Assessment of Quantity Surveyors' Service Quality

By

Emmanuel Olusegun Akinsiku

Department of Building
University of Lagos
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos
Nigeria
E-mail: eoakinsiku@yahoo.com

Abstract: Quality service delivery is an important and effective factor in the success and failure of any organisation. As a fundamental factor, it should be considered very important for the organisation to remain afloat. As a matter of fact, all service organisations must provide high quality service in order to gain the confidence of their clients. This paper assesses the quality of service being rendered by quantity surveyors with respect to construction clients' perception of it. The questionnaire was designed to collect data based on a 22 item variable which assesses service quality on the premise of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The data collection involves the assessment of quantity surveyors service by clients. The collected data were analyzed using pair t-test analysis using the SPSS software. Research results show that highest perceived gap was in the reliability dimension and the lowest gap was in the empathy dimension.

Keywords: Expectations, gap, perceptions, quality, service

1.0 Introduction

Service plays an important role in enhancing value, and can positively influence a firm's success Berry (1995). The need for the consideration of service quality is to be considered very important because all organisations depend on this for survival and for the profitability of the service rendering organisation. Stafford, *et a*l (1998) opined that the satisfaction of customers and service quality are crucial issues in the majority of service craft .Backman & Veldkamp (1995) stated that it is an essential factor involved in a service provider's ability to attract more customers. Therefore provision of high quality service should be the mission statement of any service rendering organisation. Business success according to Aghamiri (2007) is a function of creating outstanding values in the product through quality of design and production as well as rendering of services to customers effectively.

The construction industry as a sector of the economy is made up of large numbers of professionals rendering diverse but important services: such

professionals include the architects, engineers, quantity surveyors, contractor teams, financiers, suppliers and others. By being an industry with a whole lot of professionals the need for management efficiency and competency in the industry is required to gain a higher degree of competitiveness. This high degree of competitiveness and professionalism is measured based on the quality of service rendered by each professional. The quality of service rendered by any service providing professional is an important issue both to the producer of the service and the receiver of such service. Client's satisfaction is a function of the quality of service received by him, it is therefore imperative that conscious efforts should be geared at ensuring that qualitative services are delivered at any point in time at a reduced cost and within an acceptable time frame.

Service as defined by the Webster dictionary of cotemporary English is a system supplying public needs whereas quality is defined as a degree of excellence. Merging the two definitions together service quality can therefore be said to be the provision of a public need with a degree of excellence. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) measured service quality in terms of the difference between Expectations and Perceptions called Satisfaction(s). $S=E-P$. Expectation measures what is anticipated in an ideal service, perception is that aspect of the service that was actually delivered while satisfaction is the gap between expectation and perception.

Quantity surveying, being a noble profession that evolved from the biblical quotation (Luke 14) that it is wise to consider the quantity of work and cost consequences before commencing building, clearly shows the importance of the profession. It is therefore of the essence to assess the quality of service delivered by this professional in light of the huge expectation of the construction client and the society in general in terms of cost economy and value for client's money.

2.0 Problem Statement

Competition in all facets of life has necessitated the need for the provision of quality service with no exception in the construction industry. The need to improve client's satisfaction through quality service delivery is of paramount importance today. Hoxley (1995) opined that any profession which relies principally upon the recommendation or referral of satisfied clients for its new clients must provide a high quality service. There is therefore no better means of advertising a product and services than an abstraction or sample of such product or service previously rendered.

The quality of service rendered by any organisation or professional firm especially in the built industry is considered as an important factor in the

way and manner such professional service provider is made use of. A Quantity Surveyor is a professional concerned with the provision of cost monitoring and cost savings services to a client with the aim of giving the client value for his money. However, in view of the immense benefit of the services being rendered by QS to clients, it's sad to say that Nigeria clients have not fully embrace the numerous services a QS is trained and capable of providing. In fact of the three surveying profession, quantity surveying is the least known of them. Therefore, it is necessary for quantity surveyors to be aware of clients' perception of the quality of service being rendered by them in order to improve upon such service for them to be relevant in the built environment and also to bridge the gap between service rendered and quality of service received. Thus, to bridge the gap between service rendered and quality of service received, there is need to evaluate the satisfaction of clients with respect to the types of services being provided by their nominated quantity surveyor.

