to the actual (perceived) services. If perceptions fall short of expectations the customers are disappointed (Parasuraman et al, 1988). This study seeks to establish the opinions of international airline passengers on the virtual inferiority or superiority of airport services in Zimbabwe.

The SERVQUAL model suggests that consumer perceptions on service quality are influenced by three distinct gaps that occur in organizations. The gaps are as illustrated below. Customer perceptions on service quality depend on the nature of the discrepancy between the expected service (ES) and the perceived service (PS). Therefore when:-

ES>PS, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory
ES=PS, perceived quality is satisfactory
ES<PS, perceived quality is more than satisfactory (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Service quality plays a pivotal role in business and presents organizations with competitive advantage. The main advantage of the SERVQUAL model is that data can be used to determine customer priorities and their ranked order of importance (Donnelly et al 2006).

The role of tourism

Tourism is classified as a service as it exhibits the characteristics of services, namely intangibility, inseparability, perishability and variability (Kotler, 2000). This study has been primarily motivated by the general under performance of the tourism sector in Zimbabwe. This scenario is not peculiar to Zimbabwe, as noted by Naude & Saayman (2004) who assert that several African countries are yet to reap significant benefits from their tourism sectors. Goeldner & Ritchie (2006) in concurrence, further emphasize the significance of the sector in economic development.

In recognition of the importance of tourism, it is imperative to appreciate and understand the key players in the sector, the tourists themselves. As they are the main customers in the sector it is necessary to foster a better understanding of their nature and needs. According to Shaw (2011) the suc-
cess of marketing efforts hinges on the acquisition of full knowledge of the existing and potential customers. This study, therefore, intends to gain better knowledge of the airline passengers who are the main customers of the Harare International Airport.

For instance, the aspects of age and gender are crucial in understanding tourists as they determine the type of services to be preferred by the various age groups. Youell (1997) is of the same view and further asserts that age and gender have an impact on the quality of time for tourism and leisure.

Similarly, Pearce (2005) emphasizes on the need to understand the tourists’ country of origin. According to him, such knowledge assists authorities in planning for their markets. Typically, advertising and promotional activities can be tailored to the specifications of the respective source markets in order to attract and retain more visitors. Such knowledge is vital for planning purposes and it is imperative for Zimbabwean authorities to obtain and make use of information regarding the origins of their visitors.

An important aspect in not only tourism but any business relates to patronage and repeat visits. Repeat visits from customers are a symbol of loyalty which is desirable for the survival of business. Appreciating the drivers or motives of repeat visits is crucial in nurturing customer loyalty. Understanding the reasons that lead to repeat visits is best achieved by obtaining feedback from the customers themselves. This study sets out to identify the views of travellers regarding the quality of services at the airport and determine the areas that need improvement in order to ensure that these travellers are not driven away. In the same light, it is also necessary to ascertain the frequency of travel through Harare International Airport as it gives a better understanding of the travellers and helps in authenticating their assessment of services at the airport.

**Empirical Framework**

The SERVQUAL model has been used by various researchers in diverse fields. Cejas & Rendeiro (2006) investigated the impact of airport service quality on tourism on Gran Canaria Airport in Spain. They concluded that services should be provided at reasonable standards as poor quality of services could detract from the overall experience. They argued that service quality improvement is crucial for the development of tourism.

In a study to assess the impact of service quality on India’s tourism, Anand & Malik (2013) made use of the SERVQUAL model. They thus, measured service quality by focusing on the five dimensions. This study though similar to that of Anand & Malik (2013), concentrates on the quality of airport services rather than tourism services in general.

Jung & Park, 2011 used the SERVQUAL model to determine the perceptions of transfer passengers on airport service quality as well as its impact on their behaviour and satisfaction. The study which was conducted at Incheon International Airport shows that airport service quality has a direct and indirect effect on value, satisfaction, airport image, and passenger behaviour. The results guided Incheon International Airport in developing transfer passenger-focused services to increase transfer passengers.