3.0 Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study are:
1. To measure the level of satisfaction of construction client with respect to quantity surveyors services.
2. To offer solution and suggestion how to minimized the existing service quality gap.

4.0 Importance of the Study
This study will serve as an eye opener for quantity surveyors and other service provider to be conscious of the quality and how their various services is to be provided in other to meet clients satisfaction and to remain afloat and competitive in their respective field of operations.

5.0 Literature Review
5.1 Introduction
Service which is an intangible element is measured based on the satisfaction derived. Customer satisfaction is one of the most prominent issues of all organizations; therefore all service providing organizations should consider this as a key item in their mission statement.

Service is an intangible action which can not be seen with the eyes but can only be felt and experienced. They are behavioral rather than physical entities and have been described as deeds, performances or effort, Gronroos (1984) defined it as activities or process. There are four basic characteristic of services that separates is from goods as postulated by Parasuraman, *et al* (1988), they are intangibility, inseparability from production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability, storageability. Quality on the other hand is a multidimensional phenomenon, meaning different things to different people Liu *et al* (2005). Parasuraman *et al* (1991) views it as "exceeding what customers expect from the service". Service quality as a concept has been defined by various authors differently. It is measured in terms of the difference or gap between the perceived and expected variables. Expectation is a measure of what is expected in an ideal service while Perceptions is a measure of the service

as actually delivered or experienced. The relationship between expectation (E) and perception (P) is called satisfaction (S) which is conceptualized as the gap between expectations and perceptions. So: $S=E-P$ (Parasuraman *et al*, 1988). From the above definition, service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Thus, if expectations are greater than performance, then perceive quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer's dissatisfaction occurs. On the contrary, whenever performance exceeds expectation there is customer satisfaction and they tend to patronise the service provider the more. It can be achieved by knowing the customer, designing service to meet customer's needs, and then managing the service production and delivering process to the customer.

5.2 Service Quality Dimensions and Scale of Measurement

Several researchers have dealt with the issue of service quality dimensions and models. Parasuraman, *et al* (1985) introduced the gap model that focuses on a number of gaps in and between a numbers of consumers. Gronroos (1984) construct a model that stressed on technical and functional services. These two models majored on the importance of expectation versus perception in services delivery. However, a conceptual model of service quality which focuses on attributes such as: behavioural aspects; professional judgment; and physical facilities and processes was developed by Haywood –Farmer in 1988. A

measurement scale developed by prominent US researchers has received most acceptances and is now extensively used throughout the world (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). This measuring instrument called SERVQUAL was developed based on the premise of 5 construct as highlighted below. These measuring tools are:

i. **Tangibility:** The appearance of physical facilities, modern equipment, personnel, communication materials and convenient business hour.

ii. **Reliability:** The ability to perform the promised service accurately, right the first time, dependably and keeping customers informed about when services will be performed.

iii. **Responsiveness**: The willingness to help customers, readiness to respond to customers request and provision of prompt service.

iv. **Assurance:** The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

v. **Empathy**: The act of having customer's best interest at heart, provision of caring and individualized attention to customers and the understanding of the needs of customers.

5.3 Gaps Model of Service Quality

The quality of service in a professional firm can be assessed based on the perceive satisfaction of its client using the gap model. Parasuraman, *et al* (1988) formulated service quality model that highlights the main requirement for high service quality. The model as shown in Figure 1

identifies five gaps that cause dissatisfactory delivery.

Gap 1: Distinction among consumers' expectation and management's perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what customers expect.

Gap 2: Difference between management perceptions of customer's expectations and service quality attribute, i.e. improper service quality standard.

Gap 3: Difference among service quality attributes and service actually delivered, i.e. the service performance gap.

Gap 4: Change among service delivery and the communication to consumers about service delivery, i.e. whether promises matches delivery?

Gap 5: Distinction between consumer's expectations and perceived service

5.4 Potential Causes of Internal Service Gaps

- **Gap 1**: the key contributing factors in this gap include; Insufficient marketing research, inadequate use of marketing research, Lack of interaction between management and customers, insufficient communication between contact employees and managers.

- **Gap 2**: Inadequate management commitment to service quality, Absence of formal process for setting service quality goals, Inadequate standardization of tasks, Perception of infeasibility i.e. that customer expectations cannot be met

- **Gap 3**: Lack of teamwork, Poor employee - job fit, unable or unwilling to perform service, Poor technology - job fit, Lack of perceived control (contact personnel), inappropriate evaluation/compensation system, Role conflict among contact employees, and Role ambiguity among contact employees.

- **Gap 4:** absence of horizontal communications, differences in policies and procedures across branches or departments, Puffery in advertising & personal selling attempt to acquire new business.

- **Gap 5**: The Service Gap; expectations compared to perceptions

Gap $5 = f$ (Gaps 1+2+3+4)

Figure 1: Service Quality Models

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                                              ┌──────────────┐
                                              │   Customer   │
                                              │ expectations │
                                              └──────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐
  │  Manageme    │
  │     nt       │
  │ perceptions  │
  │     Of       │
  └──────────────┘
              Knowledge Gap (Gap1)
                                        ┌──────────────┐
                                        │   Retailer   │
  ┌──────────────┐                      │ Communicat   │    Service Gap (Gap5)
  │  Standards   │                      │    ions      │
  │  specifying  │                      │   about      │
  │ service to be│                      └──────────────┘
  │  delivered   │
  └──────────────┘
              Standard Gap (Gap2)

  ┌──────────────┐
  │   Actual     │
  │   service    │                      ┌──────────────┐
  │  delivered   │                      │   Customer   │
  └──────────────┘                      │  perception  │
                                        │     of       │
       Delivery Gap (Gap3)              │   service    │
                                        └──────────────┘
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Communication Gap (Gap4)
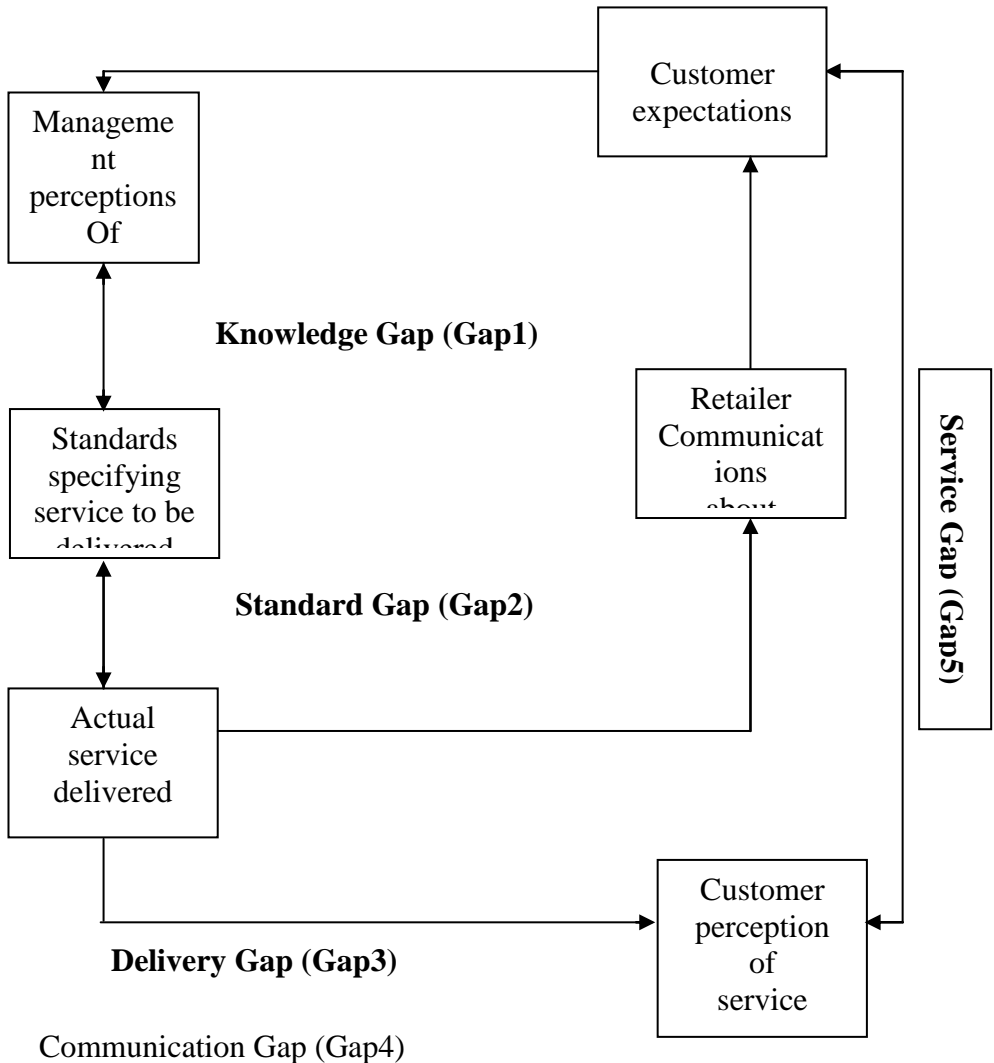
Source: Parasuraman, et al (1988).