Closer to home, Gituanja (2006) used the SERVQUAL model to conduct research on the perceptions of airport service quality at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Kenya. She concluded that airport service quality was negative mainly as a result of poorly trained customer service personnel, old and plastic passenger seats, poor toilet infrastructure, congested departure lounge, cumbersome procurement procedures, poorly scheduled airline arrivals and departures, too many taxi and tour operators, and inefficient complaint handling.
Research Methodology

Research design

The methodology follows the principles of the SERVQUAL model. Typically, the survey design is adopted, specifically the hand back intercept survey. This type of survey entails approaching potential respondents as they pass various points within the airport (Biggs et. al, 2009). Questionnaires in this study are distributed to respondents as they leave the security screening point to await aircraft boarding.

According to Thomas & Nelson (2001), surveys can take the form of questionnaires, interviews or normative studies. The survey method has been adopted mainly because of its compatibility with the SERVQUAL model which makes use of self-completed questionnaires.

The Population

The population comprises all international tourists travelling to Zimbabwe by air. The target population however narrows down to all flights scheduled to depart from the Harare International Airport during the survey period. This is necessitated by the highly secure aviation industry, which after the September 11 attacks of 2001, airlines are no longer at liberty to disclose the names of passengers prior to flight departure. This then presents a challenge in the adoption of probability sampling techniques. Probability sampling requires that each unit of the population be known and listed in order to ensure an equal chance of selection of each unit into the sample. In mitigating the unavailability of a list of passengers departing from Harare International Airport prior to departure, scheduled flights have been alternatively used as the sampling frame. Flights scheduled to depart from the airport are available and can be easily listed prior to their departure.

The sample

This is drawn from flights scheduled to depart from Harare International Airport during the period December 2013 and June 2014. Each flight has been assigned a number and this unique number entered into a computerized on-line randomizer program. The sample size is based on Krecjie & Morgan’s (1970) sample size calculator table. The on-line programme generated the random numbers to be included in the sample. It is the corresponding flight numbers that are then selected into the sample and all passengers on these flights who are willing to take part in the survey become the sample for the research.

The instrument

Questionnaires are used to obtain data from the passenger respondents. In conducting airport surveys, Biggs et. al (2009) recommend the use of self-completed questionnaires and interviews. Designed in line with the SERVQUAL model, the questionnaire is specifically adapted to suit the airport industry (Stafford, 1999). Thus the questionnaire comprises of 21 statements measuring perceptions and expectations on a 5 point Likert scale.

The Likert scale ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The 21 statements address aspects relating to each of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. The model measures the quality of services by comparing the expectations against perceptions. Consequently, the 21 statements are double thronged with each statement addressing (i) passenger expectations and (ii) passenger perceptions.

In addressing the other objectives of the research, the questionnaire also contains questions relating to the respondents’ personal profile in Section A whilst recommendations for improvements are covered in Section C. A total of 410 questionnaires are collected from all passengers willing to participate in...
the survey on the sampled flights. The questionnaires are distributed to the respondents upon completion of exit formalities in the airport’s departure lounge. The survey period covers both the peak and off peak periods of passenger traffic volume and thus caters for variations that could arise in the two periods.

The study specifically focuses on departing (outbound) passengers because unlike arrivals, they have more time to concentrate and complete questionnaires. Furthermore, they are more likely to have had more experience from their arrival through to their departure and would, therefore, give more informed and reliable data.

Data presentation and analysis

This is done using tables, graphs, charts as well as the Gap Analysis. The Gap analysis is part of the SERVQUAL model and involves measuring gaps that exist between perceptions and expectations on service quality. Perceptions and expectations are measured on a 5 point Likert scale on which higher values relate to better perceptions or expectations. The dimension by dimension analysis is adopted for analyzing the gaps (Parasuraman et. al, 1985). The calculation for the SERVQUAL score is therefore obtained by the formula:

\[ SQ = \frac{P_1 + P_2 + P_3 + P_4}{4} - \frac{E_1 + E_2 + E_3 + E_4}{4} \]

The paired sample t-test is run on all differences obtained for the various service attributes on an item by item basis to check the statistical significance of the results obtained. The SPSS and Microsoft Excel computer packages are used for data analysis.