5.5 The Quantity Surveying Profession

The Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS) (2004) defined quantity surveying as the global profession for total cost and procurement management and that which is concerned with ensuring value for money and financial probity in the conceptualization, planning and execution of building and engineering projects in all ramifications. Eke (2007) views it as the profession that is charged with the responsibility of constructional matters, particularly as they relate to the economics, management and cost control of

construction projects. A trained QS can function effectively in either a construction firm or a consulting firm.

5.6 QS Services

5.6.1 Traditional Quantity Surveying Practice

The traditional QS services includes the measuring and valuing building works and services based on standard method of measurement of building works. The traditional role of the QS as a cost control profession also include the traditional tendering, contract procurement methods, tender analysis, monitoring and evaluation of building projects.

5.6.2 Professional Managerial QS Services

In addition to the provision of 'technical professional' services by QS, the increasing development of management consultancy-type services can be seen as a means of providing market-driven, client-focused services. This includes feasibility studies, cost planning/management, value- and risk management etc. Cost planning and cost management are a dynamic part of the project briefing and scheme development, driving the design forward within the client's objectives, rather than reacting to design proposals. With the exception of legal, insurance and taxation services, consultant and contractors' QS may equally provide these services. Additional services typically provided at this level by contractors' QS operating at the senior corporate level are commercial management, negotiation of tenders and major contractual issues, including claims and corporate management covering finance, business development, tendering and bidding. Contractors' QS are also more likely to specialize in management-related services, particularly site planning and management, and quality management.

5.6.3 Cost Planning & Cost Advice Services

A higher added-value services of cost planning and cost advice including risk identification and resolution of potential problems is a part of QS professional service. Leading edge QS firms are seeking to take a more pro-active role in the management of costs rather than simply reporting on the costs of design proposals. Indeed, the more strict time- and cost-constrained clients are appointing QS as lead consultants, thereby allowing cost planning to drive design and enabling good cost management principles to be implemented. However, QS are still experiencing difficulty in being appointed early enough so as to play a decisive role during the early stages of a project. Cost planning and advice services are seen as the leading QS service

with potential for growth.

5.6.4 Financial Services
Financial services such as investment appraisal, life cycle costing and cost benefit analysis are increasingly being offered as specialist services by the larger QS consultancies.

5.6.5 Legal Services
Arbitration services, both in preparing submissions and giving expert evidence, and in acting as arbitrator, are recognized specialist QS services. Providing advice on claims preparation (mainly for contractors) and defense of claims (largely for clients), traditionally a normal part of post-contract services, has increasingly developed into a specialist service in its own right. Adjudication and conflict management will help change the rather negative perception of the industry, and thus QS involvement in these services, by clients.

6.0 Research Methodology
6.1 Data Gathering Method
A structured questionnaire was designed to generate data. The instrument consists of a 44 item measuring SERVQUAL scale (22-items evaluating client's expectations and 22-itmes evaluation client's perceptions) to assess client's satisfaction of QS services.

6.2 Sample size and Sampling Techniques
A total of twenty seven questionnaires were administered to randomly selected clients across Lagos metropolis. Twenty-four completed questionnaires (representing about 69% responses) were returned completed. The sample size for this study is therefore limited to 27 respondents.