Findings

This section presents and analyses data from 410 questionnaires completed by respondents in the departure lounge at the Harare International Airport between December 2013 and June 2014.

Demographic profile of passengers

Origin or Nationality

Currently, international tourist arrivals by air are dominated by developed countries, notably Europe and North America. Asia and Africa tend to be the least (Naude & Saayman, 2004). A total of 45 nationalities are represented in the study. British and South African passengers have the most number of respondents as they both contribute 11% to the sample of respondents. It is also evident that 90% of the respondents are foreign nationals, with Africa accounting for 40% of the total passengers in the study.

Frequency of travel through Harare International Airport

The study sought to find out how often the respondents have travelled through the Harare International Airport over the previous twelve months. This is important in determining whether respondents had previously been subjected to similar experiences. The study reveals that the majority (88%) of passengers had travelled more than once through the airport over the previous 12 months. It can, therefore, be assumed that most passengers involved in the survey were familiar with services at the airport and could, therefore, make relevant contributions to the study.

Purpose of Travel

Different people have different motivations for travel. Without motivation, there would be no tourist industry. Travel motivators can be defined as those internal psychological factors that create a person’s desire to travel
or influence individual choices (Youell, 1997). They include physical relaxation, meeting friends and relatives, personal esteem, getting away from routine, curiosity, religious pilgrimage, and business trips, among others. Figure 2 below illustrates the various purposes of travelling through the Harare International Airport.

Figure 2 above shows that the greatest number of respondents (52%) is travelling on holiday. Those travelling for business and educational purposes comprise 38% and 8% respectively. The least common reasons for travelling through the airport are medical and other reasons at 1% each.

Most of the holiday makers are from Europe, with Britain accounting for 10%. Australian nationals account for 9%, while Americans make up about 8%. Business travellers from Asian are quite significant at 17%. These are closely followed by business people from within the African continent, with Asians making up 8% of the total business community. The number of Americans and Europeans travelling for business purposes is however, insignificant.

**Airline Travelled on**

International travellers land at the Harare International from variety of airlines. These include South African Airways, BA Comair, Kenya Airways and, indeed, Air Zimbabwe. Figure 3 below shows the various airlines that land at the Harare International Airport.

As will be seen in Figure 3, South African Airways has the greatest number of respondents. Kenya Airways passengers are also significant as they make up 16% of total respondents. This composition is also reflective of the general market shares of these airlines, with South African Airways and Kenya Airways having the largest market shares of the Zimbabwean airline industry for the year 2013 (ZTA, 2014). On the other hand, Air Botswana, Angolan Airlines and Air Mozambique have the least number of passengers.
SERVQUAL data results and discussion

Travellers’ Expectations and Perceptions

Regarding travellers’ expectations, the study revealed considerable gaps between expectations and perceptions. Table 1 presents data on the gap scores for each dimension of the SERVQUAL model. The mean gap scores for each dimension are also given, in addition to the standard deviation and t-test scores.

Table 1 depicts that passenger expectations exceed their perceptions, as the average gap score for all the dimensions is negative, thus indicating that expectations are higher than perceptions. The differences are statistically significant as evidenced by the t-test scores that are mostly below the 0.05 level of significance. The t-test results imply that the gap scores are substantial and valuable to the study.

The largest gap is noted within the empathy dimension, while the smallest gap is reflected in the assurance dimension. Figure 4, below clearly illustrates that, for all the five dimensions, there is a wide gap between passenger expectations and perceptions.

Tangibility

The study further assesses the five dimensions individually. Table 2 shows the results for the tangibility dimension. According to Buttle (1996), tangibility or tangibles is about the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.

Table 1: Gap scores for passenger expectations and perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Mean score (P-E)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>t-test score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>-0.963</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>-0.878</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>-1.258</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>-1.020</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>-1.396</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4: Passenger expectation and perception gaps

Table 2: Passenger expectations and perceptions on tangibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of tangibility</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modern equipment and facilities</td>
<td>3.241</td>
<td>4.598</td>
<td>(1.356)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical layout should enable passengers to easily locate facilities</td>
<td>3.510</td>
<td>4.412</td>
<td>(0.902)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport should be clean</td>
<td>3.749</td>
<td>4.590</td>
<td>(0.841)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport should have plenty of space to avoid overcrowding</td>
<td>3.720</td>
<td>4.480</td>
<td>(0.760)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport's waiting area should provide comfortable seating</td>
<td>3.605</td>
<td>4.600</td>
<td>(0.995)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that, with regards to the physical aspects of services at the Harare International Airport, passengers are least satisfied with the equipment and facilities. The largest gap (1.356) is in relation to modern equipment and facilities, where passengers expect more modernization. The general cleanliness of the airport, physical layout and comfortable seating also falls below passenger expectations.

Assurance

As with tangibility, the dimension of assurance has been lowly rated. Assurance is defined as the knowledge and courteousness displayed by employees, as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence. Table 3 is a tabulation of passenger perceptions against the views held before arrival at the Harare International Airport.

Table 3 shows that the general perception of the respondents is that the quality of this aspect of service is poor, particularly in terms of the manner in which airport staff made efforts to assure them or make them feel safe. Table 3 shows that the most dissatisfaction is in terms of trustworthiness of staff at the airport. This is despite their high expectations for this aspect with a mean of 4.554.
Responsiveness

The responsiveness dimension is about the willingness of staff to help customers and provide prompt service (Buttle, 1996). Table 4.4 below shows the responses of passengers regarding responsiveness.

Table 4 shows that, under the responsiveness dimension, passengers’ greatest expectation are for easy connectivity between flights. They also expect baggage collection to be done more efficiently. However, Table 4 shows that their perceptions are much lower than expectations for this aspect. Even though expectations exceeded perceptions regarding the provision of prompt assistance, respondents are least dissatisfied with this factor. As a whole, responsiveness recorded expectations that exceeded perceptions.

Reliability

Passengers were asked about their expectations regarding reliability. Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service in a dependable manner. Table 5 illustrates the passenger reactions with regards to this dimension.

From Table 5 it is noted that the general view on reliability is low as passenger expectations far exceed what they perceive of the actual service. Their paramount concern is the facilities that are not functional because they are not well-maintained. In addition, the dissemination of flight-related information is poor.

Empathy

According to Buttle (1996), empathy is

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**Table 3: Passenger expectations and perceptions on assurance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of assurance</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff should be neatly dressed</td>
<td>3.700</td>
<td>4.556</td>
<td>(0.856)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport personnel should be courteous</td>
<td>3.724</td>
<td>4.478</td>
<td>(0.754)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff must be trustworthy</td>
<td>3.561</td>
<td>4.554</td>
<td>(0.993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff should be knowledgeable</td>
<td>3.554</td>
<td>4.463</td>
<td>(0.909)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Passenger expectations and perceptions on responsiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of responsiveness</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There should always be staff to provide service at the airport</td>
<td>3.534</td>
<td>4.605</td>
<td>(1.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff should be willing to provide assistance promptly</td>
<td>3.600</td>
<td>4.551</td>
<td>(0.951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage collection should be done efficiently</td>
<td>3.251</td>
<td>4.593</td>
<td>(1.342)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting between flights should be easy</td>
<td>3.241</td>
<td>4.910</td>
<td>(1.669)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: Passenger expectations and perceptions on reliability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of reliability</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flight related information should be disseminated accurately</td>
<td>3.478</td>
<td>4.532</td>
<td>(1.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport facilities should be well maintained</td>
<td>3.600</td>
<td>4.634</td>
<td>(1.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff should perform the service right at the first time</td>
<td>3.527</td>
<td>4.512</td>
<td>(0.985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport staff should provide service as promised</td>
<td>3.517</td>
<td>4.524</td>
<td>(1.007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
relates to the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers. Table 6 shows the responses in connection with this dimension.

Table 6 above shows that passengers’ highest record of expectations (4.373) is with regards to the knowledge of specific customer needs. Overwhelmingly, they indicated that airport staff at an international airport should know passenger needs.