6.3 Research conceptual pattern
For the purpose of this research, two conceptual models of service expectations and service perceptions were evaluated based on five service quality premise of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The gap between these two variables will help in determining service quality. The pattern is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Measuring Service Quality
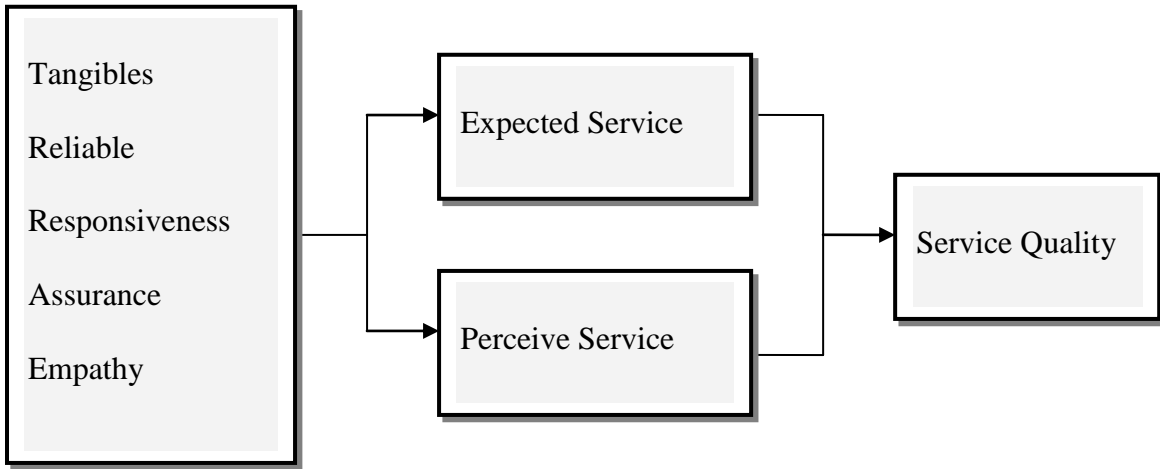
7.0 Techniques of Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The data obtained from this research were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. In other to assess the suitability and unsuitability of service quality dimension and clients satisfaction of QS services, paired t-test was used.

7.1 Respondents Profile

Table 1: Type of client organization

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Government	6	21.43%
	Private	18	64.29%
	Institutional	4	14.29%
	Total	28	100.0%

Table 2: Designation of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Director	2	7.14%
	Project Manager	10	35.71%
	Architect	10	35.71%
	Others	6	21.43%
	Total	28	100.0%

Table 3: Academic Qualification(s)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	HND	6	21.43%
	B.Sc/B.Tech	11	39.29%
	PGD	7	25.00%
	M.Sc/M.Tech	4	14.29%
	Total	28	100.0%

Table 4: How long have you been engaging QS services**?**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1 - 10 years	10	35.71%
	11 - 20 years	11	39.29%
	21 - 30 years	5	17.88%
	above 30 years	2	7.14%
	Total	28	100.0%

As shown in Table 1, 2, 3 and 4 above 22.2% of the respondents are from government organisation, 66.7% from private own organization while 11.1% are from institutional client organisation.

Table 2 shows the designation of respondent's samples, it was observed that director had a frequency of 2 representing 7.4% with project managers and architect both representing 37.0% at piece

while other with varying designation represent 18.5% of the sample space.

Table 3 shows the academic qualification of these respondents; those with HND were 22.2%, B.Sc/B.Tech 40.7%, PGD 25.9% M.Sc/B.Tech representing 11.1% of the respondents. Table 4 then shows the length of their respective engagement of the service of

quantity surveyors, those within the range of $1 - 10$ years are 37.0%, $11 - 20$ years are 40.7%, $21 - 30$ years are 18.5% while those with above 30 years of engaging QS services represent 3.7% of the sample size.

From the above it can be deduced that the respondents are in a better opinion to provide the necessary information required for the attainment of this study objectives.