The table also shows that passengers had the lowest rating for the availability of well-known retail outlets at the airport. Generally, all aspects of empathy recorded an excess of expectations over perceptions.

**Importance of service quality in decision to travel to Zimbabwe**

In deciding to travel to Harare most passengers (79%) did not significantly regard the quality of services at Harare International Airport. Table 7 categorizes and presents the responses of passengers regarding the importance of airport service quality in their travelling decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of importance</th>
<th>Passengers’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>36 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>41 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>130 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>191 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 3% of the respondents indicate that the quality of services at the airport is very important to them particularly in deciding to travel to Zimbabwe.

**Analysis and discussion**

The discussions in this study are premised on the quality of service delivery at the Harare International Airport. This is because the quality of airport service has a strong influence on international tourism, including in Zimbabwe. However, the findings of this study as presented above clearly confirm that the quality of service delivery in terms of the *tangibility* dimension at the Harare International Airport leaves a lot to be desired. In particular, Airport authorities need to pay attention to the appearance of physical facilities. In the study, it emerges that passengers generally have higher expectations than the actual quality of service delivered. This dimension has the largest gap score, an indication that passengers are least satisfied with the existing facilities and equipment.

As submitted by Bitner (1990), the physical presentation of facilities is very crucial in service delivery because it creates the vital first impressions of a service. The study was conducted at a time when there were no direct flights between Zimbabwe and major overseas international source markets. The respondents could have therefore passed through other international airports en route to Harare. Passing through other international airports can be a factor in travellers expec-
tations in the next destination as it may expose them to a variety of modern facilities and equipment.

When compared to other aspects under the tangibility dimension, ‘the availability of plenty of space to avoid overcrowding’ has the highest rating in terms of perceptions. However, this perception should be read with caution because the Harare International Airport is not always busy because it does not operate on a 24 hour schedule. In addition, the overcrowding is seasonal. During off-peak periods, the passenger volumes are low, and so is overcrowding. Similarly, during peak periods, volumes can increase quite dramatically, leading to overcrowding. However, the fact that the overall passenger expectations are higher than their perceptions means that there is still room for improvement.

Overall, passengers have high expectations regarding the physical evidence of services, yet their perceptions of the same fall below these expectations. It can thus be concluded that the quality of service is low for this dimension, although the perceptions for all five aspects of tangibility were above average, that is, $x > 3.000$.

Regarding the assurance dimension, Table 3 indicates that travellers had high expectations for all aspects of assurance. The assurance dimension is defined by the courteousness of staff as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence. Pilferage, mishandled baggage, inconsistent service delivery and corrupt employee tendencies are examples of factors that could reduce the trustworthiness of airport staff. However, of major concern to the passengers at the Harare International Airport is the lack of trustworthiness. This element of the assurance dimension recorded a low perception score of 3.561, an indication that more effort needs to be exerted in building trust within the travelling public. The importance of trust can not be over emphasized as it builds loyalty and facilitates business growth, particularly in tourism where it can be a tremendous source of competitive differentiation.

The gap between expectations and perceptions for the assurance dimension may be a function of the diversity of nationalities that are involved in this study. The differences in backgrounds might have an impact on the definitions, expectation levels, and perceptions of what courteous behaviour is about. What is considered courteous in one culture, may be totally discourteous in another. This becomes more complicated when frontline staff have to interact with and satisfactorily serve people from diverse backgrounds.

In terms of the reliability of airport services, most passengers complain about the quality of dissemination of flight related announcements. Reliability refers to the ability to provide service as per promise. Unlike the other dimensions which are prone to subjectivity, reliability generally knows no boundaries and is a universal language which needs to be mastered by all service providers (Mpofu, 2015). Airports are mostly regulated by time, with strict time frames that need to be firmly adhered to. Similarly, in tourism, reliability is a fundamental factor for business success and customer retention. As a result, it is essential for staff to perform their duties correctly the first time to avoid delays.

At the Harare International Airport, dissatisfaction with services is attributed to the poor quality of sound from the public address system as well as the maintenance and serviceability of some facilities. Consequently, the announcements made through the public address system are mostly inaudible, thus compromising the accuracy of the messages being communicated.

Passengers are also not quite impressed by the maintenance and serviceability of facilities at the Harare International Airport, or lack of it. For instance, passengers could not have hot running water; nor do they expect to walk up the stairs because the escalators are out of order. Similarly, they do not expect to be sweating in a clammy lounge because
the air conditioner is not working. Needless to say, well maintained facilities provide convenience and comfort to passengers. These are some of the experiences that contribute to the low scores under the perception of service quality. Malfunctioning baggage conveyor belts, unservicable air conditioners and information screens that are not functioning are all evidence of low maintenance at the Harare International Airport.

As for responsiveness, passenger perceptions fall below their expectations. The greatest complaint relates to difficulties in connectivity. As stated earlier, at the time of the study, there were not many flights that connect at the Harare International Airport. Passengers expect a smooth transition from one flight to the other. In most cases, passengers who have been exposed to connecting flights at some point in their travelling experiences, often develop high expectations in this aspect.

Delays in baggage collection at Harare International Airport once again come in for strong criticism. Passengers expect baggage delivery to be well coordinated, enabling them to collect their baggage in the shortest possible time (Hill, 2014). Upon arrival, most passengers are usually exhausted and only concerned with proceeding to the next stage of their journeys. Thus, the problem of inefficient baggage delivery can be of great concern to the travelling public.

Other passengers complained that they had to wait for a service because a frontline member of staff was not present. Bureaucratic procedures are also a possible cause of delays in serving passengers as frontline staff are not often empowered to make some decisions. It is possible that, with the economic challenges currently facing the country, staff shortages could be a contributing factor toward the unavailability of staff to attend to customers.

In terms of empathy, passenger perceptions, though below expectations, are relatively high, compared to other dimensions. Empathy entails the provision of individualized caring services to customers. It is an extra mile taken by frontline staff to show their concerns and give the customer a sense of belonging. According to Arlen (2008), empathy is a skill that is over and above the employees’ ability to efficiently execute their duties. In this study, there is a general appreciation of efforts made by staff to meet individual customer needs. However, some passengers naturally have special needs, such as the handicapped, sick, elderly and unaccompanied minors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The overseas market dominates arrivals travelling to Zimbabwe by air, with the bulk of these visitors originating from Europe. Although services are not of particularly low standards, there is room for improvement across all aspects of service delivery at Harare International Airport. Airport service quality is not a particularly important factor in tourists’ decision to travel to Harare. However, there are some travellers who are concerned about the quality of services at the airport. Consequently, it can be concluded that if service quality is improved such travellers would consider travelling to Harare. Furthermore, other potential travellers who also regard the quality of airport services can also be encouraged to travel to Zimbabwe, thus, increasing the number of arrivals.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study as indicated below have been made inline with the five dimensions of the 5 SERVQUAL model.

Tangibility: There is need for airport authorities to ensure serviceability of the air
conditioners in order to create a pleasant ambience for passengers particularly in waiting areas, departure lounge and restaurants. Toilet upgrading is also recommended, especially the male toilets which some passengers feel are not spacious enough and lack modern facilities. The provision of comfortable seats in the waiting area and departure lounge is also recommended.

**Assurance:** Frontline staff need to be continuously trained on the significance of courteousness and good customer service, particularly within the Immigration Department.

**Responsiveness:** It should be ensured that information screens are always functional and displaying accurate information. There is also need to upgrade the public address system to ensure that announcements are audible.

**Reliability:** Consistent serviceability of baggage conveyor belts should be ensured to avoid delays in baggage delivery. An effective electricity backup system is required to avoid ‘blackout moments’ within the terminal.

**Empathy:** Because of the limited retail outlets within the airport, authorities should consider introducing internationally well-known brands such as McDonalds and KFC. In addition, more entertainment is needed within the terminal, such as a wider selection of news channels to be broadcast on the screens, relaxing music and better access to internet services.

Finally, some passengers registered their discontent at some very noisy staff manning retail outlets in the departure lounge. It is recommended that staff be more professional and only speak in tones that do not distract passengers.
REFERENCES