7.2 Measurement of Service Quality

Table 5: Measures of Quantity Surveyors Service Quality

	Measurement	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tangibility dimension of QS Service Quality					
Pair 1	E-TANGIBLE	2.29	28	0.78	0.15
	P-TANGIBLE	2.17	28	0.80	0.15
Gap	$P_T - E_T$	-0.12			
Reliability dimension of QS Service Quality					
Pair 2	E-RELIABLE	2.13	28	0.77	0.15
	P-RELIABLE	2.54	28	0.88	0.17
Gap	$P_R - E_R$	0.41			
Responsiveness dimension of QS Service Quality					
Pair 3	E-RESPONSIV	2.49	28	0.83	0.16
	P-RESPONSIV	2.76	28	0.81	0.15
Gap	$P_{RES} - E_{RES}$	0.27			
Assurance dimension of Service Quality					
Pair 4	E-ASSURANCE	2.27	28	0.68	0.13
	P-ASSURANCE	2.43	28	0.89	0.17
Gap	$P_A - E_A$	0.16			
Empathy dimension of Service Quality					
Pair 5	E-EMPATHY	2.96	28	1.02	0.19
	P-EMPATHY	2.93	28	0.87	0.16
Gap	$P_{EMP} - E_{EMP}$	-0.03			

In Table 5; statistical indicators have been indicated for the measurement of the services quality

of quantity surveyors in two conditions of expectations (E) and perceptions (P). The tangibility of

QS services show that the expectations of respondents are more than that of their perception of QS services in the tangible dimension with a mean gap of 0.12 $(P_T - E_T)$.

The perceptions of clients are higher to their expectation with a positive gap of 0.41 $(P_R – E_R)$ which indicates that clients are satisfied with respect of the reliability dimension, this is also the same with the responsiveness

dimension which show a satisfied client with a gap score of 0.27 $(P_{RES} – E_{RES})$. The perceptions of client are greater than that of their expectations of QS service with respect to assurance dimension with a positive gap score of 0.16 $(P_A – E_A)$.

However, the perceptions of client are leaser than that of their expectations of QS service with respect to empathy dimension with a gap score of 0.03 $(P_{EMP} – E_{EMP})$.

Table 6: Paired Sample test for Services Dimensions

		Paired Differences								
		Mean	Std. Devia tion	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Upper	Lower			
Pair 1	ETANGIBLE PTANGIBLE	-0.13	1.03	0.19	-0.27	0.52	0.82	27	0.17
Pair 1	ERELIABLE PRELIABLE	-041	1.19	0.33	-0.88	0.05	-1.71	27	0.30
Pair 3	ERESPONS PRESPONS	-0.26	1.11	0.21	-0.70	0.17	-1.30	27	0.44
Pair 4	EASSUR – PASSUR	-0.16	1.04	0.20	-0.56	0.24	-0.80	27	0.52
Pair 5	EEMPATHY PEMPATHY	-0.04	1.27	0.24	-046	0.53	0.35	27	0.28

7.3 Discussion

From the analysis of the client's expectations and perception of the service quality of QS, it can be found that the Clients pay most attention on the dimensions "empathy" and "responsiveness", so QS should focus on the service delivery in terms of "empathy" and

"responsiveness". It is equally necessary to emphasis that clients generally pay more attention to the indicator such as "the ability to deliver on time ". Based on the analysis of the service perception, the respondents gave the QS a good evaluation on "reliable, responsive and assurance" service, while they

don't have a good feeling on "empathy and responsiveness relative" service. Services provision have reached a certain level in the current circumstances, in order to continue to improve their relevance level and make them play a leading role in the built industry, QS must strive for excellence in every of their service, so firm should enhance the service whose client perception is relatively low to enhance the total client satisfaction.

8.0 Conclusion
In this research, the purpose of the study is to asses the service quality of QS as well as to investigate the customers' expectation and perception on the service. The clients' service quality expectations and perceptions were achieved by using SERVQUAL method through a questionnaire survey developed on five dimension of the service quality, i.e. Reliability, Assurance,

Tangibles, Responsiveness and Empathy. The QS service indicator shows positive service quality score in the reliability, responsiveness and assurance dimension. However, negative scores were recorded in the tangible and empathy dimension. The result of this study provides a basis for QS to improve the quality of their service in all spheres of their endeavors.

In conclusion, the operations of quantity surveyors are based on the regulation and code of conduct of the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors. In view of the fact that the services provided by QS are generally undifferentiated, QS will have to compete on the basis of high quality of services offered to its Clients if they want to gain a competitive edge against their rivals and to establish their relevance in the Nigerian built industry.

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